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Bullying in Secondary Schools
A Discursive Approach

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Abstract

This study attempts to transcend the narrow boundaries imposed on mainstream research into bullying by its adherence to a modernist discourse of individualism. The theoretical framework for this research argues that a modernist focus has both limited our understanding of the phenomenon and contributed to its continued occurrence. An approach that is underpinned by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a social constructionist paradigm offers the potential for a broader and more encompassing analysis of this formidable social issue. Language is taken as a critical focus of attention because of its pervasiveness in social interaction. Discourse is understood as actively constructing the experience and meaning of bullying. Furthermore, a consideration of the power relationships embedded within discourse is an essential feature of this approach.

The study involved interviewing 24 senior students from a small provincial New Zealand secondary school to discuss a range of issues surrounding bullying. These interviews were taped and transcribed and a discourse analysis was carried out to gain an understanding of how students talk constructed bullying. Discourses were identified that constructed bullying as *disparity*, as *irrelevant*, as a consequence of *difference*, as a form of *discipline*, and as *inevitable*. The construction of bullying as *disparity* was seen to struggle against the other prevailing educational discourses that together functioned to maintain the status quo of power relationships in the educational institution. It is suggested that the acceptance of such 'common sense' constructions of bullying are effectively sustaining the pervasiveness of bullying in schools today.

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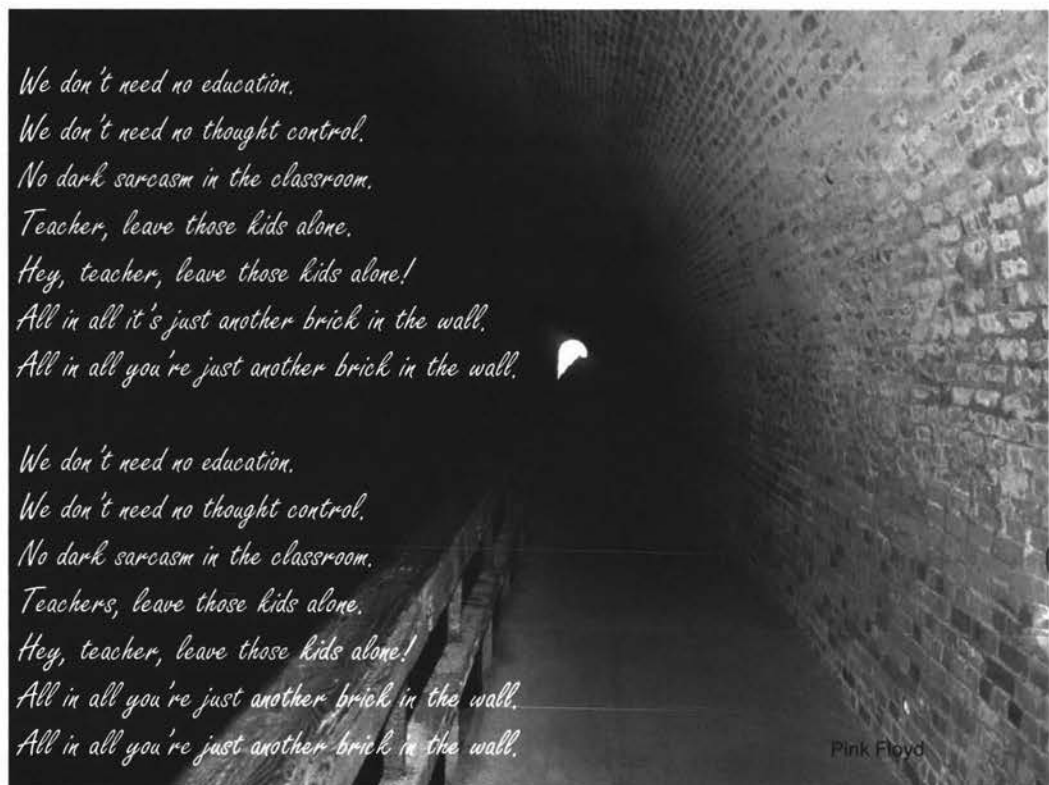


Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii

PART 1: The Research

Introduction	2
 CHAPTER ONE Literature Review	 5
Background	5
Definition and perceptions	7
Incidence	10
Effects	17
Features of bullying	19
Characteristics of bullies and victims	20
Bystanders	23
Disclosure	23
Special types of bullying	24
Intervention programmes	27
Critique of traditional research	33
Qualitative research	35
Conclusion	38
 CHAPTER TWO Theoretical Framework	 40
Social constructionism	41
Discourse analysis	45
Foucault and power	49
Problems, debates and dilemmas	51
Conclusion	53

CHAPTER THREE	Methods	54
	Setting the scene	54
	Background for a project on bullying	55
	The researcher	57
	The participants (co-researchers)	58
	Ethical and safety Issues	60
	Procedure	61
	Reflection on data collection	63
	Analysis	64
	Conclusion	65

PART 11: The Analysis

Introduction	68
<hr/>	
CHAPTER FOUR Bullying as Disparity	70
Disparity in size and age	70
Disparity in social networks	72
Academic and sporting disparities	75
Disparity as resistance	76
<hr/>	
CHAPTER FIVE Bullying as Irrelevant	78
Sense of humour	78
Unintentional	81
Minimal impact	83
The construction of bullying as irrelevant	85
<hr/>	
CHAPTER SIX Differences	87
Identification of difference	87
Acceptance	91
Homogeneity	94
Differences and normalisation	96

CHAPTER SEVEN	Discipline Must Prevail	97
	Lack of discipline	98
	Punishment	99
	Weakness	101
	Justification	104
	The importance of discipline	106
 CHAPTER EIGHT	 Bullying is Inevitable	 107
	Intervention as dangerous	107
	Telling as pointless	109
	Response as useless	111
	The inevitability of bullying	113
 Conclusion		 114
 APPENDICES		
	Appendix A: Letter to the principal	120
	Appendix B: Information sheet	122
	Appendix C: Participant consent form	126
	Appendix D: Interview schedule	127
	Appendix E: Confidentiality agreement	129
	Appendix F: Transcription key	130
	Appendix G: Authority for the release of tape transcripts	131
 References		 132

PART ONE

The Research

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a familiar phenomenon that has a long history of representation within our educational institutions. The everyday occurrence of bullying in the English public school system as epitomised by Rugby was featured in the classic “Tom Brown’s School-days” first published in 1857. The more recent “Harry Potter” series in which Malfoy intimidates and harasses Harry and his friends also portrays the pervasiveness of bullying in schools. However, constructions of bullying as a ‘normal’ part of growing up have had the effect of obscuring both its prevalence and impact.

It is only in the past 30 to 40 years that the normalisation of bullying has begun to be challenged. Intense media attention has placed a number of New Zealand schools under the public spotlight for bullying and has had the effect of lifting the cloak of denial from New Zealand as a nation. For example the trial and subsequent conviction of Taradale High’s infamous “broomstick boys” for the sexual violation of another student made it clear that such behaviour would no longer be accepted as ‘high jinks’ or as ‘boys being boys’. The reported link between bullying and the subsequent suicide of some students, coined by the media as “bullycide” also emphasised the devastating effects on the self worth and self esteem of young people.

In New Zealand the Labour Party instigated educational reforms of 1989 termed ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’, shifted the responsibility for the management of schools from central government to elected Boards of Trustees. The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) under which they operated required each school to “provide a safe physical and emotional environment” as part of their statutory duties. The emphasis placed on competition between schools by the subsequent National Government of the 1990s which allowed greater parental choice also demanded that schools tackle bullying. However, despite the plethora of well meaning policies and intervention programmes, students, teachers and parents have felt increasingly frustrated at the apparent inability of schools to deal with the issue. In the words of some student participants of this research:

Julie: No matter how many posters they stick around the school, its still gonna happen.

Cathy: And no matter how many lectures they give it’s still gonna happen.

The aim of this research then is to try and gauge a greater understanding of the phenomenon by adopting a discursive approach to students talk surrounding bullying in secondary schools. Traditional mainstream research into this topic, while providing us with a wealth of information, has never-the-less failed to 'make sense' of bullying in ways that have enabled effective intervention to follow. Indeed, I would suggest that such research has contributed to the hegemonic view of bullying in secondary schools today which is a reflection of mainstream society and functions to support the status quo.

The challenge therefore is take language itself as the topic of enquiry in order to examine the ways in which students themselves construct bullying. The benefits of this approach are based on the premise that as language is an all important, pervasive aspect of our social life it is also a powerful research tool. This adherence to a social constructionist paradigm recognises both the active and constructive nature of language. Thus the study of how language is used when students talk about bullying may potentially offer a greater insight into the phenomenon. As Tuffin (2005) comments, "psychological experience is fundamentally constituted in and through discourse" (p.78).

Interviews of a semi-structured nature were carried out with 24 senior students from a secondary school in a provincial town in New Zealand. These were taped and then transcribed by the researcher prior to a discourse analysis being performed on the data. The general research question that informed the study related to how students constructed bullying in secondary school. The report is organised into two sections:

Part I 'The Research', includes Chapter One a review of the traditional research into bullying along with a critique of this approach and a consideration of a small number of post modern studies. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework of the research in terms of social constructionism and the technique of discourse analysis in Chapter Two. Chapter Three sets the scene for the research, providing a contextual basis for the data collection and subsequent analysis.

Part II 'The Analysis', identifies and discusses the discourses that students draw upon in their constructions of bullying; Chapter Four through to Chapter Eight. Although

each construction is discussed independently, it must be emphasised that they are viewed as being intrinsically linked and this overview is presented in the final Conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

This chapter considers the extensive though relatively recent research into the phenomenon of bullying. It traces the path from the earliest studies of the ‘founding father’ of such research, Dan Olweus in Scandinavia, across the international stage to our own studies here in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Many of the salient aspects of this traditional research are reviewed along with a critique of such an approach. A possible way forward in the form of qualitative studies is then examined.

Background

There had been very little research or theorizing specifically on bullying prior to the seminal work of Olweus in Scandinavia during the 1970's. However, Olweus (1978) points to earlier studies in animal psychology as offering relevant approaches (with some caution needed) to bullying behaviour in humans. The concept of ‘pecking order’ which is a linear hierarchy recognised in such species as chickens is one such example. Once the pecking order has been established, and it is usually based on such attributes as age, sex, and size, a stable pattern emerges. Dominant and submissive pecking behaviour will occur most often between chickens of a close ranking only, which is interpreted to mean that the chickens ‘know their place’ in the pecking order. Similarly in higher animals, particularly mammals such as apes, there is a well-documented dominance hierarchy. This social interaction is more complex, but includes a range of recognised dominant and submissive behaviours, surrounding the ‘alpha’ animal or the ‘leader of the pack’.

It is important to note that such behaviours in the animal world have a definite survival advantage. Once the hierarchy has been established, it reduces the wasteful expenditure of energy in intra-specific aggression, which is better directed towards the attainment of resources and the reproduction of the species. Interestingly enough however, the dominance hierarchies in animals in captivity can in fact disintegrate from being an adaptive advantage to being anti-social and causing harm to the group. In these cases there is often a recognised ‘bully’ or group attacks on a lowly ranked individual. One wonders whether students attending educational institutions would be viewed, according to this model, in an analogous way to animals being held in captivity. This

could then be used to partly explain the pervasiveness of anti-social and harmful bullying in secondary schools.

Bullying has been characterised in much of the literature as a sub type of aggression (Land, 2003). A distinction is made between reactive aggression which is a defence response to a perceived threat and therefore an adaptive response, and proactive aggression which is motivated by a positive outcome for the aggressor. They theorize that bullying is related to proactive aggression, in that such peer-directed aggression is anticipated to have a reward, such as material gain or acceptance and respect in the peer group. However, following this line of argument bullying can also be viewed as adaptive if it achieves an advantage to the individual, even though it may be unacceptable socially.

The question then arises: should bullying be conceptualised as 'abnormal' or is it a 'normal' adaptive response of an individual to their surroundings. The implications of which categorisation of bullying or aggression we are to accept will of course have far-reaching consequences. Prior to the widespread and international media interest focussed on the problem of bullying in schools and the initial work of Olweus (1978) in Scandinavia, bullying was constructed as part and parcel of everyday school life. This 'normalisation' of bullying behaviour resulted in a paralysis on the part of parents, teachers and schools in preventing or intervening in the daily misery inflicted on some students. The perception that bullying is just a fact of life and coping with such behaviour is 'character building' has been used to minimise the seriousness of bullying.

This is not surprising as Burr (1995) points out Foucault contended that any discourse such as 'bullying is normal' can be used to achieve both good and bad outcomes. The potential danger of this discourse is well illustrated by the ongoing acceptance of bullying in schools. Robinson and Maines (1997) on the other hand, have taken up the concept of bullying as normal, though unacceptable behaviour, as the basis of their no blame approach to bullying. They point out, along with a number of other researchers, that bullying is about a power relationship. They believe that a great deal of human behaviour is also based on power relationships and thus bullying "can be viewed as part of a normal process of socialisation." (p66). Therefore, to use a punitive approach to

dealing with bullying is, in their view, just to reinforce this unacceptable power relationship.

It is against this background that the literature into bullying is reviewed.

Definition and perceptions

The conceptualisation of the construct of bullying has been fraught with ambiguity and contradictions from the earliest days of its study. Professor Dan Olweus (1978) expressed concern with the common usage of the word mobbing in Scandinavia. The word was originally 'borrowed' from the ethological studies of Konrad Lorenz. It refers to behaviour observed in the animal kingdom where a group of animals will mount an attack on an individual of another species. Lorenz (1966) also used mobbing to describe the behaviour of a group of school children "ganging up against a deviating individual" (p2). The concern from Olweus' (1978) point of view was that the widespread and familiar use of the term may have focused attention only on group violence against an individual who is deviant in some way, thereby overlooking other important aspects of the phenomenon.

In the quest to clarify the construct of bullying there has been much debate about what behaviour constitutes bullying. Robinson and Maines (1997) emphasize the importance of making a distinction between bullying and other anti-social behaviours. A good example of this is the treatment of teasing and bullying. While some researchers would include teasing as a common form or subset of bullying (Olweus 1978) others would make a clear distinction between the two. For example Land (2003) found that students conceptualised teasing quite differently from bullying and suggests that the terms need to be separated out from one another. Olweus (1999) does distinguish between nasty teasing which he includes as bullying and friendly playful teasing which he does not classify as bullying.

Stuart (2000), points to the problematic situation of trying to find an operational definition of bullying because no two people will have the same experience, despite the fact they may use the same terms to describe what happened, and researches themselves have used many different definitions of bullying. For example Robinson and Maines (1997) insist that the repetitive nature of the behaviour is of paramount

significance in the definition of bullying however, Stephenson and Smith (1989) do not believe that the behaviour need be repeated to be classified as bullying. Olweus (1993) acknowledged that a single action could constitute bullying behaviour, but specifically excluded it from his own definition of bullying.

This lack of standardization of a definition of bullying in the research community has been an international problem and can be further compounded by the different translations of the term in a variety of languages. As was pointed out there can be a number of different interpretations of the term in the English language. In contrast there is no word in French that directly translates to bullying. The word *ijime* is the term used in Japan that most closely translates to bullying, although it has less physical connotations and focuses more on relational aggression. In Italy, on the other hand, the terms *prepotenza* and *violenza* describe more violent interactions. The inability to directly compare terms utilised by researchers makes accurate comparisons of both national and cross-national studies very difficult (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson & Liefhoghe, 2002).

Many countries, therefore, have looked to the pioneering research carried out on bullying in Scandinavia, for guidance. The definition developed by Olweus (1999) has been adapted now by many researchers in the field. This definition focuses on three main criteria:

“It is (1) aggressive behaviour or intentional ‘harm doing’ (2) which is carried out ‘repeatedly and over time’ (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterised by an imbalance of power.” (p11)

Olweus also adds that often there does not appear to be any provocation.

However, the furnishing of a standardized definition of bullying can also be challenged methodologically as it may shape and limit the responses of subjects (Guerin & Hennessy, 1998) by excluding participants’ understandings of the term from the research. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that students of different ages, teachers and parents have differing perceptions of what constitutes bullying.

A study by Smith and Levan (1995) explored the perceptions of bullying by children as young as six years old by using qualitative interview techniques. They found that the younger children used a very extensive definition of bullying that included any act that

was nasty or hurtful. Their understanding of this concept was not qualified by those aspects used in research definitions and by adults, such as repetition, an imbalance of power and intentionality.

Madsen (1996) examined discrepancies in the perception of bullying in two studies; one that involved investigating age differences and one that compared teacher and parent perceptions of bullying with that of students. The results indicated that as Smith and Levan (1995) found, younger children had a much broader definition of bullying than older participants. Furthermore, parents and teachers differed from students in their perception of bullying in that they emphasised bullying as a repeated act which required intent. Students, on the other hand cited the negative effect on the victim as being the most important factor in defining bullying and depending on the severity of the incident, it did not need to be repeated.

Guerin and Hennessy (1998) carried out semi-structured interviews with students to try and establish a student based definition for bullying. Results showed that again students emphasised the victim's interpretation of an incident as being paramount in defining bullying. They felt that behaviour did not necessarily have to be repeated to be defined as bullying if it had resulted in upset for the victim. In the same way behaviour did not need to be intentional to constitute bullying and in fact they believed that students could bully others without realising it.

A study by Boulton (1997) focussed on teachers' perceptions of bullying and then compared them to an earlier study of secondary school students' definitions. He found that although most teachers regarded verbal abuse, physical assaults and intimidation as bullying, approximately 25 per cent of teachers did not perceive name calling, nasty gossip, taking other people's belongings and social exclusion as bullying. However, interestingly when compared to pupils definitions of bullying, in all cases a greater proportion of teachers than students viewed each specific example of behaviour given (e.g. laughing at people, name calling, threatening people) as bullying. The author suggests that not only is it important that teachers help widen pupils perceptions of bullying, but that if they themselves do not perceive such harmful behaviours as social exclusion and name calling as forms of bullying they are less likely to respond to such behaviour in an appropriate way.

These discrepancies have important implications not only for establishing methodological rigour in the study of bullying but for the implementation of intervention programmes. It is important that studies focus on bullying as actually experienced by students if we are to further our understanding of the phenomenon. We also need to be aware that if parents and teachers ignore behaviour that students perceive as bullying they can be seen as condoning certain behaviour which may lead children to believe that some bullying is in fact acceptable (Madsen, 1996)

Incidence

The quest to find consistent data between studies within countries and in cross-national research on the incidence of bullying is surrounded by difficulties centered on the issues of defining bullying and the variability of methodologies employed by researchers to measure prevalence. Smith (1991) contended that the anonymous questionnaire was the best practical method for establishing the incidence of bullying in schools. This he felt was supported by the high level of consistency shown by children from middle school age and upwards in answering the individual questions.

Olweus (1993) carried out a large-scale national study in Norway using an anonymous questionnaire which provided a research definition of bullying, a set time period and specific frequencies for the bullying behaviour. Results represent data from approximately one quarter of Norway's student population of 8-16 year olds. The incidence rate indicated that one in seven or 15 per cent of students were either bullies or victims 'now and then' or more frequently. Further analysis showed that 9 per cent were victims and of this group 17 per cent were both victims and bullies, and 7 per cent bullied others. When rates of more serious bullying, defined as 'about once a week or more frequently' were examined it was found that one in twenty or 5 per cent of Norwegian students were involved with more serious bullying problems; 3 per cent as victims, with 6 per cent of this group identifying as both victim and bully, and 2 per cent as bullies. This data was also supported by a sample of teacher nominations and the time frame was limited to part of a term, so as the author states not only is it procedurally rigorous but tends to suggest that the figures may actually underestimate the problem.

A parallel study was also carried out with 17,000 students in Sweden (Olweus, 1993) and comparisons made to the Norway study. Although there were many similarities, the overall trend indicated a higher rate of bullying and of a more serious nature in Sweden, this particularly applied in high schools. Another difference was the greater experience of indirect forms of bullying such as exclusion.

In a study in South Yorkshire involving 2000 students from seven middle schools (age 7-12 years) and four secondary schools (age 13-16 years) and using an adapted questionnaire and definition from Olweus, an incidence rate of one in five students were found for being bullied and up to one in ten for bullying others. This incidence rate was suggested by the findings that 20 per cent of 7-12 year olds and 18 per cent of 13-16 year olds reported having being bullied 'sometimes' or 'now and then' or more often. More frequent bullying defined as 'once a week' or more often was reported by middle school children at a rate of 6 per cent and secondary pupils 8 per cent. When asked to report on bullying others 8 per cent of middle school pupils and 10 per cent of secondary pupils said they bullied others 'sometimes' or more often and 2 and 3 per cent respectively reported bullying others 'once a week' or more often (Smith, 1991). These results can be compared directly with those of Olweus (1993) in his studies in Norway as the questionnaire used was almost identical. The Norway results indicated a significantly lower incidence rate for both being bullied and bullying others. Also the incidence rate in this particular study did not decline with age as it did in Norway, although this finding will be commented on later.

Whitney and Smith (1993) reported on the largest survey of bullying in the UK which was carried out in Sheffield with over 6000 students using an anonymous questionnaire based also on that of Olweus. A research based definition was furnished with the questionnaire. Results showed that 27 per cent of junior/middle school students (8-11 years) and 10 per cent of secondary students (11-16 years) reported having being bullied 'sometimes' or more in the current term, 10 and 4 per cent respectively reported experiencing bullying 'once a week' or more. Figures for bullying others showed 12 per cent reported bullying others 'sometimes' or more and 4 per cent 'once a week' or more in the younger age group with incidence dropping by half to 6 and 1 per cent respectively in secondary schools. These results indicate a different age trend to those seen in the South Yorkshire study where experiencing more

frequent bullying and bullying others increased in secondary schools. However, Whitney and Smith (1993) indicate that this discrepancy is likely to be due to the fact that the South Yorkshire data was only based on four secondary schools which "appear to have been atypically high in their frequencies of bullying" (p21).

The importance of reaching some sort of consensus in measuring the construct of bullying is illustrated by an extensive study in New Zealand by Adair, Dixon, Moore and Sutherland (2000). Their concern was with the range of results reported by researchers about the prevalence of bullying, due often to the differences in method employed particularly in regard to furnishing a ready-made definition of bullying or relying on self-definition. It is, as the authors' state, "difficult to know whether studies are reporting the same interpersonal phenomenon" (p208). Their findings showed that when a self-defined measure of bullying was used, 58 per cent of students reported having been bullied however, when the more extensive research-defined measure was used, the rate of students who reported having been bullied in the current year, according to at least one of the given criteria, increased to 75 per cent. Robinson and Maines (1997) also found that a higher incidence of bullying behaviour was reported using questionnaires if the researchers describe bullying prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

However, not withstanding these concerns, this and other research indicates a comparatively high rate of bullying in New Zealand compared to other Western countries. In a study carried out on 3265 New Zealand secondary school students an incidence rate of one in four was found for chronic bullying. The measure used to classify chronic bullying was quite robust and specifically developed for this study; it included experiencing any of physical violence, verbal teasing, sexual harassment and racial comments at least five times over a period of the last six months. The use of a specific minimum frequency of having experienced the behaviour was thought to be effective in eliminating what were seen as "less significant one-off experiences" (Coggan, Bennett, Hooper, & Dickinson, 2003, p20).

Another large New Zealand study was carried out by Nairn and Smith (2002) in 107 secondary schools, which represents about one quarter of all high schools in New Zealand. The 821 students and 439 staff who participated were drawn from schools

that covered the full range of decile ratings (socio-economic status of the school), rural and urban, single sex and co-educational, private and state schools. Interestingly, when they first looked at staff and student perceptions of bullying they found that a greater percentage of staff than students reported the existence of both verbal and physical bullying. This corresponds to the results found by Boulton (1997) discussed earlier, on teachers' and students' perceptions of bullying. The researchers suggested the possibility that students may underestimate bullying as they have an implicit expectation that bullying will be part and parcel of school life.

