BYSTANDER BEHAVIOUR AS AN INFLUENCE ON BULLYING IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Doctor of Communication

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In response to evidence that bullying in schools persists in the presence of bystanders, this study sought to add to the existing knowledge about its reinforcing effects. The objectives of this research project were to investigate non-intervention in bullying incidents by students. Unique approaches of this research are the multi-dimensional investigation of the emotional, cognitive and behavioural factors from the bystander’s perspective, within the context of a co-educational Catholic high school, in a sample of eighteen Year 8 students. In-depth and group interviews, participant observation and the input of a focus group of teachers formed the data collection. Previous findings that fear prevents bystanders from taking action, were extended by this study which revealed was that there are several sources of this fear. The study found reasons for students’ fear included embarrassment at making a mistake, the importance of the teachers’ responses, the need to assimilate into the new school culture, to be “cool” and to avoid a negative, conforming self-image. Importantly, the existing focus on fear does not explain why students do not anonymously report bullying. This study found that students resisted taking responsibility for intervening, and unexpected findings included that students categorised victims, only caring enough to report bullying if the victim were a friend or sibling; and also that the thrill of watching bullying was a strong deterrent to bystander intervention. The study suggests, therefore, information based anti-bullying policies will be ineffective unless students are motivated to intervene. It is crucial that programmes now address the emotional deterrents of fear, excitement and apathy before considering educational approaches, and that future policies need to examine the culture of the school, including teachers’ responses to bullying, which dictates the behavioural code for incoming Year 8 students.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bystander Behaviour as an Influence on Bullying in High Schools i
Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS 1

CHAPTER ONE 1
INTRODUCTION 1

1.0 Introduction 1
1.1 Responses to Bullying 4
1.2 Two Stories, Two Outcomes, Two Behaviours of Bystanders 6
1.3 An Historical Background to Bullying Behaviour 11
1.4 Bullying in schools – A Recent Concern 14
1.5 Gender Differences in Bullying Behaviours 17
1.6 The Influence of Power and the Language of Power 18
1.7 Masculine identity in a cultural context 21
1.7.1 Masculine identity and bullying 23
1.7.2 Girls’ Bullying 24
1.7.3 Homophobia 26
1.8 Negative effects of bullying 28
1.9 The Behaviour of Bullies 30
1.10 The Behaviour of Victims 31
1.11 The Behaviour of Bystanders 33
1.12 The Behaviour of Teaching Staff 40
1.13 The Purpose of this Study 41
1.14 Conclusion 47
## CHAPTER TWO
### COUNTERING BULLYING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Introduction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Global legislation to reduce bullying</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Education programmes and their outcomes</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Commonwealth and State Government Sponsored Programmes to Counter Bullying</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Learning theories as mechanisms to counter bullying</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Gender</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Dealing with Individuals Involved in Bullying Behaviour</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Sharing Responsibility for Countering Bullying</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Including Bystanders in Anti-Bullying Programmes</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Countering Bullying Through the School Culture</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 The role of Peers in changing school culture</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10.1 Peer Mediation</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 The role of Staff in changing school culture</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Attitude Change in a Whole-School Approach to Counter Bullying</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Considering the Behaviour of Bystanders in Anti-Bullying Strategies</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14 Schools that have achieved cultural change</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15 Conclusion about changing school culture</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER THREE
### METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Introduction</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Research Methods Used in Studies of Bullying</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The Research Setting</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 The School</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 The Participants</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 The Year 8 Students</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 Focus Group of Staff</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Data Collection - Group Interviews</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Data Collection - Individual Interviews</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Data Collection - Focus group of teachers</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Data Collection - Participant Observation</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Case Studies</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Reflective Journal</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Coding the data</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Analysis of Data</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.1 Analysis of Focus Group Data</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.2 Analysing Data from Observation and Reflective Notes</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.3 Analysing Data from Interviews</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12 Results</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13 Trustworthiness of the findings</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14 Conclusion</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.0 Introduction
6.1 Recapitulation of Aims of the Research
6.2 Methodological Issues
6.2.1 Generalisability of the Findings
6.3 Contributions of the Study
6.4 On a Brighter Note
6.5 Implications of the Research Findings for the Theoretical Literature
6.6 Implications of the Research Findings for Future Research
6.7 Implications for the Improvement of Future Practice

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D

REFERENCES
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

I am the school psychologist at a Catholic, co-educational high school in Perth, Western Australia, and it is from working in this capacity that my interest in bullying behaviour began. The first thing that struck me when dealing with bullying situations, was that school staff, students and parents did not really know what to do, or even if they should do anything at all. A pervasive sense of futility can exist in a school community, stemming from the notion that bullying is normal, that there will always be bullying and therefore, there is no point in trying to prevent it.

To illustrate the power of bullies, and, by association, the bystanders who support them, I will inform you, the reader, of the restrictions under which I write. There are a handful of bullying incidents that are so breathtakingly cruel and so elaborately planned that I cannot include them in this thesis, even with fictitious names, because to do so would risk identifying the victims. Apart from ethical boundaries, this would put the victims in extreme social danger. Most students do not work so hard at destroying others’ wellbeing, therefore I reject the notion that this is normal behaviour and that nothing can be done about it. To reduce the power of the bullies, the bystanders need to alter their approach, and whilst adults can instigate and facilitate this, ultimately, it will only be the students who achieve it.
By exploring collective understandings of social responsibility towards countering bullying, this study aims to increase school communities’ responsiveness to, and their rejection of the ‘normative’ nature of bullying cultures in schools. This study investigates Year 8 students’ meanings of bullying and how they construct power relations as normal. Better understandings of the meanings that the students make of bullying behaviours will enable the study to challenge the assumption that bullying is an inevitable part of school life. Before exploring this issue further, definitions of the behaviour to clarify what exactly is bullying, are set out below.

Describing bullying

Recent research has given schools and societies a deeper understanding of bullying, with more encompassing definitions. Rigby (1996a) describes Farrington’s (1993) definition as persuasive:

Bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons. (p.15).

Besag (1989) expands on this to include in her definition the impact of fear on the victim. She stresses that it is not only the attack that causes fear, it is also the threat of further attacks, irrespective of whether they do occur. The death of a ten year old boy who died from a heart attack whilst being chased by bullies is a tragic example of this fear (Marr and Field, 2001). Doctors concluded that his death was caused by a combination of extreme exercise, trying to escape, and the stress built up by his fear of relentless bullying. Thus, a short definition of bullying is problematic if it ignores the fact that
victims suffer far longer than the time endured being actually bullied. According to Besag, students who are being bullied spend their time at school being afraid of when the next bullying episode will occur. Bullying might be viewed as being more an attitude than actual behaviour (Besag, 1989), which makes defining the abuse of power problematic because it is intangible. For example, Besag notes that some bullies might be surprised to learn that they are more powerful than others. Researchers recommend that the whole school community’s awareness of bullying be raised so that all members can become involved to counter bullying, thus forcing a change in culture to one which does not tolerate bullying (Olweus, 1991; Slee, 1997; Rigby, 2001b; Griffiths, 2001).

This introduction outlines the behaviours of all involved in bullying incidents. An historical background is examined as a foundation for today’s bullying behaviours both in schools and in the workplace. Legal implications for schools are considered as well as the responses of those within school communities to the mounting pressure to introduce anti-bullying programmes. Current global and local awareness of bullying in schools is detailed and effective ways of countering bullying are discussed. Gender differences in bullying behaviour are highlighted and the effects of bullying on victims are discussed. The purpose of the study as an examination of bystander behaviour is clarified and a map of the rest of the study is introduced.
1.1 Responses to Bullying

Researchers have found that advice given to victims may be to just ignore the bully (Marr & Field, 2001, Griffiths, 2001), or to verbally or physically retaliate (Rigby, 2001a), both of which can invite increased bullying (Olweus, 1993). Because bullying is an emotive topic, people frequently have an opinion on how victims should deal with it. Many think that bullying is inevitable and even that it can be good for people to be bullied (Rigby, 2001a, Suckling and Temple, 2001). Highly recommended by some school staff and parents is the strategy of standing up to the bully and giving them back the same treatment (Field, 1996). This, however, is likely to land many a “victim” in more trouble than his/her antagonist, as well as leading to violence when others join in (Rigby, 2001a). This advice is a reflection on our society, which views punishment as the solution to undesirable behaviour. We fine people or put them in prison when they break the law, or “sentence” them to community work.

In schools the same culture exists where punishment is used to prevent bullying. However, punishment, being administered as it is by adults, is ineffective in reducing the culture of bullying. It can only deal with single instances and even then can be counterproductive (Rigby & Slee, 1993b). In fact, it is likely to result in the bully being angry and releasing their aggression on the victim with even more force than before (Pikas, 1989). The rationale behind their anger is that they would not have been punished if the victim had not “dobbed” on them (Rigby, 1996a). In my experience, the bully is likely to take umbrage even at mild punishment such as being
spoken to about his or her behaviour. Bullies release their anger on the victim, who in turn suffers more. It is actually better for the victim to leave things as they are, endure the bullying and not tell anyone. After all, they rationalise, it is already quite bad enough.

Recognising these consequences leads many victims, teachers, parents and students to feel it is best to just leave the situation alone (Rigby & Slee, 1993b). But by doing nothing, the bullying continues (Hawkins et al, 2001; Randall, 1996, cited in Suckling and Temple, 2001). One such example arose at this school where the victim - the subject of sustained daily bullying by a group of students - withstood their attentions for four solid years of high school, rather than seek help from the adults. Although guidelines and policies have been implemented in most schools in an effort to address this problem, the bullying continues, therefore, anti-bullying strategies need to be still more effective.

It was clear to me that there was a great deal of confusion about appropriate measures to take to reduce bullying. The purpose of this study is to clarify some of the misleading information that abounds in schools and find ways to approach bullying that really will work to alleviate the problem. It seemed inappropriate to do so without a deeper understanding of how the students themselves attached meanings to bullying behaviours. Without their perspective, anti-bullying strategies would be based on adult opinions, when adults do not have the current knowledge about bullying.
1.2 Two Stories, Two Outcomes, Two Behaviours of Bystanders

This section of the chapter contains descriptions of two separate bullying situations where the bullying is quite subtle. Name-calling forms the majority of bullying incidents (Olweus, 1993, Mynard et al, 2000) and these examples are typical of this, where the bullying could be excused by students as “just mucking around”. The first description shows what can happen when bystanders support bullying and the second shows what could happen when bystanders intervene. The bullying situation that “Melissa” and “David” face in the following stories, illustrate the type of encounters confronting many students at school on a daily basis. These situations are actual instances of bullying, with the names and locations changed.

David

It is 8.15a.m. and a Year 8 boy hurries up the school drive and quickly unpacks his schoolbag into his locker. He locks the locker, turns and there are two other boys, grinning and blocking his exit.

“Hey, Shush, where ya going?”

“Shush, tell us what’s in your bag.”

“Shush, talk to us, Shush.”

Other Year 8 students watch from the corner of their eyes, or stand alongside the two boys and grin. One of them laughs out loud and shouts,

“Shush! Why do you call him Shush?”

“‘Cos he never talks – watch. Hey Shush! You’re gabbling so much, we can’t hear you!” At this, many of the gathered boys and
girls laugh and chant “Shush!” and other denigrating remarks, as the victim, choking back tears, tries to get through the crowd to get away. A teacher approaches and they let him through, laughing in ridicule. “Shush’s” real name is David and his mother is wondering why he has started having stomachache and crying every morning before school.

Melissa

Melissa gets on the bus after school and the usual sniggers are already starting before she sits down. A spitball lands in her lap and the sniggers turn to shrieks of delighted laughter. During the trip, more missiles are aimed at her, to the merriment of most students in the back seat. Other students turn to see what is happening, many of them watching intently, grinning when she jumps as another object is aimed in her direction. When she gets off the bus, insults are shouted after her.

“See ya, Shithead”. Sarcastic comments are yelled too, gaining in velocity and pitch as the bus pulls away,

“Byee, Mellie – hope you’re not crying, Mellie”. Melissa feels utterly alone, and like David, an object of ridicule.

These bullying incidents would not be considered as physical brutality, nor do they illustrate commonly understood examples of school bullying, like stealing lunch money. Therefore, it is not likely to cause much of an uproar, even if David and Melissa were to report the bullying. Actions like these
are, nevertheless, bullying, because they cause harm to the victim (Besag 1989, Rigby 1996a). There is now a much wider view of what constitutes bullying. Traditional views of bullying have been that it is a physical assault, or at least some visibly damaging behaviour, such as stealing. Parents taught their children that they had to “give as good as they got” – in other words, to be able to defend themselves (Mercurio, 1972).

The stories of David and Melissa describe the bullies and the victims, but what is the role of the onlookers – the bystanders? These are the people who witness bullying incidents. They know bullying is harmful because of the education they have received in primary schools (Breheney et al, 1996, Griffiths, 2001), they often wish it would not happen (Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, 2001), they know they should do something to stop it, but they do nothing (Latane & Darley, 1970).

To emphasize the difference between the hypothetical and the actual, I have rewritten the same two incidents just described, as if students behaved according to their acquired knowledge – the hypothetical. The desired behaviour is highlighted in bold.

**David**

It is 8.15a.m. and a Year 8 boy hurries up the school drive and quickly unpacks his schoolbag into his locker. He locks the locker, turns and there are two other boys, grinning and blocking his exit.

“What, Shush, where ya going?”
“Shush, tell us what’s in your bag.”

“Shush, talk to us, Shush.”

Two other Year 8 boys, noticing the rising tension, approach the two boys and ask,

“Is there a problem here?”

“Yeah, with Shush, - watch, he never talks. Hey Shush! You’re gabbling so much, we can’t hear you!” At this, one of the Year 8 boys says,

“Leave him alone”, and one of the Year 8 girls says,

“Yes, stop it – and his name’s David, not Shush”. Other Year 8 students gather around, and look disapprovingly at the two antagonists, who look embarrassed and walk off wearing small, face-saving smiles.

“You OK?” one of the boys asks David, who nods. He is relieved and feels as if others, who will help him to deal with his two, now outnumbered adversaries, are supporting him.

Melissa

Melissa gets on the bus after school and the usual sniggers are already starting before she sits down. A spitball lands in her lap and the sniggers turn to shrieks of delighted laughter. An Year 11 boy stands up, turns around and says,

“Do that again, and I’ll report it to the Deputy”. This is met with,
“Ooohh dobber, we’re scared.” Then one of the Year 11 girls makes her way up the aisle and says,

“Stop throwing things and settle down. You shouldn’t be picking on people and I’m not going to let it happen on this bus.” At this, some of the younger Year 8 onlookers turn to look accusingly at the occupiers of the back seats. Some say quietly, “Yeah, that’s right”, others nod in agreement. They turn from the antagonists to give reassuring expressions to Melissa. The sniggers fade and the whole busload of children goes quiet. The bystanders on this bus have established a caring culture, protective of the victim.

These behaviours are what might be ideally expected to happen after anti-bullying programmes have been conducted. As indicated in the literature, it is also the expectation of schools that such programmes will reduce bullying (Olweus, 1993; Young, 1998; Rigby, 2001a). In my observation, however, and as supported by the literature (Pepler et al, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Salmivalli et al, 1996), what students say they will do does not necessarily translate to what they actually do. Craig & Pepler (1995) found that the majority of students may say, and even believe, that they would intervene in bullying incidents, but in fact, they do not. These authors postulate that the reason students do not intervene may be due to social contagion, which is based on reinforcement and modeling. Bystanders receive reinforcement by being part of the peer group supporting the bully. The social desirability of taking action to prevent bullying may influence
students’ intentions to do so, but the stronger force of social contagion controls their actions. Additionally, the influence of modelling is stronger if the bullies are not negatively sanctioned, because then it can be seen to have no adverse consequences (O’Connell et al, 1999).

1.3 An Historical Background to Bullying Behaviour

An historical perspective will show that bullying in schools needs to be studied within the culture where it takes place. In the past, those in authority often modelled bullying behaviour. Such classics as Tom Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1884), Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1866), and more contemporary literature such as W. Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1955) and Roald Dahl’s *Boy* (1986) confirm this. In each of these books, we see bullying between children, and male children especially are treated violently by adults. Physical bullying is quite acceptable, with beatings being common amongst boys, and name-calling and ridicule amongst all children considered the norm. My study examines bullying and bystander behaviours within the context of this historical foundation upon which today’s schools are formed.

Corporal punishment, in current understandings, would be seen as bullying, yet it has been used as a form of punishment in schools until quite recently. Remnants of the practice can still be found. Corporal punishment was not confined to schools, which were really just reflecting the culture of the time. It has only been in recent years, that corporal punishment for children by their parents has come under the scrutiny of the law. The Christian Brothers,
for example, have been widely criticised for their use of corporal punishment in schools, but they were not unique in this regard (Coldrey, 1991). In fact it was the culture of the time which overrode the mild and compassionate approach to teaching children emphasised by the Christian Brothers founder, Edmund Rice. As a less severe approach emerged in the British culture in the mid-1900s, the Christian Brothers’ harsh discipline began to be noticed (Coldrey, 1991).

As late as the 1970s, however, Joseph Mercurio (1972), an American who lived at Christchurch Boys’ High School in New Zealand for nine months to study corporal punishment under the conditions of school life, found that it was still part of the school culture. Mercurio found that, “Caning was as much a part of school life as Rugby and meat pies” (p.31). Corporal punishment was an expectation of both boys and teachers, and in many cases, parents.

Although physical punishment was accepted as normal, there was still recognition that it could be potentially brutal, with some masters at Boys’ High, as it was known, claiming to use it only as a last resort. As a reflection of the prevailing culture, caning was approved by thirty-five of the forty parents that Mercurio interviewed. Of the five who disapproved, four were mothers.

Mercurio noted that, as with many entrenched practices, the general school community considered it ‘normal’. Rather than recognising the practice as
being a culturally acquired trait, the existing culture’s attitude towards caning was that there was an almost bio-genetic explanation for the practice, hence it was unchangeable. As a result, fixed attitudes are either not questioned at all, or are strongly defended if alternative ideas are presented. Based on a central belief that caning was the only way to discipline errant boys, there was a fear that without it, the whole school system would fall apart. Mercurio emphasised how this aggressive culture was accepted unquestioningly by all involved:

In point of fact, this is just another way of saying that irrespective of its apparent barbaric overtones, caning is an integral time-honoured, hence legitimate practice of this institution. The masculine tone of the school, in conjunction with the physical aggressiveness which it engenders, leads masters to adopt the view that caning is an appropriately man-to-man way of dealing with obstreperous youngsters, hence all the more acceptable by everyone concerned. (p.86)

In fact, it was true that the boys misbehaved if they viewed a teacher as “soft”, perpetuating the code of masculinity that toughness is required. At Boys’ High, the superiority of men was affirmed, for example, when the mostly male staff scoffed at a female teacher for being soft because she was close to a nervous breakdown.

Colonialism, with its masculine hegemony, set the standard in schools, and the present day culture in schools follows on from that. Mercurio noted that the overriding culture at Boys’ High was that one took the cane to prove that one was a man – the culture of manhood. Thus, the smaller boys, still “in training” to become men, received more canings than the older ones
who had already achieved this status. This served to amplify the gap between subordinates and the dominant, adult masters.

It is against a background of this culture, where power is used by authority figures to bully students, that efforts to reduce bullying are pitched. As role models, the staff of Boys’ High taught physical bullying as a way of making others do what you wanted them to. The practice of caning was so entrenched that it became viewed as inevitable, and this view continues today in schools, where teachers continue to bully verbally and by use of punishment, and where staff, students and parents alike are convinced that nothing can be done to eliminate bullying (Cross et al, 2003a). Like Boys’ High, they accept bullying as a part of ‘normal’ school behaviour.

1.4 Bullying in schools – A Recent Concern

Research into bullying behaviour has been a relatively recent interest, possibly stimulated by the work of Professor Dan Olweus in Norway during the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to this, the problem of bullying in schools had hardly been acknowledged. In recent years, research has been conducted in many other countries creating a deeper understanding of the complexities of bullying behaviour. We now know the extent to which bullying occurs in Australian schools (Rigby, 1996b) and the harmful effects of bullying on victims (Sticks and Stones, Report on Violence in Australian schools, 1994), on bullies (Eron et al, 1987, Dietz, 1994) and on bystanders (Janson, 2000).
Research has found that many schools around the world are experiencing violence and aggression (Rigby & Slee, 1991; Olweus, 1991, 1993; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Extreme results of bullying can be the suicide of the victim (Rigby, 1996a) and murder (Tomsen, 1997, cited in Plummer, 2001). It has been speculated that bullying has been a contributing factor to shootings at schools like Columbine, U.S.A. (Skeesis, 2000). The National Threat Assessment Center, a division of the U.S. Secret Service, found that in more than two-thirds of the cases of school shootings, the perpetrators had experienced bullying (Labi, 2001).

In Australia, realisation of the harmful effects of all types of bullying has prompted governments to legislate that Australian schools introduce policies on behaviour management. However, they need only include sections on how to deal with bullying. These policies are not enough, but the threat of being sued for neglecting to act to protect students has increased attention to schools’ duty of care, which includes the requirement of taking reasonable care to avoid injury (Peer Support Foundation, 2000). The school authorities are liable for the negligence of their teachers and Principals, should a child suffer mental or physical trauma as a result of bullying. The Peer Support Foundation (2000) recounts that in 1986, a 15 year old girl was awarded $250,000 damages for a back injury sustained by being dropped on her head by a bully. The Supreme Court of New South Wales found the incident was reasonably foreseeable by the school authority and that it was in breach of its duty of care in not controlling the bully’s aggressive behaviour. In a more recent case, a girl was awarded $73,000 when she sued the Victorian
government for not protecting her from being verbally and physically bullied when she was in Years 7 and 8 (Australian Associated Press, 2003).

Awareness of the negative affects of bullying has forced relevant authorities worldwide to study the problem closely. An example is in Japan, where, after a spate of student suicides caused by school bullying, research has been conducted and the courts have taken a different view of it in recent years (Morita, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999).

In the U.S., 1.6 million children in grades 6-10 are bullied at least once a week and 1.7 million children bully others as frequently (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, (USA) n.d.). In Australia, schools have a higher incidence of bullying than overseas countries. The rate of bullying in Australian primary schools is about twice that of British schools. This figure goes up to about four times higher in high schools (Whitney and Smith, 1993, cited in Rigby 1996a). In Australia, approximately 20% of primary and 10% of secondary school students are victims of frequent bullying (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Training, 1994, cited in Griffiths, 1998).

Most bullying in schools is verbal, usually referring to physical appearance and sexuality. Often it is name-calling, sometimes of a general nature, such as, “loser” or “dickhead”. However, it is particularly damaging if the taunts refer specifically to an individual’s characteristics, such as wearing glasses, being overweight or having a learning disability (Dickinson, 1992). Some
students bully teachers by deliberately sabotaging the classroom order, being rude, disobedient and ridiculing the teacher. Certain boys override the teacher’s position of authority by using sexual innuendo to bully female teachers (Kenway & Willis, 1997). My observations of such sex-based harassment have been that it can take the form of verbal or non-verbal bullying. The harassment is often quite subtle, such as staring, suggestive facial expressions or standing too close, and leaves the female teachers feeling inadequate, confused and humiliated.

Marginalisation is a more subtle form of bullying, for example, when the big boys play football and dominate the play area, which can become the lunchtime norm. All other behaviours become ‘other’ which marginalises anyone who is not part of that group (Sluckin, 1981; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Students can be also subjected to isolation when a group excludes them, either by running away or other avoidance behaviours, or sometimes by actually telling them to go away (Simmons, 2002).

1.5 Gender Differences in Bullying Behaviours

The way boys and girls experience bullying are quite different. Boys are more likely to be involved with other boys in physical disputes. Girls are more likely to be involved with other girls in verbal disputes (Cunningham et al, 1998 cited in Naylor and Cowie, 1999). However, gender differences in bullying are not so much physical/verbal as direct/indirect. Boys use more direct methods, such as name-calling, and girls are more indirect, for example excluding people from the group (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992). Boys use
violence to bully, and they bully more than girls, though girls are just as
aggressive as boys in their less direct way (Rigby & Slee, 1995). Whilst
most bullying occurs within the same-sex groups, girls report being bullied
by boys more than vice versa (Petersen & Rigby, 1999).

Both boys’ and girls’ behaviour is often controlled by the perceived threat
of bullying. The threat of being bullied makes boys fear the playground, and
feel the need to assert themselves to prove their masculinity (Lillico, 2001,
Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001). In doing so, these authors say that they
compete in insulting each other, boasting about sexual “conquests”,
ridiculing girls and making homophobic remarks. Armed with the language
of power and supported by their friends and bystanders (Askew & Ross,
1988), it is easy to understand how boys’ behaviour turns to bullying.

1.6 The Influence of Power and the Language of Power

Before exploring the differences in the ways boys and girls bully, it is
important to examine the issue of power and how students find ways to be
powerful. Bullies in schools are powerful students (Coie et al, 1990), who
create fear, causing reluctance on the part of their victims to report the
bullying. Therefore, educational programmes alone will not be effective
unless they address the issue of power. Social power is often accorded to
individuals with whom others identify or are attracted to (French & Raven,
1959, cited in Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). French & Raven also found that
individuals gain power if they can provide rewards for others, or
alternatively, if they can administer punishments. A person will also gain
power if others accept that they have particular knowledge or a right to tell them what to do. Within a school, bullying results from a systematic abuse of power within this social context (Naylor & Cowie, 1999).

When dealing with individuals engaged in apparent bullying, Olweus (1993) highlights the importance of an imbalance of power. He also warns schools to be aware of more subtle types of bullying, which is more difficult to detect, such as exclusion of less powerful students by the dominant group. He cautions schools, however, to differentiate between the behaviour of students with equal emotional or physical power and the behaviour of bullies and victims, where one has less emotional or physical strength than the other.

The issue of power can be overlooked because it is often not easily recognized, although its influence can be pervasive. For example, Rees (1991) calls attention to the role of language as a carrier of ideology. Language can influence the way we think about events and people, and can be used positively or negatively to influence culture (Denzin, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). As an example of how words evoke differing emotions, “abortion” might create a negative response, whereas “termination of pregnancy”, with its medical inflection, is less emotional. Political correctness has been widely criticised for changing commonly used words and phrases, yet it has brought to people’s attention how the language can influence how we think. For example, ‘he’ is no longer considered acceptable as the word to encompass all people, ‘handicapped’ has been
changed to ‘disabled’. Another illustration of this is evident in the workplace, where employees, who used to be called “personnel”, are now known as “human resources” (Gancel 1997). Gancel cautions that this transforms people into a resource, rendering them no more than the means to create profit for the company.

Rees (1991) notes that the language used by people with power is objective and independent, displays no weakness and includes put-downs. Conversely, the language of submissiveness is fatalistic, non-assertive and apologetic. In schools, bullies use insults and slurs on people’s characters to gain power. Sexual insults, with their ability to humiliate, are the most powerful indignity. Boys are the main perpetrators of this type of bullying (Mac An Ghaill, 1994; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarrolli, 2001). They jeer at girls for having large or small breasts, being overweight or underweight, having their period or having sex with either boys or girls. A sample of their language is “big tits”, “fat arse”, “on the rags”, “lesbo”, “slut”. Boys also insult each other with sexual insults like “pindick”, “ball-licker”, “cocksucker”. The recipients of these insults also have to endure the taunts of the supportive bystanders, which serve to help elevate the bullies to immense levels of power. When this power is used so negatively, which it always is in cases of bullying, it is extremely destructive (Martino, 2001). Given the extent of the damage these humiliations cause, schools need to be cognizant of these power strategies within language, and incorporate these into their anti-bullying programmes.
1.7 Masculine identity in a cultural context

The behaviours described above need to be viewed within the context of the masculine hegemony. Australian cultural traditions include male mateship, sports, segregated workforce and leisure pursuits (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). Gilbert and Gilbert maintain that society interprets and employs masculinity as a performance. Masculinity is constructed as competitive, violent, misogynist and engaged in power struggles - all pursuits that are exclusive of women. A familiar example of this is the way the media promotes and glorifies violence and aggressive behaviour in its images of male sports (Fitzclarence et al, 1998).

These behaviours are reflective of the wider Western culture, which makes heroes of sportsmen, has a fascination with war and champions the use of weapons through the gun lobby and in movies. Action films idealising masculine behaviour frequently feature white, heterosexual, violent, rule-breaking and vengeful males. Fred Pfeil (1995), in his analysis of such films as *Lethal Weapon, Rambo* and *Die Hard*, notes that the male protagonist is positioned against people who are not male, not white, not heterosexual and finally, who are not sexy. If they support the hero, these others receive, at best, paternalistic or condescending treatment from him. If they are the hero’s enemy, they are likely to be killed in an indescribably brutal fashion. Justification for their bloody demise is by some evil action they performed, often to others rather than the male protagonist, increasing his stature as a hero. These types of films become box-office hits, with millions of people of both sexes endorsing the stereotypical actions of the central characters. It
is easy to understand, therefore, that they have enormous influence on the
culture which so readily pays to go and see them.

Video games, movies and television all provide male role models in a war
or civilian fighting context, who are heroic, frequently violent, brave and
strong. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) explain boys’ preference for violent
video games:

The video games position boys in an ideology…which they see as
normal and desirable ways of being male, and how they see
themselves to be.” (p.50)

There is, clearly, tremendous pressure for boys to become like these movie
and video heroes. This ideology places non-violent boys, who may be
sensitive, creative and not physically strong in a difficult position, unable to
share their counter-cultural values and fears with anyone. Askew & Ross
(1988) found that boys felt the need to appear tough and the worst thing that
could be said about them was that they were afraid to fight. A recent survey
conducted by Kids Help Line (2003) highlighted the pressure boys feel to
conform to this stereotype. Boys between the ages of ten and fourteen were
the least likely to talk about their feelings, usually because they were afraid
of being teased or laughed at. Displaying any show of emotions positions
boys as weak and feminine and inferior to the more highly valued dominant
masculinity (Askew & Ross, 1988; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). The
expectation that males should be completely independent and the fear of
ridicule if they showed they were less than this, made them feel vulnerable
and not likely to talk to anyone about how they felt. In the survey, many of
the boys expressed the wish to be able to freely talk about their feelings, as they thought girls do. They were of the opinion that such restrictions placed on masculine behaviour led to a build up of emotional pressure that often resulted in suicide.

Lillico (2001) also voices his concerns about boys’ limited avenues for expression and predicts that until boys are able to express their masculinity in a variety of ways, other than just the macho display of male behaviour, boys will continue to be the major bullies. Walker, (1988) found the same culture of masculinity prevailed in a high school in Sydney,

…a culture of youthful self-congratulatory ‘Aussie’ masculinity, which highlighted standing up for oneself and one’s mates, against authority or anything else; physical, especially sporting, prowess; and daring or exciting escapades. (p.3)

1.7.1 Masculine identity and bullying

When these behaviours are the accepted constructs of masculinity, it places the position of others in relation to the dominant male. The idealised type of masculinity occupies a dominant position (Hage, 1998), and gives rise to bullying of not only girls, but also other boys who do not fit the stereotype. Walker (1988) notes that other masculinities, for example boys who enjoyed drama, were treated with disdain. Gilbert & Gilbert (1998) claim that disruptive behaviour, violence and scorn for learning are some of the gendered experiences generated by the school and that this dominant group in turn, determines the school culture. This stereotypical masculinity, with its loud, physical and aggressive behaviours and its disruption of others is given a significance in the school beyond what the numbers of boys who
practise it would suggest. This dominant group takes over the playground, and physically intimidates other students. It presents a powerful icon and students must position themselves either with it or against it. It encapsulates many of the problems of hegemonic masculinity and schooling, creating a culture which is conducive to bullying (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998).

Mac An Ghaill (1994) draws attention to the longevity of the “macho culture” by citing Willis’s 1977 study, which found the same masculine stereotype existed then. For example, the male students at that time considered mental activities to be feminine, thus inferior. Prevailing interests were being tough, and “looking after your mates”. Teachers and whole school communities need to draw these constructs into their consciousness and work towards deconstructing the hegemonic masculinity and thus reducing the dominance of these students. Without addressing these institutionalised, aggressive attitudes, any attempts to introduce anti-bullying programmes would seem to be futile. Unless challenged, these behaviours marginalise anyone in the school community who does not conform to the ideal of masculinity, inviting disdain from the dominant group of males – teachers, women, other races and learning, particularly literature, (Mac An Ghaill, 1994).

1.7.2 Girls’ Bullying

The indirect nature of girls’ bullying is quite dissimilar to the way boys bully. Girls who bully use less physical aggression than boys, instead using more indirect ways of bullying (Owens and MacMullin 1995, Simmons,
This does not mean that girls are less aggressive than boys, for although boys are the main perpetrators of physical violence, girls are equally aggressive in a more indirect manner (Rigby & Slee, 1995). Verbal and indirect aggression escalates as age increases and both boys and girls continue with indirectly aggressive behaviour into adulthood (Bjorkqvist et al 1994a, cited in Owens and MacMullin, 1995).

Girls’ friendships are different from boys’, being characterised by being fewer and by having greater intimacy and ease of disclosure than boys (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). The intensity of their friendships fosters better social skills, and this, combined with better verbal skills allows them to use a more sophisticated form of aggression to cause harm to others and to establish power within peer relationships (Leckie, 2003). Girls’ bullying is less obvious because there is great societal pressure on girls to be ‘nice’, which leaves them no outlet for overt aggression. Until recently, teachers and parents have been inclined to dismiss girls’ aggression, saying that it’s just girls ‘being bitchy’. This could be one of the reasons that girls have, until recently, been underestimated in the bullying hegemony.

Another reason that perceptions of girls’ bullying has been minimalised is the subtlety of the strategies of aggression girls use because they are relatively invisible and make the perpetrator harder to detect (Simmons, 2002). Nevertheless, its invisibility does not mean it is any less damaging. Simmons makes this clear in her description of the way girls’ bullying works:
This is the world I want the reader to enter. It is where, beneath a chorus of voices, one girl glares at another, then smiles silently at her friend. The next day a ringleader passes around a secret petition asking girls to outline the reasons they hate the targeted girl. The day after that, the outcast sits silently next to the boys in class, head lowered, shoulders slumped forward. The damage is neat and quiet, the perpetrator and victim invisible. (p.4)

Girls use ‘relational aggression’ (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) as described above, to attempt to manipulate friendships groups, create alliances among their peers in order to gain reassurance and a sense of belonging to a group. They engage in indirect forms of bullying behaviour to destroy reputations, or harm the self-esteem of victims (Besag, 1989). Girls manipulate relationships within the group to gain power, setting up situations to foster lack of trust, fear and insecurity (Gilligan et al, 1990; Besag 2002). Crick & Grotpeter (1995) posit that it is the rapid emotional, physical and psychological changes that foster a high level of sensitivity within peer relationships among Year 8 girls. However, the nature of power assertion is complex and so subtle that it could be that insecurity leads to a heightened level of anxiety, which in turn facilitates manipulation. Whatever the reasons behind girls’ bullying behaviours, they result in a great deal of psychological damage for all concerned.

1.7.3 Homophobia

In Australia, it is not unreasonable to view schools as good training grounds for bullying skills to be honed to the point where they can become lethal. One example of this is homophobia, which typically starts in primary school, even before any experience or knowledge of sexual innuendo
Plummer’s study examined the use of homophobic terms by boys and young men and the meanings invoked when using them. Homophobia is the basis for many incidents of school bullying and boys in particular, avoid being labelled homosexual. Plummer also cites Tomsen (1993), who writes that homophobia has been the cause of 25% of stranger murders in NSW for the last 20 years, as well as being a factor in other murders.

Boys’ sexuality is a target for bullies. Homophobic terms used by boys and young men have different meanings according to age (Plummer, 2001). The rejection of boys through homophobic abuse is made clear by mapping the meanings attached to the homophobic terms used. The terms denote “otherness”, which makes students eager to distance themselves from anyone being called a “faggot” or a “poof” (Askew & Ross, 1988). Plummer found that these terms were used on boys as insults, and were associated with weakness of some description. In fact, these terms were paired with anything which placed them in opposition to the stereotype of masculinity – even being academic. Respondents reported that being called a “poofter” was the worst insult of all – above all other insults in terms of hurt and negative impact. The result was that boys learned to fear homophobia and this has been shown to greatly affect male behaviour (Plummer, 2001). In high school, homophobia accelerates with reports of homophobic abuse occurring up to fifty times day and peer groups being “saturated with homophobia” (p20). Similar findings were reported in the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training’s report,
Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys – Strategies for Schools and Teachers (2003). This research found that homophobia affects all boys because it is a way of making them conform to stereotyped, “acceptable” male behaviour. These findings suggest that further research in this area, exploring gender issues in bullying is required.