The incidence rates reported in this study were not measured over any timeframe but were limited to bullying at the students' current school. The questionnaire was designed with involvement from an Advisory Committee of young people and did not impose a research definition of bullying. Using these criteria, 45 per cent of students reported having experienced bullying at their school, and of this group 12 per cent said they were bullied often and 31 per cent reported being bullied sometimes. In order to compare rates with some other studies they combined responses of 'often' and 'sometimes' to approximate a 'once a week or more' frequently. Based on these calculations the findings suggested that 19 per cent of students in the study were bullied once a week or more and 10 per cent of the students bullied others with the same frequency. These findings are similar to those reported in British secondary schools of 18 per cent being bullied now and then or more frequently and 11 per cent bullying others. They do not however compare very favourably with Norwegian data that suggests a much lower incident rate of 5 per cent being bullied and 7 per cent bullying others either now and then or more frequently. (Nairn & Smith, 2002)

Similarly high incidence rates have been reported across the Tasman. In a cross sectional survey of nearly four thousand students from year 6 to year 10 (equates with year 7 to 11 in N.Z.) across 115 schools in New South Wales, it was found that three out of five students both bullied and were bullied in a school term. Although only 13 per cent reported being victims (Forero, McLellan, Rissel & Bauman, 1999). In a study of 220 students at an urban secondary school in Adelaide, South Australia Slee (1995) found that 8.4 per cent of students self-reported serious bullying which was defined based on Boulton and Underwoods (1992) criteria of 'once a week or more'. They also

indicated that the pattern of bullying in Australian schools peaks in the first two years of secondary school, boys are more likely to be bullied than girls, especially physical bullying, and girls were more likely to be bullied via exclusion.

Hoover, Oliver and Hazier (1992) reported a high incidence rate for bullying of 77 per cent in a study of 207 students of age 12-18 in Midwestern USA. Although the students in this study were asked about bullying right through their time at school rather than just in the previous year, these prevalence rates are considerably higher than those reported in European countries. The authors speculate whether this is due to a more violent society in America.

It is clear however, despite the issues of definition and measurement and varying research findings on incidence, that bullying is a significant social problem. Researchers have attempted to disentangle the various characteristics of bullying in order to try and understand it in greater detail.

Age Differences

Olweus (1993) found a steady decline in bullying for both girls and boys as a function of age however, with secondary students aged 13-16 years the decline was not as sharp. There was also a corresponding reduction in more physical types of bullying in the older students. Age differences for bullying others did not follow the same trend however, with slightly more boys bullying others in higher grades than lower grades; and a reversal of that pattern shown in girls. Interestingly, there was a decrease in bullying others, particularly for boys, in the first year of high school where they were the youngest students. This is not surprising given that Olweus (1991) reports that in his study in Bergen, Norway it was found that a significant proportion of bullying was perpetrated by older students. In contrast however, Smith (1991) and Whitney and Smith (1993) in studies in the UK reported that bullying is mostly carried out by classmates or other students in the peer group and only sometimes by older pupils, with little being carried out by younger students.

In the large survey of bullying in the United Kingdom, Whitney and Smith (1993) also found that the incidence of bullying decreased from age seven and eight to age sixteen, though again there was not the same decline with age in those that bullied

others. The authors suggest that this may be because the opportunities to bully others increase as you get older. By the time students were seventeen or eighteen, there was very little reported bullying. However, as Smith and Levan (1995) point out, this could be due to the fact that the students in this age group are a self-selected sample in that they have opted to remain at school. Adair et al. (2000) also found in their New Zealand secondary school study that bullying was more prevalent in Years 9 and 10 than Years 11 to 13.

The reasons for these age differences in the incidence of bullying are not fully understood, however, as previously mentioned in the discussion of definitions and perceptions of bullying, this apparent decline in bullying with increasing age may be due to the difference in perceptions and definitions of bullying as a function of age. If younger children have a wider perception of what defines bullying then this could account for the higher measured incidence of bullying at this age (Madsen, 1996). Smith and Levan (1995) suggest that this could imply that these age differences in incidence rates of bullying may not therefore be significant.

Gender Differences

Many studies have investigated differences in the experience of bullying for boys and girls. Although the particular issue of girls bullying will be covered in more detail later, there are a number of general findings that need to be reviewed.

Olweus (1993) found that boys experienced bullying more than girls, but there were differences in the type of bullying that they were exposed to. Girls were more likely to experience indirect forms of bullying such as exclusion and spreading of rumours; although approximately an equal number of boys also experienced this indirect bullying they were also much more likely to be victims of physical or direct bullying. Results from the Bergin study (Olweus, 1993) also showed that boys were responsible for a large percentage of the bullying experienced by girls but boys were far more likely to be bullied by other boys.

Rigby (1997) reported that although verbal bullying tended to be experienced equally by boys and girls, the more physical forms of bullying were more often experienced by boys whereas girls were more likely to be subjected to more indirect forms of

bullying. Smith (1991) found that an equal number of boys and girls reported having being bullied however, boys self report and are reported as being responsible for bullying others more than girls. Whitney and Smith (1993) found that twice as many boys reported bullying others as girls, but there was a very small gender difference in the incidence of experiencing bullying with girls being slightly less likely than boys to be bullied.

Ahmad and Smith (1994) undertook a study with 1,433 students in two middle schools (8-11 years) and three secondary schools (11-16 years) in the UK to investigate gender differences in the incidence and type of bullying taking place. They used a modified version of the Olweus questionnaire to include specific references to indirect forms of bullying, similar to that used by Whitney and Smith (1993). This was due to their concerns that the original survey and results reported by Olweus (1991) may have underestimated the frequency of bullying among girls because it only included physical and verbal bullying (direct aggression) and did not explicitly mention indirect bullying. Their results indicated that there was very little gender difference for being bullied but boys were more likely to bully others. However, boys were more likely to experience physical forms of bullying and girls were slightly more likely to experience verbal abuse and much more likely than boys to experience indirect forms of bullying such as being excluded.

Although Adair et al. (2000) did not find any differences in the gender of those who reported being bullied; overall it appeared that boys were more involved in bullying others. In cases of reported bullying, boys were indicated as the perpetrators in 76 per cent of the cases, either alone or with others. Similarly, based on their own definition, 49 per cent of boys reported having bullied others, compared to 39 per cent of girls. However, these findings of little gender difference in the experience of being bullied, or indeed boys being bullied more than girls, need to be interpreted with some caution. The nature of the bullying carried out by girls tends to be more subtle than and therefore perhaps not as obvious as the more physical types of bullying used by boys.

Ethnic Differences

In the study by Adair et al. (2000) New Zealand European students were more likely to report having being bullied than either Maori or Pacific Island students when using a

self-defined measure. However, when a research definition of bullying was used a greater number of Pacific Island students than European students reported having being bullied. Results from the use of both measures indicated that a significantly higher rate of Maori students reported having bullied others. The authors quite rightly question whether this finding indicates an actual difference or is a reflection of different ethnic perceptions of bullying. It would suggest therefore, that we need to be cautious in attributing differences in bullying to ethnicity.

Effects

A recent study by the Injury Prevention Research Centre at the University of Auckland (Coggan et al., 2003) highlighted the link between chronic bullying and negative mental health among secondary students in New Zealand. This large, randomised, cross sectional study of over 3000 New Zealand secondary students found a significant association between having experienced bullying and depression, low self-esteem, stress, suicidal ideation, deliberate self-harm and suicide attempts. In light of the high rates of suicide among New Zealand adolescents, the authors point out that this link between bullying and mental distress must be viewed with considerable concern.

Previous research has also indicated a link between experiences of frequent bullying at secondary school and both poor mental and physical health. A study by Rigby (1999) in a large co-educational secondary school in Australia found that students experiencing frequent bullying in the junior school suffered from poorer mental and physical health and this effect on physical health continued into the senior school for both girls and boys, with poorer mental health also continuing as a consequence for girls. These long term negative health consequences were hypothesised as being a result of the low self esteem, anxiety and stress brought about by bullying which in turn led to a lowered resistance against physical illness which endured for some time in students. The additional effects on mental health which were found to endure amongst girls into the senior school is possibly due to the more relational type of bullying typically experienced by girls which is likely to have more severe psychological effects.

A large scale cross-sectional study in Australia (Forero, McLellan, Rissel & Bauman, 1999) found a statistically significant relationship between bullying and psychosomatic health. It is interesting to note that the students who reported being both victims and

perpetrators of bullying suffered a higher frequency of psychosomatic symptoms. This has important implications in considering the effects of bullying behaviour on the bully themselves. Similarly, a study of over 16 thousand 14-16 year old secondary students in Finland found an increased level of depression and suicidal ideation in students who were bullied and perpetrators, with the highest prevalence found in those who were both victims and bullies. Suicidal ideation, when depression was controlled for, was more prevalent in perpetrators (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, Rantanen, 1999).

A study by Slee (1995) of 220 students in a secondary school in South Australia found an association between being victimized and poorer general health in both male and female students. Girls who bullied also displayed poorer general health. There was also an association between both boys and girls who were either victims or bullies, and severe depression, including suicidal ideation. A particularly interesting finding from this study was that for students who told someone about the bullying there was no correlation found between the bullying and poor health as measured by the total score on the General Health Questionnaire. The author does however point out that the design of the study did not allow for any causal inference. I would point out that with those students who had told someone about the experience there was also no distinction made on the basis of who they had told (e.g. parent, teacher, friend) and if any action was taken or not. It seems that if a student told an authoritative figure about the bullying and nothing happened, this would further contribute to the victimisation experience.

Studies then seem to indicate that both experiencing bullying and bullying others can have far reaching detrimental effects that are likely to continue for the students over a number of years. There is also a suggestion (Sullivan, 2000) that there may be a complex interaction between bullying and later criminal behaviour. Indeed in a follow up study of the Norway research Olweus (1993) found that approximately 60 per cent of those boys identified as bullies in Grade 6 to 9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 and 35 to 40 per cent had three or more convictions than those who were not bullies.

Features of bullying

Studies in both Sweden and Norway (Olweus, 1991, 1993) indicate that most bullying occurs at school, although there is an association between those bullied at school and those bullied on the way to and from school. Similarly, Rigby (1996) suggests that in Australia the three main places for the occurrence of bullying in order of frequency are the playground, the classroom and on the way to and from school. Rigby also comments that Australian research has found no consistent differences in levels of bullying between coeducational and single sex schools. However, clear evidence exists that there are significant differences between schools in the incidence of bullying which are independent of students' age and gender. Olweus (1993) found that in the large scale study in Norway some schools had four to five times the amount of bullying than other schools in the same community.

Sullivan (2000) suggests that there are a number of reasons for these differences in the incidence of bullying related to features associated with the schools, including socio economic and academic status. Thus, he attributes a higher incidence of bullying to the low socio economic background of the student body. However, Whitney and Smith (1993) found in the Sheffield study that although there was some support for this assertion, it only accounted for a small (10 per cent) difference in the incidence of bullying. Bullying is also suggested to occur less at more academic schools because the students are more focussed, succeed more in their studies, are more prosocial in attitude and behaviour and come from a higher socio economic group. This is certainly in line with the earlier studies of Olweus (1993) that found that there was no evidence to suggest that bullying was a consequence of competition for good marks at school. Rigby (1996) argues on the other hand, that undue emphasis on competition at school has a harmful effect on some children and can contribute to bullying behaviour.

However, Sullivan (2000) highlights that it is the school ethos that is most important in determining the level of bullying. This is supported by the findings of Whitney and Smith (1993) that showed that a good school culture and effective anti-bullying programmes were more important in determining the extent of bullying in a school than socio economic status. Smith and Sharp (1994) also argued that schools with a good ethos were more successful in having low rates of bullying within the school.

Other features of bullying that had for many years been commonly assumed to be true and thus taken on myth like status were debunked by the large scale Norwegian studies of Olweus (1978, 1991, 1993). The incidence of bullying at big city schools was found to be the same or even lower than figures in other areas of Norway. It also appeared that city schools were more aware of the problem of bullying. Furthermore, there was no correlation between the size of the school or the size of the class and the level of bullying. These findings were supported by data from the study by Whitney and Smith (1993). Another widely held assumption is that external deviations such as obesity, red hair, glasses, and other negatively perceived features play an important role in determining who will be victimised. However, Olweus (1978, 1991, 1993) found that other than physical strength, these external features played a very small part in bully/victim problems. An explanation of this is linked to the observation that most people in fact display at least one 'deviation' (75 per cent of students in the control group) therefore most victims are likely to conform to this preconceived notion.

Characteristics of bullies and victims

There has been considerable research focussed on identifying a typology of victim and bully based on a variety of features including personality and family relationships.

Bullies

Olweus (1978, 1980, 1993) led the way in research attempting to characterise the 'typical bully'. His studies indicated that bullies were aggressive to other students, teachers and parents, were more accepting of violence, were often impulsive and had a strong need to dominate others with little empathy for their victims. Furthermore, bullies had a positive self image, were not particularly anxious, insecure or unpopular and if they were boys were likely to be physically stronger than others of their age. Bullying was also seen as part of a larger picture of general anti-social behaviour. This 'aggressive reaction pattern' that has been described to characterise bullies has been linked with child rearing conditions and the individual's temperament (Olweus, 1980, 1993). In studies with boys four factors were identified that were important in the development of the behaviour pattern. These were a negative, cold maternal attitude; a caregiver's permissiveness for aggression; the use of power assertive child rearing methods; and a child with an active 'hot-headed' temperament. Although parental

conflict was also seen as a contributing factor, the socioeconomic status of the family was not related to the level of aggression.

Sullivan (2000) argued that this bully profile focussed only on the confident bully engaged in typically male physical bullying and did not adequately describe psychological bullying or girl bullying. Stephenson and Smith (1989) however, identified three types of bullies; the confident bully as described above; the anxious bully who is less secure and popular and struggles academically, thought to account for 18 per cent of bullies and mainly boys; and the very unpopular bully/victims.

Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan (2004) emphasised the use of power as a central issue in bullying. They drew attention to the fact that people in leadership roles have a similar sort of power but it is how the power is used that is important. They suggested three types of bullies which are similar to those identified by Stephenson and Smith (1989). These consisted of the clever bully who is popular, academically and socially confident but lacking empathy, who may also wield a lot of power with other students and teachers. Secondly, is the not-so-clever bully who is characterised as acting in a socially dysfunctional way, failing at school and being relatively unpopular although able to get peers to support their behaviour. It is thought that this type of bully is more likely to drop out of school in later years, thus contributing not only to the reduction in bullying in later secondary years but to community crime statistics. Finally, they also identify the bully/victim who in some situations is a bully, and in some a victim. It is these students that they believed to be at the highest risk for negative consequences such as antisocial behaviour, depression, and social isolation. They are also characterised as the most difficult group to deal with.

Victims

Olweus (1978, 1991, 1993) identified two types of victims in addition to the bully/victim, the most common being the passive or submissive victim. These students were characterised as being anxious, insecure and sensitive with low self esteem. They had few if any friends, did nothing to provoke the bullying but also did little to defend them selves. Boulton (1995) also found support for the idea that victims were less popular than other students in that they were found to spend more of their time alone. They therefore lacked the support and potentially protective factor of having a group of

friends around them to discourage bullies. Olweus also examined the role of family relationships in determining the development of this anxious submissive reaction pattern. Data indicated that boys who were such victims had a close positive relationship with their parents particularly their mother. It was suggested that tendencies for overprotection of the child were both a cause and a consequence of the bullying. However, as Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan (2004) point out there is a danger that the acceptance of such data by teachers and others may add to a child's vulnerability to being bullied by being characterised as overprotected and therefore part of the problem.

The second victim type identified by Olweus (1978, 1991, 1993) was a smaller group termed provocative victims. They displayed both anxious and aggressive reaction patterns and often irritated and provoked those around them. Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan (2004) suggest that their annoying behaviour results in them 'getting off side' with both other students and teachers and as a consequence they are highly unlikely to elicit support from any quarter.

Use of typologies

The development of both bully and victim typologies have culminated in guides for parents and teachers to the identification of such individuals. Olweus (1993) discusses a detailed system of primary and secondary signs that victims may display at school and at home, as well as the general characteristics to look for in the passive and provocative victim. In a similar manner typical reactions and behaviours of bullies as well as their general characteristics are listed to support this identification. However, although these lists of 'symptoms' may aid in uncovering bullying, research attempts to develop a comprehensive picture of the 'typical' characteristics of bullies and victims needs to be approached with a good deal of caution (Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan, 2004). These studies are based on a deficit model that attempts to link problems with causes. Therefore, rather than dealing with the problem as a whole, such a classification focuses on the individual and the symptoms. This can lead to intervention programmes that emphasise the need to change the behaviour of the individual rather than addressing the social systems within which bullying takes place.

Bystanders

The research focus on determining the characteristics of bullies and victims has gone on to a wider investigation into bullying as a group phenomenon and the part played by bystanders. Salmivalli (1999) identified not only the bullies and victims but witnesses who take on a variety of participant roles. These students were mostly found to actually encourage and maintain the bullying despite findings that indicate that most students have a negative attitude towards bullying (Whitney & Smith, 1993). The behaviour roles that bystanders played were assistants who joined in the bullying; reinforcers who encouraged and incited the bullying; outsiders who did nothing and as such condoned the bullying; defenders who tried to intervene; and those with no clear role. The empirical evidence from this Finnish study indicated that the trio of bullies, assistants and reinforcers outnumbered defenders by two to one, and outnumbered the victims by a far greater margin. An earlier study by Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (1996) also found significant gender differences in the participant roles with boys most likely to be in the role of bully, assistant or reinforcer and a greater frequency of girls as defenders or outsiders.

The New Zealand study by Adair et al. (2000) found that 42 per cent of student bystanders did not intervene when they witnessed bullying. The reasons for this was that the victim was either not a friend or not liked, they were fearful of becoming a target themselves, and they felt the bullying was probably deserved. There was also a sense of powerlessness that bullying could not really be stopped. However, as pointed out by Hazler (1996) bystanders make up the majority in most bullying situations and therefore are an important potential resource in tackling the phenomenon.

Disclosure

A major issue of concern in examining bullying at school is the reluctance of victims to tell someone. Whitney and Smith (1993) found that only one half of students in primary schools who reported bullying sought help from a teacher and a smaller proportion (one third) in secondary schools. Adair et al. (2000) in their New Zealand secondary school study found that bullying was reported to an adult by only 21 per cent of the 81 per cent of students who had witnessed bullying. It seems very likely then, that schools only deal with a small proportion of the bullying that is actually taking place. This is supported by Nairn and Smith (2002) who found that teachers consistently reported a

lower level of bullying than that identified by students. This may also be compounded by the differences in the perception of what constitutes bullying between students and teachers discussed earlier.

Research indicates that there are differences in disclosure related to the age and gender of the student and also who is told. Sharp and Smith (1994) highlight the finding that students are less likely to tell a teacher about bullying than anyone at home. Rigby (1997) reported that in a number of Australian studies it was found that disclosure about bullying generally declined with age except that girls were more likely to tell their friends they were being bullied as they grew older. There are many complex reasons why students are reluctant to tell someone, particularly a teacher, that they are being bullied. The culture of shame being attributed to the type of person who would 'dob' someone in (or 'nark' in the New Zealand vernacular) is cited by Rigby as being partly responsible for this reluctance. Bolton et al (2007) also found that the fear of being stigmatised prevented many students from seeking help for bullying from a peer counselling service. Furthermore, in the sample of Australian students from 8 to 18 years of those who did report the bullying, half believed the situation did not improve and in 9 per cent of the cases with boys they reported that it in fact got worse (Rigby, 1997).

Rivers and Smith (1994) also found that direct bullying was more likely to be disclosed to an adult by both girls and boys than indirect bullying. They hypothesised that this greater reluctance was often due to the difficulty of having clear evidence that indirect bullying had taken place, as the behaviour could often be interpreted in quite another way.

Special types of bullying

Sexual bullying

A study by Duncan (1999) in four co-educational secondary schools in the United Kingdom suggested that much of the reported non-sexual bullying could in fact be interpreted from a sexual context of gender conflict involving both homophobia and misogyny. He points out that this perspective has implications for the implementation of intervention programmes, and needs to be examined more closely. This is particularly in light of the withdrawal of schools from a consideration of students'

sexuality which he believes contributes to gender conflict, and also the heterosexualisation of students by our educational institutions. This view is supported by Adams, Cox and Dunstan (2004) who found that in the 19 secondary schools in the UK that they studied, none of their anti-bullying policies specifically mentioned sexual orientation.

Racial bullying

Racial bullying in the form of racist name calling is a frequent experience for many minority children. Whitney and Smith (1993) reported that in their study of 6000 British school children of those students being bullied, 15 per cent in junior/middle schools and 9 per cent in secondary schools were called racist names. However, they did not find the ethnic mix of the school to be related to the level of bullying. The indications are that this is a significantly greater problem in New Zealand schools. Moore et al. (1997) found a rate of between 31 and 47 per cent of students who reported having experienced racist name calling.

In a study into the experiences of students of Asian origin in three Auckland secondary schools Sobrun-Maharaj (2002) argues for a distinction to be made between bullying and ethnic intimidation. The author believes that bullying is a “socio-culturally benign term” (p10) and as such can have the effect of minimising the issue of ethnically motivated harassment.

Special needs students

Special needs students are particularly vulnerable to being bullied and are more likely to be involved with bullying. In a study by Whitney, Smith and Thompson (1994) in conjunction with the large scale Sheffield project they found that special needs students were two or three times more likely to be bullied than main stream students who were matched for gender, age and ethnicity; they were also more likely to bully. They identified three reasons for the high rate of bullying within this group that included these children standing out due to their learning difficulties or disabilities, being not as well integrated into their class and school as mainstream pupils and acting out in such a way that they were more susceptible to becoming so called provocative victims.

Teacher bullying

Until recently the issue of teachers bullying students has received very little attention. However, Maxwell and Carroll-Lind (1997) found that in their study of 259 New Zealand children in Years 7 and 8, 14 per cent reported having been bullied by adults at school. Nairn and Smith (2002) in their study in New Zealand secondary schools also found that while similar proportions of teachers and students agreed that teachers did not bully (41 and 48 per cent respectively), a greater percentage of teachers (39 per cent compared to 21 per cent of students) acknowledged that teachers were in fact involved in bullying students.

Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan, (2004) categorize five types of teacher behaviour that they believe potentially contribute to a bullying culture in the classroom. These include the authoritarian teacher who models bullying behaviour with a dominating, inappropriate wielding of power over students. There is the so called narcissistic queen bee teacher who has a more subtle approach whereby he or she is 'friends' with some of the students at the expense of others. Then there is the active bully teacher; the disinterested teacher who doesn't want to know; and the liberal, permissive teacher who allows an 'anything goes' culture in the classroom.

There is an important need to further investigate this aspect of bullying in schools (Nairn & Smith, 2002). As Olweus (1999) points out, not only would there be very negative effects on students from this teacher instigated bullying but that it is likely that such teachers would be ineffective in dealing with student-on-student bullying problems.

Girls bullying

Simmons (2002), comments that there is a hidden 'girls culture' where bullying is epidemic. It takes place in the form of backbiting, exclusion, rumours and manipulation of friendship groups. Recent research has focussed specifically on the issue of girls bullying and started to challenge some of the previous assumptions about gender differences in bullying. This is because earlier studies often did not clearly differentiate between indirect aggression that has been more closely associated with girls, and other forms of bullying such as verbal aggression. Ahmad and Smith (1994) point to the

definition used in the extensive studies by Olweus (1991) which only included physical and verbal bullying but did not include indirect bullying.

Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz and Kaukiainen (1992) developed a more comprehensive definition of bullying to take into account the subtleties of girls bullying. This included making a distinction between direct physical aggression; direct verbal aggression such as name calling and teasing; and indirect aggression such as gossiping, writing nasty notes and manipulating friends. In their study of three cohorts of students at age 8, age 11 and age 15 they found that the two older groups of girls were much more likely to use indirect means of aggression, while boys used direct means. Interestingly, they found no difference between girls and boys in the type of bullying at age 8. This finding they attributed to the need for a certain level of maturation and development of social networks in order to utilise indirect forms of bullying. Similarly, Crick and Grotpeter (1995), in their study of 491 third to sixth grade children found that girls were significantly more “relationally aggressive” than boys. Furthermore, they found a negative association between social-psychological adjustment and relationally aggressive children.

In a qualitative study of indirect aggression in teenage girls in Australia (Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000) the two most common forms were identified as talking about others and excluding people from the group. Although the students in this study acknowledged the devastating effects of this sort of bullying, they also described the excitement it created and the need to have close personal friendships and be part of the peer group.

Intervention programmes

Although there is justifiably a high degree of concern about the level of bullying in our schools, it is important that a considered approach is taken to the implementation of any intervention programmes. Swearer and Doll (2001) caution against bullying just being perceived as the current ‘educational fad’ with prevention programmes seen as ‘panaceas’. They go on to point out that “the proliferation of violence prevention programs marketed to schools has occurred in the absence of methodologically rigorous research proving that the programs are effective” (p8). A study by Howard, Flora and Griffin (1999) for example, indicated that less than a quarter of the 300 published

school based violence prevention programmes in the United States reported outcome data that showed that they reduced or prevented violence.

However, a whole school approach which features a co-ordinated programme at individual, class, school and sometimes community level is widely believed to be an essential element in dealing with bullying (Rigby, Smith & Pepler, 2004). Such an holistic approach can incorporate a range of strategies and interventions such as the following programmes that have shown some degree of success in countering bullying.

International Intervention Programmes

The No Blame Approach (Robinson & Maines, 1997) and the Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 1989) have both been described as a 'feelings approach' to tackling bullying because they attempt to develop practical solutions and pro-social alternatives with the perpetrators to change the dysfunctional bullying behaviour (Sullivan, 2000). Some of the assumptions they have in common is the need to develop empathy in bullies for their victims and that these feelings of concern will only be achieved in a non-blaming context (Rigby, 1997). They also focus on the social context of bullying, seeing it as a group phenomenon where peers seek to achieve dominance and status at the expense of others in the group. Both approaches also view punitive measures as just another way of reinforcing dominance and hierarchy through the use of power (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

The procedure for both these intervention programmes involves a step by step process of interviewing victims, bullies and bystanders, developing solutions to the problem and reviewing and checking on how these strategies are working. They do however, differ in respect to the order in which these groups are involved and Rigby (1997) suggests that the Method of Shared Concern is more elaborately developed as it provides greater one-to-one counselling, more protection for the victim, allows for the individual reactions of bullies and victims, and includes a final meeting with both bullies and victims to review the resolution of the problem.

Evidence to support the effectiveness of the No Blame Approach has come mainly from case studies which have presented very positive outcomes for this intervention. However, a more systematic evaluation would yield more information about this

promising technique for reducing bullying (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Some of the criticisms of this approach, according to Robinson and Maines (1997), arise from the faulty perceptions that such a non-punitive approach allows the bully to 'get away with it' and that bullies are somehow 'bad people'. Studies on the incidence of bullying certainly suggest that many young people are involved in bullying as both victims and bullies (Smith, 1991; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Robinson and Maines (1997) maintain that bullying is normal behaviour and that it is unhelpful to characterise it as abnormal or evil.

The Pikas Method of Shared Concern has also been successfully utilised in a number of schools including schools in the Sheffield project (Smith & Sharp, 1994) and in Australia (Rigby, 1996). However, amongst its critics is Olweus (1991) who disputes the claim that bullies can be made to feel empathy for their victims and believes that the supposed façade of cooperation between the teacher and bully actually involves manipulation and veiled threats and is therefore unethical.

Another intervention programme that in a similar way to the preceding two approaches seeks to respond to bullying incidents and empower students to take responsibility and find solutions is school tribunals or 'bully courts'. However, this particular approach differs significantly in that it seeks to apportion blame and decide on appropriate punishment. The Kidscape organisation advocated this approach in the United Kingdom in the 1990s and it received much publicity but there has been little evidence to support its effectiveness as it appears that very few schools have actually implemented the programme (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Some intervention programmes in practice

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme and variations of it have been used in a number of national projects in Norway dating back to 1983. The First Bergin Project Against Bullying using this programme ran from 1983 to 1985. Results obtained one and two years after the project was introduced indicated a significant reduction (50 per cent or more) in bullying as well as a reduction in other antisocial behaviour and an improvement in classroom behaviour and attitude (Olweus, 2004). However, when the programme was evaluated three years after implementation in Rogaland it was found that the overall rate of bullying had in fact increased (Roland, 2000). This was

attributed to the lack of support systems made available to implement the programme in the Rogaland area compared to the high level of support given to the Bergin Project. Olweus (2004) clearly links the effects of an intervention programme with the variability of its implementation. Subsequent national programmes in Norway have tended to take a broader approach, moving away from a focus on bullying to promote a more positive learning environment and pro-social behaviour. This is an acknowledgement of the social context of bullying and is seen as having the potential for multiple effects (Roland, 2000).

The large scale Sheffield Project undertaken in the United Kingdom over a period of two years also had mixed results. Schools in the study, which included 16 primary schools and seven secondary schools, all introduced a whole school policy on bullying and chose two or three other interventions. Although bullying reduced in the primary schools, there was little change in the reported incidence in secondary schools. However, there was an improvement in the overall culture of these schools and students were more likely to disclose bullying to adults (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

In contrast to the Sheffield results, Arora (1994) carried out a longitudinal study in a secondary school that showed that bullying could be substantially reduced with the implementation of a whole school approach, but that this effect may not be seen until after two years into the project. The author suggests that the shorter intervention period of fifteen months in the Sheffield study may partly account for the secondary school results that showed no significant reduction in bullying.

New Zealand intervention programmes

Intervention programmes that have been developed for the Aotearoa / New Zealand context include the Kia Kaha Programme (developed by the New Zealand Police Department), Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme (developed by the Foundation for Peace Studies) and Eliminating Violence - Managing Anger Programme (developed by Special Education Services).

The Kia Kaha Programme was developed in 1992 and consists of a resource kit for teachers, parents and students that includes a video, a booklet and pamphlets. It is designed for students from 8-14 years of age and a police education officer is available to schools to help set up the programme. The 14 minute video focuses on five bullying

scenarios, interspaced by questions about various aspects of the bullying and what strategies might be employed to solve the problem. The booklet compliments the video by providing guidelines for setting up an anti-bullying programme and exercises that relate to the bullying scenarios and ways to combat the bullying. The pamphlet provides information for parents and facilitates community involvement in the programme.

Sullivan (1999) acknowledges many of the positive aspects of Kia Kaha, including its bicultural focus, New Zealand context, professionally developed materials and a structure that was designed to develop an inclusive holistic approach. However, a focus group evaluation (Sullivan, 1997) aptly titled “The David and Goliath routine can backfire – tread carefully” identified many weaknesses in the programme and recommended some major changes. One of the major concerns was the focus placed on the victim and the onus on them to learn to stand up for themselves, thus implying that it is somehow their ‘fault’. Indeed, Olweus (2004) comments that programmes that “focus on changing the victims’ behaviour to make them less vulnerable to bullying” are counter-productive (p13). Other programmes discussed earlier such as the No Blame Approach (Robinson & Maines, 1997) specifically avoid this onus being placed on the victim as it can be construed as revictimisation. Furthermore, the expectation that power should be used to meet power, and the perception that bullies are stupid and cowardly and will back down in the face of assertiveness were seen as both inappropriate and unrealistic.

Some of the recommendations from this evaluation included a revision of the programme based on more up to date international research on bullying, including a wider range of anti-bullying techniques to replace the suggested solutions in the video. An emphasis change was also needed to place responsibility with the bully and their associates, and not solely on the victim. It was also thought that implementation needed to be school wide or the programme should not be offered at all. Other suggestions included the removal of questionable humour in the video which appeared to trivialise bullying, and the use of child actors in the bullying scenarios.

A study by Bell (1997) of teachers’ and principals’ perspectives of the Kia Kaha programme also recommended a major update of the programme. Her findings

indicated that while the programme appeared to assist students in coping with bullying, it did not reduce bullying behaviour. In line with Sullivan (1997), Bell (1997) recommended that a revised Kia Kaha programme would need to be put in place across the whole school, in conjunction with other complimentary anti-bullying strategies.

The Kia Kaha Programme was fine tuned in 2000 (Lockwood, 2002) to move away from laying blame, or labelling the bully and to incorporate some of the general principles of the No Blame Approach (Robinson & Maines, 1997). There has become a greater emphasis on the whole school approach and the integration of the complementary SES programme, Eliminating Violence –Managing Anger. However, an evaluation of the new Kia Kaha programme by Lockwood (2002) found that although it increased awareness of bullying among students and may assist students to oppose bullying or intervene as bystanders, it did not reduce the amount of bullying behaviour.

Eliminating Violence – Managing Anger is a programme that requires students, teachers, parents and the community to work together to create a safe, non-violent environment. Its objectives include the increased awareness of the prevalence and effects of violence, the management of anger and violence by the individual, the school and community, and the teaching of pro-social alternatives to violence that will lead to safer schools and communities. However, unlike Kia Kaha, there is a financial cost to the school to purchase this programme. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme in reducing levels of violence in schools was carried out by a team of researchers from the Ministry of Education (Moore, Adair, Kruiswijk & Lysaght, 1997) in three low decile South Auckland schools that were funded to run the programme. The findings clearly indicated a reduction in the incidence and severity of violence in the schools, as well as a greater intolerance for violent behaviour. Areas identified for improvement included the meaningful involvement of parents and the community and the need for more work in teaching individual students ways to manage anger and develop alternative strategies to violent behaviour.

The Cool Schools Mediation Programme involves the training of student peers in conflict mediation skills for both the classroom and playground. Although initially designed for primary and intermediate schools it has now been expanded to include a

programme for secondary schools and parents. This programme is designed to be implemented as part of a 'whole school approach' and is based on the premise that mediation is more effective than discipline in dealing with bullying (Sullivan, 2000). The developers of the programme suggest that it is successful in changing student behaviour because it aims to alter the culture of the school system by relying on the participation and enthusiasm of the students. However, although a small scale evaluation suggests that there have been positive benefits from the programme, the value of this research is somewhat limited, and a larger independent evaluation is needed before results can be generalised (Sullivan, 1999).

Despite many attempts to demonstrate the effectiveness of various intervention programmes across many countries, there has been a great diversity of results in the success achieved in reducing bullying. Although many anti-bullying programmes share a number of common features, particularly in regard to the 'whole school approach', there is also a wide degree of variation between programmes as illustrated previously. The differences in what is included in the programme in terms of prevention and intervention procedures and particularly the emphasis given to these various aspects make it difficult to explain the variability in outcome. Furthermore, issues of different research design and variability of outcome measures used, can present significant challenges in attempting to assess the effects of intervention programmes (Rigby, Smith & Pepler, 2004).

Critique of traditional research

This wealth of information we now have regarding bullying comes almost entirely then from studies representing the quantitative research paradigm. These studies have been underpinned by the same ontological and epistemological assumptions. They share an ontological commitment to realism whereby the world exists and bullying is a part of this world that we can have knowledge of. Associated with this is an empirical epistemology that is based on the belief that the knowledge we acquire of the world will ideally be an objective, bias-free view of the way things really are (Nightingale and Neilands, 1997).

The majority of research has set out, first and foremost to quantify bullying. It has attempted to measure or count the incidence of bullying in schools. There have been a

number of methods employed to achieve this (Smith, 1991) but the anonymous questionnaire developed by Olweus in Norway is now widely used. Furthermore, the acceptance of the epistemological assumptions of empiricism in the vast body of research into the construct of bullying has led to a preoccupation with the individual as the proper object of study. However, despite this large body of research that has accumulated over the past thirty odd years it has been suggested (Torrance, 2000; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003) that we still do not have a good understanding of the concept of bullying.

Hepburn (1997b) criticises much of the traditional research on bullying in that it focuses only on fixed personality traits of the individual and their interpersonal relationships. She points to the work of Smith and Sharp (1994) and Olweus (1978, 1980, 1993) which seeks to categorize various types of bullies and victims and their behaviour in order to explain bullying behaviour and develop interventions. She argues that this often leads to a circular logic, for example “she is bullied (i.e. a victim) because she is a provocative victim type”, which is at the heart of an adherence to a humanist ideology. This narrow focus becomes very limiting and prevents a deeper understanding of the social concept of bullying.

Hepburn (1997a) also argues that the definition of bullying used in the Sheffield study (Smith & Sharp, 1994) which was closely based on the Olweus questionnaire (Olweus, 1991), focuses only on the behaviour of children or young people. It specifically excludes any consideration of bullying that might take place between adults, or adults and children. So, although students are probably well accustomed to intimidatory behaviour from adults, whether teachers, parents or caregivers, this is not presented as bullying. This abuse of power is therefore maintained as a taken for granted norm in the way adult-child relations are conducted in our society. Furthermore, by locating the problem within the personalities of different students and their interpersonal relations with other students, the onus is on them in seeking a solution to the problem.

This focus on individualism by mainstream psychology has also been roundly criticised by Sampson (1983) for similar reasons. If we take the individual and the essences that make up that person as the proper object of study (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997), then we create, as Sampson suggests, a “psychological subject who is given the full burden

of responsibility for correcting his or her troubles... we view the troubles of people to be a problem of their willpower, motivation, intellect or personality dynamics" (p144). The implications for intervention programmes to address bullying if we accept this traditional view are of considerable concern.

A strong criticism of this individual focus in quantitative studies of bullying is also made by Yoneyama and Naito (2003) who highlight the need for a greater sociological perspective. Based on the premise that bullying is a widespread social phenomenon, the authors emphasise the need to examine the social structure of the school, its context and characteristics in order to understand the nature of bullying. Their findings from a review of the bullying literature, with a particular emphasis on Japanese research, suggest that a high level of student stress, power-dominant relationships learnt from the teacher-student relationship, the emphasis on conformity, and teacher-centred modes of learning all interact in the "cage-like" (p326) school environment to promote bullying.

This appreciation of the wider social context of bullying is also reflected in the updated national Norwegian intervention programme for bullying as discussed earlier (Roland, 2000). The design of this programme has acknowledged the intrinsic link between such things as teaching and learning, classroom management and student-teacher relationships and bullying behaviour. Indeed, Yoneyama and Naito (2003) although not commenting on quantitative research per se, have called for a paradigm shift away from the individual to looking at key aspects of the school in understanding bullying.

Qualitative research

The challenge for qualitative studies into bullying then, is to provide a greater insight and understanding into the nature of bullying, that has been somewhat lacking in the extensive quantitative studies that have been reviewed. However, as pointed out by Torrance (2000) there has been very little in the way of qualitative studies in the research literature.

Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003), motivated by this concern regarding our apparent lack of understanding surrounding bullying, carried out a qualitative study with a socialconstructionist approach to investigate how children interpret and construct bullying among their class mates. There were 74 participants of 10-12 years of age

from three classes which were chosen from a pool of 48 classes that were involved in a large-scale bullying intervention programme. The students were interviewed in same-sex groups of 3-6 with a questionnaire being filled out by students in all 48 classes a few weeks prior to the interviews. The three classes chosen were based on student's self- and peer-reports that indicated bullying was taking place. The interview groups were formed on the basis of friendships indicated by social maps drawn by the children in the questionnaire. Attitude data and information from the Participant Role Questionnaire (Salmivalli et al., 1996) was used as background information for the researchers in the analytical phase of the research. Interviews of 15-30 minutes used cartoons of bullying as a starting point and were taped and transcribed. The analysis employed a discourse analytical method after Potter and Wetherall (1987) with a focus on identifying various interpretative repertoires employed by the students when constructing bullying and the function and consequences of these constructions.

The researchers identified four categories of interpretative repertoires of bullying. These included bullying as intentional harm-doing using repertoires of "harassment" and "empathy"; bullying as harmless involving "underestimation", "externalizing" and "victim's intentions"; bullying as justified using the "odd student repertoire" and the repertoire of "deserving"; and the interpretative repertoire of "girls' talk".

There was a particular emphasis on, and common use of the repertoires that bullying is harmless or justified by the students as reflected in the title of this article, "She is not actually bullied". Some of the reasons for this, suggested by the researchers, are that the interview questions can be viewed by the students as possible accusations that they need to defend themselves against. Also in the context of the classroom, it may be difficult for students who enjoy belonging to the group to construct bullying as a type of violence. Therefore by underestimating bullying they can cope with what is happening and retain their own place in the class. It is suggested that these "bully-positive" repertoires, which are driven by bullies and their associates, can become the dominant construction and accepted as 'truth'.

Hepburn (1997a) also examined bullying in schools from a post-modern discursive approach. She argues that it is important to understand the way people construct 'being human' and their use of this construction in explaining bullying, as this can have

consequences of actually maintaining the behaviour. She carried out semi-structured interviews with teachers in two secondary schools; the questions covered a number of topics within the broad area of school bullying. The interviews were taped and transcribed, with the analytical interpretations based strongly on the work of Foucault and Derrida.

The findings showed that many of the discourses focussed on the individual in relation to bullying. A common construction was that of personal responsibility which allowed for justification and warranting of blaming and therefore punishment. An interesting point was the Catch-22 dilemma that continued to arise, e.g. if you own up to your oppression i.e. being bullied, that makes you into that type of person, i.e. a victim. However, to resist this is to refuse help and may lead to further bullying. Thus, the author argues that our acceptance of the taken for granted constructions of bullying is due to the limitations of humanist discourses on what it is to be human. The focus on constructions of individual responsibility and fixed personality traits can in fact maintain the problem of bullying. Hepburn asserts that to tackle bullying we must begin to challenge these discursive constructions. Until this wider problem is addressed she sees little hope for dealing with bullying in schools.

Hepburn (1997 b) carried out a more in depth analysis of two teachers from the above study in order to examine the consequences of various constructions of bullying and their implications for education. It is important to note that this small focus on only two teachers at one school, which mainstream studies would view with considerable concern, is a reflection of the discursive approach which does not seek to generalise findings; rather this detailed analysis attempts to examine the taken for granted assumptions we hold regarding schools, students, discipline and punishment. It looks particularly at the way secondary school teachers draw upon commonly used discourses to make sense of students, misbehaviour, bullying and discipline. The focus of teachers' talk was very much on the individual student as the source of the problem, with the need for control and conformity being a feature. Teachers used a variety of strategies around such things as normalisation, classroom control and considered rational responses to account for and justify teacher intimidation of students. Hepburn challenges these discourses that she believes function to maintain the hierarchical and oppressive power relationship between teacher and student, and indeed adult and child.

Hepburn (2000) also used this discursive approach to examine the ways in which teachers responded to implications that they had bullied students. This research again highlighted certain aspects of bullying that have rarely been dealt with in the traditional literature. These included viewing bullying as a discursively constructed phenomenon rather than as a function of an individual and their personality; acknowledging the existence of bullying between teachers and students; and focusing on the discursive resources that teachers draw upon to manage accusations of teacher bullying. Three themes were identified which illustrated the complex strategies that teachers used in order to distance themselves from being held responsible for possible claims of intimidation. These were subjectivity constructions, whereby the teacher construction of the classroom self served a useful function in terms of accountability; normalizing techniques which served to construct bullying as normal; and figuration which examined the use of figurative language in the teachers' discursive constructions.

This research is both exciting and challenging as it moves on from the traditional, mainstream research to use a strong theoretical approach in examining the issue of school bullying and indeed questioning the whole 'taken for granted' nature of educational institutions such as schools.

Conclusion

The literature overwhelmingly indicates that institutionalised schooling is intrinsically linked to widespread student bullying, and despite some differences this is found in all countries and cultures. The multiple and complex issues associated with research into bullying have however, resulted in a variety of at times contradictory findings. This has led to ongoing debates about both the nature of bullying and ways to remedy the problem.

Traditional research methods have focussed on the individual, their characteristics and relationships with others. The source of the problem has been placed squarely on the student and intervention programmes likewise, are often based on models of individual responsibility. However, it is apparent that this limited focus has done little to alleviate the devastating and far-reaching effects of bullying on young lives.

It is imperative therefore that researchers find a pathway to move forward in the investigation of bullying. Qualitative approaches have I believe, the potential to provide us with a different kind of understanding of the phenomenon. A discursive perspective allows for the identification of the various discourses surrounding bullying. It can expand the parameters of research to include the consideration of the power relationships operating within educational institutions, thus ensuring a more far-reaching focus. It is hoped that the present study will in some small way contribute to this goal.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

This chapter lays the foundation of the theoretical framework upon which this study is built. It attempts to give the reader some insight into the development of social constructionism, the relationship between power and discourse and how discourse analysis may provide a way forward in understanding how students make sense of bullying.

Traditional psychological research, as we have seen, has been based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of empiricism which seeks out knowledge through events in the real world, a perspective termed as 'exogenic' by Gergen (1985). Empiricism presupposes that the source of this knowledge is our experience of the world. Therefore, it assumes that to advance knowledge we must carry out experiments and observations on our sensory experiences; a view that is associated with positivism.

An essential element of mainstream psychology is the view that the individual and the 'essences' that make up that person is the proper object of psychological study. Furthermore, the separation of this object of study and the researcher has been a fundamental part of the development of empiricism. The quest for objectivity demands this separation; you cannot have knowledge of an object without it, as this is what objectivity means. Nor, in this theoretical framework, is the object of study granted credit that they have terms of understanding, it is the researcher that has terms of understanding. Thus, this implicit power imbalance between the researcher and the object of study means that the findings of such psychological research are given the 'stamp' of fact and therefore knowledge. As traditional psychology reflects the dominant values and biases of mainstream society it functions to sustain and reinforce the status quo (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997).

A graphic illustration of these ontological and epistemological assumptions has been seen in the traditional methodological approach to research on bullying in much of the literature, as reviewed previously. In stark contrast to the methodologies employed by mainstream psychology which are dominated by individualism and underpinned by empiricism, are the possibilities and opportunities opened up by the adoption of

radically different methodologies informed by the ontological and epistemological commitments of social constructionism. There has to date only been a limited number of studies into bullying that embrace this framework. However, as shown through the literature review, the move to a post-modern consideration of this phenomenon has the potential to challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding bullying.

In this present study I adopt such a methodology that takes a critical stance to how our present knowledge on bullying has developed, how it is maintained, whose interests it may serve and whom it may oppress. Furthermore, it will be concerned with examining the implications of this knowledge and its practical application for bullying in secondary schools. First and foremost however, it is necessary to lay the groundwork for such a theoretical framework as it is important to recognise the close link between methodology and the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning it (Tuffin & Howard, 2001).

Social constructionism

To attempt to give a single adequate definition of social constructionism is to open up a 'mare's nest' of contradiction, controversy and confusion. In fact, as pointed out by Potter (1996), this attempt would be totally rejected by constructionism; a better approach then is to examine how social constructionism itself has been constructed.

Social constructionism draws upon a number of disciplines and can be thought of as emerging at the time that has been referred to as the 'crisis of confidence' in psychology between the late 1950s to the mid 1980s (Pancer, 1997). The empiricist tradition of the discipline was beginning to be criticised and challenged. Fundamental to this critical approach was the disenchantment with the epistemological assumptions of empiricism and its links with positivism. In contrast, social constructionism is a "linguistically mediated epistemology" (Tuffin & Howard, 2001, p199). It argues that knowledge is constructed between people in their everyday conversations and interactions with each other.

One of the central epistemological assumptions of social constructionism is that language is the primary process by which knowledge is produced. It is not just a passive means of expressing oneself or communicating, but an active and functional

process; when we say something we are doing something. Language is performing a function: it serves a purpose (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Another important feature of language for social constructionism is that it is constantly changing and its meaning varies in different contexts (Burr, 1995). Not only this but language constructs our world, the person is constructed through language. The categories available to us in language are the categories through which we come to understand ourselves and our world.

Another important epistemological issue that could be thought of as contributing to the construction of social constructionism is not only the type of knowledge but also its purpose. Nightingale and Neilands (1997) refer to the inherent political stance of critical psychology. Concerns arose in the 1960s and early 1970s that psychology was being used by dominant and more powerful groups to marginalise and oppress certain sections of society (Burr, 1995). Social constructionism challenges taken for granted knowledge and those who have a vested interest in knowledge being accepted in society.

The analogy of a range of different family characteristics that can be used to identify a social constructionist position is one used by both Burr (1995) and Potter (1996). Under this model we can view social constructionism as a collection of different theoretical perspectives that have in common some basic assumptions outlined by Gergen (1985).

Firstly there is the idea that one must challenge taken-for-granted knowledge of the world, in particular the supposed objectivity of our observations of the world. The way we perceive the world around us is to divide it up into discrete categories. Social constructionism encourages us to critically evaluate whether these categories are real divisions or merely linguistic constructions.

The second tenet of social constructionism is that those categories by which we understand the world are in fact specific to, and a product of, particular cultures and periods of history. Therefore such concepts as childhood, emotion, identity, to name just a few, can change significantly over the years and vary from culture to culture. It is important to realise the significance of this in terms of its departure from the

epistemological assumptions of empiricism. Social constructionism acknowledges the multiplicity of 'truth' and as a consequence of this there can be no such thing as an objective fact. It must be recognised that all knowledge is gained by looking at the world from a certain perspective or with a certain bias, and no particular understanding of the world is more accurate in its representation of reality than another (Burr, 1995), yet this search for an objective fact is the cornerstone of an empiricist model.