1.8 Negative effects of bullying

The negative effects on victims of bullying include emotional and physical harm, and reduction of academic performance (Lampert, 1998). Many victims are angry, feel miserable and often stay away from school (Petersen & Rigby, 1999). Students who are anxious, depressed and lonely cannot concentrate on their schoolwork and learning difficulties have been associated with students being bullied (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Victims often feel a lower self-worth and suffer from post traumatic stress (Mynarde et al., 2000). In addition, the negative effects of bullying are long-lasting (Olweus, 1992, Lampert, 1998), continuing on with the bully from school to the workplace (Quine, 2001). Joe Catanzariti, writing in The Weekend Australian, (March 2-3, 2002) found evidence of this in Victoria. During the 2000-2001 financial year, 1100 claims were made to the Victorian WorkCover Authority relating to violence and harassment. Recognising the enormous financial, not to mention emotional and psychological cost, the Victorian Government has responded by releasing a draft Code of Practice for the Prevention of Bullying and Violence in the Workplace. Importantly, recognition of the bystander’s role in bullying situations is given, as it
places some responsibility for countering bullying on the employers and work colleagues.

But it is not only the victims who suffer. Bullies also experience negative effects – they are more likely to suffer depression, guilt, anger and shame than non-bullies (Dietz, 1994). In a longitudinal study of twenty-two years, Eron et al (1987) found that one in four male bullies will have a criminal record by the age of thirty and is likely to have convictions for violent crime, be abusive to their wives and children and have children who bully. An ex-bully illustrates this, saying, “Some guys think teasing makes them happy but in the end they’re going to look back and say, ‘What have I done?’” (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p.124). Boys who persistently bullied others in adolescence are more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour and physical violence by their early twenties and they may pass their behaviour on to the next generation (Olweus, 1992). Aggressive fathers who bullied in school were more likely to have sons who are bullies at school (Farrington, 1993). Clearly, bullying is a negative and costly behaviour for our society to deal with.

Institutionalised bullying is found in group settings and can become a part of the school culture (Cowie et al, 1994; Craig & Pepler, 1995). To solve this problem requires the organisation’s collective responsibility (Suckling & Temple, 2001) and this, in turn, requires the intervention of bystanders. Until recently, the focus in schools has been on victims and bullies, whilst bystanders have received little attention. It has now been found that bullying
adversely affects them too. In one study, 65% of girls said they felt upset when witnessing bullying (Lampert, 1998), and bystanders at school are likely to suffer serious and long-term psychological and physiological distress (Janson, 2000).

1.9 The Behaviour of Bullies

Pelligrini et al (1999) found that bullies have a favourable view of bullying behaviour, justifying their behaviour cognitively by endorsing it. Bullies affiliate with each other because they have aggression, leadership and dominance in common, and this results in a self-reinforcing peer group. Power can give an individual the capacity to act in a positive way, such as to motivate and liberate others, or it can be used in a destructive way, to limit and restrict others (Rees, 1991). The task of schools is not to take power from students, but to harness it to create a safe and secure environment. When students bully, they are using their power to dominate others. Rees (1991) found that they form cliques, using secrecy to exclude and create uncertainty, derision to demoralise and humiliate, and fear to intimidate other students. They employ exclusive language to bar others and use put-downs and threats to create fear. Reinforcement for bullying behaviour is also sourced from it defining their peer status and gaining them popularity. This attitude may also help self-justification, consistent with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957; Cooper & Fazio, 1984).

In spite of this gloomy outlook, and contradicting Pellegrini et al’s findings, O’Connell et al (1999) found that most bullies stop their behaviour when
they become aware of its effects. My experience agrees with O’Connell et al, as usually, bullying students express remorse for the pain inflicted upon their victims. It seems that many of them act without taking into account the damage they are inflicting. Most bullies can be persuaded to take responsibility for their behaviour and usually do not re-offend if they are spoken to using the “No-Blame Approach” (Maines & Robinson, 1992) and the “Method of Shared Concern” (Pikas, 1989). This is because these methods transfer the responsibility of stopping the bullying behaviour back to the perpetrators. Their self-esteem is not threatened, they are not punished, but are simply invited to offer solutions to the problem. These methods are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. It is when bullies are punished, they become angry and retaliate against their victim(s) with renewed ferocity. Staff education and training in these methods of countering bullying is essential in any anti-bullying programme.

1.10 The Behaviour of Victims

Victims sometimes endure an enormous amount of misery before they ask for help, and some never do ask (Marr & Field, 2001). It seems that they would rather endure daily torment than tell anyone what is happening to them. Besag (1989) found that the reasons victims do not seek help is because they feel ashamed for being so unpopular and may feel degraded by the bullying. They may even believe what the bullies are saying to them and conclude that they are indeed inferior. A victim, quoted by Simmons (2002), relates the devastation of such bullying:
They totally ripped me down to nothing. They told me how horrible a person I was. So I was nothing any more. (p.95)

It is understandable then, that the effects of being bullied are loss of self-esteem, anxiety, school phobia, reduced academic performance, depression, thoughts of suicide, isolation, loneliness and anger. Physical symptoms are headache, skin disorders, asthma, stomachache, sleeplessness and loss of appetite. Some victims miss classes or even try to change schools (Rigby, 1996a). The whole school community needs to be aware of the negative impact on victims of being bullied so that they too will make anti-bullying programmes a priority.

The victims of bullying often endure bullying far more than they need to. The reasons for this are explained in part by Pisasale (2002, cited by Cervini, 2002) in The Sunday Age. Pisasale found that boys hid the fact that they were being bullied and did not report bullying, even after an extensive anti-bullying programme, involving 800 Year 7 and 8 students, was implemented at their Victorian school. The boys said it was a waste of time because it didn’t make any difference when teachers did know and anyway, they feared retribution if they told on the bullies. The boys’ solution to being bullied was often to stay away from school. Girls also thought teachers were ineffectual, but they differed from the boys, in saying that, after the anti-bullying programme was put in place, they would tell teachers.
1.11 The Behaviour of Bystanders

The influence of bystanders on bullying behaviour is only just beginning to be understood. Latane and Darley’s (1970) analysis of the bystander effect found that there are five cognitive steps leading to helping behaviour. Each step requires a decision to be made and confusion can interfere at each level to prevent help being offered. It is therefore important to examine the areas that create confusion and address these before any overt attempts at reduction of bullying are put into action.

Firstly, and obviously, the bystander has to actually notice the incident where a person could need help. Secondly, they must interpret the event as one which requires assistance. For example, they could ask themselves if the students who appear to be fighting are actually “just mucking around”, or is someone getting hurt? Having decided the latter, the third cognitive step the bystander must take is that it is their individual responsibility to take action. At this stage, a student might decide that older students or a nearby teacher on duty will take care of the problem. This is the stage where education will promote taking individual responsibility. The fourth step is for the bystander to decide what sort of assistance is required. For example, the student could intervene directly, verbally, or physically stand between the warring parties, or enlist the aid of a teacher. Education would also clarify that if the student does not feel confident to enact such direct measures, they can notify someone in authority later about the incident. Lastly, the bystander has to decide how to put their decision into action. For example, they need to know
what words to use or where to find a teacher, or to know which people in authority are appropriate to approach with the report of the incident.

Latane and Darley’s analysis shows the complexity of the situation faced by bystanders. It is easy to see where interference at any of these stages will act to deter intervention. Although students say they should help victims of bullying, in fact, only a minority actually does (Rigby, 1996b, Tisak and Tisak, 1996). This points to the probability that students are being quite well educated about what to do in bullying situations, but when confronted with aggressive incidents, the knowledge about what to do is not being translated into action. Students’ knowledge and even desire to help may be overcome by emotional responses such as fear. In primary schools, this seems to be the case (Rigby and Slee, 1993b) who also found there was uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to intervene. Students cited fear of retaliation, bullying not being their business and that it should be the teacher’s job to intervene, as the main reasons for not taking action themselves.

Unless they do intervene, however, bystanders can encourage bullying because they act as an audience, creating a “theatre” for bullies to perform, (Fonagy 2001, cited by Labi, 2001). Bullying continues because, quite simply, other people allow it to happen (Herbert, 1989; Health Department, W.A., 1997). The effects on the victims when this happens can be devastating (Leahy, 2001). Cowie (1999) noted that in videotaped playground observations, the persistence of bullying increases in the presence of peers when they are either overtly endorsing bullying episodes
or just passively condoning it. Salmivelli (1999, cited in Cowie, 1999) agrees, saying that the power of the peer group which acts negatively can be harnessed to promote positive outcomes – that is, activated to prevent bullying. Future anti-bullying strategies need, therefore, to concentrate on the bystanders’ behaviour as well as the bullies’ and the victims’, to find methods of turning the negative outcomes to positive ones.

As can be seen in the Latane and Darley (1970) findings, many people do not take action in aggressive incidents simply because they are unsure about what they should do. The same has been found for students in bullying situations (Health Department of Western Australia, 1997). In addition to this, there are many pressures not to intervene in bullying incidents. One considerable, emotional barrier to intervention is the fear of being labelled “dobber” (Griffiths, 2001), especially when the bullies are popular at school (Cairns, et al, 1988). Fear of retaliation is probably the best known reason for non-intervention (Naylor & Cowie, 1999, Smith et al, 1999). Naylor & Cowie (1999) found that many bystanders fear taking an emotional risk and have anxiety about being rebuffed. They also often lack confidence in social and verbal skills. Cowie et al (1994), however, found that students who do have the confidence to defend victims of bullying have the highest status among their peers. It is important to focus on this, rather more positive aspect of bystander behaviour, and for schools to provide the means for students to become positively active bystanders.
Obviously, then, it is peer support for the bully that makes intervention an option only for the very confident, assertive student. In my work, I have seen bystander intervention occur only very rarely, but when it does, it can be very effective. One example at this school was when a Year 8 girl told three Year 9 boys to stop hitting a smaller, Year 8 boy. She was jeered at for being his girlfriend, but nevertheless, the bullying stopped. This was direct intervention, but indirect intervention, such as reporting the incident, is also extremely uncommon. One reason that students are reluctant to report bullying is because when bullies are punished, many other students gang-up against the victim for getting the bullies into trouble – even when it wasn’t the victim who told the teacher. Students often band together to bully anyone who has “dobbed” on a bully, whether they were the victim or not, (Rigby, 1996a).

This hegemonic ideology of protecting the offender is a very difficult one to change and creates strong resistance to students asking teaching staff or support services for help. For example, Morita (1999 in Smith et al, 1999) found that, in Japan, secondary school students resisted asking for help because they feared retaliation and believed that teachers could do nothing to stop the bullying, or might even make it worse. Phillip Slee, quoted in an article by Michelle Griffin in The Sunday Age (June 9, 2002), found the same reluctance amongst Australian schoolgirls to ask for help. He said, “Girls are very clear about the fact that adults make it worse” (Agenda, p.5). Slee maintains that only 30% of girls report being bullied because of this fear. Schools obviously need to address this pervasive atmosphere of fear,
so that students can have the confidence to ask for help. It is imperative, of course, that when they do ask for help, the adults involved ensure that they do *not* make it worse.

A less apparent reason that bystanders do not intervene is due to a diffusion of responsibility, (Latane and Darley, 1970; Beaman et al, 1978), that is, they take no responsibility for the bullying incident. The more bystanders that are present at a bullying incident, the less likely anyone is to help (Latane & Darley, 1970; Latane and Nida, 1981). In 1964, in New York City, a tragic illustration of this phenomenon occurred when a woman called Kitty Genovese was murdered, with about forty neighbours hearing her screams, as her killer repeatedly stabbed her, for half an hour. No-one helped, nor even called the police (Rosenthal, 1964). Again in New York, eleven passengers on the subway watched as seventeen year old Andrew Mormille was stabbed and subsequently bled to death. When his attackers left the train, still no-one went to his aid, in spite of there being no danger. It was diffusion of responsibility, not fear of the attackers, preventing the bystanders from helping (Latane & Darley, 1970).

This diffusion of responsibility happens in schools, even when some victims try to enlist the aid of other students (Cowie & Sharp, 1994). When students do not know what to do, they worry about what other people might think, and therefore take no action. This perhaps-unconscious support for the bully may extend to other actions, such as being friendly with the bully, avoiding the victim or not reporting the bullying incident. Support for the
bully can also be overt, taking the form of verbal encouragement for the bully, laughing, watching out for teachers or refusing to tell the teacher what happened (Cowie and Sharp, 1994).

Metacognitive perspectives relating to bullying also need to be considered, for example, the enjoyment and excitement young people derive from watching violence (Edgar, 1999). These factors can be emotionally damaging to the students, as when questioned individually, students often will express regret at their own identification with the bullying group, knowing that their actions have contravened their belief system. A bullying incident often creates cognitive dissonance for bystanders, because, for their actions to align with their belief system, they should have made an attempt to prevent the incident. When they did not, they “found themselves” (made an unconscious decision to belong to bullying group) joining in the bullying.

This phenomenon is supported by Festinger’s (1950) view that individuals selectively affiliate with others who are similar to avoid uncertainty of opinions and to achieve goals that they cannot achieve alone. Some students seem to find security in conforming to the group, which in turn supports them and other group members’ beliefs in the correctness of their own opinions (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1975). Bullies thus receive constant reinforcement from the peer group, creating a cycle of behaviour in which the bully feels compelled to continually demonstrate his or her power or be seen as a failure (Mendler, 1992). Deviants from the group are punished, and if they persist in their nonconforming behaviour, eventually, their
greatest fear will be realised and they will be ostracized from the group (Festinger et al, 1950).

A tragic example of this need to belong is reported by Morita (in Smith et al, 1999), where, in Japan, a thirteen year old boy stayed with a group which bullied him severely. They robbed him of U.S.$8,000 over time, kicking him and pushing his face into the river when he did not give them money. Eventually, he committed suicide, yet when his father had suspected bullying and told him to stay away from them, the boy presented a “close-friends” façade, passing off the bullying as just horseplay, which was supported by the group.

Perhaps one of the most convincing examples of bystander support for the bully is illustrated among young boys using homophobic insults to each other. Quoted by Martino & Palotta-Chiarolli, (2001) in Boys Stuff, one boy illustrates the fear of being branded homosexual and the resultant bullying, as well as the possible emotional damage to himself at the realisation of his own self-betrayal.

I thought he was weird and although I did feel sorry for him because of the crap he was getting from other guys, I was afraid to talk to him as my male friends might think that I was gay or was supporting his actions. It is such a powerful word…’gay’. I began to realize that all I had done to create my own identity could be destroyed in a second, simply by being called one single word. It is shocking, but it is very true. (p.129).

This boy’s thoughts are an example of Fuller et al’s (1998) point that, although some students support the bullies, there are many bystanders who
want bullying to stop. My own experience supports the literature (Lampert, 1998 and Janson, 2000) that many bystanders suffer guilt at not intervening, and frustration due to their perceived lack of options to take action against the bullying. What this has raised for this study, is that it is encouraging that bystanders want bullying to stop. Since students have such a strong resistance to asking teachers to intervene, this study places bystanders as central to the search for a solution to the school-bullying problem. Although currently they tend not to intervene to counter bullying, better understandings of the meanings students attach to bullying behaviours and working with bystanders can facilitate the implementation of improved anti-bullying programmes.

1.12 The Behaviour of Teaching Staff

It is common for teachers not to talk about bullying in their classrooms (Fuller, 1998; Pisasale, cited by Cervini, 2002). Bullying is a daily part of the students’ lives, therefore it should be a daily part of the curriculum. It is of paramount importance that the problem of bullying is discussed in classes. Authors Bjorkqvist and Osterman (1999, cited by Morita, in Smith et al, 1999) sum up the approach thus:

> It is somewhat strange that society provides education in a large variety of subjects of a scholarly nature, but when it comes to human relations, which is the source of both the greatest misery and the greatest joy in life, we do not consider it worth covering in our educational system. (p.765)

Teachers vary widely in their responses to bullying. They might blame the bully, victim or parent, become protective, punitive and even bully the
students themselves (Rigby, 1996a). The institutional culture of bullying appears again when some teachers bully students, using aggressive gestures, raised voices and punitive strategies for behaviour management. This causes resentment among the students, who then view the school’s efforts to address bullying as being hypocritical. Teachers often become exasperated with bullying incidents and blame the victim (Young, 1998). Blaming, of course, does nothing to reduce bullying.

1.13 The Purpose of this Study

Research into bullying behaviour has tended to focus on primary schools, or on high schools, rather than on a particular developmental stage. Bullying can be a particular problem in early adolescence, at this stage in a young person’s development, when they are experiencing many changes in their lives (Pellegrini et al, 1999). For this reason the participants chosen for this study are Year 8 students. In the U.S.A., bullying has been found to be a particularly acute problem, in terms of frequency and severity, in this period of development (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Unless interventions are put into place, it can escalate from primary to secondary schools. At the time of entering high school, students face many changes at this stage – puberty, beginning high school and making new friends. Because there is a gap in the research on this age group and for the reasons stated above, this age group has been chosen for the study.

Early adolescence is a time when students may be competing for the social resources of friends and allies, and this could motivate them to use
aggressive behaviours to gain within-group status (Charlesworth, 1996; Pellegrini et al, 1999). Future research needs to identify specifically which social resources are being competed for, and find alternative means of obtaining them. Powerful students stand to gain the most, and this study is important because it explores the notion of a cultural investment in sustaining a dominant, bullying group (after Rigby and Slee, 1991). These authors found that bullies are popular in Australian schools and this study will investigate why they are popular and ask how this contributes to the way bystanders behave. There are benefits to bullying and these behaviours will persist as long as the benefits outweigh the costs (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

Bullying, then, should be viewed as a social phenomenon, so it makes sense to investigate the behaviours of the peer group in bullying incidents. There seems to be a gap in the findings to date about why and how peers support a bullying culture. It has been found that whether they are actively supporting bullies or simply do not intervene, they are colluding with the aggressor. There is little research on why bystanders collude with bullies at all, particularly when they are distressed by bullying (Janson, 2000) and they say they would intervene (Rigby, 1996b). In addition, there is little persuasive evidence of programmes which propel bystanders into taking action. This study seeks to establish the reasons why bystanders’ intentions and desire to intervene do not actually result in their taking action. Some reasons already discussed, such as the possibility of being called a “dobber” creates a considerable emotional barrier to bystander intervention in
bullying incidents, especially when the bullies are popular at school (Cairns et al, 1988). Andrew Mellor (1999, in Smith et al, 1999) shows how this culture is echoed in Scottish schools, where “dobbing” is known as “clyping”. A traditional children’s rhyme is chanted at people who have told teachers when they are being bullied:

Tell-tale tit, your mammy cannae knit
Your daddy cannae go to bed without a dummy-tit (p94)

Such collective oppressive practices are underpinned by young people’s need to belong to a group, find a place and keep it. No-one wants to be an outcast. Behaviours such as those outlined above give power to the bullies. The aim of this study is to find ways to persuade bystanders to retract their support, remove the power and transfer it to the victims. The fragile hold on power that bullies have is illustrated by Starratt (2003), who maintains that power is thought of as belonging to only a select few. He claims,

Yet the reality is that no one has power over another unless that person is allowed to have that power. If everyone refuses to comply with those in power, they have no power. (p.186)

This study focuses on not only how bystander behaviour is regulated by the oppressive behaviours of the dominant peer group, but how the bystanders are unaware that it is actually they who provide the power to that group in the first place. Group and individual interviews, as well as participant observation will investigate how the peer group culture establishes hierarchies and regulates bystanders’ behaviour by accepting, promoting aggressive behaviours in physical, emotional or verbal form.
Notwithstanding the above, it is more than just fear that prevents bystanders from taking action and this study’s contribution to knowledge will be the investigation into the multi-dimensional factors that prevent bystanders from translating knowledge about intervention into practice. To analyse these preventative factors, the study frames the behaviour of bystanders in the context of the school culture, taking into account the impact of the dominant peer group (Rigby, 1996a). Bullying in middle school years is not merely the isolated behaviours of a minority of students, but it appears to be more a group behaviour (Espelage et al, 2000).

It is expected that the study will facilitate better understanding of the dynamics within this sphere, how bullying has become normalised in schools and remains largely unquestioned. The study also seeks to challenge the school’s pedagogic approaches and strategies to deal effectively with bullying, as current programmes in schools are only partially successful (Rigby, 2002). It explores the so far largely unexamined developmental stage of early adolescence. It also interrogates the behaviour of bystanders, specifically the reasons they do not usually intervene in bullying incidents. The study links to existing knowledge and augments it by providing new insights into the psychology of bystander behaviour. This is a qualitative study which aims to provide evidence that apparent bystander apathy is multi-dimensional behaviour. It should also caution against simplistic prescriptions to mobilise students to become proactive in countering bullying.
Bystander behaviour is known to influence bullying (Cowie & Sharp, 1994; Hawkins et al, 2001) therefore it makes sense to encourage bystander intervention. How to achieve this, is part of this study’s question. Little seems to be known about how to persuade students to take action to help prevent bullying, nor why they often do not intervene. Latane and Darley’s (1970) research followed several incidents where people were attacked and bystanders did not intervene. There are still many questions to be answered about why this happened. In some cases the victims actually died while onlookers did nothing to help. Research with school students has shown similar results to those of Latane and Darley - that people do not intervene for many reasons. Often, they simply do not know what to do (Herbert, 1989; Health Department, W.A., 1997). This confusion is not surprising because, until recently, students were not taught how to deal with bullying behaviour. However, even when the skills are acquired, they are not enough to ensure bystander intervention.

This study interrogates the psychological barriers between the hypothetical and the actual situation and asks what is preventing Year 8 students from behaving the way they say and want to. Although confusion and fear explain some of the lack of intervention, it does not explain others. For example, in this school, confusion and fear are removed for Year 8 students through their having access to an anonymous electronic reporting system and education on how to talk to teachers about bullying, but they still rarely use these methods of reporting bullying.
Leahy’s (2001) study on sexual abuse in sport stresses the impact on the victims when bystanders do nothing. Leahy found that abused athletes’ distress was significantly higher when they felt that other adults knew about the abuse but did nothing to prevent it. That bystanders knew about the abuse but took no action caused more suffering to the already traumatized victims. Leahy suggests that the victims process the non-intervention by bystanders, as an assumption that the behaviour is socially acceptable. Leahy stresses the impact of bystander behaviour, “It seems to indicate that the harm done by the bystander effect may override any perceived positive social support” (p. 247). A gap in the literature exists about the effects on victims, bullies, and school culture when bystanders do intervene. There is little evidence reported from participants in bullying situations on how they felt when they were challenged or supported, as the case may be, by bystanders who intervened. This information would be helpful to develop a fuller picture on the impact bystander intervention may have on all participants.

The preceding overview gives rise to the following research objectives:

1. To identify how Year 8 students experience bullying, and how they perceive the role of the bystander

2. To investigate the psychological barriers between the hypothetical and practice – what occurs to cause students to act differently from the way they say they will
3. To examine the school culture in the light of bullying behaviour, with the aim of exposing weaknesses which permit the continuance of bullying.

There needs to be a decentring of the automatic support given to the bully and a demystifying of the positive role available to the bystander. The focus of this study will be on further examination into the reasons why bystanders usually do not intervene in bullying incidents, even though they know, through education programmes, what they should do. To this end, the study’s specific research questions are:

1. Within a Year 8, co-educational group, how is bullying behaviour supported and maintained?
2. How do Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour?
3. What are the psychological barriers to bystander intervention?

1.14 Conclusion

This chapter explained the problem of bullying, its relatively recent recognition by school administrators and the role of the bystander. It has described the historical and research contexts within which the central research questions of this study had their origins.

Chapter Two outlines the public acknowledgment of bullying as a problem and the emergence of global and Australian anti-bullying programmes. Government, departmental and private initiatives are described, and their
evaluations discussed. This chapter shows that in recent years, schools in Australia and worldwide, have committed themselves to addressing the problem of bullying.

Chapter Three explains the methodology of the study. Reasons for choice of methodology are given and ethical issues arising from this are discussed. The qualitative methods are group and individual interviews of Year 8 students, discussions with a focus group of teachers and participant observation.

Chapters Four and Five present the analysis of the data, with a contextualised discussion of the complete study results.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis, and considers the strengths and also the limitations of the study’s findings, and their implications in relation to bullying and bystander behaviour. Suggestions for future research, policy and practice are outlined.
CHAPTER TWO
COUNTERING BULLYING

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter One, I showed that worldwide concern about bullying has prompted active responses by schools, government and welfare agencies. The research findings highlight that violence and aggression is a worldwide problem in schools (Rigby & Slee, 1991; Olweus, 1991, 1993; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Smith & Sharp, 1994). It has been acknowledged that the results of bullying can be extreme, with victims of bullying resorting to suicide as an escape from their tormentors (Marr & Field, 2001; Rigby, 1996a), or that the victims turn to murder (Tomsen, 1997 cited in Plummer, 2001), as has been speculated in school shootings in the U.S.A. (Skeesis, 2000; Labi, 2001).

I demonstrated in the previous chapter, that the emotional trauma of being bullied commonly causes learning difficulties because victims suffer anxiety and depression and cannot cope with the demands of schoolwork (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Lampert, 1998). Many of them stay away from school altogether (Petersen & Rigby, 1999). The negative effects of bullying can be enduring, and can be carried from school into the workplace (Olweus, 1992; Lampert, 1998; Quine, 2001), with thousands of claims relating to violence and harassment in the workplace being made (Catanzariti, 2002).
It appears that bullies suffer as well as victims, being much more likely than non-bullies to experience emotional problems such as depression, guilt, anger and shame (Dietz, 1994). These effects are also enduring, with bullies tending towards criminal activity as adults (Eron et al, 1987; Olweus 1992). As parents, fathers role model bullying behaviour, passing it on to their sons in the next generation (Farrington, 1993). Apart from people who bully and those who are bullied, being a witness to bullying also leads to psychological trauma (Lampert, 1998). Evidently, all concerned with bullying suffer from it.

Much of bullying behaviour transcends cultural differences to emerge from all areas of the globe with similar features. Some of the corresponding traits include the reluctance of victims to tell anyone in authority, gender differences in bullying, and that bullying appears in situations where people are forced together, as in schools and military institutions. Contributing authors to The Nature of School Bullying (Smith et al, 1999), describe worldwide views and responses to school bullying, including how perspectives and actions to prevent bullying are influenced by culture, history, law and context.

This chapter discusses how, in recent years, global attempts to counter bullying have focused primarily on student education. These programmes have generally been about raising awareness of the nature of bullies and victims, whole-school approaches to reducing bullying and how to deal with bullying incidents. The descriptions of the programmes in this chapter
include some evaluations, though many have not been formally evaluated. Where there are evaluations of programmes, they have been quantitative, showing to what extent programmes are effective in reducing bullying. However, there are gaps in the literature to explain what aspects of these programmes make them effective. As well, there is no explanation to why, in some cases, bullying actually increases after a programme has been implemented.

In this chapter, I argue that implementing anti-bullying programmes requires the acknowledgment of the shared common frame of reference with a school - its culture. Influences on bullying behaviour that are explored here include the use of power and language, gender, cultural norms, assumptions and values and how these issues are approached within anti-bullying programmes. As agents of change, current anti-bullying programmes locate themselves in an educational framework. The educational approach and associated learning theories are examined as a foundation to the effectiveness of these pedagogies.

2.1 Global legislation to reduce bullying

Some countries have introduced legislation to make anti-bullying measures compulsory. For example, in the United States, many states have, by law, made it compulsory for schools to have anti-bullying programmes (Delaney, 2001). France also has legislation in place for dealing with bullying in schools (Faber-Cornali et al, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999). In Finland, bullying can be prosecuted, including for psychological harassment (Bjorkqvist &
Osterman, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999). Bjorkqvist and Osterman speculate that, although the law may not act as a deterrent, it has caused attitudes towards bullying to change. In the United Kingdom, legal action has been taken, resulting in gaol terms in some cases and large sums paid to victims as compensation for being bullied at school (Smith, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999). In Japan, there is now recognition in the courts of psychological bullying, with compensation being paid to the victims (Monbusho, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999).

Australia lags behind these countries with Victoria being the only state having legislation making it compulsory for schools to have anti-bullying policies in place. In Western Australia, it is compulsory for state schools to implement a policy for managing student behaviour, which only includes one section on the management of bullying behaviour (Rigby, 2002). If the trend continues to introduce such legislation, then schools will be compelled to seek more effective methods of countering bullying. Also, they will become more motivated to act against bullying if the number of students suing schools for lack of protection increases.

2.2 Education programmes and their outcomes

Strategies currently employed by schools to reduce bullying are quite varied, but often produce a similar reduction in bullying incidents (Rigby, 2002). Olweus (1999, in Smith et al, 1999) views this variation in policy and practice in Sweden and Norway as problematic. He expresses concern about the lack of thorough scientific programme evaluation, and considers
that schools in these countries would benefit from the introduction of legislation to require them to adopt a systems approach, based on research, to reduce bullying. Cross et al (2003a) share the same concerns in Australia, noting that there are no uniform strategies adopted by schools. She calls for system level policies to be implemented by all Australian schools, in order to provide strategies and procedures that have been proved effective through research.

The impact of anti-bullying strategies is still being researched. So far, the existence of bullying has been researched quantitatively and acknowledged as a significant social problem (Olweus, 1993, Rigby, 1996a). It seems that many countries worldwide are going through a transition stage, where the extent of bullying has been acknowledged and research has established that it is prevalent throughout the world’s schools (Smith et al, 1999; Rigby, 2002). The effectiveness of some of the strategies has been established, however, other strategies are proving to be either not effective or even counterproductive (Olweus, 1993, Rigby, 2002).

The importance of this study is that it probes deeper than existing studies into the reasons for student responses to bullying behaviours. It uses qualitative research to investigate the meanings students make of bullying and seeks to expand existing knowledge about why Year 8 students often do not behave in the bullying situations the way the educational strategies have taught them to. Current understandings of bullying need to be challenged to
provide knowledge to counter the bullying that is still occurring, even with strategies in place.

Reflecting the need for information on countering bullying, advice to parent, students, authorities and victims is available online, including the following websites:

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters
www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying
www.bullyingnoway.com.au

Help is also available through ‘phone services such as Kids Help Line. This service is used extensively, reporting that calls about bullying more than doubled in the six years up to 2002.

Some programmes, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, are modelled on the work of Olweus (1993), which include a structured, rules-based approach (Froschl et al, 1998 and Stevens et al, 2000, cited in Rigby, 2002). A didactic programme is another approach which focuses on teaching children social skills, with an emphasis on reducing violence (Slaby et al, 1995, cited in Rigby, 2002). Other programmes focus on developing self-esteem among victims (Griffiths, 1998; Besag, 2002; Curriculum Corporation, 2000). Education in strategies for dealing with bullying on an individual basis has also been introduced (Pikas, 1989; Maines and Robinson, 1992), and these are incorporated into many of the
programmes. Other strategies include the use of peers within the school to help to reduce bullying (Cowie, 1999; Petersen and Rigby, 1999), whilst others consider it effective to raise awareness of bullying issues through the curriculum (Slee, 1997).

Since many anti-bullying programmes have considerably reduced bullying in schools (Olweus, 1991), it suggests that education does, in fact, help in reducing bullying. The intervention programme devised by Olweus was structured, awareness-raising and included members from all areas of the school community. Since this time, however, success rates have been less than the remarkable 50% reduction in bullying that Olweus achieved, and in some cases, increased reports of bullying have occurred (Petersen and Rigby, 1999). Petersen and Rigby discuss the difficulty of knowing whether this is due to heightened awareness causing more frequent reporting, or if the education programmes somehow increased actual bullying incidents. It seems that in some cases, at least, actual bullying incidents were more frequent. However, whilst the measurement of programmes has provided results for schools to examine, there is little to tell us why some programmes are successful and others are not. So far, it has been researchers and school staff, not students, who have been the driving force behind the programmes. This study interrogates adult assumptions about bullying and works with contributions from the students.

Education as an anti-bullying strategy has undoubtedly helped to reduce its incidence and there are many Australian anti-bullying programmes to
choose from (Griffiths, 1998, 2001; Petersen and Rigby, 1999; Suckling & Temple, 2001; Rigby, 2002). Dealing with bullying has meant expanding traditional thinking and conceiving of bullying behaviours as neither pre-determined nor inevitable. That education is not the only measure to prevent bullying, however, becomes evident in the fact that bullying continues after education programmes have been implemented. More research is required into the reasons for an increase, or no change in the rate of bullying following school education programmes. The multi-dimensional nature of bullying and bystander behaviours renders it an incautious assumption that a single solution such as education could solve the complex problems of bullying behaviours.

Australian educators reflect the worldwide disparity of anti-bullying strategies used. Whilst there is general agreement of an informal nature between Australian educators that bullying needs to be addressed, the approaches by schools in this country also vary considerably (Rigby, 2002; Cross et al, 2003a). Rigby (2002) notes that some schools have adopted a rules-based approach, some have promoted preventative strategies and others employ non-judgmental methods. One of the problems for schools dealing with bullying, according to Rigby, is that advice given by various authorities can be inconsistent and that the individual school authorities decide on the level of teacher training, which means that it varies considerably. These factors contribute to making an anti-bullying campaign in Australia disjointed and weakened by uncertainty.
2.3 Commonwealth and State Government Sponsored Programmes to Counter Bullying

The Australian Commonwealth and State government responses to bullying have also been varied. An important acknowledgment by the Commonwealth Government of the need to address school bullying was in the first major report on violence in schools, *Sticks and Stones*, Report on Violence in Australian Schools (1994). Since then, governments and education authorities have undertaken many other anti-bullying initiatives, but it is still only in the state of Victoria, Australia that there is a mandatory requirement for schools to report on their anti-bullying strategies.

While Olweus (1999, in Smith et al, 1999) and Cross et al (2003a) advocate a uniform approach to anti-bullying strategies, an individual approach also has advantages, because what may work in one school culture might be inappropriate in another. Individualising programmes enables variances, such as race, religion, ethnicity and economic status in the school culture to be considered. Gender and developmental factors also need to be taken into account (Owens and MacMullin, 1995). The outcomes of most of these programmes have not been formally assessed, therefore schools have no prescribed standard to work with. Typically, schools introduce a range of new strategies of their own choosing, and package it as an individualised, multi-faceted programme (Cross et al, 2003a). Because this is the usual approach, evaluation is often difficult because it is hard to know which part of the programme was the most effective. Some of the current government programmes available are described below.
The Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care programme *Mind Matters* (Curriculum Corporation, 2000) is a mental health programme for schools, components of which include anti-bullying strategies. Within these sections, anti-bullying education is provided through the curriculum in the form of drama and literature. Another Commonwealth initiative is *No fear: Towards creating a non-violent school community*. This programme is distributed in kit form and addresses violence, both domestic and at school, against women and girls.

State governments also have devised anti-bullying programmes. *Bullying – No Way!* for example, is a Queensland Department of Education professional development resource designed to raise awareness among teachers of bullying and to provide information on how to deal with it. In Western Australia, The *Friendly Schools* and *Friendly Schools Friendly Families* projects (Centre for Health Promotion Research, 1999) has been designed to teach primary school children and their school communities the skills to counter bullying. These projects have been successful in significantly reducing bullying amongst Year 4 and 5 primary school children, with final results still to be published. These are just a few of a proliferation of government programmes available to help schools counter bullying.

### 2.4 Learning theories as mechanisms to counter bullying

This study uses learning theories as a framework to place social context and culture as central to bullying behaviours. Much of bullying behaviour, it will
be shown, is learned by imitation and reinforcement (Bandura, 1969). Bandura noted that the behaviour of the model provided information to those observing it and that aggressive behaviour is supported by the external environment. The social context contributes to emotional contagion and the weakening of social control in bullying incidents are additional explanations by Olweus (1991) for the support of bullying behaviours by peers. Olweus also proposed that peer support for bullying is provided by reinforcement and modelling.

Needless to say, there is plenty of bullying behaviour in schools for students to observe. Others are likely to adopt the same behaviours if the bullying model receives reinforcement for their behaviour from the bystanders (Bandura, 1969; Hazler, 1996b; Cowie, 1999; Simmons, 2002). Reinforcement may be vicarious or direct, and the effectiveness of the reinforcement will vary according to the recipient (Kelly, 1982). These factors act to suppress peer actions against bullying, and are learned through imitation of others already established within the school culture. The present study will examine these influences to explain bystander behaviour among Year 8 students.

Measures to counter bullying also need to take into account the students who are bullied. Students with poor social skills, for example, are likely to be targeted by bullies. It is therefore important that these students acquire social skills in order to make friends (Fuller et al, 1998). Being liked by peers and having friends are protective factors against victimization (Rigby,
1997). Some children, however, are provocative, engaging in repeated, irritating behaviours. These behaviours include name-calling, making annoying sounds, such as clickings of the tongue, or physical contact, such as tapping, flicking or punching. Although the behaviours are unpleasant for other students, they are not considered bullying because the other students, although annoyed, are not frightened of them. The perpetrator is unpopular, suffers rejection from the group and yet persists with the very behaviours that make them so disliked, even when they have been asked repeatedly by their peers, and sometimes by teachers, to stop. When this happens, it can sometimes lead to bullying from other students. Therefore, counselling those victims who have poor self-esteem and social skills helps to improve their protection from being bullied (Pitt and Smith, 1995; Pelligrini et al, 1999).