A third assumption is that knowledge does not come from observations of the world as it really is but is instead constructed between people in their everyday interactions, particularly with the use of language. Therefore, a given form of understanding or knowledge is not only constructed but maintained by social processes. The social constructionist idea of a multiplicity of truth is referred to as relativism because each of the conflicting discourses around an object can only be viewed relative to one another. It is not possible to say if one is true or false in terms of the 'real thing' (Burr, 1995). Human beings are thrust into a contest to try and 'vie' for their version of events to be accepted over others; Gergen (1989) called this 'warranting voice'.

Following on from this is the further assumption that this social construction of knowledge carries with it a form of social action. Some constructions of knowledge will be linked to certain social action, while other constructions of that knowledge will require a different sort of social action. For example, to construct alcoholism as a depraved, unacceptable behaviour is to place blame on the individual with a consequence of possible imprisonment for the behaviour. However, to construct alcoholism as drug dependency is to mitigate blame and call for treatment (Burr, 1995). This has important implications for our understandings of bullying and the interventions that schools may wish to implement.

An essential element of the epistemological underpinnings of social constructionism is its assumptions concerning the nature of the object of study. Unlike empiricists, social constructionists are anti-essentialists in that they do not perceive people as possessing a nature or personality that you can 'discover'. Furthermore, social constructionism is concerned with the inextricable link between the individual and society; one cannot be separated from the other (Nightingale & Neilands, 1997). The object of study then for the social constructionist is language. Social constructionism is concerned with how

language can be structured, how accounts can be varied and the performative function that is achieved by that structure or variation.

The nature of the relationship between the object of study and the researcher is also central to the epistemological assumptions of social constructionism and differs significantly from the assumptions of empiricism. There is no need to separate the researcher from that which is being researched in a vain attempt to achieve objectivity. The researcher, as a human being, is part of the world and they must view the world from their own perspective with their own assumptions and bias. Social constructionism sees it as a fallacy in psychology to suggest that an empiricist approach can provide an objective understanding of a phenomena without the results being somehow 'tainted' by the researcher (Burr, 1995).

A social constructionist approach therefore, calls on the psychological researcher to acknowledge their intrinsic relationship with the object of study. The research is constructed between the researcher and the people they are researching, it is a joint production. Furthermore, social constructionism views with concern the implicit power imbalance between the researcher and the object of study in an empirical theoretical framework. The nature of an empirical epistemology means that it is the researcher's 'voice' that is given 'warrant' over that of the 'subject'. Social constructionism however, recognises that all versions including that of the 'subject' are valid. The researcher's interpretation or 'reading' has no more 'warrant' than the subject's account. This assumption then changes the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched it seeks to redress the power imbalance of the relationship (Burr, 1995).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of social constructionism have a number of implications for methodology. The aim of social constructionist research should not be to try and uncover 'facts' or search for 'truth' but to make use of the researcher's 'reading' of the phenomena to bring about change for those who need it. Thus, in the consideration of methodology, particularly in the area of problem definition, it is essential to realise that the aim of the research must be political, by virtue of the epistemological underpinnings of social constructionism. This obviously draws criticism from the empiricist point of view which would like to regard itself as

apolitical despite the fact that this 'neutral' view itself can have a very powerful political effect (Burr, 1995).

An empiricist approach requires specific definitions of the psychological constructs surrounding the research area. However, in social constructionism, this is not required. In fact social constructionists would view the whole process of defining the constructs as extremely problematic (Watson, 1998). Problem definition will come about from the specific understandings of the epistemological assumptions embedded in the research area. It will "inform both the research 'questions' which may be asked and the methods which may be deployed" (Tuffin and Howard, 2001, p196).

Social constructionism then offers a critically different approach to research than traditional empirical psychology. It does not adhere to the idea of a correct methodology for doing research. It is a matter of proceeding from the problem definition to work out a methodology appropriate to the research question. Research design will often employ discourse analysis as a technique because of the importance social constructionism gives to language, 'it simply is the most basic and pervasive form of interaction between people', (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p9). It does not however qualify technically as a methodology because it involves principles and guidelines rather than a prescription on how to proceed. This is not surprising as the very nature of discourse analysis can be seen as subjective and interpretive. It is also important to note here that social constructionism and discourse analysis 'do not map on to each other in a one-to-one fashion' (Burr, 1995, p163). Other research designs are possible for social constructionists and researchers who use discourse analysis may not be social constructionists.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad term which is used over a wide variety of research practices with different aims and theoretical backgrounds (Burr, 1995). However, there have emerged two major versions of discourse analysis in psychology. Potter and Wetherell's (1987) approach is to examine ordinary language particularly speaking and writing, as a social process. It is often viewed as a micro approach as it is concerned with the minute detail of talk and text. The other school of discourse is that of Parker (1990) which has been recognised as a more macro approach. It follows a

poststructuralist framework informed by the work of Foucault and Derrida among others and emphasises the political nature of language.

Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) refer to their work as discourse analysis, though often prefer the term of 'interpretive repertoires' rather than 'discourses'. Their understanding of discourse is that it is 'all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p7). They are particularly concerned with three major aspects of language. Firstly there is the function that language performs which is based on the assumption that discourse is used to do something, such as persuade, accuse or defend. It is important to make the point however that this 'action orientation' of language is not always carried out explicitly therefore an awareness of the context is essential in making interpretations. It is also necessary to distinguish between function and intention. For example, although you may intend to accuse, your discourse may not serve this function. Discourse analysis is not concerned with intention but the functional orientation of language in everyday use. Furthermore, it is interested in the techniques of rhetoric employed in organising discourse.

The second aspect of concern for Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) is the construction of an account. This construction takes place by using 'pre-existing linguistic resources' (p207) which Burr (1995) sees as being analogous to 'tool-kits'. The particular interpretive repertoires drawn upon to put together an account will be chosen by a process of selection which may not be conscious, but will be an indication of the speaker's interests. An important consequence of this constructive process which is linked to the function of language is the realisation that the way in which we encounter and deal with the world comes to us from various discursive constructions that are manufactured for us. Thus, the implication of this is that reality is socially constructed through the accounts we have of it. Following on from the functional and constructive nature of discourse is the third tenet which highlights the variation that will be present in discourse. This variability will not only be inevitable but is an essential element of the analysis because of its close links to the action orientation of language.

Later work by Potter and Wetherell (1995) expands these themes into six principles which emphasise the rhetorical organisation of discourse, issues of stake and accountability and concerns with what Billig et al (1988) term “ideological dilemmas” or our perception that there are always two sides to any issue which are shaped by commonly shared beliefs and values. Discourse analysis is interested in the way that rhetoric is used to perform specific argumentative functions because it enables the researcher to highlight the way in which people’s versions of the world may be organised to counter possible alternatives which may not be always explicitly stated. Therefore, the perception that humans as merely disinterested information processors is challenged and it opens our eyes to the world of social conflict. Linked to this conflict are the concerns of accountability and the stake or interest one may have in an action. This concern with the theme of rhetoric and our attempts to persuade each other of the power of our arguments leads to an examination of how ideology is organised i.e. talk about power. While discourses can be employed to keep people willingly in a condition of oppression, the concept of ideology can be used to talk about the way in which discourses obscure such power relations.

Parker has a different notion of discourse which Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) are very clear to distinguish from their own discourse analysis. They term the work of Parker as ‘analysis of discourses’ with its focus on the identification of prevailing discourses and the power relationships involved. Parker is interested in examining the ‘subject positions offered by different discourses, and the identity and political implications of these’ (Burr, 1995, p.166).

Parker’s definition of a discourse is that ‘it is a system of statements which constructs an object’ (Parker, 1990, p191). He provides seven criteria to support this definition of discourses as a way to fill a gap he perceives in the method described by Potter and Wetherell (1987). These are firstly that a discourse is a coherent system of meanings, it is realized in texts, it reflects on its own way of speaking, it refers to other discourses, it is about objects, it contains subjects and it is historically located. He also puts forward a further three criteria which he criticises Potter and Wetherell for neglecting. While Parker declares ‘my only understanding of discourse is informed by poststructuralist work’ (Parker, 1990, p190) he laments the reducing emphasis that Potter & Wetherell place on the poststructuralist tradition, particularly in their later work. Parker believes

that the focus of research should be to show the connection between discourse and power by recognising that discourses support institutions, reproduce power relations and have ideological effects. It should also be noted that this approach requires an awareness of the social power relationships of the research itself, for example between the researcher and participant.

Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) criticism of Parker's work is based on three main aspects. Firstly is the tendency of Parker's approach to reify the discourse and thus neglect considerations of what the speaker is doing with the talk (Burr, 1995). Aligned to this is that, in using Parker's criteria for recognising discourses in the analytic practice there is the danger that it will just become a 'common-sense' labelling process by the analyst. Furthermore, opportunities for critical challenges to common-sense discourses are lost if that common-sense is reified in the analysis. Despite this criticism, Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) concede their agreement with much of Parker's work and recognise the value of his approach. Indeed they confess to perhaps over-emphasising their differences in order to make their theoretical point. Similarly, Burr (1995) also acknowledges that these two versions of discourse analysis have much in common.

However, there are some aspects that seem to me to mark out and distinguish the two approaches. Firstly, while the Potter and Wetherell school of discourse seeks out discourse in oral and written text, Parker extends this idea to find discourse everywhere in everything that has meaning. For example Parker (1990) recognised an electronic game as a text in which he identified a Christian discourse. I certainly concur with Parker's wider view of discourse and think it is important to continually remind ourselves of the discourses that may be inhibiting all aspects of our world.

Another noticeable difference between these two versions of discourse analysis in psychology is their varying adherence to a poststructuralist philosophy as mentioned earlier. While Potter and Wetherell investigate power relationships as a topic through the use of psychology, for example in their work on racism in New Zealand (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), Parker on the other hand is interested in changing and disrupting power relationships within psychology.

Foucault and power

The link between power and discourse and particularly the relationship between knowledge and power have been very important issues for such prominent poststructuralist writers as Foucault (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It would be useful at this stage to explain the background to Foucault's reasoning on this relationship which can also be seen as being associated with the way in which human beings have been made subjects. The objectification of the subject is achieved according to Foucault in three ways. The first involves a variety of practises that result in the dividing of subjects within themselves or from others. An example given by Foucault was the categorization and subsequent incarceration of the insane in mental asylums. Thus 'dividing practices' allowed power and knowledge to often be applied and manipulated to certain groups to achieve their domination and exclusion. The objectification of the subject also takes place as a consequence of the scientific classification of our methods of study. The 'discipline' of economics, for example, objectifies the working man as a unit of production. While these two means of objectification view the human being as being a passive part of the process, it is in what Foucault termed the 'subjectification' of the human being that we are seen as actively transforming ourselves into a subject. It is a process of self enlightenment and giving ourselves meaning (Foucault, 1882).

The formation of the subject is inherently linked to the twin concepts of knowledge and power. However, Foucault perceived this relationship in quite a new way and argued that many social theorists' conception of power was based on an inappropriate and outdated notion of sovereign power (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Foucault saw power as having developed since the sixteenth century into both an 'individualizing' and 'totalizing' form invested in the state. This 'individualizing' form was evident in the objectification of the subject but the 'totalizing procedures' came about with changes to the relationship between the state and individuals. There was a change of focus from concerns of the sovereign and the characteristics of the state itself, to how the state could manage individuals and all aspects of society to achieve order and economy. The advancement of a rationale for statistical knowledge of all aspects of the state's power, and the subsequent growth of the administrative procedures of the state was a consequence of this change. This led to the development of what Foucault termed 'bio-power' which was organized around the human species at one end of a spectrum and the human body at the other end. This allowed knowledge and power to

be coupled and used in the ensuing conversion of human life via procedures termed 'technologies' (Rabinow, 1984). Foucault argued that understanding such technologies as disciplinary power and bio-power was necessary to appreciate the nature of modern power which operates through knowledge and is intrinsically bound up with discourse (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's plan for the panopticon is seen as a model of how 'disciplinary' technologies and indeed other technologies such as 'normalisation' act as mechanisms in the political rationale that brings together knowledge, power and the subject. This structure was conceived in the nineteenth century and consisted of a tall tower positioned centrally in a courtyard. It was completely surrounded by other buildings that consisted of individual 'cells' arranged over a number of levels. Each cell was provided with two windows, one that allowed light in from the outside and one that faced the tower. The tower also had observational windows that allowed all of the cells to be viewed at any time by a 'supervisor'. The occupants of the cells however, were not visible to one another, nor were they able to ascertain when or if they were under surveillance from the tower (Burr, 1995).

There are some interesting interpretations of how the panopticon model may be utilised to view modern day educational and parental technologies. For example Foster (2003) described how black, female athletic students enrolled in an elite sports programme were part of a similar process of surveillance, discipline and control in order to maximise their academic and athletic potential. Blackford (2004) invoked a Foucauldian analysis of the panopticon to shed light on the parental performance of mothers gathered on park benches surrounding their children playing in a suburban playground.

The important aspect of the model however, is that the architectural design skilfully ensures that all involved become ensnared in this power apparatus. The 'prisoner' (student; child) can never be certain whether they are being observed or not by the tower so they become self regulated. The 'supervisor' (teacher; parent) is also under constant observation from the cells and thus the system also controls him. Foucault saw this as the most insidious aspect of a disciplinary technology (Rabinow, 1984). The panopticon also represents the logic for 'normalization', the process by which

individuals are ordered around the norm (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). This is a very important aspect of 'bio-power' as there is the need to regulate life not by absolutes of right and wrong but by a system of identifying and judging that which is normal or abnormal. Foucault saw this as leading to the 'normalization' of the law and the implementation of 'corrective procedures' through the influence in the nineteenth century of such apparatuses as medicine, psychiatry and education.

The state is therefore seen as increasingly developing a totalizing and individualizing form of power. The aim of this research is to challenge the power structures within institutions that lead to this subjection and control. Bullying can be interpreted theoretically as a manifestation of such power structures inherent in the traditional educational institution. Thus particular discourses of education that prevail in our society today and are accepted as 'common sense' are what Foucault termed knowledge and are intrinsically linked to power. They provide the potential to act in certain ways, while marginalising alternative practices. This knowledge allows the exercising of power to obtain control while simultaneously masking that power by representing such acts as reasonable and acceptable. This discourse analysis of students' talk about bullying is an attempt to expose this relationship between discourse and power in our schools.

Problems, debates and dilemmas

Discourse analysis, as a radically different research approach to methodology, has nevertheless been criticised first and foremost from an extra-discursive perspective. As discussed earlier, the political nature of this research is unfavourably compared to the apolitical intentions of empiricism. Abrams and Hogg (1990) also question the political intentions of discourse analysts in their choice of groups they believe are marginalised. Other aspects of discourse analysis which, by their very nature, provoke outraged criticism from researchers working under the epistemological assumptions of empiricism include the perceived lack of objectivity, reliability and validity. However, in adopting this discursive paradigm, such issues are viewed in a very different light. Thus the subjective nature of discourse, the lack of quantification or restriction of data contributes to the richness of the research and as such is one of the strengths of discourse analysis.

There still however remain many problems, debates and dilemmas surrounding discourse analysis often from within the discursive field itself. Perhaps one of the most unsettling and thorny issues is that presented by relativism. If you are unable to identify a 'true' discourse relative to a 'false' discourse it becomes particularly problematic if you wish to identify such things as social inequality or oppression in order to bring about change for the 'better'. This is one of the concerns expressed by Parker and Burman (1993) in their article that considers 'thirty two problems with discourse analysis'. However, Hepburn (1997) argues that this slippery slope of relativism conjured up by Parker and Burman is a result of taking a realist perspective on the issue. She contends that "the 'relativist' is able to recognise the flexibility of a position in which discourses can be drawn upon strategically to achieve particular ends in particular contexts: perhaps for the construction of identities, or for opposition to political ideologies and institutions" (p30).

This problem of relativism can be viewed as rather a paradox as it comes about because of the reflexivity inherent in discourse analysis. Reflexivity refers to a self-conscious awareness that when you are engaged in research you are also involved in the process of constructing a particular version of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis employs a number of reflexive devices to draw attention to this constructive nature of the research itself. Edwards and Potter (1992) used the 'Reflexive Box' which consists of dialogue between the two authors. Other such strategies involve the inclusion of poems, art or the authors own thoughts as they produce their 'reading'. However, Gill (1995) has criticised such devices in that they can in fact be used to defend ones own argument against rebuttal. While I agree with Gill's concern about this potential function of some reflexive practices used, I think that such techniques as the dialogue box can in fact contribute to the reflexivity of the research. It is the responsibility of the individual researcher to ensure that they do not just become a token gesture to the requirement of reflexivity but are an honest attempt to comment on their relationship with the research as the study proceeds.

Gill (1995) attempts to address some of the dilemmas presented by relativism, reflexivity and politics by a proposed theoretical orientation to discourse analysis that she terms 'politically informed relativism' (p179) which is inextricably linked to reflexivity. I applaud Gill's insistence that the researcher must declare their own

values, biases and politics in an open and honest fashion. This leads to the potential to challenge certain power relationships and institute social change.

Reflexivity also calls on the discourse analyst to be aware of the imbalance of power that is inherent in the relationship between researcher and participant. One method of attempting to disrupt this imbalance is through the use of reciprocity. An example in some local research is O'Connor (1997) who utilised the concept of reciprocity to endeavour to ensure validity of participation. This involved returning interview transcripts to the participants, providing workshops free of charge, providing resources on counselling and collaborating with participants in the data analysis. However, Parker and Burman (1993) suggest that such attempts may still not achieve a real change in the power relationship between participants and researcher. Likewise Marks (1993) found that attempts at reflexivity still did not undermine the 'warranting' voice of the researcher.

Conclusion

Despite these issues and debates, the adoption in this study of a methodology that is underpinned by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of social constructionism presents, in my view, a way forward in our endeavours to 'make sense' of bullying. A research design that utilises the technique of discourse analysis does not aim to seek out the 'truth' from within the individual, but is interested in the knowledge constructed between people in their social interactions. This research aims to provide a critical focus to the political nature of language, its power relations and ideological effects. The goal of this discourse analysis of students' talk about bullying in secondary school is to offer up my 'reading' of the phenomenon of bullying in the hope that it may challenge prevailing educational discourses that support injustice, oppression and power inequalities in our schools, and possibly contribute to bringing about change.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

This chapter begins with an ethnographic approach to setting the stage for the research with a consideration of the significant contextual issues of the school scene and the background to the study. The researcher's story is told to highlight her place in this world and thus to acknowledge that she will view it from her own perspective with her own assumptions and bias. The participants, their relationship with the researcher and the dilemma that this posed are explored, along with safety and ethical issues. The story of the research then unfolds through the procedure, with time taken to reflect on that process and the analytical route chosen.

Setting the scene

Potter and Wetherell (1987) point to the importance of context in analysis, thus before beginning this study of students' talk surrounding bullying it is essential to examine the context of the text. This will give the researcher and the reader a greater understanding of the various linguistic resources that may be employed within the discourse. It is important to remember that "linguistic resources are culturally and historically embedded" (Lyons, Stephens, Morgan, Praat & Tuffin, 1996, p78).

River Valley High is a small, semi-rural secondary school established in 1961. Although it does not have a long history, in many respects it still clings to some of its founding traditions and formalities laid down in the era of secondary education in New Zealand in the sixties. An example of this would be the formal school assembly in which staff file on to the stage of the school hall as students stand in silence as a mark of respect. A significant proportion of the students are bussed from outlying rural areas to the school, located in a small provincial New Zealand town. The roll comprises of approximately fifty per cent of students who identify as Māori. The remainder of the ethnic composition is predominantly Pakeha, with a few Asian students and exchange students from a European background.

The town and the school itself is a close-knit community with a low socio-economic population, although farmers in the outlying rural areas have fared significantly better with the upturn of the dairy industry recently. The school has a decile rating of 2 (this is

a socio-economic ranking on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest). The students could perhaps be regarded as conforming to a stereotype of rural youth that views them as relatively unsophisticated in comparison to their urban counterparts in that they tend to be fairly open and trusting and perhaps slightly naïve in their approach to life. However, the town and the school are not without their own social problems, with a relatively high crime rate and gang and drug related issues common to many economically challenged provincial towns in New Zealand.

Many staff at the college live locally, although this is a changing trend, with a number of newer staff commuting from a nearby city. Students often perceive newcomers as outsiders, although their initial cautious attitude is usually counterbalanced by the open friendly nature of the student body generally. The small school roll, together with a strong House system that organises the students into teams, each of which consists of individuals from all year levels, means that there is a close interaction between all students and students and staff over consecutive years of schooling. Extra-curricular activities such as sport, drama and adventure based camps are a feature of the school, which also strengthens the teacher/ student bond and teacher/ parent relationships.

Background for a project on bullying

In 1997 River Valley High implemented a whole school anti-bullying programme following a study at the school by Special Education Services (SES, now known as Group Special Education, GSE). Staff and students were involved in the planning and development of the programme which was based on the SES programme “Eliminating Violence – Managing Anger”, but tailored to the specific needs and culture of River Valley High.

In 2002 I was a teacher at the school with responsibility for the anti-bullying programme. I requested that the school be part of a large research project being carried out in a number of primary and secondary schools in New Zealand about the nature and extent of bullying. A survey was administered at River Valley High with 129 students (over one third of the school roll). The findings indicated a high level of bullying compared to both national and international data. There was also found to be a low

level of disclosure about bullying and a perception by the students that at best any response was ineffective¹.

There were, however, some methodological problems with this study. These included the absence in the definition of bullying provided to the students of any reference to the criteria recommended by Olweus (1999) that the behaviour had to involve an unequal power balance and that any teasing had to be interpreted as nasty to qualify as bullying. Teachers were also not furnished with clear direction regarding an appropriate administration strategy. This meant that there were no guarantees of consistency in the way students understood and filled out the survey. A further consideration was the possibility that the heightened awareness amongst students, brought about by the school's own anti-bullying programme, may have contributed to the high incidence of reported bullying. This concern is similar to that expressed by Guerin and Hennessy (1998) whereby students' exposure to education and intervention programmes surrounding bullying, as well as its high media profile, may influence the outcome of research in this area.

However, despite these issues, the findings, although comparable with results reported by Maxwell and Carroll-Lind (1996) that in New Zealand schools up to half or three quarters of students will be bullied during a particular year, were disconcerting to say the least. The report alarmed the Principal to such an extent that all copies were withdrawn before distribution among staff, parents and the Board of Trustees could take place, despite the authors' commitment that it would be made available to the school community. Although such a response from Senior Management should be viewed with some concern, it is also understandable in that, as Sullivan (1999) points out, it can be difficult for a school to admit such a problem within the competitive climate of education in New Zealand today. River Valley High School had had its fair share of adverse publicity in the past and was in a tenuous situation of roll building and thus could ill-afford bad press.

It was against this background that I commenced this present study.

¹ This study has not been referenced here so that the name of the school is less easily identifiable.

The researcher

A fundamental epistemological assumption of a traditional empirical approach to research is the separation of the researcher from the object of their study to ensure objectivity. However, the framework of social constructionism within which I engage in this research demands a conscious awareness of the researcher's intrinsic involvement in the social process of the research. Sobrun-Maharaj (2002) points to the necessity of locating the researcher within their own historical and socio-cultural background in order to develop an understanding of how this will impact on the research process. In sharing my story, I fully acknowledge that the values and biases that I bring to this research will inevitably shape the process and final "product".

I was born in New Zealand to an English mother and "Kiwi" father of Irish descent, who was a front-line Police Officer for over 37 years. The family was a traditional, nuclear unit with Mum, who stayed at home, Dad, and two children. I was educated at both State and Catholic primary schools and attended an all girls, Catholic secondary school. The influence of Catholicism both in the home and at school was very strong while growing up. Likewise, strong discipline, which included corporal punishment, was a feature of New Zealand home and school life in the sixties and seventies.

I attained a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and went on to work with children in a variety of settings including a psychopaedic institution, I.H.C. residential facility, Children's Health Camp and Catholic Social Services Family Home. Following the birth of my three sons, whose father was of Ngāti Kahungunu descent, I began a significant journey in learning Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori, spurred on by my involvement with Te Kohanga Reo movement. I entered the teaching profession in the late eighties and commenced my career at River Valley High as a Science and Māori Studies teacher in 1991. I continued working there over the following years through the birth of three more children and a number of study opportunities that allowed me to pursue my interest in Māori and Psychology. At the time of undertaking this research I was a recipient of a Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) Study Award and on a year's leave as Head of Science and House Dean at River Valley High.

The dual role I found myself positioned in, as both a researcher and a member of the school community, was, I felt, a double edged sword. On the one hand, the 'insider'

status I enjoyed allowed for the support and trust of Senior Management for the research. It also contributed to the co-operation of teaching and ancillary staff in accessing participants. Furthermore, the high proportion of uptake of the research from prospective participants was a reflection of the relationship between my self as a teacher and the students. This established rapport also fostered a level of understanding between my self and the students which positively influenced the eliciting of students' talk around a sensitive issue.

The other aspect of this 'insider' perspective was that I was acutely aware of the power imbalance that was brought to the interview situation. The very nature of the relationship between the researcher and participant and the inherent imbalance of power between teacher and student had the potential to contribute to research difficulties. For example, students may have been reluctant to volunteer information about their experiences of bullying to a teacher due to the possible implications or consequences for themselves or other students.

However, the adoption of a social constructionist approach enabled these issues to be addressed in an open and honest manner. Acknowledging the power differential in the relationship between the researcher and the participant and indeed, the teacher and the student, heightened awareness of the need for this research to be viewed as a joint production. The students were assured that their versions of bullying were recognised as being as valid as any other version, including my own, and they were given credit for their own terms of understanding and knowledge. This was achieved by an informal discussion at the beginning of each interview in which I explained that the research itself had been prompted by my own ignorance and confusion surrounding issues of bullying. The already established relationship of student and teacher was connected to the need to help one another to try and make sense of this problem.

The participants (co-researchers)

While within the empirical approach to methodology it is viewed as extremely important to obtain a large and representative sample (Coyle, 1995), the use of discourse analysis means that quite a different view is taken on the question of sampling.

Pragmatically speaking, the analysis of discourses is an extremely labour-intensive process. If the sample size is too large the researcher would quite simply get 'bogged down' by the wealth of data. However, more importantly, because the focus is on the use of language rather than the participants per se, a wide variety of linguistic patterns is commonly obtained from a few samples (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In fact it is often found that increasing the sample size, and thus the task of analysing, does not actually enhance the outcome (Coyle, 1995).

This study was confined to a single secondary school and a single year level. Students were initially approached through a senior PELS (Physical Education and Life Skills) option which included the majority of the school's Year Thirteen students. Year Twelve students in this class who were not intending to return to school the following year were also invited to participate, but all indicated their intention to return. A snowball effect, along with an individual, personal approach from me, ensured that all Year Thirteen students were given the opportunity to participate.

In all twenty-four students, thirteen female and eleven male, out of a total of thirty five students from Year Thirteen and one Year Fourteen student at River Valley High volunteered to participate. The ethnicity of the students included eleven who identified as Māori, twelve as Pakeha and one as Asian. In most cases this was their fifth and final year of secondary education which had all been at River Valley High. Furthermore, many of the students had been together since primary school and some of the families had a relatively close association.

I wish at this point to acknowledge the students who participated in the research as co-producers of this knowledge. As bullying takes place among students in secondary schools, to further develop our understanding, it is essential to seek out the feelings, ideas and views of the students. Their role as experts of their own perspective should not be underestimated or undervalued. To conceptualise students as competent 'knowers' with their own terms of understanding and to seek out information from them directly is to allow for more insightful research. Furthermore, giving credit to students as co-researchers reinforces the idea of respect for them as a researched group and in some small way helps to address the intrinsic power imbalance of the research relationship (Alderson, 2000; Smith, Taylor & Gollop, 2002; Nairn & Smith, 2002)

Ethical and safety issues

When undertaking research with human participants, particularly young people, it is an important part of the research process to carefully consider all of the possible ethical issues that may arise. This study was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/51. However, they raised an issue regarding the possible implicit deception involved in the project. This came about because of the researcher's dual role as a teacher at the school where the research took place. It became apparent that because of the insight the researcher would gain regarding who the bullies were in the school, certain measures needed to be put in place to minimise this conflict of interest. Although the invitation to participate in the research was initially issued to all Year Twelve and Year Thirteen students in the senior PELS (Physical Education and Life Skills) class, only those Year Twelve students who did not intend returning to school were included as participants. This was to ensure that both students and the researcher would not have direct classroom involvement with each other in the following academic year. (As previously mentioned, the researcher was on Study Leave from the school for the current academic year).

Furthermore the confidentiality agreement ensured that the researcher was committed to not acting on any information that might have been obtained regarding the bullies in the school. A discussion took place with the participants regarding the ethical code under which researchers are required to operate. Students were reassured that the confidentiality agreement could not be breeched unless there was danger posed to someone. However, an unforeseen issue arose with the disclosure of the bullying and sexual harassment of a young, female teacher. This was managed by seeking a meeting with the Principal where general issues of teacher harassment were discussed and the need for support and supervision of junior teachers in the context of overall staff training and development. The actual case discussed in the research was not disclosed.

All students from the senior PELS class and other Year Thirteen students who chose not to participate were invited to take part in a video / discussion session with lunch provided at the end of the interviewing phase of the research. This was to ensure that no student would be disadvantaged by not taking part in the research.

It was considered that participants who identified as Māori could possibly bring to the interview situation, and take from the discussion, a different cultural perspective on the issue of bullying. In the same way, concerns arising from the issue could also impact differently on students as Māori. The management of these possible cultural concerns was addressed by seeking advice and support from the School Kaumatua. Through consultation at an early stage in the research design, any arising safety issues could be planned for, although these did not come about in the course of the research.

In a similar manner, consultation took place with the two school counsellors. They were fully informed about the research and made themselves immediately available during the interview sessions if required. Any issues that may have arisen subsequently for students were also able to be addressed by both counsellors.

The sensitive nature of the research in a competitive school environment, particularly in a school feeling somewhat vulnerable to negative publicity as discussed previously, required the agreement and permission of the Principal to access the students. Assurances were given that all student participants, their peers, teachers and the school itself would not have their identity disclosed in any reports produced from the study, through the provision of pseudonyms and guaranteed confidentiality. (Appendix A: Letter to Principal). The established collegial relationship of the researcher and Principal enabled this trust and support to be forthcoming.

Procedure

The potential participants met with the researcher either in small groups or on a one to one basis and were given the information sheet (Appendix B). The project was explained more fully and the information sheet was read over and explained in student friendly language. They were invited to take the information sheet away and discuss it with family or friends and to ask any questions they wished. When students were satisfied with the information provided and indicated their willingness to participate they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C). All students who volunteered to participate and met acceptance criteria (i.e. Year Twelve or Thirteen, not returning to school the following year) were accepted. Participants were able to self select their own groups of two or three students for the interviews, although all interviews in fact took place in pairs, simply from student preference.

The difficulties of using interviews to elicit data in terms of their contrived nature, participants' expectations and the difficulty in generalising the talk to activities in other settings is well documented (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). However, the advantage of this situation was the ability to study some set topics surrounding bullying in an informal, relaxed, semi-structured way (O'Connor, 1997), (see Appendix D for Interview Protocol).

Prior to the interviews, which took place in the School Counsellor's office in the Student Centre, participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement not to disclose anything discussed in the joint interview (Appendix E). The twelve interviews, which lasted between twenty minutes and one hour in duration, were audiotaped. The tapes were transcribed by the researcher using a very simplified format of transcription conventions based on those developed by Jefferson (1985) for conversation analysis (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) (see Appendix F for Transcription Key). A conscious decision was made to carry out the transcription myself because as recommended by Tuffin and Howard (2001) the time involved in this task allows the researcher to engage closely with the material which is an essential part of discourse analysis

The researcher then met again with the participants in their interview pairs. The interview transcripts were given to the participants to read, while listening to the tape. Any alterations, deletions and additions that were requested were then made. This is part of establishing the validity of the research in that it makes the data accessible to the participants so that they can decide if it is 'true' for them. This small act of reciprocity also supports the empowerment of students and contributes to disrupting the imbalance of power between researcher and participants, that has been discussed earlier (O'Connor, 1997). Following this, the participants were asked to sign an authority for the release of the tape transcript (Appendix G).

After the interviews and transcript return sessions, the researcher met with all participants and other members of Year Thirteen, the Senior PELS class and their teacher. A video entitled "The New Kid", which explored bullying and a number of related themes in a humorous, almost irreverent, way, was viewed. This approach for presenting such a difficult topic area to this age group had the desirable effect of capturing the students' attention and engaging them in some very salient issues. Nearly

all the students remained voluntarily through their lunch hour to complete the viewing of the film. Lunch, in the form of fish and chips, was provided and the students were happy to share the considerable 'left-overs' with junior members of the school.

Reflection on data collection

Although not employed in this research design, the suggestion of utilising young people as an advisory committee for studies with students has much merit (Alderson, 2000). A small group of students to help draft the discussion questions, for example, would have enhanced the idea of the participants as co-researchers and also would have been a valuable resource for ensuring that the researcher was approaching the issue from an appropriate perspective. This is particularly salient given the concerns highlighted by other researchers (Guerin & Hennessy, 1998; Madsen, 1996) regarding the differing perceptions of bullying held by students compared to those defined by researchers, parents and teachers, as mentioned earlier in the literature review. This advisory committee could have also been involved with the analysis of the transcripts and thus contributed another important dimension to the reading of the data. It needs to be acknowledged that the time constraints placed on both the researcher and students that prevented this happening can be considered a limitation of this study.

The use of an introductory vignette to stimulate discussion in the interview protocol (Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000) has also been suggested as a useful tool in eliciting information in the initial stages, rather than starting immediately with questions asking students to define bullying, which may have been perceived as rather threatening. However, this was not considered appropriate in this study as a vignette would tend to represent just one kind of bullying. This may have directed the students to consider bullying in a particular way that would constrain the possibility of accessing their multiple meanings of the term.

However, I believe the session that was incorporated in the research design of returning the transcripts to the students and going back through the tapes with them, was invaluable to the research process. In a similar way to having an advisory group of students, there was a lot of valuable discussion from this session which often produced insightful perspectives that I was able to bring to the analysis.

Analysis

Although great strides have been made and need to continue to be made in the development of the theoretical concepts upon which discourse analysis is based, there is a perceived lack of clear guidelines on the process of analysis. Although Potter and Wetherell (1987) offer a fairly comprehensive ten stages in the analysis of discourse, Parker (1990) criticises their account as being quite bewildering. Tuffin and Howard (2001), while acknowledging the usefulness of Potter and Wetherell's explanation on the initial stages of the process, believe they fall short when describing the actual analysis. They have attempted to address this concern by using a meta-analysis to guide the novice in 'what to do'.

Following the transcription, and as a preliminary to the actual analysis the data needs to be coded with the aim 'to squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks' (Potter & Wetherell. 1987, p167). Tuffin and Howard (2001), following on from Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that a preliminary coding stage will seek to eliminate any irrelevant data and a second coding stage will endeavour to organise the remaining data into specific categories. They emphasise the importance of the text defining these categories, not the analyst.

The overarching research question of "how students construct bullying in schools" provided a focus in undertaking the first step of preliminary coding. It was intended that any sections of data that did not deal with bullying would be discarded. However, because the interview questions were fairly directive towards aspects of bullying only a small amount of data was discarded by this preliminary step. Furthermore, because I carried out the coding manually and had transcribed the tapes myself, it became clear that issues of school discipline were also intrinsically linked to constructions of bullying and therefore were retained. The next step then involved placing the retained data into meaningful groupings. Initially it was very difficult not to fall into the trap of imposing my own categories on the data. However, repeated close readings of the interview transcripts slowly allowed the patterns in the data to emerge and yielded categories of constructions that were internally coherent. The five categories that emerged were bullying as *disparity*, as *irrelevant*, as a consequence of *differences*, as a form of *discipline* and as *inevitable*.

It is at the stage of the 'formal' or 'proper' analysis that Potter and Wetherell (1987) have been roundly criticised (Parker, 1990; Tuffin & Howard, 2001) for their unhelpful comments likening the analysis to 'riding a bike' or stating that, "words fail us at this point..." (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p168). However, there are basically two related parts to the analysis described by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The first requires the identification of a pattern in the data, either that of differences or similarities. The second involves looking for the function of the talk and its effects or consequences.

Although the procedure for analysis may be quite similar in practice for both the Potter and Wetherell and Parker versions of discourse analysis, it is on the question of validity that the approaches differ (Burr, 1995). Potter and Wetherell's (1987) view is that the second stage of analysis should involve hypothesis testing about the functions and effects of the various discourses supported by 'linguistic evidence' (p168). Parker, in contrast, is not concerned with supporting his analysis with empirical data as this would go against the theoretical backdrop of poststructuralism. Indeed Gergen (1985) has proposed 'intelligibility' as a criterion of validity whereby if you can follow an argument you can see it as been valid even if you don't agree with it. However, Gergen's criterion is contextually responsive so something won't be intelligible to all people everywhere. Therefore it makes more sense, rather than throwing off the 'shackles of empiricism' altogether, for the analyst to offer a piece of data to illustrate that theirs is a reasonable reading or interpretation of the text. I believe that this can aid in the unmasking of the discourses in social power relations. Thus in the presentation of my analysis in the following chapters, I have included examples from the interview transcripts to illustrate where my analytic interpretations are derived from the texts under analysis.

Conclusion

This research has been located in its own historical and cultural context as it is recognized that all forms of knowledge are specific to time and culture. This knowledge and our ways of understanding will be constructed through language therefore it is students' talk about bullying that is the focus of interest in this study. However, the possible biases that the analyst may bring to the 'reading' of these constructions are openly and honestly accepted. The procedure was at all times guided by best practice in terms of the participants' welfare and any ethical or safety

considerations. The pivotal role that the students of River Valley High played towards the goal of attempting to 'make sense' of bullying in schools is gratefully acknowledged.

PART II

The Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This analysis is arranged around the five internally consistent constructions of bullying which were evident in the data. These constructions were theoretically linked to the participants' use of discourses or interpretative repertoires to 'build' (construct) their versions of bullying. It is probably useful at this point to further explain these two concepts and their relationship to one another. Interpretative repertoires were initially linked with the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) in their study of how scientists talk about their work and that of other scientists. They are also strongly associated, as mentioned earlier, with the work of Potter and Wetherell. They are a limited set of language resources that people draw upon to describe or account for objects and events. Often they utilise metaphors and specific figures of speech put together in a particular grammatical style.

Discourses are very closely linked to this idea of interpretative repertoires and in fact serve the same explanatory role (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The point of difference is best explained as being associated with the conceptual approach one wishes to bring to the research. A perspective that relies on a more Foucauldian approach is more likely to adopt the term discourse. In this context, discourse refers to a system of statements that construct an object (Parker, 1990). When a particular object or phenomenon, such as bullying, is constructed in different ways then an analyst may identify different discourses at work in the constructed text. Since discourses are complicit with power relations, the identification of different discourses and the effects of their constructions of bullying may provide critical insights into the ways in which power relations are supported or undermined. Therefore this research, which is particularly interested in power relationships and how bullying in educational institutions can be constructed, will utilise the concept of discourses.

The consideration of bullying in secondary schools, as alluded to earlier, must concern itself first and foremost with the operation of power within our educational institutions. Indeed Foucault states that, "the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them." (Rabinow,

1984, p6). Foucault believed that we are constantly engaged in struggles against injustices and political violence not for the sake of justice itself, which he viewed as a concept that had been invented and manipulated by different societies, but in order to bring about change in power relations. In order to attempt this lofty task it is necessary to first of all identify and bring to light some of the power relations embedded in our schools.

Foucault (1982) suggested that as a starting point we should examine forms of resistance to power. This may involve both covert resistance and more direct techniques of confrontation, but it is the relationship between power and strategies of resistance that is extremely important. They are linked to one another in the same way as two sides of the same coin (Burr, 1995). Resistance is part of the very essence of power and a consequence of its existence; there cannot be power without resistance. Therefore the power relations implicit in educational institutions could not exist without oppositional discourses struggling against them as a means of escape. Foucault (1982) also suggests that any attempt to intensify the power relations in order to counteract resistance is indicative of power having reached its limits.

The opposition to bullying evident in the discourse which constructs bullying as *disparity* (discussed below) is a form of resistance to the power inequalities apparent in our schools. It challenges the taken for granted nature of the social practices and structures that are bound to prevailing educational discourses. Therefore to develop a coherent analysis I will commence by examining the category of constructions in which bullying is accounted for through *disparity*. Although I will look at this separately, I want to analyse it in relation to, and as an oppositional struggle against, the other four major identified constructions; bullying as *irrelevant*, as a consequence of *differences*, as a form of *discipline* and *inevitable* which I will argue operate together to support and maintain the status quo of power relationships in educational institutions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bullying as Disparity

The discourse constructing bullying as disparity is presented as a construction that attempts to resist the prevailing discourses within our educational institutions. It is a means of struggling against the oppression implicit in the 'taken for granted' power relationships prevalent in schools.

In analysing the construction of bullying as *disparity*, I would argue from a Foucauldian position (1982) that students are not attempting to attack the educational institution per se, but to struggle against a manifestation of its power in taken for granted constructions of bullying that are analysed separately below. The discourse that constructs bullying as *disparity* has elements in common with other oppositional strategies discussed by Foucault. It is an international struggle which emphasises the effects of power but it is also an opposition that Foucault described as an “immediate struggle” because it is a struggle in which students challenge not the system itself or “chief enemy” but bullying, an easily recognised representation of the power inequalities present in our schools that touches each and every one of them.

In the constructions that are produced through this discourse participants utilise a number of quite stereotyped, entrenched linguistic resources in order to present an account that can gain validity. This is an important strategy since explicit challenges to power which inevitably pose a threat to the status quo, are likely to be strongly challenged. Therefore there is the need to lay claim to ‘acceptable’ versions of the world (Kitzinger, 1989) even in a strategy of resistance. This is achieved within this discourse by drawing upon an image of a battle of disparities. Portraying bullying in such a light is likely to be quite successful as the inequality of the situation outrages our contemporary human sense of justice.

Disparity in size and age

Interviewer: Do you think that certain people are more likely to bully?

Julie: I think it's the ones that are always bigger, you know they think that they've got some dominance or something.

Interviewer: Physically bigger or...?

Julie: Physically bigger, yeah. Cause it was always the, the ones that were bigger than me that always used to tease on me, tease me and stuff, the ones that were always (.) older and bigger.

Cathy: Yeah probably.

Julie: Thought they had more authority.

Initially this account draws the distinction of someone physically big, or bigger than Julie, being responsible for the bullying. This disparity is further emphasised by noting that ‘bullies’ are not only bigger, but also older. The use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) of ‘always’ ensures that we are aware of the consistent nature of this feature of bullying. It is interesting that Julie also links size and age to the idea of dominance and authority; but it is a concept that she implies exists only in their thinking.

In the following extract we again see the criteria of size used to differentiate the bully:

Interviewer: What about people that bully, do you think there are certain people that are more likely to bully?

Jim: Bigger kids [laugh].

Interviewer: So you think it's just a size thing?

Terri: I reckon it is, 'cause' you hardly ever see little people picking on big people (.) oh wait, those little third formers, like they're little...

Jim: I remember Joe.

Terri: Yeah.

Jim: He used to, he used to pick on the big ones even though he was like half the size of them [laugh]

Terri: It's your attitude as well, like yeah Joe was a little (.) idiot [laugh] yeah that's why he picked on bigger kids.

Note in this extract there is evidence of some quite skilful linguistic manoeuvring. Terri has just emphasised how rare it is to observe any exception to the rule that bullying is perpetrated by physically large students on smaller students, “you hardly ever see little people picking on big people” when there is a hesitation. Terri starts to recall a situation involving smaller and younger students, “oh wait, those little third formers,

like they're little..." Jim follows on with a specific incident of a named student picking on others "half his size". However, Terri is able to manage this contradiction by side-stepping the apparent anomaly and following through with a claim that only an idiotic attitude could allow this to happen.

Disparity in size and age is linked in these extracts to an apparently normative understanding that those who are 'bigger' and 'older' are also those most likely to bully and to be socially afforded the authority to bully.

Disparity in social networks

The image of bullying as a function of disparity in size is extended to the concept of a disparity in social networks in the following extract. The coupling of these two ideas is then utilised to account for discrepancies in the pattern suggested:

Interviewer: In the same way do you think that certain people are more likely to be bullies?

Sam: Big people.

Dave: Yeah [laugh]

Sam: Yeah, and like the people in the like bigger crowds and stuff.

Interviewer: O.k. So people that are bigger physically and got a bigger crowd // of friends?

Sam: // Yeah. Like bigger surrounding of friends and stuff.

Dave: Though sometimes you get the little (.) little Maori boys that always try and pick on everyone...

Sam: Mm

Dave: ... cause they've got the bigger brothers.

Sam: Yeah.

Dave: ... and they can beat them // up.

Sam: // Cause they've got bigger brothers and cousins and stuff, they go "oh me and my cousin will whack you if you hurt me" and they pick on you.

In this exchange, Sam initially establishes with the interviewer that bullies are characterised by a larger physical size and a larger crowd of friends surrounding them, thus reinforcing the image of disparity. Dave however, introduces a case that calls this

into question and can possibly refute Sam's claim, "Though sometimes you get the little (.) little Maori boys that always try and pick on everyone." The phrase 'little Maori boys' is extremely loaded and open to a wealth of interpretations. It can be used in a disparaging (and racist) sense, but also in this particular context with Maori students it can be viewed as conveying admiration for the underdog who is prepared to challenge against the odds. Dave goes on immediately to provide a solution to the potential dilemma that this case poses to Sam's portrayal, "... 'cause they've got the bigger brothers... and they can beat them up." The logic of this is unassailable and Sam is quick to seize upon it and build up the picture with cousins included in a total 'whanau' approach which will provide a protective cloak for 'little Maori boys' who step out of the expected bully mould. Thus, having physically bigger siblings and cousins to call upon legitimises Dave's contradictory account and lends support to Sam's original argument that a disparity in size and friendship groups accounts for bullying.

The construction of bullies as being surrounded by more friends is further developed in this extract with two of the girls, Eve and Mia:

Interviewer: Do you think that there are some people that are more likely to be bullies (.) and what is it about them?

Eve: They're con..., over confident, loud people I think [laugh] most of them.

Mia: They're ones that have like heaps of friends.

Eve: // [inaudible].

Mia: // The sort of thing that they can fall back on.

Eve: Yeah.

Mia: That will give them support when they're bullying. That can rake them up and stuff.

Eve commences her description of a 'typical' bully with some very definite descriptors that carry a number of negative connotations. In fact she corrects herself at the beginning of the sentence and replaces the word confident, which may be interpreted in a more positive light, with the more disagreeable terms of over confident and loud. Despite the obvious unpleasantness of these people Mia goes on to assert that they "have like heaps of friends". The dual role that these friends play is explained utilising

metaphorical constructions that are common linguistic devices (Lyons, Stephens, Morgan, Praat & Tuffin, 1996). Thus friends are conceptualised as something solid that bullies 'can fall back on' and rely on for support in the bullying process. They also perform a further function in that they can 'rake them up'. It is unclear if it is the bully or victim they are referring to, but the image of a metal toothed, garden instrument being employed in this way lends effect to the consequences of such an action, and therefore the importance of friends to the bully.

The concept of having a strong network of friends as a characteristic of bullies is explored in more depth with Mia and Eve. However, as seen in the next part of this extract, such a characterisation causes some problems:

Interviewer: O.k. so you see bullies as being quite popular people then?

Mia: Yeah.

Eve: Nah.

Mia: Oh, um, don't know (.). Sometimes it can be lower class people as well who are bullies, like I don't mean to be (.) racist or anything, like um, it tends to be like some Maoris and that, they... yeah I don't know, like they, if they're bigger than people they tend to pick on them.

The attempt to categorize bullies with associated negative characteristics is in danger of being unravelled by the interviewer's question that seeks clarification about whether having lots of friends therefore means bullies are popular people. The use of a positive term such as popular can potentially undermine the girls' argument and the features that they are employing to support their version of bullying. In order to avoid this competing construction, Mia endeavours to seize upon an alternative rhetorical resource which will lend support to her portrayal of bullies. However, in doing so she is caught up in what Wetherell and Potter (1992) term a 'dilemma of stake'. She is attempting to apply a very offensive, racist account without being identified as a racist herself and so undermining her whole argument. The lack of sophistication and subtlety in the cliché "I don't mean to be (.) racist or anything" is obviously apparent to Mia and she tries to back away from the claim and substitute the idea of a physical size disparity which is not as problematic: "yeah I don't know, like they, if they're bigger than people they tend to pick on them".