Just as with other behaviours, the acquisition of social skills may be through direct positive reinforcement, observational learning and development of cognitive expectancies (Bandura, 1986; Keddie, 2001). To the extent that positive consequences occur as a result of social interactions, it is probable that these interactions will become part of the student’s interpersonal repertoire (Kelly, 1982). Kelly cautions that there is a subjective value of the reinforcers, however, and that this will vary between individuals. For example, teachers’ and students’ views could differ on what may constitute a positive reinforcer. Schools must, therefore, be aware of this and include some flexibility in their anti-bullying programmes to accommodate this variation.
For a social skills training programme to be more effective, it would need the cooperation of other students to provide consistent, positive responses to the new, unfamiliar behaviour of a previously unskilled student. The learning of skills relies on consistency of reinforcement for the newly acquired behaviour (Kelly, 1982), therefore, in a practical sense it has limitations within a school setting. Consistency is unlikely to happen in school, especially if a student has a known history among other students of being socially disconnected. They would be expecting him or her to revert to their usual, unskilled social behaviour. Just as desired behaviours can be reinforced, so too can undesirable behaviours and many students seek this reinforcement (Kelly, 1982). My experience supports this view, that these students gain reinforcement from the attention they get from teachers and peers, even if it is negative attention.

Social skills can also be learned through imitation of the peer group (Bandura & Kupers, 1964). Kelly (1982) notes that people will self-reinforce actions learned through modelling by evaluating their own behaviours compared with those of the model, and then adopt them as their own. However, the acquisition of social competencies through imitation will fail to occur if the student is marginalised, has little social interaction and thus has fewer opportunities for integration through modelled learning. For this reason, it is important for schools to adopt strategies to keep isolated students circulating within a peer group.
The role of the peer group in modelling social behaviours becomes more influential during adolescence (Cowie, 1999, Simmons, 2002), so it is probable that students learn how to bully from observing bullying behaviour within their peer group. The influence of bystander behaviour becomes evident when bullying is reinforced by their encouragement in the form of laughing, cheering or even just watching in silence. The social context that facilitates bullying cannot be ignored in a school (Bjorkqvist et al, 1992). Adults’ influence is secondary to the peer group’s at this stage of development, and adults are not part of the students’ social milieu. Therefore, school programmes that address the problem of bullying need to engage the support of the peer group (Naylor & Cowie, 1999).

Despite such a gloomy outlook, it is possible to harness the influence of the peer group through modelling more desirable behaviours. The cause of the bystanders’ distress when they do nothing, yet want the bullying to stop, may be due to socialisation and the development of empathic responses (Hoffman, 1981 in Rushton and Sorrentino, 1981). Hoffman recognises a natural empathy in children and advocates the enhancing of this existing tendency through socialisation. He says empathy should be encouraged through socialisation strategies such as modelling altruistic behaviour and giving the students role-taking opportunities. In a school, he recommends that inductive techniques be employed to assist students’ cognition of how the victim feels.
Some anti-bullying programmes contain sections for victims, who feel fearful, disaffected, lack confidence and feel they have to accept their fate (Griffiths, 2001). As Rees (1991) notes, “The bully bullies but the bullied put up with bullying” (p109). Rees proposes that anti-bullying programmes include sections to encourage victims to create options where none were previously evident, such as to learn assertiveness skills and to change their self-image. By reframing their self-concept, these students could view the power imbalance differently and change their existing view that the bully has the right or the knowledge to gain power over them. Or, in an alternative situation, bullied students could acquire the skills to ignore the so-called punishments they fear for not acquiescing to the bully.

2.5 Gender

The significant gender differences in bullying behaviour were discussed in Chapter One (Ortega & Mora-Merchen, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999; Griffiths, 2001), and the observation was made that there is little in the literature on gender-based anti-bullying programmes. Some similarities exist where the majority of bullying by both genders is verbal abuse (Rigby, 1996a). Both boys’ and girls’ behaviour is often controlled by the perceived threat of bullying. However, there are significant differences in boys’ and girls’ social behaviours, and anti-bullying programmes generally do not acknowledge the diversity between boys and girls as groups.

Crick & Grotpeter’s 1995 study on girls’ perceptions of direct and indirect aggression, for example, found that girls view their aggressive behaviours as
being for two different reasons. One is to protect or defend existing friendships, by exclusion, for example, in which case girls did not view the aggression to be bullying, even though this can be very hurtful. Another reason, which is deemed to be bullying by girls, is to assert power and control and deliberately cause harm to another, often with the enlistment of other girls to do so. Tactics employed may be rejection, criticism, teasing, deliberately divulging secrets or name-calling. These perceptions by girls have important implications when designing programmes to prevent bullying, because, if adults do not understand them, they may design anti-bullying programmes based on the assumptions. Obviously, if girls do not view certain behaviours as bullying, they will not respond to anti-bullying strategies to prevent them. This study is important because it addresses such issues by seeking the meanings that students, not only adults, attach to bullying and bystander behaviours.

These are significance differences in the social structure of boys’ and girls’ friendships and aggressive behaviours. Given these disparities, more research is vital into gender differences in bullying behaviours and the strategies recommended by anti-bullying programmes need to consider these in more depth.

2.6 Dealing with Individuals Involved in Bullying Behaviour

Simon Clarke, assistant principal of Chandler Secondary College, Victoria, talks about bullying being an ongoing problem in schools. He urges schools to be proactive about bullying and notes, “We are not on top of bullying,
and any school that claims it is, is a little naïve” (Sexton, 2003, p.3). In taking action, schools need to approach the problem of bullying on two levels. Firstly, when bullying occurs, a reactive response is, of course, necessary to protect students from being bullied and to attempt to prevent it from re-occurring. Secondly, it is important to work towards a school culture that does not tolerate bullying (Slee, 1997). Slee explains the reactive approach as “First Order change” (p.5), but maintains that it does nothing to address the school system that has allowed bullying in the first place. Additionally, a negative label might be attached to the student engaged in bullying. To create an anti-bullying culture, the school community needs to demonstrate that it will always respond to a bullying incident in order to support students being bullied and to provide a safe place for all students to learn. However, since so far, bullying continues in spite of preventative strategies, there will still be a need for reactive strategies at times.

2.7 Sharing Responsibility for Countering Bullying

Research has highlighted many effective ways to counter bullying on an individual basis that will minimise a negative outcome for all participants in bullying incidents. Sexton (2003) cites a student welfare coordinator, Philip Collins, who maintains that teachers often resort to the quick way of dealing with bullying, which is to engage in bullying themselves by being very harsh and punitive on the bully. This, he warns, is too confrontational and does not encourage the bully to consider better ways to behave. Collins
supports a more encouraging approach when dealing with students who engage in bullying behaviour.

One such encouraging approach is Anatole Pikas’s (1989) Method of Shared Concern, mentioned in Chapter One, which provides an alternative to the punitive approach. Pikas called into question previous knowledge about dealing with bullying and offered a less confrontational way to deal with individuals involved. This approach recommends that all people involved in a bullying incident should take responsibility for the situation and be concerned about the welfare of the victim. Following discussion with the participants individually, all parties are brought together to restore rapport, in a safe environment, with adults present to act as mediators. The purpose of this is to enable students to resolve the conflict before they leave the session. The Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 1989) offers the bullying student some control over the situation. It includes discussion with the bully, with concern about the welfare of the victim being shared. Less punishment is required and the individual is more accountable for the rights of others.

Maines and Robinson’s (1992) No-Blame Approach, also introduced in Chapter 1, is similar to the Method of Shared Concern, focusing on encouraging bullying students to reflect on their actions. It is different from the Method of Shared Concern, however, because it does not require all parties to meet as a group. It has been my experience in a high school that,
following a No Blame session, the students involved prefer to take control and speak to each other without adults present.

During the discussion, the bullying student is invited to view bullying as a problem and is helped by the adult to choose his or her own ways of ensuring that the bullying stops. Dealing with bullying behaviour with the No-Blame Approach reduces the anger of the bully because they are not being blamed or punished for their actions. They are simply asked what they think would be appropriate actions to take to stop the bullying. At this point there is a swing of power from the student to the adult, which could be problematic if the student feels threatened. However, if the adult’s power is used in an encouraging way, to help the student to find their own solutions, rather than force them to act in a way they find unacceptable, it can be highly productive. The bullying student also benefits from the adult’s role modelling of not using their power in a negative way.

Because the discussion is without blame, it negates the need for the bully to be defensive and so acts as a “defuser” of aggression, anger and fear. Even if they still have more power than the person(s) they bullied, they are less likely to abuse it if they have made the decisions about their future actions. Maines & Robinson found that if the bullying student can come to his or her own conclusion that their behaviour conflicts with their beliefs, this is much more effective than punishment and blame.
The above approaches have been useful because they address the problem of “backlash” by the bully against the victim. Schools wishing to address bullying behaviour must acknowledge the victim’s and bystanders’ fear of making things worse by telling a teacher. Simon Clarke (cited by Sexton, 2003) agrees that there is reluctance among students to ask for help, opining that this is a significant obstacle to anti-bullying strategies. The bullied student keeps their emotions to themselves, which can build up, sometimes with tragic consequences.

The effectiveness of a more encouraging approach is due in part at least, because whilst it has been found that bullies’ beliefs can be positive towards bullying behaviour (Jenner & Gravensteade, 1998), it is also true that there seems to be a point at which they themselves decide they should stop. Besag (1989) found that when they escalate their behaviour to the point where they feel emotionally unsafe, bullies can become ashamed or scared of their own behaviour, and self-regulate its intensity, or stop altogether. It seems as though it is a relief to be confronted with their behaviour. It has been my experience also, that the majority of bullying students commonly exhibit body language expressing regret and shame for their actions. The nonverbal cues are lowering of the eyes, shifting uneasily in their chair and covering their face with their hands, followed by a verbal expression of regret. It seems that they have a sense of justice and they realize that their behaviour has contradicted this.
Once the tension is reduced, bullying students who feel regretful are calm enough to allow their real values to emerge and their emotions to be expressed. This behaviour could be explained by Festinger’s (1957) *Cognitive Dissonance Theory*, where people feel disharmony if their behaviour contrasts with their beliefs. The disharmony causes some discomfort and the person experiencing dissonance is motivated to bring their behaviour into line with their beliefs and vice-versa. In the case of bullying, the students either behave like bullies and persuade themselves that they believe that this the “right” way to behave, or they believe it is the “wrong” way to behave and accept that their actions need to be changed. Usually, it seems, they have a sense of social justice and do not like to think of themselves as bullies.

Harnessing the positive aspects of the above makes restorative justice, an intervention that has been introduced recently in schools, successful (Strang & Braithwaite, 2001). This entails bringing people who have been adversely affected by the offender’s actions, such as parents, other students and staff, to meet with the offender and explain the consequences of their offence on their lives. Strang and Braithwaite maintain that when the offender realises the impact of his or her actions on others, it acts as a deterrent to re-offending. Also known as transformative justice, this intervention is used in the criminal justice system and in the workplace. It is an intervention which focuses on repairing relationships which have been damaged by an offence, or bullying. An example in schools would be where the peer group has excluded a victim. Restorative justice is an effective strategy to deal with
such bullying, but it is time-consuming because it requires at least one trained member of staff to co-ordinate and organise a meeting between the offender and the affected people. The meetings can be quite lengthy, due to the number of people present and currently most schools are unable, or reluctant to employ this method due to limited resources (Griffiths, 2003).

Critchley (2002), in an article titled ‘Nipped in the Bud’ in *The Herald Sun*, writes about restorative justice being trialled in some Victorian schools. Offenders face their victims and often are required to repair the damage they have done. This strategy encourages students to see that their behaviour has consequences for a lot of people, not just their victim. Marg Armstrong, from the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, in the same article, added that it gives the student a chance to repair harm in a supportive environment. Importantly, it also allows the victims to feel comfortable at school. Restorative justice has been very successful in preventing bullying students from repeating their behaviour.

Restorative justice, as with other anti-bullying methods described earlier, differs from traditional school practice, which has been to adopt a punitive approach to manage these behaviours. Although punishment and suspensions are still possible in repeat cases, these options avoid expulsion and suspension. Professor John Braithwaite, cited in the above article, maintains that expelling students from the school only takes them out of the school culture, where they can learn more social behaviour, and gives them an opportunity to form a criminal subculture. Perhaps this strategy will be
given higher priority as the legal pressure mounts on schools to counter bullying.

The No-Blame Approach (Maines and Robinson, 1992), described in Chapter One, also allows bullies to think constructively about solutions whilst preserving their self-esteem. Even if they do defend their bullying behaviour, the No-Blame Approach still can work because the expectation is that the bullying stops from then on. The expectation is clear that they share responsibility for rectifying the situation. These approaches are now promoted in Australia as part of anti-bullying policies in many schools in Western Australia (Griffiths, 2001).

2.8 Including Bystanders in Anti-Bullying Programmes

The negative impact on bystanders of bullying behaviour can be as severe as it is for victims (Hazler, 1996b), therefore it is imperative that they are considered as part of a school’s anti-bullying programme. By empowering bystanders to counter bullying, the school works towards creating an anti-bullying culture. This is much more powerful than adults attempting to reduce bullying (Cowie, 1999). Hazler recommends that bystanders be given opportunities to discuss their feelings with peers in a group, promoting discussion on appropriate interventions. Directly confronting the bully is the most obvious action to take, but it is acknowledged that this is a risky option, probably only suited to students with the confidence, power and skills to deal with such a situation. Alternative actions include offering support to the victim, expressing disapproval of bullying behaviour and
seeking assistance from adults. Hazler’s explanation for bystanders’ lack of intervention is that they are confused about what to do, they fear making things worse or becoming the bully’s next victim. Whilst these reasons explain some of the lack of intervention, they are not conclusive. Fear does not explain why bystanders do not tell adults or comfort the victim later, when it is safe to do so, nor why they do not make use of anonymous electronic reporting systems. The significance of my study is that it interrogates such assumptions, searches for meaning students attach to bystander behaviour and explores the psychological barriers that prevent bystander intervention.

2.9 Countering Bullying Through the School Culture

A school culture is no different from any other culture, where people come together to work, learn or engage in activities together. Social and professional behaviour within a culture is shaped by the written and unwritten rules and practices of the community (Flood, 1999). Many of these are routine, particularly in a timetable-driven school, where basic assumptions become taken for granted, or subconsciously thought of as being unchangeable. The culture, being based on the community’s values, beliefs and assumptions emerges as a predictable, daily routine as a reflection of these. Teachers adopt teaching methods and ways of relating to students and other staff, that reflect the community’s social rules and practices (Sergiovanni, 2000).
This is not to presuppose that school cultures are not adaptive. They are determined by individuals and, because of this, can be modified. Rather than viewing schools as buildings and systems, they need to be considered as organisations built on relationships within the whole community – staff, students and parents (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Besag (1989) agrees, as do Goldstein et al (1995), maintaining that a school should be viewed as a community where every person takes responsibility for the well being of others. A caring culture emerges when relationships are given a high priority. To create such a culture, it is necessary to ensure that the whole school population is familiar with behavioural standards, the current thinking and the way relationships are conducted.

In Western Australia, a programme that attempts to encourage caring school cultures is the *Friendly Schools Friendly Families* project. It is being conducted in state schools to establish a community approach to countering bullying. This project focuses particularly on communication about bullying. By raising awareness of bullying and creating guidelines for policy, practice and classroom management, it hopes to build a positive environment for students and staff. Parents are involved, providing input to the project, maintaining close contact with the school and conducting ongoing evaluation. Schools undertake to employ student services teams to help reduce bullying and to create well-supervised and inviting surroundings conducive to a safe and peaceful environment. These are projects in progress, anticipated to be completed and evaluated in 2005, with the aim of establishing effective anti-bullying strategies for statewide, and perhaps
nationwide, implementation in all schools. The evaluation in 2005 will provide results on effective strategies which will be valuable for other schools.

Phillip Slee’s (1997) *PEACE Pack* is another programme that focuses on relationships within a school. Slee maintains that, since bullying is a socially constructed meaning, students can learn desirable behaviours which will counter bullying. To achieve this, Slee wrote this programme, where P.E.A.C.E. stands for Preparation, Education, Action, Coping and Evaluation. The preferred option is a systems approach, according to Slee, because a correctional approach merely reinforces a deficit. An approach that incorporates all systems within a school changes interactions by focusing on the roles, relationships and community interactions within the school system. Unless awareness is raised and anti-bullying education is provided, this focus could be combining to actually encourage bullying.

To help change the school’s culture to one where bullying is viewed as a social justice issue, Slee (1997) recommends that as part of the education, anti-bullying messages and attitudes be conveyed through the curriculum. Quoting his 1995 study, Slee notes that there were twice as many children who are both bullied and who bully others, as there were children who solely bullied. The cycle of victim to bully and back may be explained through the modelling of bullying. For example, if a victim is bullied, they learn from the bullying role model how it is done and imitate the behaviour themselves (Cross et al, 2003b). They may observe the reinforcement of the
bully when peers accord power to bullying students. (Craig & Pepler, 1995). This social contagion highlights the importance of this study’s aim to investigate the behaviour of bystanders.

Traditional school practice, when dealing with bullying and other problematic behaviours, is to individualise and rationalise them. The current heightened focus on bullying is underpinned by a rising social anxiety about the ineffectiveness of schools in dealing with it, and is testimony to the inadequacy of schools’ conventional approaches. Through the implementation of certain programmes, there is an emerging understanding that bullying is not inevitable and that school communities need to challenge outdated notions that it is predetermined or bio-genetic behaviour.

Individuals, or even departments within a school cannot counter bullying. A whole-school approach to bullying is necessary to reduce its incidence (Herbert, 1989; Olweus, 1991, Breheney, et al, 1996; Rigby, 1996a, 2001b). The whole school approach is more proactive and has, in some studies, produced a decrease in bullying behaviour (Rigby, 2002, Olweus, 1991). However, other studies using the whole-school approach have shown limited effects in reducing bullying.

The following studies are all found in Rigby’s (2002) A meta-evaluation of methods and approaches to reducing bullying in pre-schools and in early primary school in Australia. He reports that in the Bernese study in Switzerland, by Alsaker and Valkanover, (2001), there was a decrease in
physical and indirect bullying was found, but an increase in verbal bullying occurred. The same occurred, he found in Pepler et al’s (1993, 1994) study in Toronto, where students reported a small reduction in being bullied, but an increase of bullying other students. Mixed results of reductions of bullying in some areas and increases in others, Rigby found, also came from studies conducted in Sheffield, England by Cowie et al (1994), in Liverpool and London, England, by Pitt and Smith (1995), in Spain, by Ortega (2000), in Texas, USA by Sanchez (2001), in Norway, by Roland (1986). In Australia, a study conducted in New South Wales by Petersen and Rigby (1999) also produced an outcome of reduced bullying among younger students, but increased bullying in older students.

It is, therefore, apparent that the behaviours surrounding bullying are multi-dimensional and the effectiveness of certain strategies is dependent on the school context. Slee (1994) maintains that schools which have lower incidences of bullying adopt strategies that make it clear to students how to report bullying and what sanctions will be applied if bullying does occur. He also recommended that areas around the school be identified where bullying is most likely to occur, and supervise accordingly. While the previous section has emphasised the difficulties of changing an established culture, it is possible to do so (Breheney et al, 1996), and to create a culture with a lower tolerance for bullying (Hazler, 1996a; Rigby, 1996a). Rigby (2001a) claims that to create such a culture, it is imperative to enrol the full support of the school Principal. Without this, he states, schools will find it very difficult to implement an effective anti-bullying programme. Rigby endorses
the opinion of other researchers that the Principal’s visible support as leader of the school culture, assists in bringing about change to establish a culture where students become confident when faced with bullying behaviour (Olweus, 1991; Pepler et al, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994).

2.10 The Role of Peers in Changing School Culture

Espelage et al (2000) found that it is the peers who maintain a culture of aggression, therefore, it is the peer group who are most influential in countering aggression and creating a norm where bullying is unacceptable. Salmivelli (1996, cited in Cowie, 1999) maintains that the power of the peer group which acts negatively can be harnessed to promote positive outcomes – it can be activated to prevent bullying. Tattum and Herbert (1993) agree, expressing the view that schools need to create a climate where incoming students who show signs of bullying are simply told by the existing population: “We don’t do that here”.

A number of organisations have emerged in Australia in response to the need to address bullying. Recognising the importance of belonging in a community, programmes have been developed by such organisations as The Peer Support Foundation. This provides training and information to assist schools to employ peers to help reduce bullying.

Benefits for the Peer Supporters themselves are that the training provides them with skills and strategies to find solutions for problems (Sharp & Cowie, 1998). These authors maintain that training also provides them with
the skills to respond appropriately to a request for help and to adopt non-
 punitive interventions to assist in communication between peers in conflict.
Slee & Rigby (1998) agree, endorsing further peer involvements such as
peer mediation and student representatives.

Harnessing the knowledge and skills of peers to prevent bullying is a
successful strategy (Pitt and Smith, 1995; Cowie, 1999; Petersen and Rigby,
1999). The most commonly mentioned benefits for Year 7s and 9s of having
Peer Supporters were that they provided someone who listens, someone who
cares and the strength to overcome the problem (Naylor & Cowie, 1999).
Peer Support needs the advocacy of the school community because it is
particularly effective in secondary schools, where students often prefer to go
to other students, instead of teachers for help (Rigby, 1997). The use of
peers is successful because of an understanding that the peer group fosters
inclusion, whilst the school authoritative power relations can be inadequate
(Keddie, 2001). However, the use of ‘peer’ in Peer Support is something of
a misnomer because the Peer Supporters are usually Year 11 students,
considerably older than their Year 8 charges. When bullying occurs within
the Year 8 group, it is probable that the Year 11 Peer Supporters will not
notice it. Taking into account the reluctance to report bullying (Froschl et al,
1998; Cowie, 2000; Fuller, 2001) even to Peer Supporters, it is important to
understand this shortcoming within the programme and investigate its
significance in future research.
2.10.1 Peer Mediation

Slee (1997) recommended the teaching of conflict resolution and coping skills to students as an effective strategy in reducing bullying. Peer Mediation provides an opportunity for students in conflict to find their own solutions and make agreements (Petersen and Rigby, 1999). The process could be seen as an extension of Peer Support, with the training being specifically for conflict resolution. Whilst this intervention also involves bringing conflicting parties together, it differs from restorative justice, discussed earlier, because it does not include the wider group of people who have been adversely affected by an offence. Peer Mediation only involves the students who need to resolve a dispute. It has been found in primary schools to reduce aggressive behaviour by 51-65% (Cunningham et al, 1998).

The benefit of the mediation process is that it can act as a preventative to bullying. The students in conflict may not actually feel bullied at the time of mediation if they do not perceive an imbalance of power between them. However, if the dispute were allowed to escalate, it could develop into a bullying situation. Student mediators are trained to deal with issues of power, so the mediation process is also effective if bullying has occurred. Mediation follows guidelines to bring people to the point where, under the guidance of the mediators, they find their own solutions to the conflict. The mediators remain neutral throughout the process and each person listens, without interruption to the other’s grievances. It is important for each person to hear how the conflict has emotionally affected the other party. Perhaps
because it creates empathy for the other person, the process of negotiating solutions to the problem is usually quite easy after this. The mediators do not counsel or instruct, but they guide the process until the students reach an agreement. A follow-up a week later ensures their agreement is adhered to, or allows adjustments to be made if necessary.

Another benefit of Peer Mediation is, like the Peer Support Leader, they gain communication skills. The mediators are trained in conflict resolution skills that they can use in other areas of their lives. To implement a Peer Mediation programme, a school needs to commit to training staff first, then to training appropriate students to be mediators. Their role is to intervene in disputes when they see them or hear about them and then to decide if the dispute is suitable for mediation. If not, they will refer the matter to teachers. If it is suitable, they arrange for a mediation session to be conducted, dealing with the dispute before it escalates.

A Peer Mediation programme devised in Western Australia by Anne Fyffe (1999) shows how mediation is a process where students in conflict find their own solutions. Fyffe maintains that students would rather resolve their issues with peer mediators because they view adult involvement as being punished, lectured to and having teachers decide what the solutions should be. Student mediators are empowered to resolve disputes, which makes adult input minimal and the students in conflict become more confident about resolving disputes. The positive impact on the school culture is due to
the mediation process with individuals, with Fyffe reporting a success rate of 80-85% of disputes being resolved permanently.

2.11 The Role of Staff in Changing School Culture

The school culture is a set of beliefs, values and basic assumptions around which members of the school community base their working lives. The climate of the school is established by the interpersonal relationships within the school (Sergiovanni, 1992), and bullying is reduced when there is a climate of cooperation, collaboration and respect for all learners. Both teacher and students generate this climate, where rules apply, procedures are adhered to and consequences are spelled out (Goldstein et al, 1994). Teachers, then, can act to prevent bullying because students live up or down to their teacher’s expectations. For example, a reduced tolerance by teachers is needed for “just playing” when it comes to rough play. This study examines the teachers’ role in creating a safe, caring and nurturing classroom and school. The school staff needs to recognize that during early adolescence, rough play is associated with aggression, leadership or dominance and is conducive to bullying behaviour (Pellegrini and Smith, 1998). Preventative methods, such as organisation, structure and defining procedures can be adopted to reduce aggression in the classroom (Goldstein et al, 1995).

The adults in the school need to recognise that the school culture can be improved when the students are empowered to take action. Societal and cultural differences dictate the opportunities provided for young people to
demonstrate their ability and willingness to address issues, and many adults feel ambivalent about handing over decision-making to young people (Cowie, 1999). Cowie found that comprehensive training and ongoing support of adults is essential, however, because efforts can be thwarted if there is resistance from some individuals in the school community who feel threatened by, say, the Peer Support Programme. A school culture which encourages these capabilities in the Peer Supporters will cultivate a strong anti-bullying ethos. Most students want to work with teachers to stop bullying (Petersen & Rigby, 1999), so it may only need the staff to take up this attitude to make positive changes within the school.

2.12 Attitude Change in a Whole-School Approach to Counter Bullying

The school community members’ attitude needs to be guided towards a positive view of creating an anti-bullying culture. Effective strategies to achieve attitude change can be employed in the various groups within the school community. Ideally, groups such as parent, staff and student year groups would benefit from them. Although groups which are already involved in pastoral care would probably be the most receptive to creating an anti-bullying culture, the challenge is to achieve whole-school attitude change (Griffiths, 2001).

Changing the attitude of the dominant group(s) of staff and students within a school is one of the biggest challenges to be faced. Their claim to power makes assumptions that it is their choice whether to tolerate others or not,
therefore withdrawing their tolerance if they wish and claiming their ‘right’ to be intolerant (Hage, 1998). For example, students who position themselves as superior and engage in bullying behaviour, often explain it by saying that the student they bullied had some social or physical ‘fault’. Even the bullying students’ use of language influences the thinking and behaviour of others and is employed to establish dominance (Rees, 1991). Obviously, anti-bullying strategies to challenge attitudes such as this need to counter established assumptions and lead students into a more respectful way of relating. Using the students’ perspective, this study explores students’ meanings of the behaviour of the dominant group, to establish effective ways of breaking down negative attitudes and creating tolerance and respect.

In an initiative called “Effective Discipline, Effective Schools” (EDES), Jenner and Gravenstede (1998) used an experiential learning model to develop an effective behaviour management approach. They found that, in addition to education, an attitude change amongst the individuals within the community is required before a school can effect change. Jenner and Grevenstede found that awareness-raising in traditional training was relatively ineffective at either the individual or the institutional level, so the attitude change needed to begin with senior staff members. To achieve effective training, they realised that they needed a different approach. They rationalised their approach on past experiences.
The group designing the EDES course looked at attitude change and decided that the approach we had used in our more traditional training was merely awareness raising and did not achieve very much, if any, individual or institutional change. It may have produced some initial changes in behaviour but this probably disappeared without further work on maintenance. We realised that skill acquisition requires practice, supervision and a will on the behalf of management for it to happen (p60).

Jenner & Gravenstede (1998) cite Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning which claims that attitudinal change would best be achieved by providing four stages of learning. The first stage involved some concrete experience involving the learner, secondly, some open, reflective observation. Thirdly, there is an abstract, conceptualisation phase where the learners integrate observation into a logical framework. Finally, the learners put their ideas to the test. This system of learning and attitude change can be adapted to an anti-bullying programme. Jenner and Gravenstede’s comment above, on the motivation of management echoes Rigby’s (2001b) view that the principal must be supportive of management and staff, acquiring anti-bullying skills. Once the staff’s attitude is towards a more caring, proactive environment, this can facilitate attitude change within the remainder of the school community.

Griffiths, (2001) adapted the concrete experience of Kolb’s (1984) first stage of experiential learning, to the four types of participant in bullying incidents identified by Salmivalli et al (1996). Griffiths’s programme uses role-playing the part of each participant in a hypothetical bullying incident. The participants are the “assistant”, the “reinforcer”, the “outsider” and the “defender”. The “assistant” to the bully helps in whatever way the bully
decides. The “reinforcer” incites the bully, sometimes actively, either by cheering and joining in the bullying, or sometimes more passively, such as gathering to watch, smiling or laughing. The “outsiders” usually do nothing, but might gather around to watch the bullying or look the other way, which ultimately allows the bullying to continue. The “defender” is a bystander who confronts the bully and/or provides help and comfort for the victim.

Kolb’s (1984) second stage of learning is open, reflective observation on the concrete experience. The group discusses the dynamics of the hypothetical bullying incidents and the part each participant plays in permitting bullying to occur achieve this. The next stage of learning to achieve attitude change is integrating the knowledge into a logical framework. With the concrete experience providing depth of understanding through the role-play, the group is prepared to set in motion new perspectives on how to deal with bullying. The group completes its attitude change by substantiating its understandings of bullying behaviour in the implementation of recommended policy changes within its community.

2.13 Considering the Behaviour of Bystanders in Anti-Bullying Strategies

In the same way that a child acquires the behaviour of both bully and victim (Slee 1997), then s/he may also learn how to be a bystander through the same process of imitation. If the school takes no action, then the child being bullied might interpret this inaction as approval of the behaviour. Bystander behaviour is a powerful indicator of the school culture. Students being
bullied make the same meaning out of the apparent approval of their bullying, as do the victims of sexual abuse (Leahy, 2001). Leahy’s study, mentioned in Chapter One, found that victims of sexual abuse processed outsiders’ inaction as approval of the abuse and thought that they supported the perpetrator. Feeling helpless to stop the abuse because of an absence of support, they felt betrayed by others who knew about the abuse but in effect supported it, by not reporting it. Similarly, in a school, a culture of bullying can be perpetuated by the inaction of bystanders.

The behaviour of bystanders who do intervene illustrates the notion that all people in a community are accountable for what happens within that community. Slee (1997) supports the idea of enlisting the aid of bystanders. As an anti-bullying strategy, he recommends involving the students to counter bullying by raising their awareness of bullying and asking them to assist with policy formation. This empowers students to become part of the solution and encourages them to take ownership of the school culture to create a safe environment. The power of the peer group to influence outcomes of bullying behaviour cannot be underestimated. Cowie (1999) noted that in videotaped playground observations, the persistence of bullying is related to the presence of peers when they are either actively encouraging bullying episodes or even just passively condoning it. Craig and Pepler (1995) also reported that in the majority of incidents, bystanders reinforced the bullying. This may be inadvertently through inaction, because bystanders say overwhelmingly that they were disturbed by watching bullying (Ziegler et al 1996, cited in Craig & Pepler, 1995). In spite of such
evidence regarding the influence of bystanders, there are only a few anti-bullying programmes that acknowledge this and specifically target bystander behaviour.

As an ideal, social responsibility and responsiveness create a culture where people have a feeling of belonging and of being safe in that environment, and anti-bullying programmes need to work towards creating this. However paradoxically, it is the culture that determines social responsibility and responsiveness (Breheney et al, 1996). Because bullying is often an entrenched part of a school culture, it is difficult to address and will be resistant to change. Its persistence into adult years is evidence of this, and the literature reveals some disturbing findings, such as the popularity of bullies in Australian schools (Rigby and Slee, 1991, 1993b). However, these difficulties should not dissuade schools from persisting in their quest to reduce bullying. It is hoped that interventions would cause a restructuring of the social environment.

2.14 Schools that have achieved cultural change

Although the difficulties of changing a school culture have been discussed, it is not impossible to achieve. One example of changing a school culture was in McNair Elementary school in Hazelwood, Missouri, U.S.A. The principal set out to change the prevailing attitude towards dealing with bullying. The students’ belief, mostly supported by their parents, was that the best way to respond when being bullied was to retaliate. By teaching the students to be assertive, and to ask for help, the numbers of fights reduced
dramatically and the students’ performance in maths and reading increased from the 40\textsuperscript{th} percentile to the 60\textsuperscript{th} percentile (Labi, 2000).

An Australian example of changing a school culture is that of Mayfield Primary School, in Launceston, Tasmania (Breheney et al, 1996). In the early 1990s, Colleen Breheney arrived at the school as the principal. She found a disheartened school, where violence was the daily norm amongst the students, with many of their parents and the teachers feeling as if nothing could be done to improve the situation. She wrote,

> Although there were similarities with other schools, I was not really prepared for the degree or extent of the violence at Mayfield. There seemed to be so many sad, angry people, full of despair. (p.1).

The school had a culture of violence where police involvement was routine and the community had an air of sadness, anger and helplessness. The staff coping skills were inadequate, consisting of shouting and manhandling children, appearing to be frantic, tired or lethargic, taking time off, crying, blaming others, playing victim, applying for transfers and having low expectations of the children.

Breheney and a few colleagues refused to accept this negative state and took steps to make a change. Accepting that the home environment could not be changed, they resolved to make the school environment into one of community. They sought advice and support from professional associations and consultants and began to work towards a more positive environment.
Breheney, like many others (Rigby, 1996a, Slee, 1997), thought her vision needed to be shared by students, staff and parents. She made the rights and responsibilities of all school community members the foundation for making the school a safe and comfortable environment and staff, parents and students were consulted to establish these. They were made into a document and put into the school newsletter, as well as being displayed throughout the year on various occasions. This document was especially useful when parents were difficult or complaining. Staff members were taught, through formal professional development courses, how to develop positive relationships with students and how to deal effectively with problematic behaviour. Importantly, this training was upheld and reinforced by the adherence to rules and the school’s emerging positive character. The school introduced staff and parent mentoring systems, and senior staff members were consistent in modelling appropriate classroom strategies. Staff training was ongoing and strategies for behaviour management included interviews and negotiating solutions with students.

With positive determined leadership from Breheney, and a team effort involving all in the school community, the school changed the culture to one of encouragement, parent involvement and celebration of success in school life. Mayfield was changed from a school of hostility, suspicion, conflict and violence to one where behaviour was consistent, positive and supportive. Such positive outcomes are indicators that a school culture is not set permanently and that people’s behaviour within a culture can change from negative to positive.
In the foreword to Breheney’s book, Bill Rogers, writes:

This is a book of hope. It is about a school that decided to make a
difference in a demanding and difficult social environment. There
are many critics of education and schools these days – too many.
Against much that is ill informed, this book shows how schools can
significantly affect a community. Breheney et al, 1996 (pv)

It is with this sort of optimism in mind that my study positions school
culture as central in the definition, regulation and maintenance of bullying
behaviour. The focus is on the pervasiveness and potency of this informal
and covert culture which accepts bullying as inevitable, and how these act to
change the way students themselves believe they will respond to bullying
behaviours.

2.15 Conclusion About Changing School Culture

In this chapter, I discussed how the harmful effects of bullying are severe,
widespread and long lasting (Rigby & Slee, 1991, Besag, 2002) and how it
is essential, from a moral and legal point of view, that schools address the
problem. This will necessitate a culture being established within the school
which does not tolerate bullying, and this in turn requires the attitude of the
whole school community to be changed.

The importance of educating staff was emphasized, in the skills needed for
the No Blame Approach (Maines & Robinson, 1992) and Method of Shared
Concern (Pikas, 1989) methods of dealing with bullying. By using these
methods with bullies, there is no “backlash” from other students. When
students feel confident, they will be more likely to report bullying incidents.
I have highlighted the bystander’s role, showing how bystanders often contribute to bullying, whether it be in an active capacity, such as cheering, or in a passive manner, just watching, thus creating an audience (Cowie et al, 1994). Whilst there is some research on the reasons why bystanders do not intervene (Latane & Darley, 1970; Beaman et al, 1978; Naylor & Cowie, 1999), there is little research available to explain why they say they would intervene, but in fact do not. Also, there is a gap in the literature regarding what motivates some bystanders to intervene in bullying incidents. This study is important because it will interrogate established assumptions about the meanings students make of bullying behaviour, the ways in which bystanders respond and their reasons for doing so.