Although not perceived as popular since this is too positive a term, the sheer size of a bully's social network affords them the support to carry out their role as an 'enforcer' of the institutional 'norms'. Students' constructions of the bully draw attention to the inequality evident in this disparity and thus work to challenge the social practice of bullying taken for granted in our schools.

Academic and Sporting Disparities

This battle of disparities as being at the heart of bullying is extended also to encompass the domains of academic achievement and sporting prowess and linked yet again to physical size and the size of friendship groups:

Interviewer: Do you think that certain people are more likely to be bullied?

Sam: Yeah, like the outcasts.

Dave: Yeah, the nerdy (.) type (.) and all that.

Sam: The people that are high achievers.

Dave: Yeah.

Sam: Oh, if they are high achievers but they're (.) um, yeah, I don't know.

Dave: They're not as much into the physical sports so they're not (.)

Sam: Yeah.

Dave: They're not that bulky themselves, they'll be an easy target for a bully.

Interviewer: O.k. so anything else that's... how do you know?

Sam: If they sit by themselves at lunchtime and that (.) and like...

Dave: Like if they don't have many friends to back them up.

Sam: Yeah.

In the same way that previous excerpts have constructed the bully in rather a negative light, here we have those being bullied described in a very disparaging way; 'nerdy types' and 'outcasts'. The specific attributes associated with these categories can accomplish certain goals in themselves. They invoke a sense of weakness and isolation and an inability to defend oneself. Sam and Dave consistently use the third person pronoun "they" to clearly distance themselves from being positioned within this 'victim' category. It is interesting that the concept of achievement, and in this context the implication is that it is academic achievement, is linked to being 'nerdy' and an 'outcast'. Dave widens this definition to encompass a lack of interest in physical sports

with the corresponding assumption that they will be physically small, “they’re not that bulky themselves”. The loneliness and vulnerability due to a lack of friends is further highlighted; “they sit by themselves at lunchtime”; “they don’t have many friends to back them up”.

The use of the metaphor ‘an easy target’ not only contributes to and underlines the inequality evident in the disparity discourse, but it also performs an evaluative role (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It conjures up an image of violence, conflict with weapons and pain and injury. It is also able to forestall the listener from thinking about another possible metaphor or alternative version (Lyons, Stephens, Morgan, Praat & Tuffin, 1996). This construction functions to emphasise the sheer vulnerability of the victim thereby highlighting the injustice of bullying.

Disparity as resistance

The construction of bullying as a function of disparity draws upon notions of bullying as a battle between unequal adversaries. The victim, small and alone, is at the mercy of a much larger, well supported opponent; there is no chance for them. It is David and Goliath without the slingshot. It is a powerful discourse to utilise as it appeals to the Kiwi cultural psyche of fair play and support for the ‘underdog’. This has possibly developed as a result of our colonial background in which many of the settlers viewed themselves as disadvantaged because they had lacked opportunities in their home countries of England and Ireland. They sought in New Zealand a fair chance to make their own way on their own merits. As discussed earlier this association with a very much accepted version of the world is essential if this oppositional struggle is to avoid being marginalised and to achieve some validation. In this way students are able to take advantage of a perceived ‘chink in the armour’ of the prevailing educational discourses that support power inequalities and gain some ground with their resistance without explicitly challenging the educational institution.

However, an interesting aspect of this construction is the way in which it illustrates what Foucault (1982) described as ‘dividing practices’ to bring about the objectification of the human subject. A central focus of Foucault’s work was to trace the ways in which our history and culture transforms human’s into subjects. Through disparity, students are divided from one another; for example we see the division between

physically big students and small students, the cool kids and the nerds, the students with friends and those who are alone. So this construction rather ironically also draws upon those techniques of objectification that contribute to the maintenance of the power inequalities of schools; the very thing it is resisting.

Furthermore, it is apparent that students are restricted in their ability to conceptualise bullying as a negative entity by the fact that they are only able to call upon a limited range of quite narrow terms available to them. This is not unexpected as although a language culture may provide a range of linguistic resources with which to talk about an object, there will not always be equal options (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Therefore, negative constructions of bullying are not as available to students as some of the more accepted versions that we could describe as more culturally dominant. It is the constructions made possible through these prevailing discourses that are 'taken for granted' in our educational institutions that I will now consider.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bullying as Irrelevant

A common discourse within our schools that constructs bullying as irrelevant is examined and unravelled. The way in which linguistic resources such as sense of humour, unintentional behaviour and minimal impact are drawn upon in these constructions is discussed. The function of such accounts is then considered.

The resistant construction of *disparity* is counteracted by the use of a rather sinister construction of bullying as *irrelevant*. It acts to undermine and subvert the idea that bullying is really such reprehensible behaviour. It attempts to present other versions of bullying behaviour that are apparently reasonable and acceptable. It seeks to gnaw around the edges of constructing bullying as serious, and cast doubt on the validity of bullying itself. There are a number of linguistic resources drawn upon in these constructions including sense of humour, unintentional behaviour, and minimal impact. Austin (1961) termed these ‘accounts’ as they are used to try and explain what the oppositional discourse would have us believe is unacceptable behaviour.

Accounts have been identified as consisting of both excuses and justifications (Austin, 1961). Excuses are characterised by the acceptance of the behaviour but denial of liability for it; something else is at fault, e.g. “I didn’t mean to hurt her feelings, it was accidental”. Justifications, on the other hand involve acceptance of responsibility for the behaviour with a qualifying reason or suggestion why it might be acceptable in the circumstances, e.g. “It’s o.k. because she didn’t take any offence”. However, the important point is to acknowledge that these accounts are constructed from a pre-determined, socially approved set of standard resources.

Sense of Humour

The concept of ‘positioning’ (Davies & Harre, 1990) refers to the process of negotiating the production of accounts during everyday talk and in doing so constructing our identities as a person. Thus, students are able to take up a subject position, or assign subject positions to others by drawing upon various linguistic resources, or alternatively resisting them. It is important to recognise that such positions inevitably have corresponding power implications attached to them. This is a key issue as it underlies how language can become central to oppression. Burr (1995)

discusses how feminist writers have particularly emphasised that trivialisation through language in everyday conversation is in itself a powerful device. This is clearly exemplified in the following extract:

Jan: Yous always pick on Miss Shaw.

Bart: [Laugh] Yeah our class gets into trouble cause we hit on her.

Jan: [Laugh]

Interviewer: You hit on her, what do you mean by that?

Bart: Oh, like chat her up and stuff.

Jan: As a joke or...?

Bart: As a joke (.) we get in trouble for it.

Interviewer: Is it a joke?

Bart: Yeah

Jan: [Laugh]

Bart: In some ways.

Jan: [Laugh]

Interviewer: In some ways and...?

Bart: Yeah and in other ways it's, yeah I think it pretty much is a joke (.) I don't know why we do it. Michael's the worst at it, but he does it to every teacher (.) mm.

Bart quite happily accepts Jan's accusation that his class 'picks on' Miss Shaw (a young, female teacher) and compounds the seriousness of this behaviour by admitting to 'hitting on her', a form of sexual harassment that he euphemistically describes as "chatting her up and stuff". However when Jan seeks clarification of this untoward behaviour she in fact opens the door to the use of a standard excuse, "as a joke or...?" Bart seizes on this, and the account is then constructed using a conventional form of excuse that Semin and Manstead (1983) described as a denial of intent. Once Jan is reassured that it is a joke, there is an obvious acceptance that this is a perfectly legitimate excuse and she relaxes and laughs with Bart.

The strategy employed by Bart is very successful as he is able to position himself as a joker and the behaviour as rather innocuous. At the same time it works to ward off and minimise any possible complaints of bullying or sexual harassment by Miss Shaw as she will be positioned as someone lacking a sense of humour if she does complain. The

power relations implicit in this positioning have wider implications and are a classic example of the concerns being raised by feminist writers regarding our everyday use of language (Burr, 1995).

When the interviewer however, presses Bart further over his excuse that “it is a joke”, there are some very interesting claims to alternative forms of excuses. Initially there is a lack of knowledge of any motivation for the behaviour, “I don’t know why we do it”. Then the worst aspects of the behaviour are attributed to another student but with a corresponding attempt to mitigate his behaviour by describing how fairly it is distributed, “but he does it to every teacher”. Notice too, the use of the extreme case of ‘every teacher’ to emphasise this egalitarian approach; although one would presume that this behaviour would not be directed at much older female or male teachers.

In a separate interview another student, Cathy refers to the above incidents of bullying Miss Shaw and provides a very similar and supportive construction of the behaviour:

Cathy: Yeah but she doesn't take it personally. I don't think she does else she would have done anything, something about it. And I don't think they mean it, like you know totally, but they just do it just to tease and stuff like that. But it's not like she takes it; I don't think she takes it personally because if she did she would have done something about it, you know".

The use of the third person pronoun ‘they’ makes it clear that Cathy is not involved, but she recognises that the behaviour could be interpreted in a negative light. Therefore she utilises two strategies in constructing this account, both excuse and justification. There is a strong denial of intent, “I don’t think they mean it” which is qualified, “like you know totally”. The behaviour is then explained in another, less damaging way, “they just do it just to tease and stuff like that”. The use of the word ‘just’ twice in this sentence emphasises again the lack of any intention to cause harm. The behaviour is also categorised as teasing which has a rather pleasant connotation of friendly banter, rather than sexual harassment.

In the same extract, Cathy also provides a commonly used justification by denying that any harm has been done to the person, “she doesn’t take it personally”. The evidence to

support this claim is attached to Miss Shaw's failure to "have done anything, something about it". There is a common sense assumption that any reasonable person would have done something about the behaviour if they were offended or harmed by it. Therefore the justification for this behaviour is squarely shifted onto Miss Shaw's lack of action. The power dynamics are skilfully manipulated as she is positioned as someone who "doesn't take it personally". This leaves the pathway clear for students to continue to harass her with impunity as the apparent power inequalities can not exist if she is not a victim at all.

Unintentional

The claim to lacking intent to bully in the behaviour can be achieved not only by reformulating the behaviour as a joke but by constructing an account that portrays the bullying as an unfortunate accident:

Interviewer: Do you think that you have ever bullied anyone?

Sam: Probably, I don't know [laugh] but then like not meaning it // like...

Dave: // No an accident probably, probably.

Sam: Yeah, just like joking around, but they might have taken it the wrong way.

The bullying here is excused as an unforeseen consequence of an unintentional act which is purely accidental. This is compared to "joking around" and again the onus is put back on the person for taking it "the wrong way". Hence the question about bullying is defused by manoeuvring the power relationship in such a way that the problem is diverted to the victim's inability to correctly interpret the behaviour.

A similar claim to unintentional consequences characterises the bullying as having a life of its own that is outside of your control:

Interviewer: What about the other side of things, do you think that either of you have ever bullied anyone?

Ann: Not intentionally, but I might have said something mean a few times but (.) I don't think...

Yvette: Nah

Ann: I never (.) like (.) purposely bullied someone.

Yvette: It might have slipped out but...

Ann: // Yeah

Yvette: // You didn't mean to like say it or anything.

Ann: Mm but, I try and get on with everyone.

Yvette: Yeah.

Ann: Unless someone says something mean to me and I say something mean back but (.) um (.) I don't know. I hope I haven't [laugh].

Yvette: [laugh] I hope I haven't either.

Ann: Yeah, I hope no-one thinks I'm a bully.

Although an admission is made by Ann that she “might have said something mean” it is immediately defended on a number of fronts. There is a plea to the rarity of the occurrence of such behaviour, “a few times” and its totally unintended nature, “never like purposely”; “unintentionally”. Yvette supportively contributes to this joint construction by explaining how, “it might have slipped out”. The bullying then is contrived to become an entity with its own will, outside of Ann’s control. This technique ensures that responsibility for the behaviour is deflected away from Ann and is attached to the bullying itself. She is rendered quite powerless in the face of this controlling entity.

Having successfully excused the behaviour, Ann reinforces her position as a reasonable, amicable person who tries to get on with everyone. Indeed, both Ann and Yvette resist the idea of being positioned and stigmatised as “a bully”. However, it is made quite clear with a claim to what Semin and Manstead (1983) termed the “principle of retribution” that there are grounds on which bullying could be justified, “unless someone says something mean to me and I say something mean back”. In this situation, Ann is quite within her rights as the aggrieved party to reassert control and inflict injury as the other person is clearly deserving of it.

The claim to an unintentional act also requires an appeal to the listener’s shared understanding of the world and how it works. Thus, in the following extract Bart’s explanation hinges on our ability to empathise with the position he is in:

Interviewer: What about you Bart, have you ever bullied anyone?

Bart: I probably would of once or twice, can't recall it though. Just something that happens, hang out with the wrong crowd.

Bart quite readily agrees that he has probably bullied as this is the nature of the world however, he minimises this admission by the numerical descriptor of once or twice. Furthermore his claim to amnesia of these events makes it clear that they are not of any serious significance. Bart's account then relies on the listener's common sense interpretation of "just something that happens"; an incontrovertible fact rather like night following day. Any possible accountability for the act is then shifted to his association with "the wrong crowd". In these ways Bart is able to excuse the behaviour by denial of agency (Semin & Manstead, 1983).

Minimal Impact

The linguistic resource of minimal impact supports the construction of bullying as *irrelevant* in a slightly different way to the previous two resources. Rather than providing excuses for the behaviour, it attempts to limit the damage caused by admissions of bullying by justifying it on the grounds that it is really quite trivial behaviour that causes no real harm. This is illustrated by the following extract:

Interviewer: Do you think that you have ever bullied someone yourself?

Will: Oh, I think at primary school or something, me and a few others bullied one kid, or something like that; just teasing and that.

There is vagueness to this account which is preceded with the qualifying "I think", therefore posing the possibility that it may not have actually happened. Following on from this is the doubt over where and when the possible incident took place, "at primary school or something." A further lack of clarity is also thrown into the admission by Will's confusion over whether it constituted bullying or was merely "something like that." Hard on the heels of this, Will substitutes the word "teasing" for bullying, thus utilising a much more euphemistic term which can also be linked with the previous linguistic resource of sense of humour. Finishing the sentence again with the vague "and that" there is an implicit expectation that the interviewer will understand the benign nature of "that".

Another feature of this extract is the use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) by including the qualifier “just”. This lends emphasis to the notion that the bullying is really not such a big deal by indicating the harmless nature of the action. The use of numeric descriptors also minimises the number of people involved in the bullying, “me and a few others” and again introduces a lack of clarity about the number of perpetrators of the incident, thus reinforcing its lack of importance. The fact that the very precise “one kid” only was affected suggests that the impact of the behaviour was not only minimal but very contained in that it was confined to a single person.

In the following extract we can see how this claim of the trivial consequences of bullying is supported by offering up evidence to the fact:

Interviewer: O.k. so what did you use to do, when was this?

Craig: Third form, just get smart to him.

Eric: Yeah, call him names and that.

Craig: Not push him round or nothing.

Eric: Nah.

Craig: But he hangs out with us now.

Again, although the bullying is acknowledged, it is portrayed merely as a name calling exercise in which the intention is “just to get smart to him”. There is a clear denial from both boys of a physical dimension to the behaviour, thus warding off possible accusations of any real injury. The evidence of this minimal impact is further substantiated by the fact that “he hangs out with us now”. This would appear to be indisputable confirmation that there were no lasting consequences to the behaviour.

It must be acknowledged that students are placed in a very difficult position by utilising this linguistic resource. Unlike the other two resources drawn upon in this construction of bullying as *irrelevant*, students are actually conceding that they have responsibility for the bullying. In the other two resources they were able to deflect such accusations by reformulating the behaviour as joking or unintentional and consequently not their fault. This admission therefore, places them in a delicate position as it leaves them open to be associated with all the negative attributes that go along with the label of bully and as such undermines their whole integrity. It is important therefore, that their account of

the bullying is organised in such a way to limit potential damage to what Gergen (1989) termed their “warranting voice”. This is the desire to have their version of events accepted over that of others. This is achieved by skilfully persuading the listener that they are in fact honest and forthright by owning up to the behaviour. Therefore their portrayal of bullying as having minimal impact as a justification appears to be more reasonable and believable.

The work done by the oppositional construction of bullying as a function of *disparity* is also directly challenged by utilising this resource of minimal impact in a more general way. In the following extract Scott uses his position as a student insider and therefore an “expert” to offer an account that attempts to globally challenge the concept of bullying as a ‘big deal’:

Scott: Doesn't happen very bad, not like some // people think it happens real bad.

Angie: // Yeah.

Scott: Even if it is in school doesn't really rule dramatically as you see on T.V. and stuff like that. People sometimes overestimate it and think a bit too much about it.

Although Scott is prepared to acknowledge that bullying can sometimes take place in schools (“even if it is in school”) he disputes the serious nature of the behaviour and its consequences on a number of fronts. Firstly he contends that it “doesn’t happen very bad” and with a pre-emptive strike negates what “some people think”. The vague use of the term “some people” reinforces these outsiders as not possessing the knowledge that he has access to, and therefore undermines their warrant as speakers. In a similar fashion he asserts that bullying “doesn’t really rule dramatically as you see on T.V. and stuff like that”. Again Scott is able to lay claim to superior “voice” by representing media images of bullying as being fictitious drama unlike his own privileged experience. Finally these inexperienced, unknowing “people” are accused of misjudging and exaggerating the whole issue of bullying and indeed we are cautioned that they “think a bit too much about it”.

The construction of bullying as irrelevant

The resources of sense of humour, unintentional behaviour and minimal impact utilized in this construction co-articulate in such a way as to highlight the irrelevance of

bullying as a social issue. The effect of this is to support the status quo of the prevailing power relationships within the educational institution. It is imperative for the survival of the institution that students themselves are part of the mechanisms of ensuring the maintenance of these power inequalities. Therefore any attempt to interfere with this central goal by suggesting that bullying is unacceptable, as in the resistance construction of *disparity*, must be addressed. The resources that constitute *irrelevance* function by providing an alternative construction of bullying that can allow people to view the behaviour as reasonable and not a 'big deal'. This 'common sense' framework also has the effect of masking the underlying power relationships which is essential for the success of power (Foucault, 1976).

CHAPTER SIX

Differences

The concept of differences and the way in which students utilise this construct is identified as a central element in how they make sense of bullying. Differences are seen to affect other constructions and work in conjunction with them as part of the technologies of normalization.

Talk of *differences* can be seen as being at the very core of students' constructions of bullying. It is also inherently related to the oppositional construction of *disparity* since a difference must first be established in order for an inequality to be identified. The importance therefore of developing an integrated analysis whereby discourses can be shown to interact with one another cannot be over emphasised.

Foucault's concept of 'normalisation' can be seen as a key element in the function of *differences*. He used what he termed the 'archaeology of knowledge' as a method of analysis to trace back and uncover how certain concepts had been allowed to develop (Burr, 1995). In particular the insights he produced regarding institutions such as prisons and mental asylums are very relevant to this analysis. Technologies of normalisation developed hand in hand with the establishment of such institutions as schools. In bringing together a large number of people in a set area the opportunity was provided for the observation and identification of differences. However, large numbers of people also required efficient management and co-ordination, hence individuals and their differences were organised and distributed around a "norm" (Rabinow, 1984; Rose, 1990). This norm can be viewed as a standard or a measure by which the process of individualization can take place. Thus, an individual can be judged according to what degree they conform or not to the norm (Wetherall, Taylor & Yates, 2001).

Identification of difference

In the following extracts some of the strategies participants used for identifying differences are discussed:

Interviewer: You talked a little bit before about students who are different. I guess I'm trying to get at a definition of what's different (.) how do I know he's different?

Will: Not doing what everyone else is doing and so like people who are usually for like rugby and that, people playing rugby that's sort of like cool, and people that play are normal and that. But people that are playing like chess or something, they have different abilities, they might be good at that game, but other people will think "oh, he must be a nerd or something, he's not doing what everyone else is doing" so...

The norm here is clearly established as "doing what everyone else is doing" thus emphasising it as a common sense shared notion about which activities students should participate in. Will makes it clear that the norm of "playing rugby" is something that students should aspire to as he evaluates it as "that's sort of like cool". This is linked therefore to a shared cultural norm as playing rugby is something that is admired in the cultural context of adolescent boys. He also reinforces that students who adhere closely to these common sense, cultural norms can therefore be identified as "normal".

Although Will clearly constructs students choosing an activity that deviates from the norm as possibly displaying attributes of skill and ability, these are different to those required in the dominant game. More importantly, this is not what the vast majority of other students are engaging in as an activity. I would suggest that this particular activity was chosen as an example to lend emphasis to the extremely low value attached to it within this shared meaning of norm. Hence students who choose the game of chess are identified in a negative context, "he must be a nerd or something" as they fail to measure up to the norm.

In a similar fashion other anomalies are identified that deviate from the norm in the following extract:

Interviewer: What do you think about students who are different, how do you define someone who's different?

Sam: If they wear glasses...

Dave: [laugh]

Sam: ... people always pick on them.

Interviewer: O.k. yeah.

Sam: And if they've got like braces and they like, they wear the uniform but it's like, looks real crusty or something, like got holes in it and stuff...

Dave: Or they're gothic.

Sam: Yeah (.) just different from the crowd, if they're different from them then they're (.) classified as [inaudible].

Interviewer: Classified as?

Sam: Like nerds and stuff (.) outcasts.

It is apparent that in order to bring about normalisation a rather narrow set of criteria based on appearance is being utilised. While in the previous extract sporting activity was discussed as a reference point, here there are physical features that you may be judged on; glasses, braces, wearing of uniform and being gothic. However, the defining point is again a deviation from the shared meaning of majority, "just different from the crowd". The language used to describe this deviation is significant in that it portrays the similarities to the previous case where students who do not conform to the common sense perception of norm are classified as "outcasts".

Rabinow (1984) claimed that an essential element of the normalization process in the nineteenth century was the gathering of vast amounts of information in order to obtain more accurate records about individuals so that the criteria for normalization could be both more encompassing and refined. Students also are part of this "vast documentary apparatus" (p.258) in their endeavours to seek out and gain precise knowledge about other individuals. In the following sequence of extracts, students are responding to a general question from the interviewer about how they would go about determining differences and the acceptance of these individuals:

Lewis: And (.) you can ask them all sorts of questions really (.) and if they're not really the right answers to the questions that you asked them then you automatically think they're, this person is weird.

The strategy for identifying differences in this extract is quite explicit as it has been formalised into a list of questions. It is also interesting that Lewis is clear that there are both correct and incorrect answers, with a corresponding failure to pass the test resulting in an automatic classification as "weird". This construction lends support to

the notion of obtaining accurate knowledge about individuals as part of the technologies of normalisation.

A related strategy requires a more subjective approach:

Ann: We'd probably (.) talk to them and (.) see what they were like and...

Yvette: Mm (.) Yeah, we'd see what they're like before we accepted them.

Ann: Yeah like (.) sooner or later they'll find their little group [laugh] like we have, but yeah.

In this construction there is a sense that a little more time is required to measure and calculate “what they’re like” before judgement is made. The criteria for acceptance are unclear to the listener although talking appears to be one form of acquiring knowledge. The failure to meet these criteria will preclude membership to “their little group”. It should be noted however, that other groups appear to be available to those that don’t measure up.

The role of normalization is to firstly identify and isolate differences so that these so called anomalies can be normalized “through corrective or therapeutic procedures” (Rabinow, 1984; p.257). The construction of *differences* is closely aligned to this function in students’ constructions of bullying and is a constant theme running through the analysis. The following extract illustrates this point:

Jan: Cause there's like an, the T.V. puts out an image, you know if you, you don't kind of fit to their image, people are just gonna bully you. Like there's a certain standard that people, like must have.

The notion of the norm in this instance has been created by a media image, but the importance of conforming to this image is very apparent. It is also described as a “certain standard” that it is imperative for people to attain. Failure to “fit to their image” inevitably results in the ‘corrective procedure’ of bullying. As Rabinow (1984) would suggest such a normalisation technology is designed to deal with anomalies or “dangerous social deviations” (p. 257).