Naylor & Cowie (1999), maintain that we need to focus on the social context that facilitates bullying behaviour, which necessitates the school culture being subjected to close scrutiny. To change a school culture from one that accepts the inevitability of bullying to one that does not tolerate it, it is necessary to examine how attitudes change. The principal and leadership team need to be a driving force (Rigby, 2001b) to ensure that staff awareness of the issues surrounding bullying are raised (Slee, 1997). Countering bullying will be better achieved if staff attitudes towards a more caring, proactive environment, are changed first (Jenner & Gravenstede, 1998) and this will facilitate attitude change within the remainder of the school community. To assist in attitude change, the new school culture needs to be publicised through posters, articles in the newsletter and students speaking at assemblies.
In my experience, the anti-bullying education still does not convince bystanders to take any action, even to anonymously report incidents. Education has not changed the actuality that students still bully and bystanders still allow it to happen. Other factors, such as the influence of the peer group, where belittlement and ostracism are perpetuated as justifiable tools for self-legitimation, are the meanings that matter most to students. When students are full of self-doubt because of the treatment they fear from students who bully, no amount of education is going to induce them to intervene in what they will consider to be such dangerous territory.
3.0 Introduction

In Chapters One and two, the literature that pertained to the research questions of this study was examined. Historical and cultural contexts were placed as central to the study and the actions of several players in bullying behaviours were discussed. It was established that it was not only the victim who is damaged by bullying, but that all people involved suffer. The burgeoning worldwide concern about bullying in schools was discussed, and the flow-on into the workplace, and how bullying has now reached the law courts as legal involvement intensifies. The implications of this for schools is that pressure is mounting for them to demonstrate proactive measures to counter bullying. The effectiveness of attempts to counter bullying so far in schools were discussed and the limitations to the wide body of research already undertaken (Rigby, 2002). This chapter discusses the methodology of the study, including a background of methodologies used in research to date.

Group and individual interviews contribute by far most of the data for the study. I discuss issues related to the relationship between myself as researcher and the participants, strengths as well as limitations of my role as the “Human Research Instrument”. The structural aspects of the study are described in this chapter, including the location of the research, the
participants and methods of data collection. Also outlined are the procedures for data collection, including participant recruitment, interview contexts and techniques, participation observation, field notes and reflective notes. In accordance with Deakin University Ethics Committee approval for this study, pseudonyms have been used for the names of the school and the participants.

Following a brief description of research methods commonly used in studies of bullying, the first section discusses the qualitative theoretical underpinnings of the study. The second section describes the school in which the research took place and the third section contains an outline of the methods used for data collection. The fourth section explains the analysis of the data and theory development. The fifth section discusses the trustworthiness of the findings and the final section finishes the chapter with the conclusion.

3.1 Research Methods Used in Studies of Bullying

Quantitative research methodologies have provided figures relating to the extent of bullying in schools (Olweus, 1992; Rigby & Slee, 1995; Rigby, 1996b; Bosworth et al, 1999) and observation methods have been used to measure peer intervention (Craig & Pepler, 1995, Hawkins et al, 2001). The use of surveys and questionnaires to establish the effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes has contributed to current knowledge by measuring quantitatively the success or failure of programmes.
Olweus (1991) employed quantitative research methods by using anonymous questionnaires to assess the results of an intervention which focused on raising awareness of bullying amongst the whole school community and creating a caring school climate that rejected aggressive behaviours. Rules against bullying were made clear and were constantly referred to, as were procedures for dealing with all people involved in bullying incidents. The results were that bullying was reduced by up to fifty percent in Norwegian schools following the programme.

In Australia, Petersen & Rigby (1999) also used questionnaires in their pre-test post-test research design to assess the effectiveness of an anti-bullying programme which trained peers to become involved in the strategies to counter bullying and to help victims of bullying. Although there was no change in the rate of overall bullying, Year 7 students reported being bullied less by their peers than before the programme was implemented. Older students reported an increase in bullying, but it is difficult to establish the reasons for the difference between the age groups. This is an example of why it is now important to employ postpositivist research designs to gain a greater understanding of bullying behaviours as seen from the unique viewpoint of students. While it is essential to understand the rates of response to anti-bullying programmes to give school authorities valuable insight into the statistics – whether a programme is seen to be reducing bullying, or as is the case sometimes, increasing it – researchers need to examine bullying and bystander behaviours in more detail to gain in-depth understandings of the way the students themselves experience them. We
now need to investigate the meanings students make of bullying behaviours in the first place, and how the programmes fit with their understandings of the behaviours.

School authorities have traditionally adopted an adult approach to solving the bullying problem in schools. Stringer (1996) claims that society needs to change its view of professionals as,

…professional as mechanic/technician to one of professional as creative investigator and problem solver. This new vision rejects the mindless application of standardized practices across all settings and contexts, and instead advocates the use of contextually relevant procedures formulated by inquiring and resourceful practitioners. (p.3).

To a certain extent, this applies in schools, where the expectation is that student support professionals will deal with bullying issues. The present study aims to challenge such approaches, as there is overwhelming evidence that they are not working (Stringer, 1996). Schools now need to discard taken-for-granted assumptions in favour of a more encompassing view of the bullying problem, so that the whole school population becomes part of the solution to bullying behaviours (Rigby, 2001a).

Patton (1990) describes the choice between qualitative and quantitative research approaches as a trade-off between breadth and depth inquiry. The choice of qualitative research for this study is because it seeks to uncover underlying meanings to behaviours surrounding bullying and uncover why students respond the way they do. It asks, then, are the current programmes psychologically reaching the students? That bullying has actually increased
following the implementation of some programmes (Rigby, 2002) suggests that their design may have been based on oversimplified, adult assumptions. In recent years, however, there have been a few research projects that have chosen grounded theories to gain deeper understandings of the complexities of bullying behaviours (Janson, 2000; Cross et al, 2003b). The choice of research design for this study has been influenced by the aim of gaining in-depth information, to provide expanded knowledge through deeper understandings of the students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviours.

Without such in depth knowledge of the complexities surrounding these issues, schools may make assumptions regarding bullying behaviours that result in ineffective strategies to counter them. The findings from this study are intended to enable schools to develop a grounded, best-practice model of organisational and individual strategies for addressing bullying behaviours.

3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

The methods chosen for this study have been determined by the nature of the research questions. Since the study seeks to explore in depth, Year 8 students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviour, the research falls into the broad definition of qualitative research. Quantitative methods are restricted to statistical analysis, and, as mentioned in Chapter Two, many quantitative studies on bullying behaviours have already been conducted. While these studies have been invaluable in exposing the extent of bullying and some of the reasons for it, and although these approaches
are not mutually exclusive, very few quantitative studies have been equipped to investigate these issues in an in-depth, interpretive way.

Denzin & Lincoln (2000a) note that qualitative research differs from quantitative methods in that it includes a variety of representations involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach. Ontology, say Denzin and Lincoln, is the overarching paradigm or world view, which frames our way of understanding the ‘reality’ of meaning construction. It is a set of ideas which form the framework upon which to build theory. The postpositive or interpretivist ontology is that reality is socially constructed, rather than immutable information. Certain assumptions about epistemology and consequently, strategies and methods are discussed below. The construct of questions in the research and the specific ways that they are presented make up the epistemology, and finally, the methodology and data analysis are formed from the examination of the data and the conclusions drawn from them.

Within the qualitative description, this study, mainly on a small group of Year 8 students lends itself to a micro-sociological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). In the research study, the number of participants is not large to validate a claim of generalisability. Postpositivist research methods are focused on in-depth information, and therefore, my findings may not necessarily be generally extrapolated. The study’s main participants are a small group of students, and it seeks to answer questions about their
psychological and emotional experience of bullying and bystander behaviours.

The value of the in-depth information is that it attempts to reveal what students actually feel and experience, enabling future anti-bullying programmes to approach the bullying problem based on what they say, rather than what adults think. They are the ones who are the experts on their culture, so it makes sense to allow them to speak freely about the knowledge they have about it (Stringer, 1996). Blaikie, (1993) agrees, describing interpretivism as understandings of everyday life, and adds that this goes further than just “establishing the truth”, to opening up possibilities. Discussion on the trustworthiness of the findings, the theory and methods employed for this study are described throughout this chapter.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) note that researchers working from the feminist, action, constructionist, action, cultural studies, queer and critical race theories are affiliated by the desire to investigate the perspectives of people who have been oppressed by various forces in their environment. The perspectives, and the theoretical approaches associated with them, as in this study, are necessarily fluid and always intuitively shifting as people’s situations change. The interpretive perspective is particularly applicable to this study, because, as Schwandt (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) notes, it is concerned with the meanings people attach to their actions. Also relevant to this study, which searches for the meanings students attach to bullying and bystanders behaviours, is the social constructivist perspective
on research methods because it can produce a large quantity of detailed information about a small group of participants, revealing the complexity of meaning the participants attribute to a psycho-social phenomenon, (Patton, 1990).

Informing the study also, is a hermeneutic approach, which asks: “What are the conditions under which a human act took place or a product was produced that makes it possible to interpret its meanings?” (Patton, 1990, p. 84). Hermeneutics and interpretivism, known as the Verstehen tradition, were developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Germany by Wilhelm Dilthey (Patton, 1990). They are studies of interpretive understanding of events, with an emphasis on context, showing how existing conventional ways of thinking can be reviewed according to new understandings. By studying the context of behaviours, a deeper level of understanding can be better achieved if familiar patterns of behaviour can be defamiliarised to make them clearer (Bogdewic, 1999 in Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). In this study, where bullying and bystanders’ behaviours are studied in the context of the school, contextuality will be central to the explanations of these events given by the students.

Patton (1990) cites Kneller (1984) as proposing four principles to hermeneutic inquiry. These principles are pertinent to this study, with particular emphasis on the researcher’s role. Firstly, all learning, particularly understanding human behaviour, is similar to interpreting a text. Secondly,
all interpretation carries with it a tradition. Thirdly, interpretation requires
the researcher to be open to the information received and to question it.
Lastly, interpretation must take into account the historical and social context
of the researcher (Patton, 1990). Clearly, researchers need to be conscious
of the impact certain factors will have on the way they approach their
research. They need to identify their affiliations and be self-reflexive, be
aware that history and culture influence interpretation and be mindful of
their own “unexamined assumptions” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, in

Supporting this view, Schwandt (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b),
outlines four ways of defining interpretive understanding, or *Verstehen*.
Firstly, to know the meaning of another’s behaviour, it is necessary to
understand their intention, (though the ability to do this accurately is
debatable). The researcher cannot claim to be an insider, but can work
alongside the participant closely if aware of the need to discard their own
previous historical knowledge to understand the intentions of the other
person. Whilst this is a useful concept for an interpretivist approach, caution
needs to be exercised because it is possible only to identify with the other
person and *assume* knowledge of their motive - to gain “empathic
192).

The second explanation of interpretive understanding is the reconstruction
of the meanings of actions and speech, according to the context in which
they are performed. This explanation examines how we make sense of our everyday world. The third explanation of the interpretivist approach involves the many ways language is used, and the meanings that people extract from language, again, within the context and culture. These first three definitions emphasise that although meanings are subjective, they can be understood objectively. When the researcher reconstructs the action, the meaning must be the original intention of the actor.

The fourth representation emerges from a philosophical stance, which rejects the notion that hermeneutics is rules-based, but claims that understanding itself is the interpretation. Schwandt notes that it is impossible to disregard our traditions because they are invisibly shaping our thinking, but rather researchers should be aware of this and should change only those prejudices which will interfere with their ability to understand others.

One of the more specific perspectives within the interpretative approach is social constructivism. Woods (1993) cautions that, in a social constructivist method, researchers carry their personal biography with them into the research, as well as the meanings they make of the information according to their gender, age, class, race, culture and ethnicity. However, Woods notes that if the researcher is reflectively aware of their own biases, close observation and sensitive interviewing will enable a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ social constructions. These considerations are brought to this study and for this reason, I was mindful of my own
perspectives and disclosed these openly to the participants, so that we were both aware that they may influence the data. I was cognisant of my own views of the ‘others’ being studied, and the necessity of minimising the impact of my own life experiences on the research.

Strategies employed to address these issues include open reporting of my role as researcher, with disclosure of my philosophical stance with regard to the research (after Janesick, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Also, thorough examination of personal biases throughout the entire research process was necessary. These are explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Schwandt (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) notes that according to social constructivism, we do not acquire knowledge so much as construct it, and we constantly rework these constructions as new experiences occur. Lincoln & Guba (1985) hold that social constructivism takes context into account and research is undertaken in the participants’ natural environment. The researcher, they say, collects the data because they can understand and evaluate the meaning of participants’ interactions. Charmaz, (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) maintains that, since theory grounded in the data is more likely to be responsive to the participants’ natural environment, it should emerge from the data rather than from established theory. The strength of human interaction is such that verbal and nonverbal responses can be interpreted, whereas a non-human instrument might miss such
opportunities. The primary research instrument is a “Human Instrument” in this study, and therefore responses are expected to be intuitive.

Lincoln & Guba (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) add that values permeate the entire research process - even the choice of research material and process. Lincoln and Guba explain constructivism as hermeneutic inquiry into local and specific constructed realities and maintain that basic issues should be expanded to include the concept of axiology, since it concerns the role of human spirituality in inquiry. The micro-sociological interpretivist approach to research also cautions the researcher to be aware of several assumptions relating to people’s everyday behaviours (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). Blackledge & Hunt emphasise the importance of personal autonomy and how the meaning of behaviour is negotiated within people’s interactions, how these meanings are negotiated with other people and are therefore not static, but change over time.

Similarly, participant behaviours in the presence of the researcher are likely to change. For this reason, my positioning in this study is identified and reveals the constructedness of the researcher/researched relationship. With the aim of decentring my position as a “detached” researcher, my approach has been a self-conscious and continuously self-reflexive stance. This approach underpins the study’s methodological belief that researcher neutrality is not obtainable, but should not be viewed as an obstacle (Minichiello et al, 1995). It is possible, however, to remain objective and yet still understand other people’s perspectives without actually acquiring the
same emotions, beliefs and values (Schutz, 1971; Schwandt, 2000 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Whilst no stranger to any of the participants in this study, I still acknowledge that my position as college psychologist, adult, female and possibly other personal characteristics are implicated in shaping the data. There is an inevitable asymmetry of researcher/researched relationships – adult/child, psychologist/student and, in some cases, female/male. It was important therefore to establish trust with the participants. This was achieved through familiarity, acquired from my fulltime presence at the school, and positioning myself as an ‘alongsider’, rather than an ‘outsider’. I discuss this in more detail in the following pages.

Attempts to reconcile these implications were also made through triangulation. In order to capture a mosaic of students’ perspectives, to secure in-depth understandings of bullying and bystander behaviours encompassing their school and developmental experiences, triangulation was necessary, to verify and compare information (after Marlow, 2001). Multiple data sources were employed, these being group and individual interviews, the input of the focus group of teachers, observation of students in the school and reflective notes.

The micro-sociological interpretivist approach pertains to this study because it investigates the meanings that the students attach to others’ behaviour, and how the actions of the individuals within the school community create the culture within the school that accepts bullying behaviour. In order to understand the meaning of everyday activity, students, whose activities
involve others, need to understand the meanings that other people attribute to their own behaviour and that of others. Individuals act towards events according to the meaning they attach to it, and towards people, based on their previous knowledge about them (Blumer, 1962). Therefore, the historical context of the research influences subjective perceptions (Patton, 1990). Our social behaviour develops out of the past, forming our cultures, and our individual perspectives need to be viewed through our historical background. For this reason, this study includes the histories of participants in its investigations. The research questions ask:

1. Within a Year 8, co-educational group, how is bullying behaviour supported and maintained?

2. How do Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour?

3. What are the psychological barriers to bystander intervention?

Investigation of these questions involved attempting to discover the meanings the participants attached to bullying and bystander behaviours. Taking the participants’ school life histories into account, the students were interviewed as a group about their views regarding bullying, bystander behaviour and other aspects of bullying with which they may have had connections. These aspects were also included in the individual, in-depth interviews, with the aim of achieving more in-depth information. They were also asked what they thought might be done to reduce bullying, particularly in regards to the role of the bystanders. Two meetings with a focus group of staff sought to gather similar information from an adult’s
perspective. With these factors considered, the next section describes the research settings for the collection of the data.

3.3 The Research Setting

This section is divided into two parts. Firstly, the school (using a pseudonym) within which the research was located is described and the reasons given for its selection. Secondly, the participants and sampling processes used in the study are outlined.

3.3.1 The School

Mayne Catholic College is a co-educational, Catholic High School, of about eight hundred students, situated in a predominantly working to middle class suburb in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia. The familial, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the students are diverse, with twenty-nine different ethnic backgrounds being represented among the student body. The school has had an anti-bullying policy in place since 1999 and various programmes were being implemented during the time of the research. I chose the school as a convenient research setting because I am the College psychologist, which gives me a position of trust and access to the students. During the time the participants contributed their perspectives, participant observation was also being conducted (Whyte, 1991). Notes were taken, data was analysed and ideas were formed. Following Crane & Richardson (2000), propositions emerged, were modified and planning for action occurred. The school thus became both the research setting and the
site for change (after Goff, 1995). Being positioned in a psychologist role by
the students and staff who participated in the study posed minimal
problems, because it is a normal part of my job to deal with bullying and to
work towards its reduction.

3.3.2 The Participants

Denzin & Lincoln (2000a) note that theoretical or purposive sampling,
rather than random sampling is applicable for postpositivist, constructionist
and critical theory qualitative research. Purposive sampling is preferred,
they say, because it is more likely to produce the emergence of a theory that
reflects the local environment. Denzin & Lincoln note that each person will
reflect some of the culture, or situation, in which they exist. Patton (1980)
also supports the notion that it is preferable to target only the participants
who are considered to have experience in the research topic. It is
acknowledged that nonprobability sampling will limit the generalisability of
the findings, but probability sampling may not yield the information-rich
cases that this study is designed for. For these reasons, purposive sampling
methods were employed for this study, and participants who were most
likely to have experience of the behaviours being studied were chosen. The
participants who volunteered were eighteen Year 8 students, eleven girls
and seven boys, and a focus group of teachers, two male and two female.
The participants are described in the next two sections.
3.3.3 The Year 8 Students

Selection of students to be interviewed was made on the basis of age, all of them being Year 8 students. One criterion that students should be in Year 8 was because, as mentioned in Chapter One, early adolescence is the stage of development when most bullying occurs. Another criterion was that it was important to include a representation of both genders. Although more girls than boys volunteered, there were enough boys to contribute a male perspective.

With the above considerations in mind, I explained the purposes of the study to the whole Year 8 group. Subsequently, a letter was sent, by myself and the college Principal, to the parents and their Year 8 child seeking permission for their child to participate in the study (see appendices A, B and D, respectively). In the letter, students and parents were advised of the interview process, the likely time required and any inconvenience envisaged. Issues of anonymity were addressed, with assurances to maintain confidentiality, measures to ensure this were explained and the aims of the study were outlined. Invitations to discuss the study with the researcher, if they chose, were also given. Parent consent was necessary, as well as the student’s consent.

The majority of students had received some education about bullying in their primary schools, ranging from three or four isolated sessions, to full-year, ongoing, whole school activity, throughout the primary years.
3.3.4 Focus Group of Staff

The focus group of staff consisted of four people, again employing the purposive sampling method. At the time of conducting this part of the study, I had been a member of staff at the school for two and a half years and consequently knew particular staff members who had a keen interest in countering bullying. I invited seven people to participate, and four accepted. A letter outlining the purpose of the study and expected commitments was given to each person (see Appendix C). The group consisted of two males and two females, each of whom signed a consent form to participate in the study.

Two of the group members were in management positions at the school. Harry, in his early forties, was the deputy principal, responsible for pastoral care. Greta, also in her early forties, had seventeen years’ experience as a teacher and had just become a House Co-ordinator at the beginning of this year. The other two teachers were in their mid-twenties. Greg was in his second year of teaching and had been working in other fields before doing his teaching degree, and was midway through his master’s degree on gendered issues. Felicity was a young, female teacher, who had been teaching for four years and had keen interests in pastoral care and issues of equity.

3.4 Data Collection - Group Interviews

Interviews present the opportunity for human interaction as a means to a deeper understanding of others’ perspectives and meanings (Minichiello et
Human interaction involves language, and the language used by participants in this study was seen as conveying their meanings. Therefore, interviews with the students were the greatest source of data for this study. This section describes the group interviews.

Interviewing is a preferred method for collecting qualitative data because it discloses the richness of the subject’s experience. Group interviews are applicable when anonymity is not important, the research seeks in-depth information and a high response rate (Marlow, 2001). Marlow notes that individuals will respond differently within the group, but that this reactive effect is not necessarily a problem because there is recognition of exploring a topic together in a researcher/respondent partnership.

Two group interviews were conducted before the individual interviews because this offered a suitable, non-confronting interview context for discussing sensitive issues around bullying behaviours. The group interviews took place in a natural setting, in the chapel, with which the students are well familiar, having attended many religious and non-religious functions there. The arranged time was during House time, which normally occurs every two weeks. It could be argued that such a meeting is an artificial construction, but school students at this age are continually attending such ‘artificial’ gatherings. Examples of this are House time, House paraliturgies, school excursions, assemblies and Special Programme. As the college psychologist it was appropriate that I discuss issues of bullying with the Year 8 students in this context.
Information from the group interview was recorded in notes. I used personal shorthand, to ensure as much of the interview as possible was recorded, without interrupting the flow of interaction between the group and myself. The criticism of note taking is that it could restrict communication between researcher and respondent (Minichiello et al, 1995). However, in these interviews, it was a particularly effective method of recording information, as I made notations regarding body language, hesitations and reactive responses by others in the group. Additionally, the researcher has to listen more carefully when note-taking than when recording on tape (Minichiello et al, 1995) which allows information to be especially representative of the interview. To ensure that information was recorded as accurately as possible, I concentrated on key words and ideas at the time of the interview and then wrote field notes immediately afterwards, so that information was not forgotten (after Minichiello et al, 1995). This method of recording information is familiar to me in my role as college psychologist, where I routinely take notes, using personal shorthand, as people are talking. Nevertheless, these methods used for recording data became more streamlined during the research, as I became more practiced at getting it recorded accurately.

The students’ behaviour in the group interview setting was determined by the atmosphere created by the adults – the teacher aide and myself. The atmosphere was relaxed and the students responded well to being in a situation without any teachers present. The teacher aide was the only other
adult present, whose presence was needed to help a student with an intellectual disability to understand the questions, to encourage him to respond and to speak for him. The interview process was clarified to the students, and the fact that there was going to be another group interview was explained at the beginning of the first interview.

Mindful of the social constructivist belief that the meanings of both questions and answers need to be negotiated by the interviewer and the interviewee (Fontana and Frey, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b), I ensured that the students understood the questions in the way that was intended. Strategies used to clarify understandings included paraphrasing, giving realistic examples where possible, and checking with them that they understood what I was asking. Similarly, it was essential that I understood the students’ answers in the way that they intended. It was important that my assumptions about the students were acknowledged, and their assumptions about me were taken into account. To ensure the best understanding possible, I paraphrased their comments, asked for clarification and checked with them that my interpretations were what they intended. The students were at ease in the company of each other and responded more enthusiastically as the first interview progressed. The second interview was even more productive as they were responding eagerly right from the start.

Establishing rapport with the group was facilitated by the students’ familiarity with me in my role as school psychologist. Even if they had not
talked to me on an individual basis before, I am not a stranger, as they see me every day and had been in groups that I had addressed. However, due to inequities associated with authority, adulthood and the school rules, possible implications exist for the researcher and participant relationship. Processes and strategies I employed in consideration of these issues included acknowledgment of the researcher/respondent relationship. I presented myself as an inquirer, seeking to discover the students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviour. Additionally, I emphasised that there were no “wrong” answers, but that, since it was difficult for adults to know what was happening in schools regarding bullying and bystander behaviours, I was seeking information from them that they had access to, and adults probably did not.

The group interviews took place twice during Semester 1, 2003, for approximately one hour each time. The second interview was scheduled two weeks after the first, so that students could elaborate on their first comments, or bring in additional information. The same students were then interviewed as individuals, with the invitation to return at any time with additional information if they thought of it.

Group and individual interviews formed the greatest part of the data gathering for this study. Group interviews can be structured, semi or unstructured. Although it is systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously, it does not replace individual interviewing, but provides another level of data gathering or perspective on the research problem.
Although loosely structured, some questions were prepared as an interview guide, to ask the group (Minichiello et al, 1995; Stringer, 1996). These questions are outlined below.

1. Can you tell me who is involved when bullying incidents occur?
2. What types of groups do you think have the most influence on bullying incidents?
3. Do you see any problems with bullying behaviour? What do you see as a problem?
4. What problems do other people in the school see?
5. What problems do you think the teachers see?
6. If you were the Principal and you had to think of ways to stop bullying, what do you think you would do?

Additionally, anticipating a degree of shyness in students of this age, certain prompts were prepared to encourage participation. For example, I used hypothetical instances of bullying, starting with least threatening examples to put them in the picture.

3.5 Data Collection - Individual Interviews

The advantage of in-depth, individual interviews, according to Crabtree and Miller (1999) is that researchers can position themselves in social environments and listen to the conversations that spontaneously arise, and join in if appropriate. From this, interview guide questions can be intuitively inserted. Crabtree and Miller make the point that the depth interview is a powerful qualitative research tool when there is a narrow focus of inquiry,
when the participants are comfortable about being interviewed, and the aim of the research is to generate themes.

Following from Crabtree and Miller’s approach, the strategies adopted for in-depth interviewing were founded on the concept of negotiated meanings between researcher and respondent (Fontana and Frey 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b), thus forming a partnership to get the information the way it was intended (Blumer, 1969). The interview approach attempted to permit the students to speak for themselves, with as little input from the researcher as possible (after Stringer, 1996). Stringer stresses the importance of this strategy by giving the example of the inappropriateness of having a male lead the National Organization for Women. In a school, the same principle applies, where adults cannot speak for students. In these interviews, then, it was assumed that non-victims cannot speak for victims, non-bullies for bullies and non-bystanders for bystanders. Skills required to encourage participants to speak for themselves were active listening, reacting, interpreting, maintaining focus on the topic, clarifying any ambiguities, filling gaps, checking for accurate communication by re-working and feeding back, thus forming a partnership with the student in getting the information the way it was intended both ways (Blumer, 1969). In order to avoid inhibiting responses and to allow the participant the freedom to respond and to express their views autonomously, no set questions were asked. The strategy, *funnelling*, was used during the interviews, where the questions are asked in general terms and are designed to guide the
participant towards the issues and to encourage them to engage in conversation (Minichiello, 1995).

Acknowledging that methods can change during the research, Crabtree and Miller (1999) maintain that hierarchical assumptions are made about the “rules” of interviewing, such as who asks the questions. For example, it was my decision that interviews took place in my office. The students knew me by now as the college psychologist, had seen me in a group setting several times and had attended two group interviews, so re-establishing rapport following the group interviews was relatively easy. Nevertheless, face-to-face interviews are personal and intimate, and I was particularly sensitive to the participants’ possible discomfort of being in a one-to-one situation with the researcher. The strength of the human research instrument is that methods can be responsive to varying situations and I was also acutely aware of my need to maintain good communication skills, such as active listening, non-verbal and verbal encouragement to continue and expand on their statements.

In spite of the above skills, I remained aware that the questions were likely to carry my own views, assumptions, values and beliefs. To minimise researcher interference as much as possible, “grand tour”, or main questions were asked first. These questions are often vague, and are designed to produce answers that ultimately relate to the theoretical literature and yet are open to new meanings being made (Marlow, 2001). Unstructured interviews can provide a greater depth of information than structured interviews,
(Fontana & Frey, 2000, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000b), so the main questions were open and easily understood, focusing on students’ feelings about bullying and bystander behaviours and what meanings they attached of them.

Dichotomous questions tend to seek agreement, which limits the depth of answers, therefore, questions in these interviews were presuppositional, encouraging more expansive answers. Typically, these questions, were, “Tell me about your experiences of bullying behaviours at school?” Or, “What usually happens when other students see someone being bullied?” More specific, yet still open, questions were, “How would you describe the incident that happened yesterday?” To gain more in-depth information, it was necessary to guide some students somewhat, with probes that avoided, as much as possible, leading the respondent, such as, “Can you tell me more about what the bystanders did during the incident”, “Why do you think they responded that way?”

A crucial element in this investigation is the gap that exists between students’ emotions and logic. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, it is the students’ emotional states that determine their behaviour as bystanders, not their knowledge about what to do in bullying situations. When emotions and logic are in conflict, the feeling tends to override the knowing. Therefore, it was important to explore the participants’ emotions around bullying and bystander behaviours. To explore feelings, open questions were likely to be, “How did you feel when you saw that happening?” “See if
you can tell me what was going on inside you when you saw/heard the bullying”. To encourage a narrative about the participant’s experiences with bullying, prompts were similar to “I’d like you to tell me as if you’re telling me a story, like, ‘I was sitting in class and…””. Investigating the participant’s actions, questions were asked such as, “What did you do?”, “What would you have liked to happen at the time?” (after Marlow, 2001).

The least possible reliance on questions, however, facilitated open communication, my aim being to leave minimal footprints on the interview. To achieve this, it was necessary to be patient, cautious and reflective, encouraging and respectful, and willing to acknowledge the student’s point of view (Patton, 1990). Importantly, I needed to remain flexible to accommodate unexpected responses and to encourage participants to speak about their meanings. Patton (1990) maintains that note taking needs to be thorough and comprehensive, citing actual quotations. At times, I asked the participant to stop while I wrote down particularly important, perhaps insightful information.

It is important that a relationship of trust be developed between the researcher and the researched. Burgess (1989) cautions that conducting research in institutions can pose a problem because the participants might be engaged in behaviour that breaks the rules, which was the case in some of the interviews. For example, some participants admitted to bullying other students. In some cases, when participants related stories about bullying, breaking the “No swearing in front of adults” rule, they told their stories
including the obscene language that had been used during the bullying incident they were describing. From an interpretive perspective, human actions have reasons, and the intentions underlying these actions could have acted as an inhibitor. Actions occur within a structure of social rules which has meaning for both actor and observer, and language is the conveyer of the meanings (Connole et al, 1995). Therefore, I resolved to adopt a non-judgmental, non-authoritarian and confidential approach when students revealed information that was likely to reveal that they had broken school or social “rules” regarding their own or others’ behaviour.

Factors in participants’ life history have an influence on how they think in the present, so interviews started with getting their school life history, because it is not possible to extract their perspectives as a “slice” of time at this moment (Minichiello et al, 1995). Students were asked to comment on previous experiences of bullying and bystander behaviours and give reasons for thinking this way. Later in the interview, to avoid the possibility of stifling the students’ freedom of expression, fewer questions were asked and they were encouraged to speak in an open way. Good rapport is important, and a positive relationship also (Patton, 1990) to allow free expression of viewpoints and feelings. A conversational style emerged, allowing information to flow unencumbered by feelings of restraint because of too many questions, or because of not feeling relaxed during the interview.

In forming the questions for the interview, it was essential that unplanned questions could be asked if necessary. Therefore, limits were not set by
structured questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), except some that were considered essential for information required, and were prepared as a guide for the researcher. The following interview guide was used to help prepare for the interview (after Minichiello et al, 1995) and ensure that all the major issues were covered, without making the interview inflexible.

The Interview Guide

1. History
   - Have you ever had any experiences of bullying at school? (Prompts: Been bullied yourself? Seen anyone else bullied? Had friends who were bullied? Heard about bullying?)
   - What did other people do?
   - What did you do?
   - Can you tell me why you did that?

2. The Present
   - Have you had any experiences of bullying behaviour at this school?
   - Can you describe your experience(s)?
   - Why do you think bullying happens?
   - Did anyone do anything to help?
   - Why do you think they/you did that?
   - What was going on in your mind at the time?

3. The Bystander
   - What do bystanders normally do?
   - In your opinion, why do you think they do that?
- Why do they usually not take action (even anonymous reporting) against bullying?
- What difference do you think it would make if they took action?
- How do you think bully/victim/bystanders would feel if this happened?

4. The School
- Do you think the school is effective in countering bullying?
- What is the school doing that is/is not effective?

5. The Remedy
- If you were in charge of the school and had to develop an anti-bullying programme, what would you do?
- Do you think this is what we should be doing now?
- Who can help the most to counter bullying?

Notes were made of non-verbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, shuffling in the seat, signs of agitation, such as squirming, nervous tapping of feet; tone of voice that denoted excitement or sadness (after Marlow, 2001).

The interview questions were developed from the research questions, repeated below, which ask,

1. Within a Year 8, co-educational group, how is bullying behaviour supported and maintained?
2. How do Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour?
3. What are the psychological barriers to bystander intervention?

The students’ perspectives are the meanings they attribute to their experiences of bullying and bystander behaviour. The meanings that students attach to their experiences can be considered in terms of their own reasons for thinking and acting the way they do. The interview questions were framed to incorporate many facets of bullying behaviours, the behaviour of bullies, bystanders, victims, the feelings experienced by all players, and finally, what they thought could be done to encourage bystander intervention.

3.6 Data Collection - Focus group of teachers

A focus group of interested teachers provided an exploration of the adults’ perceptions and interpretations of bullying and bystander behaviour. The benefit of using a focus group is that the participants can interact, often providing more information than individual interviews. Also, the role of the researcher is often diminished, allowing the participants’ real opinions to emerge (Madriz, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Madriz cautions that focus groups have the disadvantage of meeting in an atypical setting, and that the presence of the researcher may change the responses of the participants. However, in this study, teachers were used to the meeting room, were used to me attending the same meetings as them and were committed to working towards countering bullying.
Interviewing skills are required in a group meeting to work with the group dynamics to avoid the possibility of “groupthink” (Fontana & Frey 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). This is a phenomenon where there may be a dominant person or persons within the group who may interfere with the other members’ freedom to express opinions. Nevertheless, Fontana & Frey maintain that the focus group can provide a stimulating environment, helping people to recall events and build on each other’s contributions. Whilst the results of a focus group meeting are not generalisable, as part of a multi-method, ethnographic inquiry, these meetings allowed a different, adult perspective to be contributed to the interviews with students.

Two meetings were held during first Term, each of approximately one and a half hours’ duration. There was good compatibility of the participants because they were all interested teachers who volunteered to participate in the study, due to their shared concern about the bullying culture in the school. Notes were taken by myself in informal shorthand, with comments on the nature of the discussions taking place. Field notes were added to these immediately after both meetings.

The meetings generated rich and diverse views and opinions from the participants. Both professional and personal experiences of bullying and bystander behaviours were discussed, as well as discussions, interpretations and understandings of bullying and bystander behaviours that were school-based. Thoughts, ideas and insights into these behaviours arose, and the meanings adults make of these was explored.
3.7 Data Collection - Participant Observation

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000a), two basic beliefs have led researchers to seek a method allowing them to record their own observations accurately while still uncovering the meanings their subjects bring to their life experiences. The first belief is that competent observers can report objectively and precisely on their own observations of the social world, even others’ experiences. The second belief is that the respondent has the ability to report on his or her own experiences. The respondents for this method give subjective meanings of events. However, Denzin & Lincoln hold that no single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Therefore, a wide range of interpretive methods is needed for qualitative research, to gain in-depth understandings of people’s experiences.

Observations of Year 8 students in the relatively unrestricted environment of the schoolyard corroborated and strengthened the accuracy and trustworthiness of the group and individual interviews. Students’ behaviour is natural within this setting, and more likely to provide data about natural behaviours. One of the major criticisms of participant observation methods of research is that people’s behaviour may change if they know they are being observed (Patton, 1990). However, in a schoolyard setting, students expect to be observed by the staff on duty. Although it is not my role to perform recess and lunchtime duty, students at the school are used to seeing me in the schoolyard at lunchtimes, and interacting with various students of all ages as well as the teachers on duty. Therefore my presence at these
times was not unusual, though I attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible. The advantage of this type of observation was that I could witness events in their everyday context, as they actually happened. Also, I could record minute actions of students, the sequence of behaviours and connections between various actions that could add meaning to bullying and bystander behaviours. They probably would not have described these subtleties in an interview.

Not wishing to draw attention to myself, I did not take writing material with me in the schoolyard, but recorded field notes as soon as I returned to my office, noting structural information such as the date, location, time of day, age and gender of students. In particular, the actions of the bystanders were recorded when aggressive exchanges occurred between students, especially in relation to power issues and group dynamics. Guba and Lincoln (1989, cited by Stringer, 1996), say:

> The major task of the constructivist investigator is to tease out the constructions that various actors in a setting hold and, so far as possible, to bring them into conjunction – a joining – with one another and with whatever other information can be brought to bear on the issues involved. (p.142).

To this end, detailed descriptions of aggressive behaviours were noted, even those that the students construct as “friendly”, and “just mucking around”, such as insulting, swearing, pushing, punching and shoving. Observed and noted also were the collective behaviour of bystanders, and where groups defined themselves from some individuals and other groups.
The assumptions students make are taken for granted in the school setting, for example, they defend their bullying behaviour, saying it was just a joke. Or they take it for granted that seeking help for victims is “dobbing”, therefore a bad thing. These assumptions stem from the school’s culture, so participant observation affords another perspective on bullying and bystander behaviours, rather than just relying on the students’ accounts. Differences between real and verbal behaviour can be compared, as what the students say in interviews might not be a true reflection of their actual behaviour.