The requirement by the educational institution for normalisation can be seen to lead to the process of individualization whereby students and their differences are organised around a norm and judged by their degree of conformity to that norm. Students play an essential part in the implementation of these technologies of normalisation and therefore must also be involved with the development of a common idea of how the majority of students should look and behave, and the identification of any social deviation from this norm.

Acceptance

In talking of *difference* bullying is constructed as a technique for standardising social deviation. Students who are unable or unwilling to conform to this shared sense of social norm are inevitably subject to bullying. It should be unsurprising therefore that many students' constructions also revolved around the linguistic resource of 'fitting in':

Pat: Like I've been picked on, called white boy whatever a lot of times by most of the Maori kids and because I don't like fit in with them, like I never used to play rugby, I used to always play soccer so I was always called a pussy rah, rah... and in college I turned to rugby mostly cause I wanted to fit in.

Will: Yeah

Interviewer: So it can come down to something like the sport you play?

Pat: Yeah, even like the subjects that you choose in class and that.

Interviewer: So you actually make a subject choice based on that?

Will: In third and fourth form if your mates want to choose one subject you'd more likely choose that one as well instead of doing something you want, just to try and fit in more and be more accepted and that sort of thing.

The individual student's desire to aim for the norm, with its achievement being associated with acceptance by one's peers, is shown to be all pervasive in school life. Pat is unable to correct the colour of his skin but is able to utilise sport as a mechanism to "fit in". Although not stated, it is inferred that this "turn to rugby" provided him protection from the previous bullying. I would suggest that the macho, sport dominated culture of River Valley High allows for a hierarchy of cultural norms. Therefore participation in the dominant sport of rugby which is admired in the shared cultural

context of adolescent boys can transform you from the category of different to the achievement of normality and subsequent acceptance.

The strength of these normalization technologies is evident in the lengths that students will go “just to try and fit in more and be more accepted”. In the previous extract Will describes a process of making a particular choice “instead of doing something you want” in order to achieve this. In the following extract Jan describes the desire to conform as a need for safety:

Jan: I like to be normal if I'm allowed [laugh] follow people, just so I can be safe.

Interviewer: Yeah

Jan: Because I've just had enough of being picked on by catty girls.

The experience of having undergone a particular procedure of normalisation, “being picked on by catty girls” has left Jan with a very strong desire “to be normal”. The use of the very well known animal metaphor of “catty girls” conjures up images of a hissing, sharp clawed beast and leaves us in no doubt about the unpleasant effects of this particular process. Jan can therefore be seen as having her anomalous appearance or behaviour successfully corrected as she makes it quite clear that she is prepared to “follow people” and therefore adhere to the norm.

However, at first glance there does appear to be a noticeable exception in the data to this pattern of wishing to fit in, be accepted and remain safe by conforming to the norm. Potter and Wetherall (1987) point to the relevance of such cases as they can often be more informative than the regular pattern of accounts. As stated earlier, my interpretation of this construction of *differences* is closely related to the Foucauldian concept of normalization; the identification, isolation and correction of anomalies. However, in the following extract it is hard to reconcile Julie's account with my suggestion that the goal of individuals is to work towards the norm:

Interviewer: How would you define this being different, you know what do you think about students who are different?

Julie: I know from personal experience of being different that there is nothing wrong with it at all. I don't follow fashion trends because I think they're stupid. I wear what I want to wear 'cause I feel comfortable in it and because I like it.

It is noticeable that Julie begins her account by presenting herself as someone with personal experience, thus highlighting her warrant as a speaker (Gergen, 1989). This is a skilful technique as she needs to ward off possible argument to her next statement which asserts that "there is nothing wrong" with being different. It is interesting that she chooses to defend against the acknowledged negative connotations of difference rather than emphasising the positive aspects. However, it is her following claim, "I don't follow fashion trends" which initially appears to be problematic to the present analytic claim. There appears to be a determined effort to construct an account of a wilful desire to deviate from the norm, "I wear what I want to wear". This is in marked contrast to the previous pattern that characterised students as making decisions, at times against their own wishes, in order to belong to the majority and conform to the norm. What is it then about the organisation of this account and how is it functioning in the broader analytical scheme?

The answer to this question can I believe be found in the second part of the extract:

Julie: With me being the victim of a lot of bullying in primary school it has made me think "nah, I don't give a shit what anybody says any more". You rise above it because you've had enough of crying.

Cathy: // Yeah.

Julie: // And running to teachers and stuff, and nobody seems to listen after a while so you think, "nah, I don't give anymore".

Interviewer: But do you, do you give a shit?

Julie: Nah. I wouldn't be where I am now if I gave a shit [laugh].

It is clear from this section of the account that Julie has indeed been subjected to some strong procedures of normalization. She characterises herself as a victim of these supposedly "corrective" techniques. Her response to being identified as an anomaly is to seek help in the form of "crying" and "running to teachers and stuff". However, as discussed previously, these normalisation technologies seek to identify and then isolate

these differences, so “nobody seems to listen after a while”. At this point Julie is faced with a dilemma, unlike the other accounts where deviation has been eliminated she is contesting the strategy and resisting bullying as a normalising technique. Therefore she is faced with being designated as an undesirable social deviant.

The account then must be organised in such a way as to offer her some form of protection from this categorization. Hence difference is constructed initially as not a bad thing, thus attempting to weaken the concept that not conforming to the norm is necessarily undesirable. This is then supported by the use of a spatial metaphor (Lyons, Stephens, Morgan, Praat & Tuffin, 1996) which also has distinct religious connotations, “you rise above it”. The implication is that the unsuccessful normalization techniques are being managed by being assigned to a plane beneath Julie’s position, consequently enabling her not “to give a shit”.

This apparent exception then should not be viewed as problematic but rather it can be shown to assist in confirming the analytical claims made about the function of *differences* in the construction of bullying: a phenomenon Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to as “confirmation through exception” (p.69). Despite the role played by normalization in controlling the social masses in the nineteenth century, Foucault pointed to the contemporary development of new categories of anomalies such as the delinquent as evidence of the failure to eliminate deviations from the norm (Rabinow, 1984). Normalisation is a mechanism through which power can be channelled but as such it will be challenged and will not always result in successful regulation (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001).

Homogeneity

The effect of normalisation however, is to create homogeneity in a social body by comparing all individuals to a norm and judging them against this measure (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The function of *difference* constructs this homogeneity by drawing upon the linguistic resources of maturity and closeness. In the following extract the changing relationship between teachers and students is discussed:

Interviewer: How would you describe the teacher/student relationship at the school?

Jim: It's alright.

Terri: Yeah. They're just like us, I don't know. Oh, they're teachers obviously but you can just talk to them normally.

Interviewer: Has it always been like that?

Terri: Nah. Ah in third form we were just like teachers; students.

Jim: Mm

Terri: We didn't talk to them or nothing.

Jim: But now you can just like talk to them like normal people.

The relationship between teachers and students in the junior school is characterised by a huge divide whereby teachers and students exist at almost opposite ends of a hierarchically organised scale. The use of the third person pronouns, “them” and “us” makes this separation quite clear. The differences are so vast that there is no effective communication between the two groups, “we didn’t talk to them or nothing”. However, the situation has changed in the intervening four years since third form to a point where the groups have merged to such an extent that teachers are described as being “just like us”. It is interesting that this student construction implies that it is teachers that have moved on this scale to now be like “normal people”

This coming together of student and teacher as a function of the students growing maturity results in the formation of a more cohesive homogeneous body. In a similar manner, the purported low incidence of bullying at River Valley High is attributed to the closeness of the student body. This construction of closeness can be construed as evidence of the achievement of homogeneity, therefore no longer warranting the techniques of normalisation associated with bullying:

Interviewer: Do you think there's a lot of bullying at River Valley High in comparison to other schools?

Mia: Um, I don't reckon there is as much // (.) here.

Eve: // Yeah, yeah, I don't think there is as much because of...

Mia: Everyone knows everyone.

Eve: Yeah, they're sort of like close together, cause we're such a small school and compared to all the other bigger schools where there's like, you know five hundred or something students and they're all like (.) separate sort of thing (.) I think we're a lot closer and that and there's not as much bullying as in other schools”.

The suggestion here is that the size of the social body has a direct bearing on the ability of students to be “close”. Individuals at larger schools are more spread out from one another and thus display greater deviations from the norm; they are “separate” from one another. On the other hand homogeneity is far more achievable for students at River Valley High by virtue of the smaller numbers. Individuals are able to cluster together around the norm and hence there is less need for normalization techniques and a corresponding reduction in bullying.

Differences and normalisation

Through the function of identifying differences, bullying is constructed as a ‘corrective technique’ required for the normalisation of the student body within an educational institution. Students are a fundamental element of the institutional apparatus as they are called upon to seek out precise knowledge of their fellow students. The individual can then be judged according to a shared understanding of social and cultural norms that are applicable in our schools. However, the consequences of non-conformity are clear to all. Thus is created the need to ‘fit in’ and be accepted by one’s peers. The failure to achieve the institutional goal of homogeneity of the social body inevitably leads to bullying of those members who continue to deviate.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discipline must prevail

According to Foucault the development and operation of disciplinary technologies within our educational institutions is a necessary requirement to ensure the orderly compliance of its subjects. Discipline is constructed in such a way that both teachers and students have a role to play in maintaining the status quo of such power relationships in the school.

Foucault theorized power to have developed historically such that the state's political power or governance involved not only individualization techniques but also a "totalising form of power" which touched all aspects of human life including for example, education. This power and knowledge Foucault referred to as "bio-power" which brought about the development of "disciplinary technologies" based on the human body as an object to be controlled and manipulated (Rabinow, 1984; p.253).

Foucault believed that this disciplinary control was a necessary pre-requisite for the success of modern capitalism. In institutions such as schools the aim "is to forge a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1979; p.198). Thus students are organised and distributed into year levels and subject groups and timetabled into classrooms within the school environment. This arrangement facilitates the supervision and disciplining of the individuals to ensure appropriate behaviour.

The relationship between discipline and bullying underpins the power inequalities in our educational institutions. As discussed previously a defining aspect of bullying is that it is an interpersonal relationship characterised by an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1991). This, I would suggest, is a very salient feature of school discipline. However, the prevailing educational discourses of discipline and the associated social practices function to disguise this relationship and thus support the continuation of bullying in schools.

This construction of discipline illustrates the role that both students and teachers play in the 'disciplinary technologies' that Foucault identified. Students construct discipline in such a way as to emphasise the notion that it must prevail at all costs. In a similar

manner to the identification of *differences*, an institutional norm of discipline is set to ensure the effective control of the student body. Any deviation from this norm must be attended to with strong corrective procedures being applied to the deviant. Students develop this construction of discipline by drawing initially on linguistic resources of lack of discipline and punishment. The prevailing power relationships in the school are further maintained by the identification and bullying by students of weak teachers who are perceived as failing to impose adequate discipline on students, and the legitimisation of teachers bullying students.

Lack of Discipline

Interviewer: What about discipline here at the college, what do you think? What's that like?

Shayne: What detentions and stuff?

Interviewer: Well yeah.

Shayne: It doesn't work. It's stupid. It doesn't do anything.

Ali: Nah detentions [inaudible].

Shayne: It's stupid. Just sit and write lines.

A noticeable feature of this extract is the use of the three part list (Jefferson, 1985) by Shayne in her assertion, "It doesn't work. It's stupid. It doesn't do anything." These three descriptions work in a systematic way to draw attention to the general unsatisfactory nature of the school discipline. There is also an expectation that discipline should be capable of some undefined task. This is linked with an implied metaphor of a non functioning appliance or machine to give emphasis to the fact that "it doesn't work" and therefore the task has not yet been accomplished.

In the following extract Julie is discussing the response from a teacher following what she had described as "a serious breach of discipline":

Julie: Yeah [laugh] but he's going on and on at me.

Cathy: // Oh, I heard about that.

Julie: // But he was repeating the same thing over and over again. It's like he's not doing anything, you know, you're not going to do anything about it if you're just gonna sit there and talk.

In a similar fashion to the previous extract there is a concern with the apparent powerlessness of the discipline, “he’s not doing anything”. However, this construction personalises this impotence to the teacher rather than to the system itself. As in the previous extract and in other examples in the analysis, the use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) “just” portrays a deficiency of action in the discipline, “you’re just gonna sit there and talk”. The emphasis on the word “talk” also reinforces this lack of consequence.

This theme of a perceived lack of discipline is constructed as a concern about control over students’ actions:

Yvette: I don’t think the discipline at this school is good enough.

Ann: Nah, put your name on the board.

Yvette: Yeah.

Ann: Get a tick, // get a detention.

Yvette: // We get (.) we get away with so much (.).

Ann: Yeah.

Yvette: We’re not strict enough.

Discipline is seen as a standard that schools must aspire to achieve, with River Valley High falling short of the mark, “I don’t think the discipline at this school is good enough”. The failure to uphold this standard results in students’ movement away from the criterion, “we get away with so much”. There is a sense here of an escape that has allowed students to place some distance between themselves and this yardstick of a ‘docile body’ compliant to the institution’s control. It is also interesting to note the dual use of the pronoun “we” to refer to Yvette and Ann as students getting away with so much and also in the final sentence as part of the disciplinary process itself, “We’re not strict enough”. This dual positioning of students as part of the social body and also a key element in the disciplinary technologies will be examined more closely later in the analysis of discipline talk.

Punishment

Students skilfully utilise this established concept of concern about a lack of discipline to set the stage for appearing quite reasonable in recommending appropriate remedies.

Under the guise of a lack of strictness, dissatisfaction with the punishment techniques within the system for upholding discipline can be expressed. The support therefore for teachers to enforce their power on students and effectively bully them is being crafted as entirely acceptable.

Bart: That's all you really get, just detentions. It's not even really that hard.

Jan: Yeah.

Bart: It should be stricter.

Interviewer: So how, what would you do?

Bart: Take out their sport times.

Jan: Yeah.

Bart: Take out something that they enjoy.

Jan: Take out their mufti days.

Interviewer: What do you think that would achieve, having stricter discipline?

Bart: Make them think twice.

The use of the metaphor “hard” bestows the image of a quality of material that is desirable to achieve with discipline in much the same way that a standard was constructed earlier. Jan and Bart then go on to offer examples of ways that this might be achieved, all of which involve the removal of “something that they enjoy”. The use of the term “take out” implies a rather painful process much like a tooth extraction or as in pop fiction where it is a reference to the removal of a life. The outcome of such measures is claimed to “make them think twice” which, rather than allow students to intellectualise their choices to a greater degree, has a somewhat menacing connotation. There is the suggestion that strict discipline can be equated with the exercise of power over you to enforce control if you continue to deviate. There is also a very definite usage of pronouns; their, they, them, to separate Jan and Bart from the students that need to be disciplined in this way.

The following extract also constructs the role of punishment quite distinctly:

Scott: Like kids sent into (name of withdrawal room) for doing, um not doing their speeches and, and today I just see them there, not worried at all.

Angie: // Yeah, I reckon...

Scott: // [Inaudible] so they're doing all this, meant to be suffering, well it's just an easy way out for them.

Scott's portrayal of a discipline procedure whereby students subjected to it are "meant to be suffering" conjures up medieval or spiritual images of pain and torment. His disappointment that they are apparently not distressed, "not worried at all" is evident, and he concludes therefore that "it's just an easy way out for them". This also suggests that it is a means of escape from their deserved fate. The use of the word "easy" contrasts with the earlier metaphor of "hard" used in this construction, in a successful complementary fashion. Although rather excessive this perceived requirement for punishment techniques to inflict misery on individuals in order to be successful as a disciplinary technology is a common construction.

The foundation has now been laid for the taken for granted nature of existing power relationships in our schools. That *discipline must prevail* epitomises current educational theory and practice. The consequence of this pedagogical view is the sanctioning of institutional bullying in all its various forms.

Weakness

Foucault's ideas of subject, power and knowledge are brought together in his famous example of the plan for Bentham's panopticon, described previously, as an illustration of a disciplinary technology. He also suggested that it provided the rationale for normalization technologies that were discussed in the previous section concerned with *differences*. The construction of *discipline* clearly illustrates the dual positioning of students within these disciplinary technologies; although they may be subjected to the power of the school they are also part of the exercising of that power. This idea is organised around the concept of teacher weakness:

Interviewer: So how do you choose the teachers that you bully, or do you bully them at all?

Linda: We choose the weak ones [laugh]

Paula: Yeah, sus out the teachers you could get away with it and which ones you wouldn't be able to.

Linda: Yeah, like Mr. Price, oh don't bully him [laugh] wouldn't work.

Interviewer: So how do you pick them?

Linda: You try things; like you try a little each time a little more each time to try and push them and if they just like (.) yeah, they just, they just ignore it then you do it a little more harder until they break, you know like "cool". I think it comes down to the power, like how we've got power over the teacher.

In much the same way as students observed and classified other students in the construction of bullying as *differences*, there is the perceived task of identifying and distinguishing between "weak" teachers and those that "you wouldn't be able to...get away with it". The metaphor of continuing to push them harder and harder until the weak ones break is very evocative of a physical struggle. The victor then is able to seize power, which in the following extract is constructed as being intrinsically related to control:

Ann: Miss Shaw will try and tell her off (.) and she must seem so weak around us, ah?

Yvette: Oh, I, I, I reckon she doesn't like (.) she's not in control of our class. Like we're, like more controlling over her.

Ann: Mm. Like we tell her what we're going to do.

Students are utilising this linguistic resource of weakness to transcend themselves from a traditionally less powerful position than teachers to one where they are in control. Walkerdine (1984) examined the power implications of how children and teachers position each other and themselves in different discourses in a nursery school setting. In one particular example she found that by using an alternative discourse to the prevailing teacher/student power discourse, namely a sexuality discourse, two four year old boys were able to take power themselves and put their female teacher in a relatively powerless situation. In a similar fashion in this analysis students are able to wrestle power from the teacher by positioning the teacher within this subject position of weakness. In doing so they are able to take up the relinquished subject position of being in control. The function of this in terms of disciplinary technologies and the paradigm of the panopticon is to exert control over teachers in order to ensure that discipline and the orderly behaviour of students is maintained.

The way in which students pit weakness against strength ensures that the strict teacher is given a more privileged position:

Angie: Maybe it's the strictness of them, or sometimes it's the way they teach like (.) you find mainly the strict teacher's everyone likes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Angie: But ones that you can walk all over, kids don't really (.) like (.). Like Mr. Fisher, he's quite strict but everyone likes him.

The effect of locating a teacher within a subject position of strict carries with it the right to be respected, listened to and not to be bullied. This is because they are efficiently fulfilling their role within the existing institutional context of education and discipline. However, for teachers located as weak there is a corresponding loss of this right to respect, to be free from harassment and indeed to teach:

Sam: The weak ones you just start like picking on them and yeah, throwing things at them.

Dave: You just make it hard for them to teach.

Sam: Yeah, and like talk all the time (.) yeah, whistle in class [laugh].

Dave: Just make their job as hard as possible.

There is a good deal of variability surrounding the use of the linguistic resource of weakness within the construction of *discipline*. On the one hand is the suggestion that the teacher must yell at the students in order to bring about discipline and assert control. The implication being that weakness is displayed by an inability to comply with this requirement:

Jim: Cause they like don't tell you off or anything.

Terri: Yeah, that's why they get bullied // cause they don't yell at us.

Jim: // Cause you don't get into trouble from them or anything.

Alongside this construction is a contradictory construction of a teacher who utilises the strategy of yelling but still fails to impose discipline:

Jan: (.) And she's a stupid teacher, she yells all the time. I'm not in her class, I just hear her.

Bart: She yells all the time (.). But we don't really do anything 'cause she just goes back and gives us detentions, and it's that detention thing again, we just keep doing it.

This variability is to be expected because as Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out a central tenant of discourse analysis is that "people's talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects" (p.168). In this case the variability of the constructions serves to function in a complimentary fashion. Strength is displayed by the teacher who will raise "his" voice in response to student misbehaviour. The contrasting construction of the teacher who yells at the students with little effect serves to further undermine the credibility of the weak teacher. A further interesting feature is the gendering of effective "yelling" in these constructions. Students draw on a stereotypical construction of men's voices as carrying authority when they are raised, whereas women's raised voices are constructed as 'out of control'.

In this construction of discipline it must be upheld at all costs, and for this to happen behaviour that deviates from a desirable norm must be linked with a significant response. Thus, students act as agents of the institution to harass weak teachers in order to ensure the maintenance of discipline and consequently the orderly behaviour of students. *Discipline* insists that teachers must exert their power over students in order to control them. The failure by any teacher to preserve the status quo of power relationships in the institution must be remedied. Students therefore can be seen as having a valid institutional responsibility to bully weak teachers.

Justification

It is also essential that the disciplinary technologies utilised in the exercising of power by teachers are justified, even by those subjected to them. They must be constructed as being a fundamental part of the necessary social practices linked to this prevailing educational construction of *discipline*. The failure to legitimise such teacher behaviour would place it in danger of being recognized as unacceptable and in doing so could possibly contribute to the unravelling of the institutional power relationships. Students' constructions of teacher behaviour then function to achieve this objective:

Interviewer: Do you think that any of the teachers bully students?

Reg: Nah.

Lewis: If they do it's really for the student's own good. Like I know Mr. Ames, he, he bullies a few of them, but he only does it to help them out.

Interviewer: So when you say bully, what sort of stuff does he do?

Lewis: Like if people are behind on their work then he'll put them in the senior class, like take them out of class and put them in a senior class.

Reg: Yeah, cause we get smart // to them

Lewis: // And yeah, he knows that us senior kids give them, give them shit (.) and I think he does that for their benefit. Like, cause you don't want to be in a class with senior students that are all yelling at you for getting kicked out.

The behaviour of the teacher is couched in terms of his good intentions; his motivation is entirely centred on the student's welfare, it is all for "the student's own good" and "to help them out". The collusion between the teacher and senior students is an interesting feature of this extract. It supports earlier ideas about the closeness that develops between students and teachers as a function of maturity. As they move closer together to form a more homogenous group, they serve a complimentary role in the exercising of power, "he knows that us senior kids give them, give them shit, and I think he does that for their benefit".

Even those students that are at the receiving end of these technologies construct a classic justification:

Interviewer: O.k. what about some of the teachers, do you think that they actually bully students?

[Long pause]

Ali: Nah.

Shayne: I reckon they can be hard out against you though.

Interviewer: Is that bullying?

Shayne: I don't know.

Ali: Feels like they are sometimes, but they're not, just doing their job.

This question obviously presents quite a problem for Shayne and Ali. The idea that teachers' behaviour may be constructed as bullying is quite a foreign concept. It is therefore rather difficult, particularly as the question has been posed by a teacher. Although they both describe experiences that could be interpreted as bullying they are unable to label it as such. This is understandable as this would challenge the apparatus of power itself within the school. Instead Ali handles this incongruence by utilising the justification that teachers are "just doing their job".

The importance of discipline

According to Foucault (1976) it is important that we do not recognise the operation of power as people would not knowingly allow themselves to be controlled in such a way. The construction of *discipline* therefore serves the purpose of social control within our schools. Power is exercised when this construction allows the behaviour of teachers to be justified as a necessary part of the educational process. Indeed, students contribute to the process through their bullying of weak teachers to ensure the continuation of this institutional power imbalance. The recognition by students that the teachers' actions are acceptable within the framework of this construction continues to "mask" the power behind them. "Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault, 1976; p. 86).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bullying as Inevitable

This construction of bullying as *inevitable* is seen as sending out a clear message that bullying is inescapable. It supports the other prevailing constructions of bullying as *irrelevant*, *differences* and *discipline* by cementing the idea that it is futile to try and attempt to disrupt the power balance within schools that legitimizes bullying.

The final construction identified; *inevitability*, works in close association with the previous two; *differences* and *discipline*. As we have seen these are centred on the concepts of normalization and disciplinary technologies. They are essential elements in the maintenance of the power of the educational institution. *Inevitability* is a construction that attempts to support the status quo by warning about the futility of any attempts to disrupt the prevailing power relationship. It is organised around the linguistic resources of intervention as dangerous, telling as pointless and response as useless.

Intervention as dangerous

Lack of intervention in bullying is constructed firstly as an act of self preservation:

Interviewer: What do you do when you observe bullying happening?

Mia: I just sort of keep my mouth shut [laugh].

Interviewer: Why do you do that?

Mia: Cause I don't want to speak up (.) just in case you get bullied yourself maybe.

There is a clear assumption that any attempt to “speak up” will predictably result in the person themselves becoming the target of bullying. As the following extract shows there is the sense that while someone else is being bullied you can enjoy a certain degree of safety:

Pat: Oh well watching is better than like being on the end of it. So (.) yeah I think everyone tries to avoid being bullied.

Will: You don't want to sort of stick up for the person that's being bullied otherwise people start on you and (.) you'll end up getting bullied yourself so, sort of sit back and watch, you don't really want to get involved.

A noticeable feature of this extract is the utilisation of metaphorical constructions of bullying and intervention. Thus, the danger of “being on the end of it” is emphasised by this allusion to a sharp, injury inflicting object. Equally, the action of “sticking up” and coming to the aid of someone being bullied places you in danger as it makes you obvious to the perpetrator and as such an easy target. This is akin to a wartime analogy where showing your head above the trenches carried with it an almost certain consequence of being shot. The only reasonable action then to ensure your safety is to “sit back and watch” and not “get involved”. Students draw on this resource of self preservation to justify their apparent unwillingness to intervene.

The danger of intervention is also in co-articulation with the construction of *difference* that has previously been discussed. There is a reluctance to step outside the boundaries of a normal distribution, to draw attention to one self, and to be identified as different. This concern extends to restricting your own behaviour to fit in with other peoples’ perceptions of you:

Bart: It’s kind of sad, like um my mate he picks on people, you just can’t do anything about it cause you’re scared he might change, like think different of you, so you just laugh and carry on with it, try not to butt in or anything because he might put the bad word into you, even though you feel real bad about it, you can’t stop it or nothing.

Even though you are personally unhappy about the behaviour, “you feel real bad about it” you have no choice but to continue, “you just laugh and carry on with it”. There is a fear that any attempt to interrupt the normalization process and “butt in” will lead to you being categorized in a different way, “he might change, think different of you” and this may result in you being subjected to a similar procedure. It is interesting that the bullying is construed as unstoppable; this sense of inevitability is also evident in the following extract:

Interviewer: Have you ever just watched and just sort of stood back?

Jim: Yeah, I’ve just watched before [laugh].

Terri: I do it all the time.

Interviewer: What watch?

Terri: Mm, well you can't really do anything.

Jim: Scared you're gonna get a whack if you go in there [laugh]

Terri: [Laugh] You can't even stop it anyway, you walk over there, they don't listen.

Constructing intervention as hopeless also provides an acceptable explanation for not intervening. There is the implication that although a person may desire to do what is perceived as 'the right thing', the action will have no effect. The assertion by Terri that she watches "all the time" is then able to be defended on two fronts; the danger of getting "a whack" and the fact "you can't even stop it anyway".

Telling as pointless

The linguistic resource of telling as pointless reinforces both the dangers and the uselessness of others attempting to intervene in bullying. The following extract initially constructs the bullying as something disgraceful that should be hidden, with any divulging of the secret resulting in an escalation of the problem:

Interviewer: Who do people tell, if anyone, if they're being bullied?

Linda: Mm (.) I would have thought they wouldn't tell anybody.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Linda: They'd just keep to themselves, like everyone would know anyway, like (.) but um, yeah. Why would, why would you want to tell anyone that you're being bullied, shame sort of thing.

Interviewer: You wouldn't want to tell teachers or parents maybe to make it stop?

Linda: Mm it might get worser (.) For it might be like "you narked on me, come here" [laugh].

Interviewer: Do you think that does generally happen, like if teachers or parents are told?

Paula: Yeah if they do intervene, especially parents, if parents come in to deal with it, yeah things often get worse.

The victim of the bullying is portrayed as somehow being dishonourable and to blame for the behaviour in a similar way to historically prevailing discourses of sexual abuse and rape. There is therefore surprise expressed over anyone wanting to disclose their "shame". Furthermore, if you did dare to tell someone it would inevitably lead to you

being recast as a “nark”. This is a common term used in the school and in the community at large that carries with it some very negative and frightening connotations. It refers to the violent response given to police informers in the small but strong criminal gang culture of the town, to which many students have links. Finally, the consequences of having parents intervene is characterised not only as ineffectual but the cause of aggravating the bullying. It is unclear in what way parents “deal with it”, but one is left wondering if this is merely a reformulation of the power imbalance involved in bullying whereby parents use their more powerful position over the bully.

The negative construction of the person being bullied works in an insidious way to support the non disclosure of bullying. This is particularly evident in the way boys spoke about telling:

Interviewer: What about you Lewis? What about people that tell?

Lewis: You get the name that you're weak ah, can't handle.

Interviewer: Who do people tell if someone is being bullied?

Scott: Oh, people, teachers say to go to them and stuff, but they never do. Cause it's hard to, cause for boys it's kind of like you've got pride in yourself or something. I don't know whatever, don't wanna tell anyone.

There are similarities here to the construction of *discipline* where some teachers were placed in a subject position of weakness. There is a strong resistance to being positioned as “weak” and unable to “handle” bullying with the corresponding damage to your male “pride”. There is the implication therefore that admissions of being bullied will implicitly locate you in this highly undesirable subject position.

In a way similar to that in which the linguistic resource of intervention as dangerous co-articulates with *difference*, the pointlessness of telling also operates in conjunction with differences to emphasise the futility of trying to stop bullying:

Sam: Cause I don't think they'll tell their parents cause then their parents will probably want to do something about it, but they don't want to get more outcast, like their parents coming in sort of thing.

Interviewer: And do you think that's what would happen?

Sam: Probably, cause like the parents will go in and then the, they'll nark and then they'll get teased for being a nark and yeah, it goes on and on, torturing.

This extract makes it quite clear that the person being bullied has already been identified as an "outcast". As we saw in relation to *differences*, this then required them to be subjected to normalization techniques. Any attempt to intervene and disrupt this process, particularly by parents, results in the individual moving further down the scale away from the desirable norm; they "get more outcast". The justification for this further departure lies, as before, in the recasting as a "nark". The penalty for such anomalous behaviour is no less than "torture".

Response as useless

The inevitability of bullying is sealed with a linguistic resource that highlights how ineffective and at times non-existent the response to it is by teachers in our schools. The earlier analytical claims of the role of bullying as a normalization technique offer an explanation for this lack of action. As agents of the educational institution, teachers are also reliant on students' bullying to ensure the coming together of a homogenous group that can be more easily disciplined and moulded. In this first extract the teacher's action is seen as equivalent to doing nothing:

Yvette: But even if we did tell a teacher they didn't really take action to it.

Ann: Yeah.

Yvette: They just told us to go play in a different part of the area and just leave them alone. "Just walk away".

Ann: I hated it // when people said that.

Yvette: // Ohh, it frustrated me.

In this exchange it is clear that the teacher's response to the bullying is met with a considerable degree of irritation by the girls. The spatial removal of the students reporting the bullying is seen as totally unfair and unacceptable. The concept that one should "just walk away" fails to validate their experience. It is unsurprising therefore that this is constructed as not really taking any action. There is also the assumption that

teachers' would have to be physically present in order to respond effectively to the bullying:

Interviewer: What happens if someone does speak up and maybe tell a teacher or a parent, do you think that (.) it's effective?

Terri: Nah (.) It won't stop them. They do it when they're not, when you're not watching. But I suppose you tell the teacher, what are they gonna do? [Laugh]

Honestly what are they gonna do? They can't exactly (.) be there all the time.

Bullying then is constructed as a covert activity which exists beneath the radar of teachers. In a similar way to that seen in the discourse of *discipline*, there is the need for bullying to conceal itself in order to mask power. Even if teachers are told, the perpetrators are still able to skilfully carry it out without being observed. There is a real cynicism to this extract that challenges the listener to provide an alternative suggestion for an effective response to this hidden behaviour, "Honestly what are they gonna do?" There is no suggestion here that the teacher is at fault in anyway, rather they are portrayed as also being placed in a helpless situation, "they can't exactly (.) be there all the time".

However, in the following extract, there is a contrasting construction of teachers who fail to respond effectively:

Dave: Sometimes teachers do see it but they just turn a blind eye to it.

Sam: Yeah, they usually stop, "you sit over there, you sit over there". They don't really shut it down, they just minimise it.

Dave: You can even see them sometimes when they see someone being picked on they walk the other way so they don't have to do anything about it.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Dave: Can't be bothered doing anything about it.

Sam: The hassle.

Initially the response of spatial separation of those involved in a bullying situation is again described as ineffective. The metaphor of "shutting it down" conveys an image of trying to contain or turn off the activity, but it is only partially successful, "they just

minimise it". The continuing use of spatial relations in this construction makes it clear that a teacher's response of "walking the other way" is a wilful act of avoidance. The avoidance is attributed not to any ulterior motives, but to a desire to take an easier path, "can't be bothered"; "the hassle". The image of the teacher "turning a blind eye" also adds metaphorical emphasis to this construction. This example is in contrast to the previous construction of teachers being powerless to respond. This variability has the function of covering all bases, so to speak, within this linguistic resource of response as useless. Teachers it would seem are either unwilling or unable to respond effectively to bullying.

The inevitability of bullying

The construction of bullying as *inevitable* is a potent message that underlies just how entrenched the power relationships are in our educational institutions. Students and teachers are both inherently part of that power apparatus in operation in the school. Bullying is a required mechanism for maintaining this status quo. It is not unreasonable therefore to appreciate the inevitability of bullying in this prevailing educational climate.

CONCLUSION

This analysis presented in the previous chapters offers but one version of bullying in secondary schools which is inevitably shaped by my own personal values and biases. It is fully acknowledged that there are many other possible 'readings' of these student interviews that are valid interpretations. The aim of this research has not been to seek out the 'truth' about bullying but rather to open up the possibilities and potential that is offered by a fundamentally different approach to the study of this phenomenon. It is also hoped that it may open up other avenues for future research. For example studies of the discursive construction of bullying by teachers and parents would also be useful in furthering our understanding of bullying and thus contribute to more successful intervention programmes.

Mainstream, traditional research, underpinned as it is by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of empiricism, leads as we have seen to reductionism. This approach attempts to break down the complex phenomenon of bullying into simpler components in the mistaken belief that somehow this process will lead to a better understanding by virtue of a simpler level of explanation. This 'social reductionism' (Hayes, 1995) results in explanations that are firmly focussed on the individual. The issue with such individualistic conceptualisations is that if the source of the problem of bullying is located within the internal psyche of the student, then the responsibility for correcting the problem also lies within the individual. We have seen that this has had major implications for bullying intervention programmes which on the whole emphasise solutions at an individual level. Hepburn (1997a) describes this as a 'Catch-22 situation' whereby the problem of bullying comes about because of the problems that the 'victim' or 'perpetrator' has as a result of their fixed personality traits. There is thus a sense of inevitability surrounding these explanations of bullying. Furthermore, there is the danger that this can lead to a blaming culture (Tuffin, 2005) in which both those being bullied and those bullying are seen to be authors of their own inadequacies and carry the burden of individual responsibility to rectify these failings.

Individualism not only fails to take into account aspects of power and control but it functions to divert attention away from other possible explanations. In stark contrast, the alternative paradigm of social constructionism has the potential to elucidate the

phenomenon of bullying and liberate it from the confines of reductionism and individualism that have functioned to limit and narrow our understanding. This linguistic ontology emphasises the importance and pervasiveness of language in all our social interactions. Language actively constructs our social reality; the experience of bullying therefore is inevitably constructed through discourse. However, these discourses are never benign or politically neutral; they are inherently linked to power relationships. This research unashamedly embraces a political agenda which seeks to challenge the prevailing discourses surrounding bullying. The power inequalities evident in such 'taken for granted' educational discourses both create and maintain bullying behaviour in our schools.

Power, according to Foucault, does not 'belong' to any particular group or institution, but rather the discourses that historically, culturally and socially are taken as 'common sense' will be those that are accepted as 'knowledge' and 'truth'. Thus prevailing discourses of bullying are intrinsically bound up with power. They bring with them special rights and privileges and open up possibilities to act in certain ways. In the same way however, it is possible to exercise power by drawing on alternative discourses that seek to contest the established 'truth'. This resistance to the dominant educational discourses was evident in the construction of bullying as *disparity* that emerged from the analysis. Students are able to utilise this oppositional construction to bring attention to the injustice of bullying and in doing so resist the status quo as inevitable. Students draw upon images of an unfair battle of size and numbers to invoke a well accepted and legitimate discourse in New Zealand society of 'fair play'. It constructs a version of bullying that is immediately recognisable as deplorable and therefore is quite successful. The success of this strategy can be directly linked to the acceptability of such a discourse. There is no attempt to challenge the educational system directly or indeed the power inequalities inherent within. Discourses that could be seen to explicitly threaten the institution and the status quo would be 'unacceptable' and therefore meet with strong opposition.

This resistant construction of *disparity* struggles however with a rather limited range of linguistic resources because quite simply there are more readily available versions of bullying that students' can draw upon. This concern with the lack of 'acceptable' alternative discourses and the marginalization of others will be returned to later. It was

evident from this analysis that the prevailing discourses of bullying that function to support the status quo were more 'taken for granted' and therefore easier to say. Constructions of bullying as *irrelevant*, as a function of *differences*, a form of *discipline* and *inevitable* can be described as more culturally dominant in our educational institutions. They operate together to maintain the imbalance of power relationships in schools and in doing so contribute to the phenomenon of bullying.

Constructions that emphasised the irrelevance of bullying by reformulating bullying 'as a joke' for example have the effect of positioning people within the discourse that will have power effects. Such constructions can allow the 'bully' to claim the subject position of a joker and unless resisted, the 'victim' may be assigned the position of someone lacking a sense of humour. Thus identities with corresponding power implications are forged that can radically alter the rights and obligations of the participants. The problem, as constructed by this talk is not the bullying at all but rather the inability to recognise a 'bit of fun'. In a similar fashion the linguistic resource allowing bullying to be construed as unintentional within this *irrelevant* construction produces an account of an unfortunate accident. Subjectivities are manoeuvred so that there is a lack of intent in the behaviour and any claim of bullying is reconstituted as a failure to interpret other's actions the right way.

It is important therefore to examine such discourses and identify the positions they may provide in order that we may claim subject positions that are favourable and resist adverse ones (Burr, 1995). This skilful use of positioning was evident in the way in which the linguistic resource of minimal impact was utilised. Through an initial admission of bullying, students can position themselves as honest and consequently enhance their warrant as a speaker. Therefore their subsequent claims of the minimal damage caused by bullying are more believable. Thus, the recognition of the possibilities offered by various positions within discourses can aid in the quest to bring about change in the present conditions of bullying. It is only through doing this that we may seek to redress the imbalance of power adhering to these constructions.

The construction of bullying as a function of *differences* is a central feature in the process of 'normalisation'. Institutions such as schools provide the ideal opportunity for the identification of difference. They also require the efficient management of large

numbers of students and the achievement of this goal is ensured by a range of normalisation technologies that inevitably lead to the procedure of individualization. Students are both part of and subject to these technologies. Accurate and detailed information is sought about each individual so that they can be compared to a shared social and cultural norm of how students should look, think and behave. Any deviation from this majority view will require correction by bullying as a normalising technique for standardising social anomalies. Hence the need is developed to 'fit in' and be accepted by ones' peers. The power of the educational institution then can be exerted through the mechanism of normalisation of which students are an integral part.

Students' constructions of *discipline* work in close coarticulation with constructions of *differences*. The focus on individualism is inherent within the educational process of our institutions. Thus individuals are also seen at the centre of issues of discipline and must take responsibility for their problem behaviour. However, constructions of *discipline* do not recognise these disciplinary interactions between adults and students as bullying because there is a common sense presumption that adults have a right to behave in this way. Hepburn (1997a) points out that this taken for granted acceptance of what is essentially a 'systematic abuse of power' functions to culturally and socially legitimise bullying.

Furthermore, students also play an active role in the functioning of disciplinary technologies. They become part of the schools' power apparatus by applying corrective procedures to any teachers who are identified as failing to conform to the ideal norm of 'strictness'. In a similar fashion to techniques used in the construction of bullying as *irrelevant*, students are able to contest subject positions with deviating teachers by positioning them as weak, thereby taking up a controlling position. Thus, contrary to a typically Marxist analytical perspective whereby teachers maintain a position of power over students, it can be seen that students can change the power dynamics in their favour in order to bully weak teachers. In such situations students are acting as agents of the institution to ensure the control of the student body and in doing so function to maintain the status quo of power imbalance.

Constructions of bullying as *inevitable* also work in close association with constructions of *differences*. Any attempts at intervention are characterised as

dangerous because you will step outside the boundaries of a shared understanding of what is appropriate action. The concern therefore is that by drawing attention to your difference you are also liable to be subject to the corrective procedures of bullying. In a similar fashion, the disclosure of bullying is but a confession of difference and again this anomalous behaviour must be disciplined. The coup de grace of inevitability, so to speak, is the lack of an effective response on the part of teachers to bullying. However, within the intricate power dynamics of the institution, teachers rely on bullying between students as part of normalisation technologies to ensure the bringing together of a homogenous student body that can be more readily moulded and disciplined.

Bullying in schools effectively maintains the inequalities of power relationships in our educational institutions. The prevailing educational discourses that are socially and culturally entrenched in these power relationships function both to support this inequality and legitimise it. They continue to receive the 'stamp of truth' because they successfully obscure the operation of power. However, Foucault would suggest treating with extreme caution any attempt to recommend alternative discourses in order to challenge this prevailing knowledge. We have no way of predicting what the possible effects of a particular discourse maybe. Although we may anticipate it will be used to make a change for the better it may in fact have undesirable consequences. Nevertheless by highlighting these discourses that need to be challenged this analysis may offer some insight into our understanding of bullying and the ways in which we perpetuate it. It may also allow us to recognise other discourses that have been marginalised within our schools and the possibilities offered to us by accepting or resisting various positions within discourses. More importantly it may give a voice to students who are effectively disempowered by prevailing educational discourses.

Future research into bullying must be prepared to venture beyond traditional mainstream conceptualisations in order to provide a more encompassing focus that recognises how bullying is discursively constructed and maintained. It is only in this acknowledgement that bullying can begin to be targeted effectively.

Appendices

Appendix A:

The Principal
River Valley High
Blackberry Lane
River Valley

Dear Mr Smith

I would like to request permission to carry out research into bullying for my Masters thesis using senior students at River Valley High as participants. Year 12 and 13 students in the P.E./Life Skills (PELS) option will be invited to volunteer to participate in informal interviews on the topic of bullying in groups of 2-3. It is envisioned that approximately 10-15 students will be involved, with a time commitment of two PELS sessions.

The interviews will be audio taped, transcribed and then analysed using the techniques of discourse analysis to examine how students talk about and make sense of bullying. It is hoped that this approach will give us a better understanding of bullying and therefore a possible way forward in dealing with this issue.

The project will be under the supervision of Dr. Mandy Morgan, a Senior Lecturer at the School of Psychology, Massey University. All student participants, along with their peers, teachers and the school itself, will be assured that their identity will not be disclosed in any reports produced from the study through the provision of pseudonyms and guaranteed confidentiality. Furthermore, there will be a thorough process to ensure the fully informed consent of each participant.

Mr. Hemi Ropata, Kaumatua of the College, as been consulted and has generously agreed to make himself available for any issues arising from Maori student participation. The school Counsellors will also be available for any students who experience discomfort in any way due to their participation.

I believe that the involvement of students in this research will be an excellent learning experience and the participants will benefit from having the opportunity to discuss and reflect on an issue that affects them all. Students who decide not to participate in the research will still have the opportunity to take part in class discussions about bullying during a PELS session.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns regarding this research, it will of course have to be reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee before commencement.

Yours sincerely

Anne Ryan

Appendix B:**Bullying in Secondary Schools****A Discursive Approach****INFORMATION SHEET****Introduction:**

You are invited to participate in a research project being carried out by Anne Ryan, a researcher at Massey University and a teacher at River Valley High, as part of a Master of Science degree in Psychology. The supervisor for the research study is Dr. Mandy Morgan, who is a Senior Lecturer in The Massey University School of Psychology at Palmerston North.

The study involves listening to students talking about bullying at school and analysing this talk to identify the ways that bullying is understood. Its aim is to gain a better understanding of the issues surrounding bullying and the possible ways of dealing with it.

Contact Details:

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 Palmerston Nth
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Participant Recruitment:

Students in Year 12 and 13 PELS classes at River Valley High will be invited to take part in the research and all students who wish to volunteer to participate will be accepted. (For this qualitative type of research it is hoped that participants will number between 10 and 15) We do not expect that participants will experience discomfort or any risk as a result of participation. However, participants should be aware that some may experience a feeling of anxiety about discussing certain aspects of bullying. There may also be concerns regarding possible repercussions for speaking out or a sense of disloyalty to peers, teachers or the school. The discussion may also uncover some personal issues for some individual students. It must be emphasised that the Project Procedure guarantees confidentiality for all participants and support is available for anyone who does find the discussion uncomfortable for any reason. Neither participation nor non-participation will affect your marks or progress through your course.

Participant Involvement:

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an informal interview with 1 – 2 other students of your choosing. The interview will take place in the School Counsellors Office and be timetabled during a PELS class. During the interview you will be asked by the researcher to discuss a number of questions surrounding the topic of bullying at school.

Project Procedures:

The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed word for word by the researcher. Participants will have the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy and change as needed. The transcript will then be analysed using a technique called discourse analysis. All participants, along with peers, teachers and the school itself can be assured that their identity will not be disclosed in the analysis, through the use of pseudonyms. The tapes and transcripts will be held in locked storage, and at the end of the research project the tapes will be destroyed. (The transcripts will be held for 5 years following the conclusion of the research project – This is normal for research data.)

A summary of the project findings will be made available to all participants.

Participant Rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate you have the right to:

- ⇒ Withdraw from the study at any time until the analysis of the data is completed (August 2004)
- ⇒ Decline to answer any particular question
- ⇒ Ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview or leave the interview at any point.
- ⇒ Request removal or amendment of any part/s of the transcript resulting from your interview.
- ⇒ Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- ⇒ Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher.
- ⇒ Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it s concluded.

Support Processes

The discussion groups should provide a positive experience, but if any participants feel unduly affected by the process, School Counsellors will be available to them. The College Kaumatua is also available to deal with any issues involving the participation of Maori Students.

Project Contacts:

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact either the Researcher or Research Supervisor.

M.U.H.E.C Approval Statement:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/51. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North. Telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C:

Bullying in Secondary Schools
- A discursive analysis of adolescents' talk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This participant consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask
further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Appendix D:**Interview Schedule**

- What do you think bullying is, how would you define it?
- What do you think the effects of bullying are on people – are there long-term effects for the victim or bully, or do people get over it?
- Have you ever been bullied? What happened?
- Do you think that you have ever bullied anyone else? Tell me about it?
- Have you ever watched someone else bullying someone? What happened? What did you do? Why?
- Who do people tell, if anyone, when bullying is taking place? What happened when someone does speak up? Why don't people tell?
- How is bullying dealt with at River Valley High? Do you think it is effective?
- Why do you think bullying happens? What are the reasons for it?
- Do you think certain people are more likely to be bullied? What is it about them?
- Do you think certain people are more likely to bully? What is it about them?
- Do you think you can stop bullying completely?
- What do you think about students who are "different"? How would you define "being different"? Do you think it is a good or bad thing? How does the school view students "who are different"?

- There has been a lot of publicity recently about the use of cell phone and emails in bullying – do you think this is a problem?
- Do you think there is a lot of bullying at River Valley High or in other schools in general?
- How would you describe the methods of discipline at River Valley High, in the classroom and in the school generally?
- How would you describe the teacher-student relationship at the school?
- Do you think some teachers bully students? In what way?
- Do you think some students bully teachers? Tell me in what way?

Appendix E:

Bullying in Secondary Schools

- A discursive analysis of adolescents' talk

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I _____ (Full Name – printed)
agree to keep confidential all information concerning this project: Bullying in Secondary
Schools - A discursive analysis of adolescents' talk.

I will not discuss anything disclosed in the Focus Group.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F:**Transcription Key**

(.) A full stop in round brackets indicates a noticeable pause, though not timed.

// A double forward slash marked the start of speech overlap.

Really Underlined words represented an emphasis in speech.

[Laugh] Words in square brackets signify the speaker's actions.

(a teacher) Words in round brackets are for clarification or explanation.

... Three dots indicate that the speaker omits material.

Appendix G:

Bullying in Secondary Schools

- A discursive analysis of adolescents' talk

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

This will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Anne Ryan in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name: _____

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