Blaikie (1993) warns, however, that the researcher also inhabits a culture and belongs to groups which provide him or her with ontological assumptions therefore, observers are active agents, not passive receptacles. The experience, knowledge, expectations and language an observer brings to research will influence what is observed (Blaikie, 1993). Aware that assumptions made by researchers can create barriers to the truth, I conducted observations with Stringer’s (1996) words in mind, of his own action research,

...any hypothesis or explanation that I formulated at a distance from those worlds of meanings could bear little meaningful relationship to the actions and activities of the people who inhabited them; and that any interpretation of their behavior that failed to take into account the ways in which participants defined and described their situations must necessarily fail as an explanatory system. (p.8)

As emphasised for interviewing, I was mindful of the importance of the researcher being reflective when considering the themes that emerge from the data. Preconceptions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and my own
assumptions regarding bullying and bystander behaviours needed to be
examined to ensure that my interpretations did not interfere with the
students’ meanings of their behaviours. Copious reflective notes were
written, which were invaluable later for analysis.

3.8 Case Studies

For case study research, it is beneficial to select cases that maximise what
can be learned, need not necessarily be typical (Stake, 1995) but ask which
ones will help understanding of bystander behaviour the best? Stake
maintains that history and context are the foundation of each case. The
sampling method was purposeful, to provide cases that would produce the
most in-depth information (Patton, 1990). In my position as school
psychologist, I was aware of bullying situations from which I could readily
select exemplary cases (after Yin, 2003). The intention of using case studies
was that by examining specific cases of bullying and bystander behaviour in
detail, useful information may be generated. Patton (1990) claims that by
examining the depth of the participant’s experience, a more holistic
description is available, where people are represented in their own terms. To
this end, case information was recorded from the observational notes over
time, the interview, the records and others’ perceptions about the case.

3.9 Reflective Journal

A reflective journal was kept during the data gathering period of the first
three terms of 2003. My own thoughts, perspectives and explanations for
behaviours were recorded several times a week. This journal served the
purpose of self-reflection on areas such as my position on the material written in the field notes. Notes were recorded after each group and individual interview, including students’ reactions to being interviewed. I also recorded incidental conversations I had had with teachers and other students about bullying and bystander behaviour. This helped me to get a flavour of the adult understandings of these behaviours within the school. Whilst the journal was unashamedly biased, it corroborated and embellished the data from the other sources of data and provided me with a deeper understanding of the emotional side of research processes.

3.10 Coding the data

Data was recorded using codes. The codes used to represent the data were organised according to the date, time, gender of students, type of interview and area of the school. For example, (G1, 19/5/03) indicates that this was in the first group interview, on the 19/5/03, (F.G.2, 25/5/03) means that this data pertains to the focus group of teachers’ second meeting on 25/5/03. Observations and reflective notes were recorded in a similar way (O. oval 10/6/03) shows an observation entry, the place of the observation and date, and (r.n. 15/3/03) denotes a reflective notes entry and date.

3.11 Analysis of Data

All data was recorded using hand-written notes, much of it in my own method of shorthand. These notes were then transcribed onto a word processor and the documents were imported into QSR N6 software package
for qualitative analysis. References to bullying, bystanders, victims and associated contextual data were identified. These were sorted into categories and analysed according to the language used to describe bullies, victims and bystanders and their various behaviours. Following the coding by QSR N6, the analysis searched for meanings invoked by bullying behaviours.

3.11.1 Analysis of Focus Group Data

Analysis of the discussions with the focus group of teachers included teachers’ perspectives of bullying within the school as well as data that either corroborated or rejected the information in the student interviews. Analysing this data, I was informed by the literature and professional development courses on bullying, and how students position themselves variously as actors in bullying incidents. What I wanted the data to tell me about these, was, what philosophies and attitudes held by these teachers underpin the discourses and behaviours around bullying? Do these philosophies and attitudes act to perpetuate or counter bullying in schools?

3.11.2 Analysing Data from Observation and Reflective Notes

The data collected from observation and reflective notes were analysed to identify parts of it that might enhance specific aspects of the research purpose. Descriptive observations and reflections explaining aspects relating to, but not immediately apparent in, the transcripts of the interviews, such as contextual data were included to add meaning to the interview data. My observations regarding body language and gesture, and verbal language used in bullying incidents were applicable in this regard.
3.11.3 Analysing Data from Interviews

The collective data were analysed and interpreted in terms of the cultural context and institutional dynamics. The participants’ self image is thus connected to their relationships with their peers and the wider school structure. Guiding my interpretation was an analysis of how bullying and bystander behaviours were supported and maintained within this culture.

The ‘grounded theory’ method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) has been shown to be consistent with social constructivist theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where theory emerges from the data, rather than existing theory being tested. No theory could describe the complexity of the students’ meanings of bullying and bystander behaviours, therefore the inductive procedure is more likely to reveal their perspectives. Another reason for using the ‘grounded’ theory method of data analysis is, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that the researcher and the participants needed to work in partnership to negotiate the meanings students attached to bullying and bystander behaviours.

Using the software QSR N6, the data were analysed variously by word coding, line-by-line coding, phrase and concept coding. This data was then broken down, compared, conceptualised and reassembled in categories pertaining to themes emerging from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the literature (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b).
Basic concepts were entered as unstructured, unsorted categories under Free Nodes. These became a series of abstract categories formed by examination of text, with inserted notes written alongside interview and field notes. Examples of categories were contextualising bullying and bystander behaviours in relation to the school culture, developing concepts about the role of the bystanders, examining evidence about why bystanders do not intervene and forming ideas about what could be done to counter bullying.

Following Charmaz (2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b) coding emerged and changed throughout the research, interacting with the data. Coding was recorded first in Free Nodes as ideas formed and unconnected concepts emerged. Later, nodes were organised hierarchically under tree nodes, called thus because they can have an unlimited number of branches, at various levels. For example, a tree node contained a “parent” called bystander, “children” called fear, and can’t be bothered, with these categories having their “children” (bystander’s “grandchildren”) called of being bullied themselves and I don’t know them respectively. The codes were organised into categories to reduce the data to major themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). According to Charmaz, codes start the development of theory, which then explains the data and finally defines the behaviours being studied. Open coding involves using examples from the data to form potential themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
The following is an example of simple, line by line coding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line by line coding</th>
<th>Interview statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying bullying</td>
<td>I saw this girl telling her friends to stay away from another girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining reason for bystander support</td>
<td>She was a really popular girl, and the others just all followed her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes bystander behaviour</td>
<td>The other girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim empathy – understanding confusion/emotional damage/acceptance</td>
<td>didn’t know why it had happened. She was really sad, but no-one spoke to her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural norm of siding with bully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The simple coding procedure translates selected information into a set of basic concepts, and for this reason, some of the data was selected according to its meaning, rather than in line-by-line form only.

Data from the first few interviews were provisionally analysed before proceeding to the next interviews, so as to define emerging concepts. Whilst gathering data, observations, questions and preliminary hypotheses were written and filed (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and these were used during the coding process using QSR N6 software.
In order to effectively conceptualise and categorise data, it was necessary to be constantly sensitive to the subtleties of meaning in the data (Glaser, 1978). Clarification of participants’ intended meanings was achieved through constant re-reading of the notes, the information taken during interviews and re-checking participants’ meaning with them, either at the time of the interview, or later. These strategies were employed to clarify any areas where there could have been a query over their intended meanings.

3.12 Results

Axial Coding

Axial coding makes connections between categories, grouping them around different conceptual axes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As concepts were formed, QSR N6 was used for axial coding to discern strategic or consequential relationships. The data was entered, according to its nominated code and then carefully reconsidered. Nodes were merged and intersected with other nodes to assist in finding potential relationships between categories.

Stating causal, strategic or consequential relationships included defining the problem of bystander non-intervention in relation to the purpose of reducing bullying. As a strategy for promoting bystander intervention this can only help bring about the development of the students’ capacity to take responsibility for reducing bullying in their environment. As a consequence, the students are more likely to adopt ownership of their social environment, develop and extend social responsibility as a school culture (Cooney, 1999).
Selective Coding

Basic categories were systematically related to other categories and to each other to form concepts and themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Whilst the complete methods of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) selective coding system were not used, its fundamental procedure was helpful in allowing themes to emerge from the data. The selective coding stage of data analysis identified a set of related propositions for Year 8 students, which corresponded with the key issues recognized in the Interview Guide. These propositions were then, in turn, further intersected with each other.

3.13 Trustworthiness of the Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that there are four basic questions that researchers need to ask before being able to claim that their research is trustworthy. Firstly, to establish the “truth” of the findings, do they seem true to the participants in the context of the research? The second question addresses the applicability of the research, asking are the findings applicable in different contexts? Thirdly, the consistency of the research is confirmed by asking, could the same results be achieved if the research was conducted again in the same manner? Finally, the neutrality of the researcher is scrutinised by asking, to what extent do the researcher’s perspectives or biases determine the findings?

Within the interpretivist paradigm, internal validity, which relates to Lincoln and Guba’s first question, asks how well the findings capture reality, but for this study, the term “credible” is more appropriate than “valid” (Guba, 1981,
cited by Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credible findings will be produced if the researcher presents multiple strategies that are credible to the participants and the reader (Minichiello et al., 1995). According to interpretative sociology, reality is not an objective phenomenon and reality is formed from the meanings or social constructions that both the participants and observers attach to their experiences (Blumer, 1969; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These have been thoroughly documented through various field notes throughout the study.

Consolidating the credibility of the findings can be achieved also by “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which is when the researcher immerses herself within the culture being studied for a long period of time. The data collection period was relatively extensive and intensive. Apart from working at the school full time, much of my daily routine is spent working with staff and students on issues to do with bullying and bystander behaviours. Additionally, I have spent a great deal of time with the Year 8 group, building rapport and exploring their individual histories in a number of other areas.

During the research, Year 8 students had two group interviews and another in-depth individual interview, with follow-up interviews with some of the students. These sessions enabled an atmosphere of trust to develop. Students were asked for their opinions and perceptions and it was explained that the information they gave could influence future anti-bullying programmes, that their participation was invaluable to not only this school, but perhaps to
other schools as well. Additionally, they were assured repeatedly that their contributions would be kept confidential and their identities protected. By the time the third interview occurred, I had had time to re-evaluate previous interpretations of the data compared to new data and to make adjustments as required. Being a familiar figure in the school enabled good rapport and trust to be established between myself and the participants. Also, the study’s credibility is improved by its use of corroborative research methods and multiple methods of data collection.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) second question, on the applicability of the research findings relates to the traditional notion of external validity, which asks if the study could be conducted in other contexts, or with other people (Kincheloe, 1991). As with internal validity, a better term for this study is a “thick description” of the data. (Geertz 1973, cited by Lincoln and Guba, 1985). “Thick description” is the base of detailed information about the study’s context necessary for the research to be transferable. “Thick description” leaves the reader to decide the applicability of interpretivist research, who determines if the research would apply in other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher needs to include enough description for the research to be judged by the reader to make a decision regarding making a transfer, based on this information (Patton, 1990).

This study’s interpretivist approach considers the perspectives of a particular group of people. In, particular, the in-depth perspectives of a small group of Year 8 students, and a small group of teachers were sought
within one school, therefore I do not attempt to make generalisable statements about the study.

The third question deals with the reliability of the study, which traditionally tells us if its findings would be repeated if conducted again in the same manner. Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite Guba (1981) as proposing the concept of “dependability” to replace “reliability”. However, this assumes there is a single, objective reality which can be observed, measured and known. This study’s interpretative position assumes that “reality” is a function of personal experiences and interpretations (Blumer 1969). In this study, student and staff perspectives and the meanings they make of bullying and bystander behaviours were explored. This involved different individual experiences and interpretations of reality, therefore, “reality”, in terms of this study, is a composite of many subjective realities (after Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The dependability of a study is associated with change and includes reliability and consistency (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In interpretive research, the researcher can change the research design and interpretations of data during the research as new information is gathered and new theory emerges. Dependability nevertheless implies that the actual findings can be depended on and are not likely to change without adequate explanation. To achieve this, a researcher needs to leave what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as an “audit trail”, which are records of information gathered during the research process. Requirements for this study’s “audit trail” were letters of
introduction of the study to the Catholic Education Office, Perth and the Principal of the school where the study was conducted. These letters also asked for permission to conduct the study. Letters to parents, students and staff explained the reasons for the study and requested consent, respectively, for their children and for them individually, to participate in the study.

In addition, Spradley (1979, cited by Kirk and Miller, 1986) maintains that four types of field notes are necessary, and they should be extensive, explicit and self-reflexive. This study has employed all four of Spradley’s recommended method of recording data, all of which were systematically stored. Firstly, there were handwritten and transcribed notes taken during the group and individual interviews, focus group and case study, all coded and filed. Secondly, notes were written immediately following observation and interview sessions, which expanded on the abbreviated notes already taken. Thirdly, the journal of reflective notes was maintained, which contained notes on problems encountered during the research, ideas, and various experiences pertaining to the research process. The last of Spradley’s recommendations is to recognise the ongoing, often changing nature of notes analysing the emerging theories on participants’ perspectives, bystander behaviour and theories to counter bullying.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the study’s research methodology, including data collection, representation and analysis procedures. The poststructural concerns with language, power and contextuality were explored in relation
to how these concerns inform the study’s conceptualisation of the students’ perspectives of bullying and bystander behaviours. The significance of the meanings they make of such behaviours was also described.

The implications of my positioning in shaping the research process and product were discussed. The inequities within the adult/child, staff member/student, researcher/researched relationships were acknowledged as well as the significance of understanding participants’ meanings. These issues were reconciled in the study’s approach, specifically to conduct the research self-consciously and reflectively.

This chapter has detailed the research process, data collection and analysis. The location of the research and the participants were described. Group and individual interviews, the focus group of teachers and participant observation were the methods of data collection. Group and individual interviews with the Year 8 students were explained as methods of data collection which were compatible with the study's aims. These were explained in terms of methodological and procedural implications. Participant observation as data collection, was explained as enhancing the data collected from the interviews with students. Interview and observation techniques were described, with detail provided regarding structural and practical considerations. The reasons for reflective notes were explained, analysis of the data and interpretation procedures were clarified and aligned with the research questions. In the next chapter, the findings of the research are considered.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE SCHOOL CULTURE

4.0 Introduction

This chapter’s function is to expose the complexity of bullying and bystander behaviours, from the perspectives of various players, with a particular emphasis on the context of the school and the cultural expectancies surrounding bullying and bystander behaviours by all in the school community. Analysis and interpretation of the data is explained, and the need for a whole-school, integrated approach to countering bullying. The teachers’ role and the school culture are examined as contributors to bullying and bystander inaction. Differences in the ways boys and girls bully are explored, and how the school culture creates an environment where members of the community view bullying as inevitable and are reluctant to take responsibility to prevent it.

Here I present my interpretation of the data gathered, pertaining to the school culture and its effects on bystander behaviours and address the first two of the research questions, which ask how the school community understands, supports and maintains bullying behaviour and the meanings students attach to bystander behaviours:

1. Within a Year 8, co-educational group, how is bullying behaviour supported and maintained?

2. How do Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour?
The following chapter, Five, examines the last research question regarding the psychological barriers to bystander intervention, and the forces that work to regulate accepted responses to bullying behaviours.

3. What are the psychological barriers to bystander intervention?

Data collection relied mainly on individual, in-depth interviews with Year 8 students, but also included group interviews with the same group of students, focus group discussions with staff members and participant observation. As an observer, I decided not to interfere in the normal way students interrelate around the school, except where a student’s physical or emotional welfare was at risk. At that point, I resolved I would intervene to prevent harm being done to a student.

Since this chapter contains excerpts from participants’ interviews, it is necessary to draw the reader’s attention to the way I have presented them. The actual words that students and teachers used are in inverted commas for short quotes, or are indented for longer sections. Words are sometimes omitted from the transcripts, for the purpose of brevity, and these omissions are represented by three dots (…). When participants emphasised words, these words or phrases are written in italics. My own words to explain a student’s meaning are written in brackets, for example, where a students said, “It”, this might be followed by my explanation to the reader, (bullying). Body language that added to the meaning of the participants’ words is explained within the conversation and written in brackets. Reflective notes are written in italics, and field notes are in a different font.
to differentiate them from the main text. Following reflective notes and field notes are the date of when they were written, for example, (r.n. 31/3/03, f.n. 31/3/03).

4.1 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Analyses of the perspectives on bullying of Year 8 students are presented, with a particular focus on their views regarding the role of the bystanders who witness, support and encourage bullying behaviours. The participants’ experiences of bullying examine the meanings they attach to bullying and bystander behaviours. While the data are shaped to highlight bullying incidents that reflect the study’s poststructural concerns with abuses of power, the school culture and bystander behaviour, the research seeks to be inductive rather than demonstrative.

This research on bullying behaviours was influenced by my experience, and general knowledge of the traditional centrality of this aspect of adolescent behaviour within the school context. Throughout the interviews and observations, ‘grounded theory’ strategies were used in gathering and analyzing the data. This approach was consistent with the interpretive theory of knowledge and, more particularly, the theory of social constructivism underpinning the study. Major, interrelated propositions emerged from the analysis of the various sources of data, which will be described in Chapter Five.
In my role as school psychologist, I am active in the school’s efforts to counter bullying. Because of this, I am mindful of how my own perspectives are present within the interview situation, and how they may shape my recording of the data. Whilst data was collected from various sources, I am aware that I was the recorder and the information is represented by me. Therefore, I have clearly explained my involvement, my contributions and how topics were raised and discussed during interviews, my actions during participant observations and how I represented the issues.

This study took place in a high school, and in that context, I represented the adult world, representing adult ideals. To this end, some of the students would have responded to me in the same way they would have responded to teachers – probably by giving me information that they thought I wanted to hear. Students were not necessarily trying to hide their true thoughts about issues, but in fact, they may have a range of inconsistent thoughts on one subject. They might view the interview situation in different ways too, therefore it was necessary to negotiate with the students, the meanings of the conversations during the interviews.

An example of inconsistencies occurred when talking with students about empathy for the victim of bullying. They often made the point that they did not care, then, following questioning and prompts, they thought about it and found that they did care, deep down. Then, they thought again, and said the victim should be able to look after themselves (don’t care), and that others should at least do something (do care). Consistent with speaking about
bullying behaviour in the way they thought an adult would approve, students who warmed to their subject recounted incidents where they bullied others, but related the incidents as if they were in their distant past. Therefore, although they engaged in non-adult discourse, they kept the conversation emotionally safe for themselves by placing the behaviour that adults would disapprove of firmly in the past, for example, Anna’s admission to bullying recounted earlier experiences.

*Anna:* I’ve bullied others – hitting boys and calling names – in retaliation…I called them “nerds”. It’s peer pressure – everyone did it.

To gain as wide a representation as possible of data gathered, participants’ perspectives were explored throughout the study with data from various sources incorporated corroboratively. At times, understandings of bullying behaviours varied and could even be contradictory. These contradictions serve to highlight the complexities of bullying and bystander behaviours within the school context. Therefore, to emphasise the importance of issues, and since data is gathered from multiple sources, various perspectives might be presented surrounding a single issue.

The Year 8 interviews were conducted as group sessions as well as individual, in-depth interviews. As the interviews progressed, I became aware of issues that were of particular importance to the students, and adjusted my questions and responses to accommodate the need to gain more insight into these areas that the students were telling me were of importance to them. I noticed, for example, that students were indicating a lack of trust
in the confidentiality of anonymous emails. Accordingly, I asked for more information on their perceptions of the email system, which generally were that it is *not* anonymous because it is possible for others to look over your shoulder and see you sending an email.

Previous research has emphasised the importance of gaining the support of all members of the school community to counter bullying (Olweus, 1991; Slee, 1997; Griffiths, 2001; Rigby, 2001b). Without a whole-school approach to the problem, the school culture cannot change. With this in mind, the next section interrogates the school approach to countering bullying.

### 4.2 The Need for an Integrated, Whole School Anti-Bullying Perspective

This section highlights the difference in perspectives of bullying among members of the school community. This is somewhat surprising because the school has the leverage of being a Catholic school, and all that that entails in terms of Christian ideals. Quite apart from the social expectations of justice, this school can fortify its appeal for fairness, empathy and caring by promoting the Catholic way of life. According to this, school cultural expectations are that people will intervene in bullying incidents. Students’ perspectives also agree with this, as they *ideally* identify themselves as being people who make a stand against bullying. However, they did not believe the cultural ideals were being upheld, particularly by teachers. Almost all the students expressed the opinion “bullying is bad”.

146
Nevertheless, close analysis of the students’ other understandings reveals that this apparently all-encompassing statement is largely detached from and has little practical impact on their other perspectives. When asked about the student body as a whole, participants report that this anti-bullying role is hypothetical, and when it comes to reality, bystanders do not act for various reasons. In other words, the term, “shouldn’t”, when applied to the students’ actual actions in a bullying incident, is not linked in any detailed or convincing manner with the school’s Catholic ideals or anti-bullying policy. In fact, denial of any wrongdoing or responsibility for harming others is routine when teachers challenge students during a bullying incident.

The focus group of teachers were critical about a school culture that they viewed as strict and authoritarian, with time wasted doing extra duties for punishments, like litter duty. This, they said, caused the students to define themselves against authority, creating a “them” and “us” attitude that was not seen as productive. They accused the media of encouraging rebellion in such programmes as *The Simpsons*, which was cited as an example of anti-authority. The students’ rejection of being bullied by adults occurred readily, the teachers said, citing an example of when the canteen manager shouted at them, the boys started tapping coins loudly in protest. As Greta said, “If it’s an aggressive adult, they’ll have a go”. Harry agreed, saying, “It’s not a lack of self-esteem – it’s arrogance – they believe they’re right – they question adults”.

147
These issues made dealing with bullying, and other problems difficult because the teachers felt they were not taken seriously by the students. They thought there was status to be gained by the male students, in particular, by being contemptuous of teachers. Women teachers thought the boys were given too much power and often felt intimidated, as if their position was at risk, when male students used domineering tactics such as standing too close, raising their voices and swearing. This perception was confirmed recently, in an incident where a female teacher felt at risk after confiscating a football on the oval and was closely surrounded by a threatening group of angry Year 11 boys. Recognising the same intimidation applied for some students and the difficulty they have in challenging powerful bullies, the teachers recommended raising awareness of power structures within student groups and amongst the staff.

The complex, situated nature of bullying was acknowledged, with the group being in favour of encouraging critical thought about the school’s culture, the lack of unity amongst the staff approaches to bullying, the way things are done and what is taken for granted. Although the school has an anti-bullying policy and has printed anti-bullying leaflets, it still lacks an integrated visionary approach to countering bullying. The group thought the school community is diverse in its opinions on how to counter bullying, with resistance to unifying its perspectives on the role of the school. Being a Catholic school, teachers felt that Catholic values should be brought to the bullying issue, but at the same time, realised that only approximately 5% of the students were practising Catholics. The next section examines the
behaviour of some of the teachers, which contradicts the Catholic and school cultural ideal of countering bullying.

4.2.1 Perpetuating a Bullying School Culture Through Teachers’ Role Modelling of Bullying Behaviour

The focus group of teachers thought that power structures within the school were masculine. The school had an overall emphasis on male sport, the top management positions were male-dominated, and the entire office staff was female. Power was viewed as being distributed in masculine ways, like shouting. Two of the male teachers were known to be especially aggressive, engaging in shouting at students, being overly punitive and inviting trouble by constantly challenging the older students. The school was seen as modelling aggressive behaviour and supporting a way of being negative, which prevented mutual respect between teachers and students. The school culture was criticised by this group as being oppressive, punitive, hierarchical and regimented.

The propensity to believe in the negative affects of bullying teachers was shared by the students. The following gives a student’s perspective on the way teachers relate to students. When asked what she thought the school could do to counter bullying, Jaimie said,

\textit{Jaimie:} Sometimes bullies have been bullied themselves, therefore they take their anger out on others – they should talk to someone about it. Teachers bully in front of the class.

\textit{DL:} How do you feel about that?
*Jaimie*: It causes embarrassment, then anger. Then when it’s too much, some kids go over the edge, e.g. suicide

*DL*: Suicide?

*Jaimie*: Yes, not here, but in other schools. Kids hurt themselves here though.

*DL*: Is that because of teachers bullying?

*Jaimie*: Not all, but, like, if a kid’s having a bad time at home, like divorce or something, then a teacher bullies them, it might be enough. Sometimes teachers are really mean.

*DL*: How?

*Jaimie*: They yell at you, then, when you try to explain something, like, why you didn’t do your homework, or why you’re late, or something, they, like, yell more, or just go (raised her eyes and groaned).

*DL*: And what does that mean?

*Jaimie*: I means that you’re not worth listening to. You’re nothing.

When students feel like this about teachers, there is likely to be little connection or communication. Teachers’ refusal to listen to students, or to intimidate them is likely to cause fear and resentment and a reluctance to confide in teachers. Therefore, it will be extremely difficult for students to ask such teachers for help if they are being bullied.

### 4.3 Support and Maintenance of Bullying by the School Culture

The school culture is already established when the new Year 8 students arrive from primary school. This section will discuss how the school culture shapes and supports bullying behaviour, approves of gender-appropriate
bullying and blocks attempts to counter it. In a highly anxious state, with low confidence levels, most students felt insecure and vulnerable in coping with the difference in culture from their primary schools. It is a time when they are eager to blend in with the crowd and therefore will not be likely to do anything which contravenes the established behaviour code. For example, students said that it was easier in primary school for them to tell a teacher about bullying, but upon entering high school, it is forbidden.

4.3.1 The Students’ Perspectives on the School’s Bullying Culture

It is argued in this section that the students’ perspectives are caught up in a form of behavioural dualism. The flexible, multidimensional nature of their responses was particularly evident in their views on bullying behaviours. Firstly, they view bullying as an observer, commenting on it as if it does not involve them. When they are forced to reluctantly view themselves as being part of the incident, it causes great discomfort, and strong resistance is given to taking any blame for the incident. As an observer, they have certain perspectives which they themselves note change when they become involved in a bullying incident. The extent to which students did not integrate their ideal and actions into an overall perspective mirroring the school’s anti-bullying policy, is considered. The rest of the school community’s acceptance of this behavioural dualism allows the school culture to present itself as one which tolerates bullying.
It is noteworthy that the ideal of a school without bullying has been given considerable prominence in many schools (Cross et al, 2003b). It is surprising, therefore, that the students’ perspectives on anti-bullying do not incorporate the two most radical characteristics of anti-bullying strategies – namely, empathy with the victim and intervention in bullying incidents, thus creating a culture that does not allow bullying. Empathy is a part of the whole-school Pastoral Care ethos, purportedly of great importance within Catholic Schools. Intervention to counter bullying requires fortitude and conviction of beliefs, which also currently eludes the school community.

In view of the central importance of this concept of a caring ethos of the school, it is somewhat surprising that the students do not rely on it to protect themselves from one of the most feared aspects of school life - bullying. The caring infrastructure is highly visible, as in most schools. There is a Pastoral Care team, an anti-bullying policy, a large team of Peer Support Leaders, teams of Peer Mediators in Years 9 and 12, the friendship club, “Peer Pals”, and complete House systems, all of which fail to act as the compelling and cohesive influence needed to unify the students’ perspectives on the prevention of bullying. The students’ perspectives on bullying behaviours obviously do not view any of these support systems as protective against bullying. The reader’s attention will be drawn repeatedly throughout this Chapter and Chapter Five, to the way students feel very much alone when they are dealing with bullying.
The next sections explore the differences between the ways in which girls and boys bully. It is important for schools to accommodate the differences in the behaviours, and be aware of the complex nature of behaviours of all players in bullying incidents.

4.4 Gender

Research has established that boys and girls both bully, but that their bullying may take different forms (Besag, 1989, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the difference in the way boys and girls bully during the planning stage of developing anti-bullying programmes. Measures to counter bullying need to incorporate the many forms of bullying that occur in schools.

4.4.1 Boys Bullying

In Chapter One, I noted that boys bully more than girls, are more physically aggressive and are likely to engage in more overt bullying. The most powerful form of insult for boys is to attack their sexuality (Epstein, 1996, in Holland & Adkins, 1996). Insults that insinuate a lack of sexual power, such as “pindick” or “wanker” are typical, as is any affront that suggests homosexuality or femininity - those being viewed as weak and inferior to heterosexual masculinity - such as “poof”, “faggot”, “girl”, (Mac An Ghaill, 1994, Keddie, 2001). Keddie, (2001) found that within boys’ groups, individual behaviour was controlled and shaped this way, by the rejection of any activity that contravened the accepted masculine norm.
At Mayne, boys are extremely offended by inferences that they may be homosexual. Adherence to the masculine stereotype is paramount, and such insults are frequently given as reasons for violent retaliation. When boys bully girls, they call them names such as, “titless” or “fatarse”, to suggest their unattractiveness to heterosexual males. More subtle forms of sexual harassment occur, even within same-sex groups, such as when a girl wanted to join the army, another girl questioned her aggressively. This is similar to the boys controlling any behaviour, through ridicule or rejection, that is deemed deviant to the accepted gender norm (Keddie, 2001).

The focus group of teachers maintained that the masculine culture was promoted through the media, where women were trivialised. Attractiveness to heterosexual males is very important, for example, being admired as supermodels, but not much else. Women had little opportunity otherwise to gain status, these teachers noted. For example, women were not usually featured in the sports section of the paper until the third back page, whilst aggressive male sporting heroes were frequently on the front page, achieving high status, power and wealth, and the students emulate them.

The focus group of teachers’ comments about gender suggested that the school culture reflects our society where women were trivialised in the media, being required only to be attractive to heterosexual males. Therefore, girls felt the pressure to look good, but had little opportunity otherwise to gain any standing in the community. The media constantly positioned men as superior, they said, giving them more opportunities than women to be
admired in our society through sport, politics and business. Felicity’s observations were enlightening,

Felicity: The boys especially, quickly get the idea that learning’s not for them. We can fight against this, or we can change things to suit boys more. But then, we run the risk of leaving the girls behind. At the moment, all the girls have got is their academic skills. Not that they count for much as far as other students are concerned – boys, anyway.

DL: Do the boys’ opinions count?

Felicity: Well, yes, because they’re the dominant group – what they say, goes. Just look at the students who are looked up to here – they’re all boys, and some of them are looked up to for all the wrong reasons, like the bullies. Look at Stephen (a boy known for bullying in Year 9) - they all love him, and he’s bullying so many people, making so many people unhappy. Then there’s the sports guys – I mean, great that they’re good at sport, but where does this leave the girls? We’ve got the media to blame for this too. Women are admired as supermodels, but not much else. To get status in the Western world, women have to look good – be glamorous, young, beautiful – wear all the right clothes. Heaven forbid that you’re seen wearing the wrong clothes – that can be enough for you to be kicked out of the group – you’re seen as someone who’s nerdy, who just doesn’t get it, and no-one wants to be your friend, in case they’re looked on in the same way. They don’t want to be associated with
someone who’s so out of it. And all this is based on the way you look. No wonder our girls don’t have any confidence, especially in this masculine school. They don’t stand a chance.

We need to challenge boys, who think about sex all the time. Honestly, they never shut up about it. You have to constantly stop them from giggling every time you say something that could remotely be construed as having something to do with sex. And they get all the attention – even the girls laugh at them, though they do get sick of it eventually, but the boys don’t. They need to realise that silence is consent, so they need to be taught to speak up if they object – in school and in life. When it comes to bullying, this message really needs to be brought out.

My field notes include instances of bullying that seem to occur especially among boys, in particular, the use of violence to resolve conflict. In an incident involving Jacob, in Year 9 and Kieran, in Year 8, Jacob was very agitated and said that I had better come quickly to “sort out” Kieran, one of the Year 8 boys, before he hit him. He was quite serious when he told me he did not think he would be able to control himself without my help, saying, “I’m going to have to hit him, so I’ve come to see you before I do”. My field notes recorded the following:

We hurried over to the courtyard where a crowd of about fifteen boys from both year groups had gathered, shouting and gesticulating at each other. The noise subsided a little as I approached, then gained
momentum as they all tried to give their version of the story when I asked what was happening. It emerged that Kieran had called Jacob “gay”, to which his friends eagerly joined in. Kieran and his friends were calling Jacob ‘gay’ because the Year 9 boys were rough-playing, looking like they were "raping" each other. Jacob had taken offence and pushed Kieran, who fought back, issuing threats. Soon, there was a group of them calling out “gay-boy”, repeatedly. Jacob had ignored it at first and moved away, but they followed him, and after repeated insults, Jacob became very angry and came to see me. (f.n. 27/8/03).

Jacob’s sense of the inevitability of violence occurring placed this threat out of his control – as if there was no other option available. Although girls do occasionally resort to violence, it would be hard to imagine a girl claiming the same inevitability. What made this incident surprising was that Jacob was one of the well-trained mediators, who was skilled in conflict resolution, but, overwhelmed by his anger, felt it would have been justified if he had hit Kieran.

The teachers also mentioned the physical way boys related to each other. Exasperation at the amount of bullying was apparent in Harry’s comment,

Harry: They thump each other and that’s mateship…they don’t understand. We need to give them the message that it’s your right to speak to bullies – “Does he call you heterosexual?” The 13-14 year olds are always getting bullied. With the girls, it’s only once a year,
when they’re falling out of love with each other. The boys are much more constant, constant – thick! As they get older, it gets more power for the boys. The last two weeks of term is the worst.

The teachers’ perspective on boys’ bullying was that boys had learned more sophisticated bullying skills from girls, such as manipulation, which in turn were being used for sexual harassment. In Year 12, for example, there was a prize of a bottle of scotch for the boy who had had the most sexual experiences during the year and the Year 10 boys list the top ten girls according to their sexual attractiveness. The teachers saw this as a “power trip” within the group. The teachers thought the issue of masculinity needed to be addressed in the school. Greg thought boys might be disillusioned and made this comment:

Greg: Disillusioned boys need to look at their masculinity, but parents disapprove of questioning traditional masculinity.

Greta agreed, adding,

Greta: There is a cultural influence – Mayne’s old-fashioned, traditional, peasant-like attitudes. It’s not socially enlightened – fathers saying to their sons, “You should’ve had a bit by now”. Meanwhile, their daughters are under lock and key.

The group agreed that the school’s micro-culture reflected the wider culture, where men hold positions of power, and women hold positions of service to those in power. For example, in the school all the office staff is female. The principal is male and has a female secretary, middle-management positions
are female-dominated, but were not seen as being positions of power so much as positions of administration.

The group stressed the importance of the culture in the classroom, and of not allowing “mob rule” where male students routinely called each other ‘gay’ and other insults, constantly putting each other down. Teachers in classrooms can create a culture that does not tolerate bullying (Simmons, 2000). The following exchange occurred when I was discussing a Year 8 boy with his teachers, who was being ridiculed in class.

Today, I talked to several of James’s teachers, to ask them to keep an eye on him because other students were putting him down in class. He had been to see me to say that in class he was getting “teased”. A few other students were the leaders, and the rest of the class (it felt like the rest to him) joined in. When I asked the nature of their teasing, he said that when he answered questions, they moaned, sniggered, threw spit balls at him, and called him names - “nerd”, “squid”, “fagot”, “gay”. The teachers did not notice, he said, all except Mr. Basile, who, according to James, was very strict, and did not allow any behaviour like that in the class. I asked him if Mr. Basile noticed the comments, and he said, Yes, every time, so they didn’t do it. He enjoyed Mr. Basile’s classes. When I spoke to the teachers, they said they had not noticed. Two of them, Miss Banks, and Mrs. Kelly, said that, well they had actually noticed “it all going on”, but had put it down to just the kids being normally horrible to each other. When I explained to Mr.
Basile that James was getting bullied in classes, his immediate reply was, "Not in my class, he isn't - no-one is." He was right. (f.n. 30/5/03)

Mr. Basile’s determination to eliminate bullying in his class, compared to the other teachers’ acceptance of it, illustrates a lack of understanding of the dynamics of bullying in classrooms. I wrote the following in my reflective notes:

Mr. Basile was so forthright in his denial that anyone got bullied in his class and it appears that he was right. James certainly felt more safe in his class than in anyone else’s. It seems that the teachers have told themselves that students just behave badly, and they have adopted a “What can you do?” attitude. They don’t seem to realise how much this is hurting students, who may be covering up their distress with laughter. If only all teachers were like Mr. Basile, the classroom culture would be so much more respectful and the students’ anxiety would be reduced enormously. (r.n. 30/5/03)

4.4.2 Girls Bullying

Besag (1989) found that whilst boys bully to gain power and to dominate the group, girls bully indirectly, manipulating friendship groups for the purpose of being part of the ‘in’ group, and to ostracise the victim, making it impossible for them to belong to the group. Thorne, (1993) agrees, maintaining that girls have a need to belong and to share intimacy with their friends, and competition arises because their friendship groups are smaller and more intense than boys’. The subtlety of their bullying strategies make
it virtually undetectable to a teacher. In the student interviews, this was a common theme. Ellen described girls’ bullying,

*Ellen:* Girls use body language to get others not to like you and then everyone else just thinks you’re a geek. They spread rumours, exclude you. Boys are really mean through talking, girls are really mean through body language.

Gemma’s perspective was the same,

*Gemma:* Girls usually start rumours, verbally – they swear.

Cecelia’s description of girls bullying revealed the indirect way they put each other down, and so distanced themselves from those whose standards of clothing, in this case, were not up to those in the ‘in’ group,

*Cecelia:* Kids get teased for “wrong” clothes, like shoes. At the disco, there’s a lot of pressure to wear the right clothes – all the cool ones are doing their hair in the loos. If you don’t, you get called “loser”. Me and my friend don’t care about clothes. They come up and say, “Where do you get your shoes?” pretending to be nice, as if they’re really interested. And what they really mean is to make everyone look at your shoes that they think aren’t cool, or they’re cheap or something. It’s just to let you know they’ve seen them and they say it loud enough for everyone to hear and look. (Cecelia had a very angry look on her face.)

Ellen described how girls use body language to marginalise each other,

*Ellen:* I’ve been bullied a couple of times. I’ve been ignored – they go off and just leave you. It’s their body language – they don’t say anything. When she (victim) says, “You’re not including me”, they
say, “sorry”. The “boss” wants just one friend. She was possessive in Year 6…Some girls look at me funny – is it how I look? How I walk? Then start whispering to each other. When I answer questions in class, they imply through their body language, but I just ignore it.

**DL:** What do they imply?

**Ellen:** That I’m a nerd

Correspondingly, Ilsa’s comments were,

**Ilsa:** Girls put each other down on looks and then you feel stupid. That’s bullying…Girls say things behind your back, like how you look – to gain popularity. Boys are physical – they think they’re tough. They tell people off to their face.

**DL:** Which is the worst, do you think?

**Ilsa:** Boys really because they hurt you – I mean physically. But girls hurt your feelings. They’re both the worst.

Katrina was also undecided about which type of bullying was the worst.

She said,

**Katrina:** Boys and girls do the same amount of bullying. It’s worse with verbal than fighting – it keeps going. Punching doesn’t hurt as much as verbal. It goes on and on with both verbal and physical. Girls are verbal and boys physical.

**DL:** So which do you think is the worst?

**Katrina:** Verbal

**DL:** Why is that worse?

**Katrina:** Because it goes on and on.

**DL:** Which do you think goes on the most?
Katrina: Verbal just keeps going – it never stops. (Pause) So does physical actually. Boys do both physical and verbal. At least girls only do the verbal, but that’s bad. (Threw her hands in the air and smiled) Oh, I don’t know – they’re both really bad. As bad as each other. It all hurts people.

An interesting postscript to this section is that none of the boys mentioned bullying that was not visible. Only one, Frank, mentioned girls bullying, saying,

Frank: Boys bully more than girls physically.

DL: Is that bad?

Frank: It hurts the most. Girls are more verbally.

DL: Which is the worst, do you think?

Frank: Boys because they hurt you.

DL: What about the way girls bully?

Frank: Yes, that hurts, but it’s only words (pause) and your feelings. It’s not you.

DL: How do you mean ‘It’s not you’?

Frank: It’s not you – it’s not your body getting hurt – you know, punches and kicks.

DL: Do you think the girls’ bullying hurts?

Frank: Yes – your feelings, but no, not really – not much, anyway.

When girls bully other girls, they use sexual insults too, like the boys, but there is a difference. Whilst boys attack each other’s sexual competence,
girls attack each other’s sexual activity. This is the opposite of the way boys insult each other, by ridiculing those deemed sexually incompetent. The most hurtful insults girls use are words like “slut” and “hoe”, which were used extensively in a particularly unpleasant, relentless episode of bullying that occurred amongst Year 10 girls. Obscene messages were being sent to one of the girls, Christine, via mobile ‘phone SMS messages, or through an email system at the school. They were careful to ensure the messages were undetectable, as with obscene graffiti that appeared around the school, all of it attacking Christine’s sexual behaviour. Her house had eggs and food thrown at it and a window broken. In this way, the girls managed to destroy her reputation, create a rift between groups of Year 10 girls and gain popularity by being part of the larger, “tougher” group. The actual culprits were never found.

Girls’ bullying usually takes an indirect form like this, using rumours, body language, manipulation and marginalisation to gain power within the group. Therefore, it is essential that anti-bullying programmes expose this type of bullying as well as the more obvious, visible aggressive behaviour. Rumours, particularly, can spread and cause a mob-like mentality which can be highly destructive.

Non-physical ways of bullying were acknowledged, but this was balanced by the students’ perception that significant bullying is physical. On one hand, the meaning students attach to bullying was that it hurt, yet on the other hand, their assertions were that physical bullying was more hurtful.
What was really interesting was the students’ acceptance of the way that boys and girls bully. They gave simple descriptions, without question, indicating that they were reconciled to the fact that this was unavoidable. Their perception of bullying as inevitable is discussed in the next section.

4.5 Students’ View of Bullying as Being Inevitable

Perhaps the most effective barrier to students’ intervening in bullying incidents is their perspective that bullying in schools is inevitable, so they tell themselves that all efforts to counter it are futile. As bystanders, the students’ experiences of bullying had led them to resignation about bullying as a “normal” part of school life. I noticed that many of them used words like, “always” and “never”, as if the school culture accepted bullying and there was no way to change it. They simply accepted bullying as an inevitable part of school life. As Olweus (1991); Rigby (1996a) and Cross et al (2003a) note, the anti-bullying policy in a school has to be supported and implemented by the whole school. Students felt that this was not the case, and were well aware that teachers are confused and do not know what to do. They also observed the micro-culture they find themselves in and could see clearly that there were prescribed ways of behaving, with severe consequences for breaking these expected behavioural rules. No amount of anti-bullying propaganda was going to change their view that bullying is inevitable. When people reach this stage of resignation, they are not likely to take much interest in what they see as ineffectual strategies to counter bullying.
The motivation to continue the effort to counter bullying is also lacking amongst the adults within the school community. Teachers and administrators sometimes take the view that because bullying has always occurred, they can do nothing to prevent it. However, in my experience, whilst bullying might occur in all schools, the prevalence and intensity of bullying differs from school to school. This study places the school culture as central to the behaviours surrounding bullying, and each school has its own culture, which dictates the tolerance level of the whole school community for bullying. The social context in which bullying behaviour is shaped and maintained depends on the degree to which the school community allows it to happen. More research is required into the school culture’s impact on students’ behaviour and how behavioural norms are shaped and maintained in schools.

Carlo’s interview, below, revealed how he made meaning of the ubiquitous nature of bullying. His explanation started off being that bullying was natural – an innate behaviour of young people. During the interview, he said he thought even trying to do anything to stop bullying was a waste of time and that it was always going to be a problem. What provided me with some hope of changing this view, was the way that he changed this view when he thought of his own friends, who did not bully anyone. By talking through the situation, he adjusted the meaning he attached to the school bullying culture and came to his own realization that it was not necessarily normal for all young people. At his point, he brightened visibly and began to
enthusiastically suggest some options for change. This was his second meeting with me.

_Carlo:_ Yes, I’ve been thinking, you see, I’ve seen quite a bit of bullying lately. It’s nothing too serious, like hitting or anything, but it’s, like, hidden. People gang up on each other and talk and say mean things in class.

_DL:_ Like what?

_Carlo:_ Like “You’re gay”, or “nerd”, or “loser” – it happens all the time, I mean it’s _everywhere_ (spread his arms and widened his eyes). I saw bullying at primary school, but not as bad. Not nearly as bad. (paused, looked thoughtful). I think bullying’s a part of life, it’s always been here and it always will be and there’s nothing you can do about it, so why even try?

_DL:_ Why do you think nothing can be done?

_Carlo:_ Because it’s just the way things are – you know, like, it’s the usual thing. Kids’ll always do it.

_DL:_ Do you think all kids do it?

_Carlo:_ Yes. (then he gave a little laugh to negate what he had just said)

Well, no. Some do. Most do. No, not most – some do.

_DL:_ So is it the usual thing for everyone?

_Carlo:_ No, just those ones.

_DL:_ The ones who bully?

_Carlo:_ Yes.

_DL:_ So what is the difference between the kids who bully and those who don’t, do you think?
Carlo: Whether they’re nice people or not.

DL: Do you think it is more to do with the type of people?

Carlo: Yes, it’s all to do with that.

DL: So how does that fit with your thoughts that it’s the usual thing?

Carlo: Well, I didn’t really mean usual for all people (paused) – it’s like, only some really. They enjoy hurting people.

DL: So do you think we shouldn’t bother to try to stop bullying?

Carlo: Well, sometimes you just feel like that, you know. It’s like, it’s like, you think you can’t stop it because it’s everywhere.

DL: Does this happen with your friends?

Carlo: (quickly, and sitting up straight in his chair to add emphasis to his words) No, no – not my friends. We keep to ourselves. It’s the popular people – you know, the ones who are the ‘in’ group.

DL: Would this be a good school if everyone was like your friends?

Carlo: (smiling, nodding) Oh yes.

DL: Would that help to reduce the bullying problem?

Carlo: (still smiling) We wouldn’t have a bullying problem.

DL: What, not at all?

Carlo: No – not at all

DL: What do you think we could do to make more people be like your friends?

Carlo: I think you should show videos of what it does to people – like them committing suicide and that.

DL: Do you think that might help to stop bullying?

Carlo: (Nodding enthusiastically) Yes, I do.
DL: Don’t you think people realise the hurt they are causing when they bully?

Carlo: (Definite shake of the head) Nah (pause, thoughtful again) No way.

DL: Do you think they would stop if they realised how much they hurt people?

Carlo: Ye-ah (as if to say, what would you think?)

Carlo’s assertions about bullying varied within this interview. At the beginning of the conversation, he had a despairing tone to his voice. Gradually, he changed his mind when he applied a different viewpoint to his argument. It was as if he had just thought up the notion that people could be good, like his friends. Towards the end, his judgement went from ambiguous to definite, in what constituted a complete turnaround in his perspective.

Later, I wrote in my reflective notes:

I was sad at his despair – his acceptance that this was it, and don’t try and do anything – the futility of trying to fight it. He was obviously overwhelmed by the amount of bullying going on around him. He was trying to fit bullying into a ‘natural’ behaviour, therefore unstoppable. His body language looked resigned, defeated almost. Then, amazingly, he perked up and came up with solutions! I must watch these inconsistencies with the kids because it’s as if they argue within themselves, and their ideas change as they talk. They make new meanings of events and behaviours as they go along.
Interesting that his ‘solution’ focused on the damage done to victims (r.n.19/6/03).

Other students made similar comments. Stressing the futility of trying to counter bullying, Ilsa said,

_Ilsa:_ Boys and girls will always come around and tease, even though they don’t know you.

Katrina agreed,

_Katrina:_ Bullying’s something that doesn’t go away – we can’t get everyone to like each other and leave each other alone.

Jaimie drew attention to how attempts to reduce bullying had failed,

_Jaimie:_ We have an anti-bullying programme, but they take no notice of it.

Students felt apathetic towards efforts to counter bullying because they had resigned themselves to its inevitability. The meanings they attached to the bullying behaviour were that it was “normal” behaviour because of its frequency and because there were no visible anti-bullying strategies being taken. They scorned the anti-bullying policy because their experience was that it was not effective, or not being enforced.

Students’ other perspectives, discussed throughout this chapter, had foundational and cohesive potential, such as accepting responsibility and the moral obligation needed to take action. These are largely blocked, however, by a resistant culture which supports and encourages bullying. The popularity of the bullies, the power that is given to them by their peers, with
the apparent approval of the school community, the code of silence surrounding bullying behaviour, offering complete protection and the anti-“dobber” mentality protecting bullies, all combine to provide effective barriers to students telling adults about bullying, even when it is anonymous.

4.6 Responsibility for Countering Bullying

Students arriving in a new school culture are subject to a great deal of confusion over many things. There is considerable change between primary and high school, a large component of which is knowing how to behave in the new environment, and where they have to make a decision about whose responsibility it is to prevent bullying. Most students participating in this study felt it was someone else’s responsibility. This could bring the reader to the conclusion that they simply did not care enough to be accountable for the bullying in the school. Whilst this was sometimes the case, and will be discussed later in more detail, upon analysis there were also several other reasons for students’ reluctance to take action against bullying, frequently involving the school culture.

The uncertainty students felt about the cultural norms were revealed in comments such as, “They might feel they’re not doing a good thing”, and, “You might think someone else would tell a teacher.” During the group interview, other opinions emerged, and some tension arose over this question. The students were resentful of the assumption that it was their responsibility to counter bullying, and were of the definite opinion that it
was the teachers’ job. One student said, “Why should we? (intervene in bullying incidents). Is it really up to us to stop it? That’s the teachers’ job.” Others then joined in, saying, “Yes, where are the teachers in all this? We’re not the police.” As the tension rose, the students’ anger found a party to blame, and this time it was the victim. One of the girls spoke about bullying, implying it could be a good thing anyway, to allow the bullying to happen, “If you didn’t like them, you might want them beaten up” and “Maybe they deserve it.” When I asked why bystanders would not use emails to report bullying, one boy said it was too risky because someone might see you sending it. He said, emphatically, “No emails – you don’t want to deal with another problem – I’ve got my own problems”. The group settled a little when another boy said, “You might not know what’s happening,” and they agreed that it was better to stand back than make a mistake.

With this reluctance to accept responsibility, it becomes unlikely that students will take action against bullying. This is a step that could be facilitated for students through educational programmes that tell them how to counter bullying. Given the confusion students feel about how to respond to bullying, education could give them confidence to choose appropriate help for differing bullying situations.

Students’ perspectives placed responsibility for countering bullying on the adults within a school community. Participants maintained that students say they will act to prevent bullying, because of a pervasive ethos of it being socially just to do so, but do not really take the responsibility to do so. In
answer to the question, “Why do you think people say they will intervene, but actually, they don’t?” students’ perceptions were that people were trying to look good to teachers, so they said they would help, but did not mean it. Many participants explained that students say to a teacher that they will intervene because that’s what the teachers want to hear. Students are almost obliged to give the “correct” answer. Anna said this,

Anna: People say they’ll intervene because to make it seem like they’re not bullies, so teachers won’t think they’re mean – to look good to teachers. (Pause) But they don’t really mean it – most.

Ellen said,

Ellen: They feel like they’d like to tell a teacher – they would really want to help the person, but lack courage. They’re thinking of themselves first – “I'm going to get bullied.”

Francesca’s observations indicated a tendency to want to intervene, and to want to look good,

Francesca: They say they’d intervene because they’re trying to do the right thing – to look good, but they never do.

Jaimie’s comment was similar,

Jaimie: They say they’d intervene to look like good sports…It’ll only make it worse, even if it’s not the victim who told. So I don’t tell.

Cecelia thought people said they’d help, just to impress teachers,

Cecelia: They say they’ll intervene because it’s what you’re told to do and it’s what the teacher wants to hear, but they never do (with a resigned expression on her face).
Harriet agreed,

*Harriet:* They say they’d intervene because they know it’s the right thing, but sometimes they’re not brave enough. That’s what they’re meant to do – just to please adults.

Ilsa said the same thing,

*Ilsa:* When they say they will tell a teacher, it’s the right thing to do.

   I meant it, but when faced with the situation, I’m too scared or maybe sometimes I wouldn’t care.

They recognized that this was what teachers wanted to hear, but to translate into action this verbal intention to intervene required not only dealing with the fear of the consequences, but also developing the students’ moral character, to promote empathic responses. Without empathy, the students are not likely to identify with the victim (Rigby, 2001, cited in Suckling and Temple, 2001) and make independent decisions to counter bullying.

During the interviews, and in my observations, I learned that Year 8 students arrive at high school in a state of confusion, trying to understand what the school culture demands of them, in terms of work and behaviour. This is the time where they establish their own patterns of behaviour, according to the dictates of the existing culture. When the culture is apathetic and does not demand that *all* members of the school community take responsibility for countering bullying, it is not surprising that the Year 8 students do nothing to prevent it. However, it is not only these factors that support and maintain bullying behaviours.
4.6.3 The School Culture that makes Bullies Popular

Students were aware, from a bystander’s perspective, that they were giving power to the bully. The bullies were aware of it too, and responded to the positive reinforcement by bullying more. From the bully’s perspective, the power was very rewarding, as Anna confirmed in her account of how she bullied other people herself,

Anna: I’ve bullied others – hitting boys and calling names – in retaliation. I called them “nerds” and I’d say stuff to them and to others – swearing, called them nerds. It’s peer pressure – everyone did it. It made me popular – everyone laughed and joined in, saying the same thing. I was the class clown. “Nerd” got shy and said “shut up”. She was brainy at Maths and she had other nerdy, fat friends. We laughed when they cried, but ran away in case a teacher came.

Anna’s self-image as the class clown was one that she would have been obliged to maintain, and the influence of bystanders on her behaviour is forced her to continue her behaviour in order to keep her place as the center of attention. Ellen’s perspective on how bullies maintain their popularity and keep their followers, revealed this pressure on the bully to continually entertain the group,

Ellen: Everyone’s sheep and follow popular people. (There are) only a couple of them. They try out bad behaviour, get everyone laughing and then they think it’s funny and have to keep doing it to become popular. If they stopped doing it, they might lose popularity. Others might walk off and think you’re not the way you used to be.
Katrina also recognised the bully’s power, observing,

*Katrina:* Bystanders side with the bully because the bully’s the popular one. People are scared of the bully. If they side with the victim, they might get bullied too. Power goes to the bully from bystanders and if it went to the victim, he (the bully) would stop.

Bystanders do more to control bullying behaviour than just watching bullying happen. They put bullies under threat of losing their popularity if they stop behaving in aggressive ways. Jaimie’s story about a bully’s efforts to sustain his “cool” image in order maintain his popularity sounded exhausting.

*Jaimie:* …every time someone told a teacher about a boy name-calling, he would tease her even more because he was angry about getting into trouble. He had loads of friends. He was popular and everyone wanted to be *his* friend. He was good-looking - girls liked him - good at schoolwork, didn’t pay attention in class, every day he’d do something different to make people like him. He’d show off at football and people liked him even more – he’d talk about kicking a goal and make a big deal out of it. No-one could compete at his level. All the boys liked him because of his sport. They might desert him if he couldn’t play sport.

*DL:* What did the bystanders do?

*Jaimie:* Bystanders would clap and cheer when he called her “dumb” and “stupid” because she was dyslexic. She didn’t say anything – she often ignored them. Friends just let it happen but
didn’t actually tell him off – they supported her afterwards. They didn’t say anything to him because he’d bully them as well. As long as they kept quiet, he didn’t add their names to it. They were scared of him. The bully gains popularity with others. If he didn’t have the support of the bystanders, he wouldn’t have done it.

Ilsa’s final comment on this shows how the school culture is protective of bullying,

*Ilsa:* People don’t like bystanders who intervene because nobody likes it when someone tells others off because everyone wants to feel tough.

The masculine culture emerges again with this reference to the desirability of toughness. Being tough was repeatedly cited as a contributor to the bullying culture. Students had to look tough, so they bullied and bystanders wanted vicarious toughness, so they supported the bully. In explaining why she thought people did not tell teachers about bullying, Ilsa said, “Kids want teachers to think they’re strong”. Appearing to be tough was so important that victims did not tell teachers or show how upset they were because they wanted to appear tough, even to teachers.

The teachers’ perspective on the school culture also acknowledged issues of power. The focus group of teachers recognized that students compete for power in an environment that does not effectively deal with power abuses. Teachers thought that gender stereotypes in the school culture mirrored the
wider society. Greg linked boys’ bullying to issues of power and proposed a more egalitarian approach to behaviour management.

*Greg:* It is difficult for people to stand up against the bully because of too much power. Your position is at risk – it’s an issue of power. There’s a pecking order – you have to challenge it, even if it’s your friend (who is bullying). Power is given to students by staff and students, in very masculine ways, for example, shouting. The school models behaviour and supports a way of being negative. There’s no mutual respect. The school philosophy is wrong and students respond – it’s oppressive – red notes, hierarchy – it’s regimented. The kids define themselves against authority. It is strict, time’s wasted, doing extras (duties). A positive relationship with student results in good behaviour. All you have to do is to be respectful of them, and they respect you.

There was some inconclusive debate amongst the teachers about boys’ behaviour. Harry suggested that in the wider culture, men were bitter about being in dead-end jobs and that the traditional male role was now defunct, leaving males feeling insecure and not knowing where their power lay. This insecurity was evident in the school, and he thought that an all-male retreat would help boys to be more at ease with their masculinity and stop questioning it and trying to prove it. He cited an example of a boy in another school who wanted to play music, but his father would not let him because it was not a masculine pursuit. Greg refuted the notion of boys’ insecurity,
however, commenting that men are not victims, and that at school, “boys
know how to get power”. The following section makes clear how power is
built by bystanders’ support of the bullies.

4.7 The Code of Silence

The bullying culture is supported by a code of silence, signifying strong
loyalty to the bully. It seems that whenever bullying has occurred, no-one
admits to it and no-one has seen anything or knows anything about it. It is as
if the whole group galvanises towards the bully, protecting him or her
against teachers who are trying to find out what happened. Anyone brave
enough to talk about the bullying is immediately ostracised and bullied
relentlessly, whether they are the victim themselves or a bystander. The fear
of talking about being bullied is very strong for girls. The wider culture is
changing now, but the effort to change women’s silence continues on their
experiences such as rape, incest and domestic violence. The same culture
exists in schools, particularly when girls’ bullying takes such a nebulous
form and is hard to detect and describe, even if students wanted to report it
(Simmons, 2000). To add to the difficulty, bystanders, and even victims
sometimes, are loyal to the bully. The power that bullies are given by
bystanders is so strong, that even those who are hurt by them remain loyal.

An example of loyalty to the bully occurred within the Year 12 group,
where a girl, Jasmine, had been hurt by a Year 12 boy, Mark. The students
in Year 12 were very animated about the event and it seemed that everyone
had an opinion about it. The following day, another boy who had not even
seen the incident, but had heard about it, expressed his full support of Mark. On his way to an English class that Jasmine also attended, he announced to the students around him, “I'm going to give her (Jasmine) shit in English.” He was heard by a teacher and ended up in trouble for it. The point is, his loyalty for Mark was so strong that he was willing to risk punishment for harassing Jasmine in class.

4.6.1 Dobbing

“Dobber” is a derogatory Australian word, describing a person who tells an authority figure about a person’s behaviour that has broken the society’s rules. To be called a “dobber” is one of the worst things for students and they are very afraid of this because the consequences are rejection from the group and ridicule. The fear of being called a “dobber” is another way the school culture supports bullying and protects the bullies. The fear is evident in the students’ responses:

*Ilsa:* I wouldn’t tell a teacher because people would ask, ‘Why did you dob?’ and the bully might bully me.”

Harriet was definite about the reason for people not taking action against bullying:

*DL:* Why do you think bystander usually don’t take action against bullying?

*Harriet:* Reputation – you’d be called a dobber if it’s not confidential.
Ellen’s description of telling an adult about bullying as “dirty work” indicated the contempt in which such behaviour was held. She and other students also mention the danger of sending emails.

Ellen: No emails because people might be watching your computers. We need a letter box for anonymous reporting at the office. It’s more comfortable talking to a Peer Support Leader, who could then tell a teacher or you (psychologist), so you’re not the one seen talking to the teacher. They might feel they’re not doing a good thing – and let someone else do the dirty work.

Gemma expressed the same reluctance to use emails to tell adults about bullying.

Gemma: They don’t send emails because they don’t have time, or know how to use it – or someone might see your computer.

The consequences she would anticipate if she told adults about bullying were a strong deterrent for Cecelia too.

Cecilia: They don’t send emails because there’s no time in class and people in class might see it and you don’t want to be known as a dobber. If you dob, the bully might be mad.

DL: And then what would happen?

Cecilia: All his friends would call you names and do things to you

DL: Like what?

Cecelia: I don’t know. You wouldn’t want to come to school though

DL: Why?
Cecelia: ‘Cos they’d make it so bad (Pause) and you’d have no friends

DL: Why would you have no friends?

Cecelia: Because nobody likes a dobber

DL: Even if you dobbed to help someone else out?

Cecelia: No-one would see it that way

DL: How would they see it?

Cecelia: Just that you dobbed – it doesn’t matter if it’s to help someone – it’s still dobbing and they’d hate you for that.

Dimitty’s earlier quote about the change from primary to high school indicates an acceleration in Year 8 of the disdain for dobbing.

Dimitty: I think at this age it would get worse because dobbing is seen as worse now in Year 8…If you dob, you’re uncool.

Francesca’s comments echo those of Dimitty,

Francesca: It’s easier to tell a teacher in primary school, than in high school. You don’t tell the teacher and you’re now grown up. If the bully finds out, she or he’ll call you a dobber and then be bullying you.

DL: Why is there such a difference between primary and high school?

Francesca: There is a difference – you’re too afraid to tell teachers in high school what’s happening because it could get back to the bully.
Telling a teacher that you, or someone else is being bullied is behaviour that contradicts the cultural norm. Whilst students object to their peers telling teachers about bullying, it is a different story when teachers bully students. When this happens, they are very indignant and readily report the bullying, often involving their parents, which is rare when it is the students who are bullying.

4.6.2 Victim Denial Supporting the Bullying Culture

The fear of being called a “dobber” is the reason that even victims will deny that they are being bullied. At Mayne, victims may not know what to say or do and can invite more intense bullying by their lack of response and by allowing their fear to show. Others make ineffectual attempts to stop the bullies, such as laughing, to pretend it does not matter to them. They also might use the “wrong” words and body language, which can exacerbate the situation. Yet others retaliate aggressively which can result in them being punished by teachers.

Victims often deny being bullied so that they can keep their place in the bully’s group, however painful this may be. As Ilsa commented,

_Ilsa:_ The victim says it’s just mucking around to stay in with the crowd and the fear of being bullied.

What is remarkable about this statement, is that the victim is already being bullied, yet prefers to remain with the group that is making his or her life miserable. One way of staying in with the group is to declare loyalty to it. A
particular incident among Year 11 boys at Mayne illustrates this phenomenon of victim denial. This report came from my field notes.

A teacher who had been on duty at lunchtime was upset overhearing a group of Year 11 boys calling one of their peers, Sam, who had pimples, “Scabface” and “Pusface”. She said he was sitting there looking miserable, with the other boys laughing - there were about six of them. When Sam went to the toilet, the other boys told the Year 8s to lift a table against the door so he couldn’t get out. (Role modelling! - teaching them that the school culture is a bullying one). The Year 8s all gathered into a crowd and were laughing and cheering. When I asked the boys what had happened, they all said Sam was a mate - they were just joking. I asked Jeremy, the Principal, to talk to them and they were all extremely angry - “We didn’t DO nothing!” they cried, astonished that Jeremy wanted to speak to them. They denied that they had put the table against the door, which was true, but they did not mention that they had told the Year 8s to do it.

That afternoon, Sam excused himself from class to come down to the Deputy's office to protest against the others getting into trouble. The Deputy was out, so I spoke to him instead. I explained it was the school acting, not him - that we were trying to establish a culture of, "We don't do that here". He settled somewhat when I told him I deliberately hadn't spoken to him to protect him from being accused of dobbing. He wasn't even angry with the others, claiming them as his
mates, saying he didn't want them to get into trouble on his account - it was a sort of fierce loyalty for his antagonists. Sam saw himself as their friend. How far do "mates" have to go before they become ex-mates? (f.n. 21/2/03)

Later, I wrote in my reflective notes,

*I wondered if this boy was sticking up for his “mates” because they were the only ones he could hang around with, and as such, were better than nothing. How much humiliation would he have endured before he declared them ex-mates, I wondered? Was it so important to him to be part of the group, albeit as a figure of ridicule, to allow them to treat him so appallingly? It is very difficult to find an answer to this question, because I have found that people who are victimised this way, usually do not explain their behaviour very well. Perhaps he felt it was better to be bullied by “friends” that he knew, than by others – the Devil you know. Perhaps he felt that he could cope with it – had built up a tolerance for it – and that it really was OK. Alternatively, maybe it was me not catching on to the boys’ sense of humour. However, this seemed unlikely because the duty teacher’s distress stemmed from his apparent misery at the treatment they were giving him. According to her, he was definitely not enjoying the taunting, and was certainly unhappy about being locked in the toilet. I felt sad that this destructive way of relating was the best these older boys could come up with.*
... I was struck at the willingness of the Year 8 boys to go along with the Year 11 boys' instructions to barricade him in the toilet. This could have been because they genuinely thought it was a joke, (though it was obvious that the joke was at someone’s expense) and enjoyed the connection with older boys, who normally would take little notice of them. The message given to the Year 8 boys was clear – that it’s normal to bully someone, that it’s normal to pretend it’s a joke, and finally, that it’s normal to deny that any harm was meant. The Year 8s were caught up in the excitement and had the Year 11 boys acting as a “shield” against any trouble, should a teacher catch them barricading the boy in the toilet. (r.n. 21/2/03)

It is very difficult for schools to act against bullying when the victim denies he or she is being bullied. This denial is also reflective of our wider society, where, for example, domestic violence victims fail to press charges against their abusers because to do so would finish their relationship, however bad that might be.

This chapter has examined the bullying and bystander behaviours in the context of the school culture, this being a reflection of the broader culture in which we live. Factors such as a lack of a whole school, integrated anti-bullying approach, an atmosphere of acceptance and inevitability of bullying, and a reluctance by members of the school community generally to take individual responsibility to counter bullying were taken into account. This chapter gave an overview of the different ways boys and girls bully,
with the intention of alerting the reader to the need for different solutions to the bullying problem. The next chapter further analyses the data, with an emphasis on the emotional barriers that prevent bystanders from taking action against bullying.
CHAPTER FIVE

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO BYSTANDERS COUNTERING BULLYING

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how bullying behaviour is supported and maintained by the school culture. I argued that the school community’s lack of an integrated, whole-school approach to countering bullying was not productive. Attention was drawn to gender differences in ways of bullying and the need was highlighted for anti-bullying programmes to address these variances in behaviours. School community apathy, brought about by a sense of inevitability of bullying behaviours, was discussed, as was the general reluctance to take responsibility to take action against bullying. The way students define themselves against authoritarian teachers and administration was emphasised as enhancing the school culture’s support and maintenance of behaviours surrounding bullying.

This chapter explores the psychological barriers that prevent bystanders from taking action against bullying, even though they sometimes want to. This is the third research question, and is not exclusive of the first two, but adds a more specific focus to the existing bullying culture, established through the support and maintenance of members of the school community. Here I investigate the meanings students attach to bullying behaviours, arguing that bystanders do not take action against bullying because of fear, but that this fear stems from numerous sources. Reasons for non intervention are explained, such as the teachers’ responses to reports of
bullying, the students’ anxiety about not belonging to a group, confusion about what behaviours constitute bullying and the fear of being viewed as a person unable to grasp the new culture’s behaviours. The school culture’s protection of bullies is emphasised, including the popularity and power afforded to the bullies through the desire for entertainment and shielding attempts to counter bullying by secrecy. Excitement, including crowd commotion, as a barrier to intervention is also discussed. The chapter finishes with a description of students’ ideas on how to counter bullying and their perspectives of measures that would be effective.

5.1 Bystanders’ Reasons for not Taking Action

To understand the way bystanders attach meaning to bullying events and how they reach a decision to intervene or not, Latane and Darley’s (1970) study on bystander apathy highlights the intricate process. Latane and Darley make what may be seen as an obvious observation, that the first step to bystander intervention is to actually notice the incident. Given that much bullying occurs without anyone witnessing the incidents, this step may not be as obvious as it first seems. It is virtually impossible to witness bullying if it takes the form of spreading rumours, manipulating friendships, excluding people from the group, hiding or stealing someone’s belongings.

5.1.2 Confusion about the bullying situation

If the event is noticed, it is the second of Latane & Darley’s steps that prevents many students from taking action. This is to make the decision that this is, in fact, bullying, and that the victim might need help. It is at this
stage that confusion abounds, for many reasons, but one in particular is worthy of discussion. Bullying is often disguised as a joke – “just mucking around” (Martino & Meyenn, 2001). Bystanders have great difficulty at times in translating aggressive behaviour as bullying, because so much behaviour between friends and acquaintances is also aggressive. Katrina explained the dilemma in her comment,

Katrina: I’ve seen bullying, but I didn’t think it was actually bullying because they were pushing each other. That’s part of the reason people don’t intervene (because of the confusion).

Cecilia made a similar comment,

Cecelia: You don’t know the whole story, so you don’t want to do anything with only half the story.

The importance of gaining full understanding of a bullying incident is revealed in her next statement,

Cecelia: You’re scared all the time.

DL: How much of the time?

Cecelia: All of it – every day.

The following incident, from my field notes, highlights the notion that aggressive play can actually conceal bullying. Students use a pretence of misinterpretation of the incident either to mask their protection of the bully, or their lack of intervention.

A Year 8 boy, Jesse, was hit by a Year 9 boy, Adam. Later, it turns out that Jesse is a provocative victim, hanging around, calling out names, being a nuisance. Adam threatened that his friends will beat Jesse up.
He "hit" him with his thigh, (he's twice the size of Jesse) and Jesse ran off crying. When I asked the Year 9 bystanders what they did when the threats were being made, they were energetic in their denial that they were guilty of doing anything. (This is so common). When I asked why was that? (that they did nothing) they looked perplexed, then came up with the standard answer, "We thought they were just mucking around." This was just an excuse this time, and I later found out that they actually thought Jesse was getting what he deserved because he deliberately annoys them. I spoke to Jesse later, and went through some social skills with him, using role-play. He said he would not go near Adam or his friends again. (f.n. 5/3/03)

Another, similar incident was written in my field notes involved students claiming to be just playing, or, as bystanders, claiming to not know that bullying was taking place.

I was walking through the quadrangle and saw a group of boys whose body language looked aggressive. They didn't see me approach because they were in an undercroft, quite well hidden. They were a group of Year 9 boys, calling a Year 8 boy, Ben, names, (I didn't exactly hear what they called him, but heard the shouting) and jeering at him. When I asked them what was happening, I got the standard answer, "Just mucking around, Miss", even from Ben. He later said they'd been doing it a long time. When I asked them why, they still said it was mucking around, and I had to repeatedly question them, before they came up with how annoying he was. Apparently his crime was to have a serious
face. I met them in my office after lunch and ran through the No
Blame Approach, individually, with three of them and explained that it
becomes a discipline issue after this. They agreed that it would be
hard for Ben at lunchtimes, and said they’d stop doing it. (f.n. 2/7/03).

The following also draws attention to the way bystanders behave according
to the meaning they attach to aggressive behaviour if they witness it. This
incident highlights the difficulty that students have in deciphering
aggressive behaviour as being friendly or bullying.

Walking along the corridor at the beginning of school, I could see a
gathering of Year 8 students lined up outside the class, waiting for
their teacher. As I approached, I could see two boys, Glen and Robert,
wrestling quite roughly. As I got closer, I could see that Robert was
trying to get away, and finally wrestled himself free. Glen then kicked
him hard in the shin, and Robert flinched with the pain. At least two
other boys were saying things to him, which, although I could not hear,
I could see from their aggressive body language that it would not have
been friendly. Robert was keeping his distance and looked afraid. His
face registered relief when he saw me. I took both boys aside and
asked them to wait in separate areas for me to see them shortly. The
teacher had arrived by this time, and I asked him for a couple of
minutes with the assembled students. I asked them what had
happened, and most of them did not know. When I asked if anyone
thought they should help Robert, they said they thought the boys
were friends, and were just joking. I was sceptical at first, but after
further discussion, was more convinced because they said it wasn’t until he was kicked that they realised it was a more serious situation.

(f.n. 2/4/03)

The next situation again illustrates the confusion bystanders face about the nature of the aggressive play. Only the close friends of the bully knew that it was not friendly playing.

A Year 8 boy was being picked on on the bus by three Year 10 boys and some Year 9 girls – bystanders, smiling and laughing at the names. They called him names “gay” and “faggot”. A duty teacher saw him standing in the rain and told him to get under the shelter, and he said “No”. The teacher asked him why, and he said he felt safer out of the shelter, away from the others. That’s how I found out he was being bullied. No-one else had said anything, least of all the victim. He was very afraid of being called a “dobber”, so I found some of the Year 11 and 12 boys on the bus, to look after him. When I asked the older kids why they had not done anything to stop the bullying, they said they thought that the group were all friends, and were just calling each other names. One of them said, “I thought they were just stupid kids, acting stupid. We all call each other names, too, and we’re mates”. The meanings that they had attached to the aggressive behaviour were that the younger kids were friends, and that insulting each other was a way of communicating in a friendly way. This is a case of unawareness, rather than apathy, I think. The older kids seemed surprised that the behaviour was bullying. (f.n. 26/8/03)
Confusion acts as a robust obstruction to bystander intervention. That it is a very powerful barrier is evident in Ellen’s explanation that embarrassment made most students reluctant to intervene in case they were mistaken,

_Ellen_: There’s confusion about getting it wrong. If you butt in and they say they’re mucking around, and then you’d feel stupid.

The difficulty in discerning bullying from play is also evident in Ilsa’s statement,

_Ilsa_: There’s competition between fear of the bully and sympathy for victims. You have to be clear that it’s not mucking around. The victim says it’s just mucking around to stay in with the crowd and the fear of being bullied.

Aaron also pointed out the difficulty for teachers to notice bullying. He said,

_Aaron_: When I see it (bullying), I don’t mention names. I say, “Sir/Miss – something’s going on over there. Maybe you’d like to have a look”. It’s obvious when they’re all in a circle. The teachers might think it’s a game.

As can be seen, students legitimate bullying by using aggressive “play” as a cover for violence, and bullies capitalise on this confusion, using it as a shield against being blamed for bullying. Aggressive play is yet another support for bullying behaviour and schools need to strenuously oppose this form of play. It is not necessary to ban all physical play, but a culture is needed that sets a distinct limit to the physical nature of interactions, and calls aggressive play exactly what it is – aggressive. The school’s
clarification of activities that constitute energetic play and those that are regarded as aggressive would provide a distinction between them that would remove any confusion. If schools could ban aggression within play, they would be removing a strong prop of bullying behaviour. The above situations show how those students, disinclined to help victims they found annoying, used confusion to cover their inaction, knowing that they could pretend they did not know it was bullying. They knew they would have a good “reason”, if an adult were to confront them, for not taking action. When victims are provocative, or are disliked, bystanders have little empathy and are unenthusiastic about intervening on their behalf. However, this is not the only reason for bystanders’ lack of empathy, as will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.3 Bystanders’ Lack of Empathy for the Victim

In searching for explanations for why bystanders do not intervene to prevent bullying, and having suspected that fear was not the only reason, I investigated further reasons for their lack of action. One of the surprising elements that emerged in this study was the lack of empathy for victims. The students were not in the least hesitant to offer “can’t be bothered” as a reason for not intervening in bullying incidents or telling a teacher about it. This contradicted somewhat, their previous statements that they thought intervention was the “right” thing to do. More in-depth understandings of the meanings they attached to this inaction were required. Closer investigation revealed there were several reasons for them saying this, one of these being that students really did not care about a victim being bullied.
This points to a fundamental flaw in existing anti-bullying programmes, which teach the strategies to counter bullying assuming that students actually want to do so. For bystanders to take action against bullying, it is first necessary for them to care enough to act. Typical viewpoints from the students were, however, “It’s not really your problem” and “They can’t be bothered – it doesn’t matter enough”, and some had the opinion that the victim should be able to manage the situation themselves.

The absence of empathy for victims is based on a typical school culture that promotes masculine values, reflected in the way school administrations traditionally value and employ rational, disciplined strategies and ignore the importance of emotions and feelings, (Askew, 1989; Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997). Some students even thought the victim “deserved” to be bullied. This lack of empathy can evolve into a certain satisfaction of witnessing a person the bystander does not like being bullied. Katrina said,

Katrina: Bystanders gather around to see what’s happening. Maybe they don’t like the victim…

Ellen’s perspective was that if a victim “deserved” being bullied, the bully was providing a service to others. She said,

Ellen: If the victim deserves it for being a pest…You’re punching him for me as well, because I feel like doing it.

Similarly, David’s perspective was that bullying was justified if the victim was annoying. Notice his derisive remarks regarding behaviours he considered to be contrary to the approved, masculine culture.
David: The victim might make smart comments – like shout in class and makes everyone angry. Shows off and no-one likes him. Anger makes people bully. They put (his) clothes in the shower. If you look nerdy, or have a girly voice when he’s a boy – makes him sound and look like a wimp. Bullies take advantage of you – they argue with or scare him.

Whilst Aaron’s perspective did not actually point to a lack of empathy for the victim, he placed responsibility for bullying equally between multiple parties, including the victim. He said,

Aaron: I’d like bullies to have a good reason for their action – also the victim – they can be annoying. Also, others hanging around – like a TV show.

Some students said they would care enough to intervene if they knew the victim. Others said they did care really, but didn’t know what to do, others said they would care, but only if the bullying was extremely violent. Among this diversity of opinions is the varied ways in which students categorise victims, explained in the next section.

5.2 Meanings of “victim”

The diversity of opinions, under discourse analysis, however, emerged within interviews, with individuals making inconsistent statements, and sometimes even contradicting themselves. For this reason, it was important to be vigilant when talking to the students to ensure I understood the meanings they attached to the behaviours of various players in bullying.
incidents, were understood by me correctly. When I investigated the
different ways in which “victim” was constructed by the students, further
anomalies appeared, which I discuss in the next two sections.

5.2.1 Minding Your Own Business and Categorising Victims

During interviews, students’ meanings of “victim” were negotiated, with
some varied outcomes. Victims were not perceived as an homogenous
group. Students defined victims according to their relationship with them
and how much they liked them. It emerged that victims were placed in
categories such as “someone you don’t know”, therefore, not to be bothered
about if they are being bullied. Tisak & Tisak (1996) found that students in
early adolescence thought that it would be more wrong not to intervene in a
bullying incident if the aggressor was a sibling, than if they were a friend.
In this study, the same principle was applied, but this time, when the victim
was a sibling, or close friend. If the victim was “someone you know”, there
was more concern for their welfare, with a higher likelihood of intervention
on their behalf.

Another close category was “a brother/sister” or “a friend”, or even,
“someone you know well”. Anna explained,

Anna: Some people might help if it was their friend or brother or
sister, but not otherwise.

Ilsa’s perspective was similar,

Ilsa: I’d be more likely to tell a teacher if I know them (victim).

From a bystander’s point of view, knowing the victim would cause more
distress for the bystander, who faced the dilemma of wanting to intervene,
but being prevented from doing so by their fear. Knowing the victim increased empathy, as Katrina explained,

*Katrina:* Bullying upsets you, even if you don’t know them, but it’s worse if it’s one of your friends. If it was one of my *close* friends, I’d tell them to stop – you’d have to be very brave – but not if it was someone I didn’t know.

Carlo felt the same way,

*Carlo:* Sometimes – only if it’s a friend, you feel bad. If it’s not a friend, you just ignore it.

Gemma also had empathy for the victim,

*Gemma:* The fear of being bullied – it’s the worst thing that can happen to you. Even if they *do* care enough, they don’t (take action). It would be better, then the bully might stop …They (bystanders) can’t be bothered if it’s not a friend – who cares? It’s not me. If it’s a friend, it’s different…If you don’t know them, it doesn’t matter, even if you see them upset.

The following conversation with Ewan highlighted the reluctance to get involved if the victim was not well known to the bystander. Importantly, Ewan also mentioned that the bullies would be more likely to stop bullying if the bystander intervening were a friend of their victim.

*DL:* Why do you think people don’t do anything when they see bullying?

*Ewan:* Don’t know (pause) – they don’t have to, I suppose

*DL:* They don’t have to?
Ewan: No, why should they? It’s nothing to do with them – only if it’s your friend.

DL: You’d help if it was your friend?

Ewan: Yes

DL: What would you do?

Ewan: I’d tell them to stop, and say, “He’s my friend”

DL: Do you think the bullies would take more notice if you told them the victim was your friend?

Ewan: Yes. If it wasn’t your friend, they’d say, “Mind your own business”

There were other similar comments about the way bullies would respond if the victim were a friend or sibling. Francesca and Frank both had similar perspectives.

DL: If it was your friend, how would the bullies react?

Francesca: They’d stop if they knew. They’d tease me too, but they’d still stop.

DL: Why would they tease you too?

Francesca: Because they’re bullies.

DL: Why do you think they’d stop bullying your friend?

Francesca: Because I’d tell them to stop. If they saw me first, they’d sort of go quiet a bit anyway.

DL: Go quiet?

Francesca: Yeah, they’d sort of stop – a bit – because they’d know I was her friend. Only if it’s good friends. If it’s just someone you
know, they wouldn’t care. They’d tell you to mind your own business if you said anything.

DL: Why is that?

Francesca: If you told them to stop and it wasn’t even your friend.

DL: How would that make you feel?

Francesca: Really stupid (pause) like I was sticking my nose in.

Frank also thought there would be more response from the bullies if a bystander intervened on his sibling’s or friend’s behalf.

Frank: “If they saw you coming, and it (victim) was your sister or brother, someone would say, ‘Here comes Frank! Quick! Stop!’”

DL: Why would they say that?

Frank: Because you were his brother

DL: And why would they stop because of that?

Frank: (With an impatient expression) Because you were his brother, and they shouldn’t be bullying your brother.

DL: What would happen if it wasn’t your brother or sister?

Frank: They wouldn’t care – well, a bit, if it was your best friend

DL: What would they do if it was your best friend?

Frank: The same – they’d stop

It appeared that the bullies’ response depended on the relationship between an intervening bystander and the victim. As evident in Frank’s answers, the students were not aware of any reason for this. In my reflective notes, I wrote,

*It seems that saying that the victim is your friend or sibling gives you more permission to intervene – as if you need an excuse.* The
psychological barrier of not wanting to be told, “Mind your own business” is removed, at least. The culture approves of you intervening on your friend’s or sibling’s behalf, but not just for anyone. Another interesting pattern that seems to be emerging is the students’ perception that the bullies would respond to intervention in this case, but not in others. It’s not just a case of being outnumbered, because the bully usually is surrounded by friends. Will investigate this further. (r.n. 29/4/03)

Students said they felt strongly that they, as bystanders, should mind their own business. However, even this apparent respect for others’ “privacy” was not what it seemed to be. When analysed, ‘minding one’s own business’ was structured around the risk of being bullied themselves, or being ridiculed for making a mistake.

Carlo thought people did not intervene because,

Carlo: It’s harder in reality – for example, I didn’t think there’d be this many people. They’ll remember who you are and they’ll bully you instead, and say, ‘Why didn’t you let them sort it out themselves?”

Cecelia also thought bystanders usually just minded their own business,

Cecelia: Bystanders just stare or walk on by if you don’t know the victim, or if you know them, you’ll stick around to make sure you get the true story, like, “he was hit five times”. You don’t want to be seen staring because the victim might say, “Why didn’t you help me?”.
The consequences of intervening was what students feared most. Being regarded as foolish would mean being rejected from the group for being so socially unaware that they could make a mistake about a “joke”. If the confusion surrounding the behaviour were removed, students could be more clear about the nature of the behaviour they are witnessing.

5.3 Excitement

When excitement levels in a school are high, for any reason, rumours spread quickly. When bullying is the source of the excitement, it is dismaying to see how eagerly students can turn on the victim. The intensity of the frenzy created, sometimes by a whole year group, is overwhelming and only an extremely brave student would take action against it. Aaron’s view, for example, was that students do not think as individuals when large numbers of them are gathered.

Aaron: People know what’s right in their head, but it’s like they’ve forgotten when it comes to one of those situations. They want to see the result – everyone else is watching, they set a bad example for others and more people come, then the crowd gets bigger.

It seems as if the “crowd”, as Aaron observed, dictates the behaviour of the individual, as was the case in this example from my field notes, which shows how an already unpopular boy was ridiculed by what seemed like the whole of Year 8. His crime was reported to be that he had pulled his pants down at sport. His version was that he had urinated behind a tree.
A Year 8 boy, Daniel, under siege due to rumours that he dacked himself at the football - (flashed at them). He denied it. He was in a rage at school, refused to go to class and eventually went home when his Mum and Dad had come in to discuss the situation. The whole of Year 8, it seemed, was abuzz with the excitement of it all - and Daniel was an absolute outcast. An awful pack mentality, too big for me to deal with. Arranged a support group to stay with him during recess and lunch. (f.n.23/6/03)

I spoke to Daniel a couple of days after the above event, and the “mob” had settled down somewhat.

Checked with Daniel how things were going, and he said there were now only a few people jeering at him. The rest had quietened down and he felt OK now. (f.n. 25/6/03)

It is easy to see why no-one intervened on this boy’s behalf. Firstly, he was not a popular student amongst his peers, and had no friends to support him. Secondly, the excitement level was very high and it would have spoilt the enjoyment students were getting from the agitation if anyone had tried to reduce it. This victim had little choice but to wait until the excitement level subsided and the taunts diminished. Similarly, Cecelia observed that when a victim is unpopular, there is little empathy from the bystanders. There is an element of revenge, where it is satisfying to see someone being bullied if you already have a grievance against them.

Cecelia: Bystanders usually join in (bullying), maybe because they’ve (bystander and victim) had a previous fight or it’s to impress the bully, who’s usually popular.
DL: Why is the bully popular?

Cecelia: Don’t know… I don’t think it’s that they’re popular, it’s just normal people trying to get popular by picking on losers. If you tease someone else, it makes you feel superior.

Cecelia’s perspective was that bullying could serve multiple purposes – in this case, revenge, to gain popularity and to feel superior.

However, revenge is only explanation for a crowd of students to attack another. In the following incident, there was no provocation on the victim’s part. The only reason for the Year 9 boys to bully the Year 8 victim was to join in the fun. I do not believe that, individually, they would have bullied him in the same way.

I was waiting for a duty teacher at the end of school, at the bus stop. A group of five Year 9 boys got there first and started some rough play. I observed their pushing and punching each other – the knuckles on the arm, the kicking on the legs, the pulling of clothes, all accompanied by laughter, even though it must have hurt. They completely ignored me, and I am not sure if they even saw me. Shortly, a Year 8 boy, Chris, arrived and stood apart from them, looking up the road in the opposite direction for the bus to come, I thought. One of the Year 9 boys spotted him and nudged one of his friends, grinning. The other boy looked around and quickly called the others’ attention to the Chris. This was obviously a source of some exciting entertainment, and they turned toward Chris with interest. They started calling out his name, to gain his attention, but he steadfastly looked in the other
direction. Soon, with their efforts being ignored, the calls grew louder and more insulting. His name was called in an increasingly jeering fashion, then, when this did not achieve the desired result, they called him names - “f**khead, gay boy, dickhead, faggot”.

I was already approaching them to intervene when the duty teacher arrived at that moment and the Year 9 boys resumed their rough play, as if nothing had happened. The boys’ bullying behaviour was obviously dependent on the absence of an adult, but they knew that their aggressive play with each other would be tolerated. I asked the female duty teacher if they always played so roughly, and she just raised her eyes, as if to say, sadly, that’s just the way things were. I spoke to Chris the next day and found out that this had been happening all year. He once got his sister’s boyfriend to come to the bus stop and threaten them, which only served to increase their bullying. He had stood in the road to avoid them for several days, but was roughly told off by one of the older boys for not standing in the designated area. He couldn’t win. The lack of awareness of the hurt they cause is evident in the relaxed and quite friendly manner the Year 9 boys used when they told Chris that they picked on him because he’s the only Year 8 on the bus.

Later, Chris told me they teased him about his grandmother, who had come to pick him up one day, saying she was fat and ugly. He was very close to his grandmother, but had dissuaded her from coming to pick
him up again. He felt ashamed to stop her, because she could not understand why he would prefer to catch three different buses and get home at five o’clock, to getting a lift with her.

He was devastated by the daily treatment he received from these boys and was trying to persuade his parents, to let him change schools. His mother had said he should stay at this school until the end of the year, but he was applying pressure to move immediately. I wondered if the Year 9 boys had thought about the damage their one minute of insults had caused, would they have done it. I was never to find out because, when speaking to Chris about it later, he was adamant that I should not get involved, for fear of making it worse. I respected his wishes, and instead, asked the older students on the bus to tell them to stop. Once again, the pack mentality and the thrill of it struck me as being irresistible to these boys. (f.n. 25/8/03)

The ongoing series of incidents between Year 10 girls, described as girls bullying in in Chapter Four, which led to two distinct factions forming, was another example of how a group can become aroused and destructive. As usual, in this case, it was impossible to get to the real truth of what had happened, however, the harassment had reached a point where I was worried that someone was going to get physically hurt. The following was written in my field notes.

Meeting with mother and Christine about graffiti being spread around the school. House being bombarded with food, a bolt thrown through a
window, wheelies on the lawn. All this has brewed within the school. An ongoing series of incidents, such as swearing, SMS messages, emails, obscene phone calls, etc. There have already been two meetings with all the girls - about 10 in all, about keeping the peace at school. This situation is not appropriate for mediation because of the enmity between the girls, only one of whom was willing to give mediation a try. This is a very difficult situation because, apart from the graffiti at school, it is so hard to find evidence of bullying - it is almost all done verbally and electronically and is untraceable. The war between the two factions is distracting the other Year 10s, who are spreading rumours, one being that boys arrived with guns last week. The rumours and gossip are such that I even overheard a group discussing it. If it's so ubiquitous that I am hearing it, that means that it's severe.

Spoke with the Deputy about these girls' boyfriends from outside the school, driving at high speed, squealing their tyres, yelling obscenities, etc. No-one's identified them or got a number plate yet. I was worried that this would escalate to violence and the Deputy asked me to call the police and arrange a meeting, which I did for the following day, with the girls and their parents. (f.n. 21/8/03)

The next day, a meeting was held with the girls, their parents, the two Deputies, a police officer and myself. My field notes continued,

Community police brought in to explain to Year 10 girls the severity of their threats, text messages, graffiti, etc. Nine mothers and one father came, and the meeting was acrimonious, with accusations and
counter-accusations between parents and students. Even the officer addressing the group could not keep control. One mother said she was taking her daughter out of the school immediately, stood up and got to the door, but stayed. (f.n. 22/8/03)

Following the meeting and feeling distressed by the intensity of negative emotions, I wrote this in my reflective notes:

*The mob behaviour is not confined to just students – when emotions run high, particularly anger, adults are the same. There had been phone calls between parents, apparently, which has fuelled the acrimony, and parents arrived in an aggressive mood.* (r.n. 22/8/03)

Clearly, any bystander would have to be extremely brave to confront such a large number of angry people. The intensity of such a situation acts as an effective obstacle to anyone intervening. Groups tend to become closer when they are confronted, which makes finding the truth and countering bullying an impossible task. Groups bond under such pressure, with members’ loyalty to bullies being impenetrable. The only way such a situation could be avoided is to create a school culture that disapproves of such victimisation and aggressive behaviour.

5.4 Effectiveness of Education Programmes

To create an anti-bullying school culture, many schools, globally and throughout Australia, have implemented educational programmes aimed at teaching students how to respond to bullying situations (Rigby, 2002). The effectiveness of these was examined, finding that, although bullying was
reduced in most cases, sometimes this was not the case, with bullying actually increasing in some cases.

Crucial to a comprehensive anti-bullying strategy is the inclusion of both educational and emotional approaches. Educational programmes, with their focus on cognitive factors, provide information and instructions on appropriate behaviour in bullying situations. However, this study reveals that it is emotional factors that set up barriers to behaviour. This is what prevents students from taking action against bullying, even though they would like to. Educational programmes that overlook the psychological barriers to bystander intervention also ignore the very motivational factors needed to propel students into action. Without motivation, no amount of information is going to induce students to intervene. An indication of the competing demands of empathy and fear, and knowing what she should do, are illustrated in Bree’s somewhat contradictory comments. Firstly, she says that she would be motivated to take action by using the anonymous email to report bullying because of her empathy with the victim.

*Bree:* I would use the email because I feel sorry enough for the victim.

Nevertheless, a short while later into our conversation, she changed this, saying,

*Bree:* I’d be afraid with the email, that someone might see me sending this. Lunchtime would be the safest, but (paused), not (paused again, searching for the right word)

*DL:* Foolproof?
Bree: Yes, not foolproof

Bree’s fear of being caught appeared to be a barrier to her decision to send an email. Her thoughts on education further exposed the tension between cognitive and psychological factors,

DL: Do you think the school is effective in countering bullying?

Bree: The education isn’t working because they don’t want to be bullied themselves. It doesn’t matter how much you know you aught to help, or how bad you feel, you still don’t. There’s a huge fear of being bullied. Everyone avoids it.

Some students felt they had learned how to deal with bullying from educational programmes in their primary schools. Others felt education was not working. Currently, students are saying that they know what to do, but they are unable to act on this knowledge because of psychological barriers. Schools implementing educational anti-bullying programmes have to be cognisant of their emotional plight.

Katrina’s opinion that bystanders would intervene if they knew what to do, however, offers some hope that education can have an effect on students’ emotional state. It is an indication that education would be beneficial if there was motivation to help. Her comments highlight the importance of raising awareness of the victim’s distress, thereby inducing an empathic response.

Katrina: It upsets people because that kid being bullied doesn’t deserve it and that’s upsetting – they’d go help the other person if you knew what to do…like the Programme Achieve bullying programme in primary school – it helped because of role plays.
Sometimes you could really get into it and feel sorry for the person being bullied. The bullied person could retaliate and then they’d know what it was like. People don’t have sympathy for the victim, because they’ve never been teased and they don’t know what it’s like – or they don’t like the victim. They don’t care enough.

Notice that Katrina also qualifies the “type” of victim, who she thought was only likely to be helped if people liked them. Students are selective about who they will help, according to how they classify the victim. The yardsticks of being liked or being known, were constantly used to measure how worthy victims were of being helped. This categorisation of victims is another area that educational programmes need to address, so that students will be willing to help all victims, even if they do not know them or even dislike them.

Aaron’s views highlight the strength of empathy for the victim as a motivator.

Aaron: As a bystander, I would tell a teacher. I don’t want to be a hypocrite. You know how it feels (being bullied) – nobody gives a damn. We need to take responsibility. Bullies make them feel like crap – they beat them half to death…Bullies make the victim feel bad, sometimes they are jealous. We need a video to teach bystanders to take action – dunno if it would work – depends on if you’re a nice person…What do we need to get bystanders to act? (His own question to himself). Empathy – a different perspective.
Clearly, it is the psychological, more than the cognitive barriers, which are in the way of bystander intervention. The next sections deliver a somewhat more positive message, with students’ perspectives on what measures will work to counter bullying. Detailed are students’ comments that contradict some of those mentioned previously, indicating, among other things, that students actually do have empathy for victims and that bullies can be deterred.

5.5 Participants’ Views on How to Counter Bullying

5.5.1 Empathy for the Victim

In spite of the frequently negative comments about victims, many students said they did have empathy for the victim and that they knew how they felt. In some cases, this was from their own experience of being bullied, but in other instances, they could empathise even without having been a victim themselves. Bree said,

_Bree:_ Victims feel useless – not wanted because they’re called names. Their body language – they don’t stand up straight, have a sad expression. (Mimicked them with slumped shoulders, sad face).

Aaron, who was very concerned about the victim’s welfare, was quite scathing about other people’s lack of action.

_DL:_ Why do you think people say they will intervene, but actually don’t?

_Aaron:_ Interest, (in the bullying incident) or they might not know names – can’t be bothered. If it happens to them, they make a big song and dance over it, but not with others – they’re selfish – the rest of the world doesn’t exist. They need more empathy. If I could, I’d
get them to not look at a fight as a circus, as interesting – instead think, ‘This isn’t right, it’s not fair’. They’re just focusing on what’s going on, wanting to see who wins and see if someone’s going to get hurt – it’s exciting. Until they’ve been bullied themselves, they won’t know what it’s like (pause).

Aaron was on the point of crying at this point in the interview. After a moment, he continued, and contradicted his last statement that people would only know what it felt like to be bullied if they had been bullied themselves. With great feeling, he added,

Aaron: You shouldn’t need the experience, you should just know.

The emotions are fear, not bothered (pause) – don’t know.

Berating bystanders for not taking action, he said later,

Aaron: Why can’t they go and do something about it if you haven’t experienced it? Do they have to be put through that process just to realise? (He was questioning himself). Even if they have (experienced bullying), they say, “It’s OK, it’s not happening to me.”

Aaron’s body language was despairing, his head down and his hand was covering his forehead. He went on,

Aaron: What do we need? (his own question to himself). We’ve tried sympathy – what if it happened to you? Then they continue – could be bullied (his explanation for bullying), get a kick out of it – it makes you popular and makes others laugh. It’s very rare for people to stop it.
It was surprising after such an impassioned outburst that even Aaron, as a bystander, said he would only intervene if the victim were a friend. He said,

_Aaron:_ I tell people to stop and I say “Don’t say that about them”. I have loyalty for friends. If I don’t know them – that’s different.

_DL:_ How is that different?

_Aaron:_ Well, you don’t know them – you don’t know what they’ve done.

_DL:_ Does that make a difference?

_Aaron:_ I know it shouldn’t, but it does really. You wouldn’t know if they’d deserved it or not.

_DL:_ How do you mean, “deserved it”?

_Aaron:_ It could be that maybe they’d stolen something from them, or, or, I don’t know, called them names or something.

_DL:_ So would that be OK to bully them?

_Aaron:_ No, not bullying exactly, but if it was just someone getting them back for something.

_DL:_ Would you call that bullying?

_Aaron:_ No – no – I wouldn’t (pause). That’s why I wouldn’t say anything to stop it.

_DL:_ What if it was your friend?

_Aaron:_ I’d know them, and know they wouldn’t have done anything wrong, so I’d tell them to stop.

From Aaron’s comments, it appears that it is not so much the fact that the victim was unknown, but that events leading up to the incident were not
known. As already discussed, bystanders will not intervene if there is some doubt about the reasons for the bullying. They need to be able to interpret the aggression as bullying, and if this is unclear, they will not intervene. In spite of this, it is encouraging that students expressed a desire to stop bullying. This is the motivation that is needed for anti-bullying programmes to be effective. There were further comments from students expressing their desire to help, feeling bad about not helping and seeking ways to do so, as Bree said,

*Bree:* (It) makes you want to do something about it but don’t, because you’re scared of being bullied too…It worries me quite a lot. I wish I could do something, but I don’t.

The next remark, from Anna, I found *really* telling. Anna, who admitted to being a bully, thought it was a case of bully or be bullied.

*Anna:* But they don’t really mean it – most (bullies). People don’t want to get bullied and be less popular and get bullied too. It would be easier to intervene if others did it, but they don’t.

*DL:* Why?

*Anna:* Because they don’t care really

*DL:* What are the victim’s feelings, do you think?

*Anna:* Sadness, loneliness, anger

*DL:* And the bully?

*Anna:* Kind of awful – happy because of friends laughing. I want to tell them to stop, but don’t because it’s nerdy. I feel sorry for the victim. I have reassured victims before – they smiled and thanked me.
This interview was interesting because Anna’s conversation was full of inconsistencies and contradictions. I wrote in my reflective notes,

A “different” interview with Anna. She seemed confused about what she felt about bullying. She was quite relaxed about telling me she’d bullied other people, then, as with some of the others, when she started thinking about it, she said that bullies don’t really mean it and inferred that you only bully to save yourself from being bullied. But she had already said that people bully to be popular, saying it was peer pressure and she was the class clown. I think there may be many reasons for people bullying, and that’s why the students sometimes look as though they’re changing their minds about their answers. She became quite sad and spoke quietly when I asked her what she thought the victim’s feelings might be, and was quick to let me know that she had reassured victims before. The roles in bullying behaviour seem to be interchangeable, as with Anna, who had been in a bullying, victim and bystander role. (r.n. 21/4/03)

Ilisa’s story about bullying in the previous year, at primary school, emphasises the way victims get bullied. However, she described how she had intervened on one victim’s behalf, and how she thought he would have felt as a result.

Ilisa: People get bullied because they dress funny, like short shorts, the way they act, braces, glasses. One boy was teased for having short shorts and even his “friends” (pulled a quizzical face to show she didn’t think they were real friends) left him and he had lunch by
himself every day. He would have been sad and lonely and he would have to go to another school.

One boy in the same year with braces, short pants and glasses, had his head down in the middle of the circle – she (bully) called him “Four-eyes”. The others were laughing and encouraging her to say things, like he must be poor to not afford other pants. When I told her off “It’s not nice to do this – you should think what it’s like”, she turned on me and called me “Shorty”, and she said, “No-one would ever do it to me because I'm better than anyone else”. (Sighed - sad, head down –hopeless).

One of my friends backed me up – I was screaming at her, then teachers came out and broke it up and I got a detention for screaming that loud. I said I wasn’t going to leave someone being hurt. He was also intelligent and they called him a freak. I’d have felt happy (if I was him) because somebody cared and maybe that girl would always back me up and I would never be lonely because you think you’ve got no friends.

This story illustrates Ilza’s recognition of the loneliness and rejection felt by the victim, and her view of the importance of having support from friends. She added,

*Ilza:* You’ve got to have a little bit of braveness and stay close to your friends. If the bully has *numbers*, it’s worse. One Year 11 boy got asked why he didn’t wear a bra by a bunch of Year 9 boys. He didn’t turn around
because there were too many of them. People feel scared to do anything because they know they couldn’t do anything wrong in front of them.

Some students thought bullies would change if only they took the time to think about the harm they do to their victims. Jaimie seemed to think it would occur only if the bullying was extreme.

*Iaimie:* Bullies do feel bad when they think about how they affect the victim – when someone’s killed themselves. Here at school, bullies feel bad when they find out someone’s hurt themselves, like cutting themselves. Bullies either stop or lay off.

Having evidence, however tenuous, that students would intervene now begs the question that if they actually did take action, would it be effective?

### 5.6 Bystanders’ Perspective on the Effectiveness of Intervention

The research reviewed in Chapter One shows that bullying is emotionally damaging to bystanders (Lampert, 1998, Janson, 2000). In the group interviews, several comments were made indicating that students did feel distressed about bullying, such as, “They don’t like to see it (bullying) deep down inside,” “(Feel) upset”, “They feel bad because I’m not doing anything” and “You can’t ignore it because it’s happening.” During the individual interview, Harriet agreed with this, but her statement was qualified by her categorising the victim as a friend. She said,

*Harriet:* People are upset by bullying – only if you know them. You stick up for your friends.
Students did think that intervention would be an effective deterrent to bullying. Anna said,

Anna: If bystanders said anything, he would probably leave them alone. For example, Jack said, “leave them alone”, and he did….It would be easier to intervene if others did it, but they don’t.

Grant was one of a few students who managed to overcome the psychological barrier of fear to intervene.

Grant: I have told people to stop before – it takes courage. I was scared, but I still did it. After a while he did (stop) but not straight away.

DL: How do you think people feel about someone intervening?

Grant: Everyone would be relieved that someone is doing something to stop it and then others – the bully’s friends – would say, “loser”. Bystanders would be relieved because they feel better because they want it to stop. The victim’s friends especially want it to stop. Most people feel bad they’re not doing anything. This bad feeling inside to make you want to stop it.

DL: What makes you think most people want it to stop?

Grant: I’m not sure. Just people don’t like seeing people being bullied, but they’re too scared to do anything, and they’re standing there watching it and wishing it would stop but they can’t do anything.

DL: Earlier, you said that people found bullying exciting. How do these people feel about seeing bullying.
Grant: Well, yes, there’s those ones. But not everyone. They’re only a few. And sometimes, it is exciting, even though it’s bad at the same time, and then afterwards, people feel guilty.

DL: Why do they feel guilty?

Grant: For not doing anything to stop it, and for enjoying it, when someone’s getting hurt.

Grant’s comment “This bad feeling inside to make you want to stop it”, is suggestive of guilt, but it is also suggestive of empathy for the victim. Without empathy, there would be no guilt. It was this that encouraged Grant to find the courage to intervene, even though he admitted he was scared. It was this sort of courage that students said they admired, as Bree said,

Bree: If bullying is visible, people take more action. It makes them popular because they’re strong.

DL: What difference do you think it would make if they (bystanders) took action?

Bree: Friends would be pretty amazed – they’d think you were pretty strong and can stick up for what you believe in.

DL: Why do you think bullying happens?

Bree: People bully because they’re having troubles at home, like divorce, and they take it out on people at school. Others bully to be seen as being strong.

DL: What do you think the difference is between a strong bully and a strong defender?
**Bree:** A different reason for actions – the defender doesn’t care what people think of them. The bully does – they’re just weak and trying to impress people.

**DL:** And do they impress people?

**Bree:** Yes, I think they do.

Cecelia also alluded to admiration for the person brave enough to intervene,

**DL:** How do you think people would feel if someone intervened?

**Cecelia:** Some might snigger and others – about half – might think you’re a really nice person.

Gemma’s comment, quoted earlier, also recognised that intervention could stop bullying,

**Gemma:** The fear of being bullied – it’s the worst thing that can happen to you. Even if they do care enough, they don’t (take action). It would be better, then the bully might stop.

Intervention sounds like a good idea, but what does the victim think? Students’ perspectives were that victims would definitely feel better if people intervened on their behalf. Katrina’s comment below, however, indicates that it is too frightening to intervene if you are on your own. She said,

**Katrina:** If it was someone I didn’t know, I would tell them to stop if I was with other people. If I was on my own, I’d go get someone. People say they’d intervene because, if they’ve been bullied - because they know what it’s like. More would help if they had experienced bullying themselves.
Dimitty gave an account of her own experience of being bullied, and of having bystanders intervene on her behalf.

*Dimitty:* She was popular – she teased me and didn’t stop – anything, like red hair. She was teasing the new kid – off and on. I had friends, so it was not too bad. Some of her friends were on my side. She got angry with them.

*DL:* What do bystanders normally do?

*Dimitty:* They said, “Just leave her alone” and she kept going but not as much because she wasn’t as powerful and stopped.

*DL:* Why?

*Dimitty:* Because of her friends

Gemma also felt the benefit of having friends to stick up for her:

*Gemma:* I wasn’t good at reading and boys say stuff and laugh. I was saying “Please don’t choose me (scared body language – hunched shoulders, fearful face), please don’t choose me (to read aloud).” I try my best, I was nervous.

*DL:* How does this make you feel?

*Gemma:* It made me feel I don’t belong here. Friends stuck up for me, saying, “When you were young, you weren’t much good at reading, so leave her and she can be better if she gets a chance.” Sometimes the bullies don’t even start if my friends stare at them first.

*DL:* Why don’t they start?
Gemma: ‘Cos of my friends. My friends are there for me and stay with me if I didn’t want to go downstairs because I was scared they’d tease me again.

DL: What difference do you think it would make if the bystanders took action?

Gemma: If the bystanders told the bullies off, I’d feel better. Bullies would stop if their friends told them to.

Ben gave a similar account from a victim’s point of view.

Ben: I would’ve been very surprised if the bully’s sister had told her brother off. I would have been very happy if she had…It would have been good inside of me if my cousin had stuck up for me and my self-esteem would be much better.

Aaron gave his opinion, also from a victim’s perspective, on bystanders intervening. He said that if anyone came to his aid, it would make him feel better.

Aaron: Sometimes my friends have stuck up for me. I feel better even when the bully is having a go, being mean. Just a little support seems to help. The best is when you’re a friend and they’re also a friend of the bully “on the inside”. When the bully’s outnumbered and the strength of the people. They stop.

DL: Why do you feel better?

Aaron: Knowing they’ll try and make me feel better – they know I don’t feel good. It’s a comfort.

DL: Why?
Aaron: Knowing that they’re not just standing there like zombies – they’ll do what they can – you don’t feel so alone, someone cares, wants to help. They care if you’re OK. It doesn’t matter who it is – Year 8 or Year 11.

DL: Is it different if it’s a teacher?

Aaron: No – it’s the same

DL: Who would be best to stick up for you?

Aaron: A friend – any age, as long as they stick up for me. If they’re prepared to stick up for you, I would do the same for them – and have.

Aaron reiterated the notion that being alone and being bullied, being watched by “zombies” was a stressful experience. As with many other students, he was angry about bullying and bystander inaction. Katrina also expressed her dislike of bullying,

Katrina: They say they’ll intervene because it’s not actually happening because they’ve seen bullies and don’t like it, but if they see it happening, they might get bullied too… Bullying upsets you, even if you don’t know them, but it’s worse if it’s one of your friends.

Carlo agreed,

DL: How important is it for us to stop bullying in the school?

Carlo: 9/10 (importance) to stop bullying – some people don’t want to come to school because of bullying (emphasis).

Ellen’s view was encouraging because, like others, she empathized with the victim,
Ellen: They feel like they’d like to tell a teacher – they would really want to help the person, but lack courage.

It is because of perspectives such as these, that the No-Blame Approach (Maines & Robinson, 1992), of dealing with bullying, is so effective. The No-Blame approach was discussed in Chapters One and Two, and involves talking to bullies in a non-punitive way, with the aim of helping them to arrive at their own solutions to bullying. This non-threatening interaction fosters positive emotions, where bullying students can leave the session without resentment and with a high self-esteem.

Punishing bullying behaviour may achieve a short-term solution to some behaviours, but it is ineffective as a long-term strategy. Dealing with bullying this way is ineffective and in fact, punishment usually exacerbates the situation. As was evident, students object to being “dobbed” on because they associate this with getting into trouble – being punished. In fact, they are often right because, in spite of education on the No-Blame Approach, many teachers take action according to their own emotional response to bullying and adopt retaliatory strategies to deal with it. Anecdotally, some teachers have commented on the “do-gooder” approach, the “soft” option in dealing with bullies. Repeatedly, I am asked by teachers if I think it is alright for the bully to “get off Scott free”. They usually feel angry with the bully, pity for the victim and frustration at the lack of clarity on how to deal effectively with bullying.
It is difficult to withstand the emotional force from teachers that seeks punishment for bullying. However, to establish a non-bullying culture, it is the students that need to arrive at their own conclusion that bullying will not be tolerated. This is unlikely to happen when their emotions are focused on anger at being punished. When discussing the incident in a non-threatening environment, the bullies often experience guilt and say they did not see past the fun they were having, name-calling, laughing, and so on. This is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory, because now emotions are brought into line with beliefs and their behaviour is adjusted to reduce dissonance. They are usually surprised when they hear how their bullying has affected the victim. As a result, they feel remorseful enough to want to do something positive to compensate for the damage they feel they have done to the victim. In most cases, they volunteer excellent solutions and offer unsolicited compensatory actions, such as inviting the victim into their friendship group.

One of the unique aspects I have found, using the No-Blame Approach, is the opportunity to change the bullying student’s self-image. In a strange twist, their generosity of spirit in offering to change their behaviour, provides me with the occasion to congratulate them for their creative contribution. Additionally, I thank them for their co-operation and ask them how much of a difference their suggested changes will make to the victim. They are always pleased to imagine the good they are achieving. Finally, I mention that, since they are leaders, they obviously have a strong influence on other people in the school. I ask them if they would watch for other
instances of bullying because students without their strength or authority need their help and protection. Consequently, these previously bullying students change their self-image from one of bullying to one of defender. Reassurance that they will make a big difference to the victim’s life at school allows them to feel positive about themselves as they leave the discussion. Students in this frame of mind are much less likely to be angry or to accuse the victim of “dobbing”, or bully them again. This is a much more satisfying and long-lasting solution than punishment.

5.7 Students’ Solutions to Bullying

Policies to counter bullying are usually formed from the viewpoint of the teachers working in that environment, and with minimal, if any, consultation with the students who are actually experiencing the bullying. It is useful, therefore, to compare the students’ solutions with the data, collected from various perspectives, to see how they might work, and how effective they might be.

5.7.1 More Teachers on Duty

Students say that they do not challenge bullying because they think it is inevitable. They expect it as part of school culture. Reflecting a school-wide acceptance of the inevitability of bullying, which has been discussed throughout this chapter, some of the students recommended that more teachers be placed on duty to prevent bullying occurring during lunch and recess breaks. This idea is a mirror of our wider society, where police patrol in highly visible form, on foot in uniform or on clearly marked motorbikes and cars. The use of multanova cameras for speeding drivers has caused
anger amongst motorists, who accuse the government of revenue-raising, rather than seriously addressing the issue of speeding on our roads. The effect is to create a “them” and “us” attitude between motorists and the police. The same attitude occurs in schools between teachers and students.

Whilst the idea of providing more teachers on duty is sound, in practice it would only partially counter bullying because it is difficult for teachers to see any other than physical forms of bullying incidents. As the students explained, there are other harmful types of bullying such as verbal bullying, friendship manipulation, stealing lunch money, exclusion, and bullying through subtle, non-verbal communication which would not be visible by teachers.

Even if more teachers on duty did prevent bullying, it still would not allow an anti-bullying culture to form because this suggestion places the responsibility for reducing bullying on the adults in the school community. This was evident in the students’ perspectives and it was clear that they saw this as the teachers’ job. They were not prepared to be accountable for the prevention of bullying, even when it was pointed out that it was the students who are actually doing or watching the bullying.

Even with visible bullying, students know that bullies are careful not to get caught bullying other students. Often with the assistance of others, the bullies make sure teachers’ backs are turned, before they carry out their intentions, so one wonders how many extra teachers on duty it would take to
be effective. Mentioned earlier in this chapter was the situation where, if they do happen to get caught, they pretend that they really were not bullying, but that the teacher was mistaken. The bullies’ initial reaction to teacher intervention is to attempt justification of their behaviour. As Aaron said,

Aaron: They have amazing excuses – “Just mucking around”, or they lie,

“He did this to me”.

Another serious issue that concerned students, was the perception that the teachers do know, but that they do nothing about it. The students’ reasoning is that so much bullying happens in class and the teachers say nothing, yet they could not possibly be missing all the bullying. Students expressed a feeling of being abandoned by the teachers because of this. More thorough staff training is required to make teachers aware of this.

5.7.2 Peer Support

The view was expressed that conflict should be managed with a minimum of fuss, by Peer Support Leaders, or other student leaders. Many of the students could see the value in mediation, with suggestions for the bully and the victim to talk to each other, mainly so that the bully could know how the victim felt. Perhaps the most convincing solution came from the idea that if people knew how bad the victim felt, they would be less likely to bully them.

Aaron: I’d like to see them get a firm grasp on the idea of how it is to be bullied – they shouldn’t have to go through it.
Dimitty: I’d talk to students who bully and ask how you’d like it so they’d know how the other person feels

The students expressed a desire to be able to counter bullying themselves when they suggested stronger Peer Support, to protect from bullying, which they saw as helping them to be more confident to stand up to the bullies. As a measure to prevent bullying, they also thought the Peer Support Leaders should be more visible, as in one student’s primary school, where they had worn orange hats. Students were more comfortable talking to the Peer Support Leaders as the first person to tell about bullying, than they were telling the teacher or psychologist directly.

5.7.3 Teach Empathy for the Victim

Dimitty’s comment reflects a favourite educational solution of developing empathy for the victim. Students felt that if bullies realised how bad their victims felt, they would stop. Some thought that putting the bullies through some discomfort to drive the message home would develop empathy, as suggested by Ilsa,

**Ilsa:** Take two weeks – put the bullies in a special class, teach them how it would feel being bullied. Do activities or take them to a place like Freo Prison at night and leave them by themselves to make them scared.

**DL:** In Fremantle Prison?

**Ilsa:** Yeah, like on the Ricky Lake Show – didn’t you see it? She took a thirteen year old boy to go to jail to realise how bad it was to go to jail. He cried all night and said he wasn’t bad.
Harriet thought bullying could be countered if the bullies knew how the victims felt,

*DL:* How could we get kids to care, do you think?

*Harriet:* To get kids to care (thoughtful) – act out things so that you can feel how it is to be the victim. To experience feelings – loneliness, low self-esteem, feel bad about themselves, sad, don’t feel like coming to school – don’t want to face it again, maybe scared, especially physically, depends how bad it is.

The development of empathy for the victim was a strong response, and could be the key to establishing an anti-bullying culture. Gemma felt the benefit of having empathic friends who supported her,

*Gemma:* I wasn’t good at reading and boys say stuff and laugh. I was saying “Please don’t choose me (scared body language – hunched shoulders, fearful face), please don’t choose me (to read aloud).” I try my best, I was nervous.

*DL:* How does this make you feel?

*Gemma:* It made me feel I don’t belong here. Friends stuck up for me, saying, “When you were young, you weren’t much good at reading, so leave her and she can be better if she gets a chance.” Sometimes the bullies don’t even start if my friends stare at them first.

*DL:* Why don’t they start?

*Gemma:* ‘Cos of my friends. My friends are there for me and stay with me if I didn’t want to go downstairs because I was scared they’d tease me again.
5.7.4 Counselling

Counselling was seen as another way to reduce bullying, with students being of the opinion that bullies themselves needed help. Bullies are adversely affected by their own behaviour (Dietz, 1994, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001), so this suggestion recognizes that bullies also need support. Students suggested that bullies be encouraged to go to the school psychologist, or even the Principal, in case they had their own issues, such as home or school problems, that needed to be discussed. Bullying was commonly seen as being caused by the bully being bullied at home, or at school, by other students. The issue of power abuse is touched on here, where students often felt that bullies were having troubles, such as divorce, at home and then coming to school and taking their unhappiness out on others.

Counselling as a means to counter bullying merged with education, where students felt that people could be taught to behave in a better way. Ben’s innovative suggestion was for bullies to counsel each other. He said,

*Ben:* Bullies should all be put together and made to ask each other why they bully.

*DL:* Do you think this would help them to stop bullying?

*Ben:* Yes, I do, because there’s no good reason, and when they realise that, then they’ll stop

*DL:* When they realise what?

*Ben:* That there’s no good reason for it.
5.7.5 Education

There was a mixed view of education as a solution to bullying, with some saying it did no good, and others advocating certain types of education. In primary school, some students had learned from anti-bullying programmes, many of them being action programmes, with an emphasis on student involvement. One in particular is worthy of note:

Harriet: In my primary school, we had a “Rock and Water” programme about being in control of yourself and how you can get out of a fight and stand strong. The programme helped me. We practised walking past a bunch of bullies and could do it confidently. If it was in a real situation, I’d know how to handle it. Bullies always go for the under confident people. If everyone had confidence and took the programme seriously, they wouldn’t get bullied – less, anyway. Anger management included. They could stop the bullying themselves – their posture, body language, being scared, etc.

Other students preferred visual learning for their proposed anti-bullying education, such as showing videos to teach bystanders how to take action or watching a play that was realistic enough to be transferred to real life, particularly for victims. Some were pessimistic, saying that the programmes that worked well in primary schools would not be effective in high school because people are too scared. Perhaps most telling, was the frequent answer of, “I don’t know”, when asked what they thought the solution(s) might be. This reflected their surrender to behaviour that they see as being inevitable, and the futility of trying to find a solution.
5.7.6 Exposure of Bullying

Bullying is shrouded in secrecy, as has been discussed extensively throughout this thesis, mainly due to the “code of silence”, brought about by fear. When examined closely, there are several reasons for this fear, such as, the threat of being called a “Dobber”, the danger of being bullied in retaliation for telling a teacher, the teacher not wanting to know if they were told and, perhaps worst of all, the rejection if ostracised by the group. The difficulty with dealing with bullying is that adults, and many of the students, are excluded from the knowledge of its extent and intensity. Participants in this study recognised this phenomenon and recommended that bullying be exposed in the school. They recommended that the problem of bullying be mentioned in newsletters, assemblies, in the curriculum and discussed in classrooms. Cross et al (2003b) support the participants’ view in their programmes, Friendly Schools and Friendly Schools Friendly Families, and cite open communication about bullying as one of their key messages in countering bullying. This breaks down the hidden, thus protected, aspect of bullying behaviour.

In contrast to the secrecy described above, some students thought that bullying could be reduced by exposing it. Their ideas included showing videos about bullying, announcing the frequency of bullying, giving messages to bullies at assemblies on how to stop and who to talk to. Students thought information on bullying should be in the school newsletters, and that respected students should be the ones to make
announcements at assemblies, including reminding the students that any aspirations they might have to become leaders would be under threat if they bully. Carlo recommended clear and definite messages should be given.

Carlo: Address it at assemblies and newsletters, (by a) student who’s looked up to – a Year 12 Leader, for example. It’s no good a younger student because nobody would take any notice. They should say, “If you want a leadership job, you shouldn’t bully. And if you see bullying, then tell a teacher…they should say, ‘We know someone got bullied and we want to stop it, so every time you see bullying, we will be giving this message until it stops’. Bullies will then think, ‘I’d better not do it ‘cos they’re on to me’.

Recognising that having friends protects against bullying, students could see that they could befriended the victim, even if they felt unable to intervene directly. Harriet talked about the comfort she derived from friends’ support,

Harriet: Friends supported me with hugs – made me feel better.

They said stuff to him to tell him to shut up.

Ilsa agreed, saying that friends had helped her when she was a victim.

Ilsa: I had friends – that helped. Some stuck up for me. They’d say, “It doesn’t matter if she’s small – youse can be teased for being tall – like a giraffe.” I didn’t like it, and thought, “One day I'm going to grow taller just like youse”…You always need friends – if you help them, they’ll help you.
Overcoming the secrecy surrounding bullying was viewed as central to defusing its power. Given the students’ misgivings about intervening in bullying incidents, due to this closed communication, it is not surprising that the anonymous email system was not seen by students as being particularly useful. The fear of being seen sending one would act as a preventative measure to reporting bullying. The fears felt about telling an adult about bullying engender mistrust among students, which strengthens the code of silence and in turn, provides more power to the bullies. However, the suggestion was made that an anonymous box be placed somewhere for people to put notes in about bullying.

5.8 Teachers’ Solutions to Bullying

Although a small focus group of teachers, their perspectives are important, particularly because each one had a keen interest in working towards countering bullying in the school. A lively discussion occurred, revealing some thoughts these teachers had had for a long time. As would be expected, some of their views on how to reduce bullying differed considerably from the students’.

During the meeting, the teachers agreed that some of the other teachers actually encouraged bullying by their own, bullying behaviour. The group was critical of the way some teachers treat students and blamed their authoritarian, regimented approach to students for causing students to bully. By providing a bullying role model, they thought it gave students permission to bully others. Examples were given of teachers who laugh at students’ answers in class, and of a particular incident where a music
student who put up her hand to go to her lesson. The teacher said that if her question was not related to the subject being discussed, she had to be quiet. The student was too intimidated to protest and missed her music lesson, which her parents were paying for privately.

By alienating students this way, they thought that the students would take less notice of adults’ perspectives. The group agreed that to change the school culture, students needed to be immersed in anti-bullying information, in the same way as they were in school rules. They cited examples of attitude changes in smoking, which have been brought about by the same saturation, often using advertising to shock the viewer. They thought a similar approach, pertaining to bullying and its effects, would shock students into realising the damage it causes. They thought that encouraging bystanders to remove the victim from the bullying scene might be more achievable than asking them to support their friend against the powerful bully.

Part of the problem with anti-bullying programmes was, Greta thought, that bullying has been overdone and that a different name could be used. She warned,

*Greta:* We run the risk of flogging a dead horse – the kids might say, “Not bullying again”.

The teachers thought that, whilst the anti-bullying education programmes have given students information, so far they have not been effective because they do nothing to *empower* the students to do anything to prevent bullying.
The focus group applauded the effectiveness of the Year 12 retreat in addressing conflict of any sort between the students. However, they said that by Year 12, bullying incidents have reduced as the students mature anyway, so the benefits to the school overall were quite small. When discussing retreats for younger students, they agreed that even students in Year 10 would not cope with the same retreat situation. A suggestion was made that a retreat tailored to their needs could be a way of countering bullying.

5.9 Conclusion

The information discussed in this chapter, is derived from student and staff interviews and my own observations and constitutes the data gathered in the study. Within a poststructural framework, the data, collected during the first three terms of 2003, were shaped through an illustration of mainly Year 8 students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviours. The interactional dynamics of language, the abuse of power, the status of bullies, victims and bystanders and the meanings students attached to these were investigated. The students’ and staff’s perspectives highlighted the richness of the research by juxtaposing the many voices contributing to the study’s data. Additional information drawn from other texts were relevant, providing both supportive and differing interpretations of bullying and bystander behaviours. These were interwoven into the data, emphasising the multi-dimensional nature of the study.
In the next, concluding chapter, I describe the expected and unexpected findings, the methodology, the strengths and shortcomings of the study and the contributions it has made to understandings of anti-bullying policies. The usefulness of the study for educators, psychologists, parents and students, within anti-bullying policies is explained.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

6.0 Introduction

Within the school context, I have presented the perspectives of a group of Year 8 students on bullying and bystander behaviours. Emphasis was placed on the students’ understandings of power, the role as bystanders in supporting bullying and their perceptions of what might work to prevent bullying. The study aimed to find answers to the three research questions, which are:

1. Within a Year 8, co-educational group, how is bullying behaviour supported and maintained within the school?

2. How do Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour?

3. What are the psychological barriers to bystander intervention?

Clear parallels are drawn between this study and previous research, strengthening the study’s theorising of bystander behaviour. Links between the study and the literature are made, emphasising the importance of the bystander role in countering bullying. Significant connections are also made in identifying the implications of the masculine, bullying ethos within the school. Investigations include the support given to unequal distributions of power, amongst both the students and staff, the principles and practices for
dealing with aggressive behaviour, and the support and perpetuation of a dominant masculine culture.

The chapter is divided into four sections, the first being an explanation of the aims of the study, with the second defining the study’s methodology. The third part considers the contributions to existing knowledge of the study, including unexpected findings. The final section investigates the value of the study in highlighting areas for future research, policy and practice.

6.1 Recapitulation of the Research Aims

This research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the Year 8 students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviour. The aim of establishing a school culture that does not tolerate bullying was a leading objective of this research, and it was recognised that students’ perspectives were required as input in creating such a culture. My overarching goal in conducting this research was to find a way to change an existing bullying culture into one that is respectful and caring of its community members.

Students say they will take action to prevent bullying, even if it is just to report it to teachers, but usually they do not. I wanted to discover the psychological barriers to them taking action, and what would induce them to question bullying as a “normal” behaviour, and to take responsibility to oppose it. With a deeper understanding, current anti-bullying programmes can be made more relevant to new high school students, so that they can
relate better to the programme’s principles and thus be more likely to put the ideals into action.

6.2 Methodological Issues

Previous research reveals that bullying is a debilitating behaviour in schools (Bjorkvist et al, 1992; Hazler et al, 1992; Simmons, 2002). This study’s findings will be useful to educators, psychologists, parents and students, because it not only confirms the previous research, but also provides a deeper understanding of the students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviours. Qualitative research methodology was chosen to facilitate gaining as deep an understanding as possible, adding to the wealth of knowledge already established by quantitative research on bullying (Rigby & Slee, 1991; Olweus, 1991, 1992). To avoid unmanageable amounts of data, the number of participants was limited to eighteen Year 8 students, a focus group of four interested teachers and my own observations.

Since this study was focused on the participants’ perspectives of bullying, purposive sampling and an interpretive approach was appropriate (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The most appropriate of the approaches within this spectrum was social constructivism (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). This theoretical position assumes that people’s behaviour is based on the meanings they attach to certain events or things (Blumer, 1969). Blumer notes that people’s behaviour dictates how they relate to each other, and that this is the basis of culture. Thus, the students’ perspectives needed to be analysed within their social context (Kincheloe, 1991). A
multi-dimensional methodology was considered suitable to achieve the aim of incorporating as wide a range of responses as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The combined data was analysed using Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) ‘grounded theory’ technique of coding by constant comparison of the data, allowing theoretical propositions to emerge within each coded category. The software package, QSR N6 was used to code the data and the analysis was conducted with the aim of achieving consistent, logical and inclusive theoretical propositions derived from the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The theoretical findings of the research – that is, the concepts and propositions that relate to them - were reported mainly through the Year 8 students’ group and individual interviews, supported by the contributions from the focus group of teachers and my own observations. The data was analysed and several theoretical propositions were developed, which I discuss below.

6.2.1 Generalisability of the Findings

The generalisability of the research refers to the external validity, or the ability to replicate the findings in other research (Kincheloe, 1991). In the Methodology chapter, I explained that generalisability does not pertain to social constructivist research, because it explores the participants’ perspectives in particular contexts. Therefore, generalisability within the social constructivist approach is not applicable to this study.
However, the reader may decide that the study’s findings could be replicated in another setting or context. The discussions within this study may facilitate the reader’s analysis, leading to their deciding that they could use the information, for example, for future policy-making, practice or research (Burns, 1994). Geertz’s (1973) “thick description” of the participants’ perspectives and behaviours should provide an accurate portrayal that would enable a reader to apply the processes of the study to a different situation. In this study, the participants were described so that the reader could envisage the contexts of the participants and their motives, insights, actions and emotions. Assuming that readers of this research would be associated with schools, and probably occupants of a pastoral care role, they could relate this information to their own schools and decide on further applications of the information. Whilst the findings of this study cannot provide prescriptive models of anti-bullying strategies, it is valuable to the reader who, using their own unique professional approach, may wish to apply them to the school they work in.

6.3 Contributions of the Study

The first research question examines the behaviours that were viewed as being supportive of bullying. The students perceived the code of silence as being protective of the bully and an obstacle to countering bullying. Silence is an enormously powerful, yet invisible, shield against detection. It creates distrust of others, allows bullying to continue, excludes adults from the behaviour, and acts as an impenetrable barrier to adult intervention.
The threat of being bullied is particularly effective in preventing students from reporting bullying to adults in the school community. However, although it is well known that students did not report bullying to teachers because they were afraid they would be bullied themselves, this study found that there were more reasons than this for their fear.

The second research question asks how Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour. The study found that there was a great deal of confusion about what the school culture demanded of them, in terms of behaviour. There were two distinct messages being given. One was from the anti-bullying programme, giving instructions on what to do to counter bullying, and the other “message” contradicted this, and was being played out daily before the new, Year 8 witnesses.

It is at this time of uncertainty that new, Year 8 students are most vulnerable and therefore, easily influenced to conform to the cultural norms. It is, therefore, imperative that they be encouraged to adopt less aggressive and bullying behaviour and be guided towards a caring, respectful way of interacting with other students. Behaviour conforming to the culture is shaped and controlled by others, who move to reject actions deemed to be outside the cultural norms (Keddie, 2001). The students were even afraid of creating a self-image of being external to the culturally accepted norms and reported not wanting to view themselves as “Goody-Two-Shoes” or “nerdy”.

246
One of the important theoretical findings emerging from this study is that students and staff consider bullying to be inevitable. Students in this study were apathetic about taking decisive action against bullying, perceiving that the school community condones aggressive behaviours. The way Year 8 students experience and attribute meaning to bystander behaviour arises from the confusion about what behaviour the school culture expects. They have to decide whether to conform to the school’s adult-designed anti-bullying programme or to the popular, student, anti-authoritarian group norms. They receive more convincing, consistent encouragement to imitate the dominant group than they do to become bystanders who intervene. Consequently, they come to the conclusion that bullying is inevitable, possibly exciting, definitely ubiquitous, and therefore there is little incentive to attempt change.

Alongside this view of bullying as predetermined behaviour is a reluctance, indeed a refusal to take responsibility to counter bullying by both staff and students alike. The students’ perception is that the staff engages in bullying themselves and accepts bullying among students and confirms their suspicion that bullying is a behavioural norm within the school culture. The staff’s perception, meanwhile, is that no matter what they do, bullying persists, so there is no point in trying to prevent it.

The third research question attempts to understand the psychological barriers to bystanders taking action against bullying. The study found there were numerous factors preventing bystander intervention. Being tough, for
example, is highly regarded in such a masculine environment and is one way to identify with an aggressive peer group. Previous research has established that students fear rejection from the peer group (Morita, 1999 in Smith et al, 1999), and the present study’s findings confirmed this. However, what was surprising was that they were also afraid of being seen as not assimilating into the school culture. Students’ fear of this was so strong that they did not tell teachers in case the teachers did nothing. Teachers’ inaction was interpreted by the students as a sign that they had misunderstood the situation and that teachers disapproved of their inappropriate behaviour. The uncertainty around what constituted bullying behaviour caused students to fear the acute embarrassment they felt at making a mistake, being viewed by the peer group as not minding one’s own business and consequently being rejected for not being compliant to the culture’s behavioural norms.

Contributing to this confusion is the way bullying is concealed under the guise of humour, with students claiming to be having a joke with each other. When even the victim concurs that this is indeed the case, it is difficult enough for an adult to insist on naming it bullying behaviour, much less a student. Such uncertainty keeps the new Year 8 students in a state of anxiety about how to respond, so the safest thing to do is nothing, and thus bullying becomes a well-protected behaviour. Students fear behaving “wrongly” in a new environment and this contributes to their anxiety and consequent inaction in bullying situations.
Although the above explains why students do not intervene directly in bullying incidents, it does not explain why they do not report the bullying anonymously. One of the unexpected findings of this study is that the reason for this was a lack of empathy for the victim. Students will not go to the aid of a victim unless they know them personally and like them. It was surprising to hear how students basically did not care about what happened to victims and could not be bothered to take any action. In some cases, they were even quite pleased if an annoying victim was being bullied. For the victims, however, the perspective of bystander behaviour is quite different. The meaning that victims attach to bystanders is that they must be friends of the bully. Whilst this may not be the case, in their isolated state, it seems like it to the victim, who suffers fear of the crowd and feels resentful that no-one helps.

The dominant, masculine culture of schools allows an aggressive culture to become a normal way to behave (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001; Keddie, 2001). Within this culture, bullies become popular because they personify the traits so admired – aggression, dominance and anti-authority. The bullies are protected by secrecy and the support from bystanders, which combine to uphold the dominant masculine view of toughness as being desirable. Therefore, victims and bystanders alike are deterred from asking for help to oppose bullying by the fear of being seen as weak and inferior. Even the girls adopted this masculine ideal and wanted to portray an image of being tough.
The present study found that the students’ excitement at watching, or participating in, belligerent behaviour, exacerbated the aggression within the school culture. It can be seen, then, that bullying behaviour is formed and controlled by bystanders who provide an audience for the bullies to perform to when they witness a verbal or physical assault. The bully then experiences pressure to maintain an entertaining or tough image to remain popular with the peer group, which expects and demands a performance from them. Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) illustrate the two-way relationship between the bully and the bystanders in the following incident. An interview was being attempted with a bullying male student, who was being admired and laughed at by other students watching through the window. The bystanders’ demands for entertainment, coupled with the bully’s attention-seeking behaviour were making the interview difficult for the researcher.

I stop asking questions and sit quietly observing. The boys outside the window indicate to him that I’m watching. He turns to me. ‘What’s up?’

‘What are you doing?’

‘Just mucking around.’

‘Why?’

‘They’re watching me. They’re waiting for me to do it. Anyway, that’s what normal boys do.’ (p.33)

This study confirms Rigby’s (1996a) claim that bullying becomes a conforming response when the school culture is dominated by macho values.
like this. It follows that this culture makes it almost impossible for most students to take any action against bullying.

6.4 On a Brighter Note

In Chapter One, I argued that students’ attitudes towards bullying are not all the same. In spite of the popularity of bullies and the support they receive from bystanders (Cairns et al, 1988; Cowie and Sharp; 1994; Edgar, 1999), there are some students who want the bullying to stop (Lampert, 1998; Janson, 2000). It was true of many participants in this study that they thought bullying needed to be challenged in the school. They shared the view that bullying is undesirable behaviour and that it needs to be eliminated in schools.

The Year 8 students felt that development of empathy for the victim is central to the best way to reduce bullying. If bullies had empathy for the victim, they maintained, the bully would reach a full understanding of the consequences of his or her actions, and would then not do it. It was interesting that participants thought empathy from the bully would be an effective deterrent, but that their own empathy was conditional to the victim being known or liked by them. Development of empathy and a sense of justice, then, need to be major considerations in the preparation of all students in countering bullying measures. There is an urgent need for those designing and implementing anti-bullying policies to understand students’ perspectives.
6.5 Implications of the Research Findings for the Theoretical Literature

In the first two chapters, it was stressed that the potential to decrease bullying is dependent on the ability of the whole school community, led by the school principal, to work towards creating a school culture that resists them (Rigby, 1996a, 2001b; Cross et al, 2003b). The roles of varying members of the community were discussed, including the main players in bullying incidents – the bully, the victim and the bystanders – the teachers’ role and, as head of the community, the role of the principal.

The findings of this study have implications for the position of the school leadership, because they indicate that, despite an anti-bullying policy, there are significant variations of understanding and application among members of the school community, of the principles purportedly upheld in the policy. It was argued that, with this lack of an integrated, philosophical approach to countering bullying, teachers themselves bully, deal ineffectively with reports of bullying; and the school supports a masculine, bullying environment with a pervasive sense of inevitability about bullying.

The above highlights the need for the principal to support all initiatives advancing the anti-bullying culture in order to develop a more visible, acceptable, explanation of a whole school philosophical foundation for an anti-bullying school culture. If there is no directive forthcoming from the administration, there are likely to be divergent views on the meaning and purpose of the drive to counter bullying. This creates a weak platform upon
which to build a united approach to countering bullying, without which, as Rigby (2001a) asserts, anti-bullying efforts will be unproductive. This study highlights the significance of the principal’s ability to articulate the school’s anti-bullying policy and require compliance with it.

Sergiovanni’s (1996) view that schools develop higher morality by the provision of a democratic tradition is noteworthy at this point. The school examined in the present study is hierarchical, leans heavily on a punishment and reward system, and suffers from a “them and us” resistance from the students. This attitude creates further support for bullying, because the behaviours are kept hidden from the adults, who could help if they knew about it.

However, to ultimately create an anti-bullying culture, it is necessary for the students themselves to take the responsibility to address aggression, and to do this, they need to be motivated to do so. While they feel antagonism towards the adults in the school community, they are unlikely to accept responsibility for taking action against bullying because they see it as the teachers’ job. Starratt (2003) maintains that schools should be concerned about developing responsible, moral behaviour in students. Starratt outlines three qualities without which, he claims, a moral life would be impossible. “Autonomy” refers to making one’s own decisions out of personal choice, “connectedness” is when people accept responsibility within a relationship and are responsive to other people and the environment. “Transcendence” means when people go beyond self-absorption to engaging the lives of
others, following an ideal and reaching out for excellence. These qualities need to be introduced and nurtured in schools because they would cultivate moral values. This would foster stronger student empathy, creating a higher sense of responsibility to intervene and the motivation to act.

Sergiovanni (1996) advocates as an ideal school culture, a community that shares common goals, values and beliefs to form a bond between community members. This way, the entire community works for the good of all – justice, caring and nurturing. To reduce antagonism between teachers and students, the decision-making process needs to be shared, with more democratically arrived at solutions to problems such as bullying. It is very difficult to develop moral values in an environment where the dominant student group is so opposed towards authority. These issues raise questions about the implications of the findings of the present study for future research.

6.6 Implications of the Research Findings for Future Research

The research questions highlight a need for further studies on the issue of bullying in schools. Quantitative studies have already provided an insight into the extent and intensity of bullying, which point to some urgency for school authorities to take action against it. There is now a pressing need for more qualitative studies, for example, case studies of the various players in bullying behaviour. The present study has investigated the Year 8 students’ perspectives on bullying and bystander behaviours, and case studies would contribute even more in-depth information. Deeper understandings of the
bullying experience from different perspectives would result, for example, from staff or other year groups. Additionally, research that investigated the different ways boys and girls experience bullying would be helpful, to gain knowledge about how to address each gender’s aggressive behaviours. One of the present study’s limitations is the time frame during which data was gathered. Future longitudinal research would provide an understanding of students’ perspectives of bullying as they moved through the high school years.

This study evaluates the implementation of the policies and conceptually frames the undertaking of studies of the policy context within high schools. The participants’ perspective was that the teachers were sometimes bullying role models, or did not care about people being bullied, and were consequently confused about what to do to prevent it, or took action that actually made it worse. The literature has already established that a whole-school approach to countering bullying, particularly the engagement of the principal, is essential for it to be effective (Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 2001b). It would now be instructive to compare the countering bullying efforts of schools where the leadership has embraced the issue enthusiastically, with those where there is no visible support for the anti-bullying policies in place.

The present study highlight the fact that students do not believe that teachers can be relied on to help them counter bullying. While this view persists, it makes sense to promote the notion that the responsibility for reducing bullying lies in the hands of the students. This would remove the likelihood
that students would resist intervening in bullying incidents simply because that would constitute cooperation with teachers. Action research to investigate the effectiveness of teachers taking a facilitating role, rather than an instructive one, in support of students countering bullying, would be ambitious but instructive. Such research could create opportunities for changing the school culture, resulting in the students’ motivation and empowerment to contest bullying as being contrary to the school’s cultural norms.

This study has revealed that there is a lack of empathy for the victim, with victims being categorised according to the relationship they have with bystanders and according to their popularity. Close examination of the policy, school values and principles would highlight the context in which this lack of empathy is allowed to become part of the school culture. Repeatedly, Year 8 students said that if only bullies and bystanders could understand the suffering they caused, they would not behave so destructively. Developing ongoing dialogue between the leadership team, the staff and students would provide a constant, whole-school perspective on bullying behaviours and how to counter them.

The findings of this study revealed a need for related research to take place. For example, for reasons of a necessarily constrained scale and scope, this study did not focus particularly on the teachers’ perspectives. Similar studies of this type could be conducted with teachers, to gain their views on bullying behaviours. This study was limited to research with Year 8 students
in one, Catholic high school, therefore, future research would also be useful in all year groups and in a broad range of schools in other states in Australia. Such comparative studies would reveal the significance of the meaning staff and students attach to bullying and bystander behaviours, so that future anti-bullying strategies take these perspectives into account.

6.7 Implications for the Improvement of Future Practice

As I have demonstrated, the potential to improve anti-bullying strategies exists, particularly in relation to the role of the bystander. Most importantly, the study reveals an urgent need to consolidate opinion within the school regarding the roles of community members. Drawing on the theoretical insights gained from this study, propositions arise which are aimed at creating a visionary, inspirational and integrated perspective on countering bullying to create the desired, caring environment that opposes bullying.

The students’ perceptions of bullying are acknowledging of the notion of power, of the emotional barriers to intervention, of the superior status of the bullies and the inferior place occupied by the victims. The bullies’ investments in aggressive behaviour are seen as perpetuated, legitimated, reinforced and regulated, in the peer context, through the broader support they gained from bystanders. Confirming a bullying culture is teachers’ inadequate treatment of bullying by “turning a blind eye”, trivialising the bullying incident, or inadvertently making it worse through incompetence in dealing with the situation. Teachers’ own role modelling of bullying behaviour towards students, and the students’ perspective that the principal
does not understand what is happening, all uphold bullying as an acceptable culture within the school.

The underlying problem in this particular school is a lack of engagement by the school community, where bullying is dealt with by a select few, such as the school psychologist, the House Coordinators and the Campus Minister. The traditional style of leadership that allows this segmentation, needs to be modified to insist on a more democratic, encompassing policy that involves all members of the school community. The proposed strategy is to adopt a new learning model that offers promise of solving the problem. It also aims to provide an answer to the questions relating to the role of the bystander and, as a further consequence, to develop an improved method of preparing staff and students to deal with bullying behaviours. Consideration is now given to the model as it could apply to policy development and best practice in schools, particularly the question of the roles of the staff and the students, and the role of the bystander.

This study has sought to raise awareness of weaknesses in existing anti-bullying strategies, and to make educational programmes more relevant in order to build a new, more respectful, caring and safe school environment. The school’s anti-bullying policy itself contains sound advice, based on research and formed by a committee. However as Rigby (1996a) noted, “The important thing is not, of course, where the policy lies. What matters is what it says and what, if anything, people do about it.” (p. 86). Rigby goes on to say that the policy’s task is to ensure that the ethos of the school
does not support bullying. Critical to the policy’s effective implementation is the support of the whole school community. This study found that students do not actually do what they’re taught in anti-bullying programmes, which is not surprising, given that students’ perception is that teachers do not deal with bullying effectively, or worse, that they do not care about it. Obviously, teachers also do not do what the policy requires. There is, therefore, a pressing need for teachers to uphold the school’s anti-bullying policy and provide better role models for the students. Students are taught one thing, but it is clear to them that this is not the way things work in this school, with the result that the anti-bullying education is ineffective.

An expert committee, established by the school Principal, might consist of representatives of all school community members – students from each year level, parents, staff and the leadership team. These committee members need to refer to relevant studies and programmes (Olweus, 1993; Griffiths, 1998; Rigby, 2001a) so that their contributions are well informed. Consultation with experts in the field should take place and discussion meetings held for widespread consultation. Following this, the present anti-bullying policy should be reworked and updated.

Professional development for all staff members, clearly explaining their responsibilities to counter bullying, should be provided. The professional development should begin with questionnaires or interview assessments of the staff’s perspectives on bullying, then continue to educate staff in the best methods of dealing with bullying. Maines and Robinson’s (1992) No Blame
Approach and Pikas’s Method of Shared Concern (1989) foster a vision of sharing a common goal, reducing the alienation of bullying students. These methods of dealing with bullying should be well known to all staff members. Similarly, consistent and ongoing anti-bullying programmes for students at all year levels need to be regularly worked into the school curriculum. Emphasis should be placed on every individual taking responsibility to counter bullying.

The urgency of professional development for staff is highlighted here, because currently the students do not have any faith in the way they approach bullying situations. Students are angry with the school and the teachers for allowing it to happen, perceiving teachers as being disinterested, untrustworthy with confidentiality or incompetent. It is crucial that teachers understand how these students view their efforts to address bullying. One of the surprising findings of the present study was the importance placed on teachers’ responses by Year 8 students who attempt to report bullying. Inaction or inadequate responses by teachers are perceived as disapproval of the students telling the teacher about bullying. Students feel as if they have been abandoned by teachers and keep quiet about what they see, ensuring the continued concealment of bullying. It is essential, therefore, that teachers be aware that they should be reassuring students that reporting bullying is the right thing to do.

Staff training is also required to develop deeper understandings of the way that secrecy acts as protection, and to learn methods of addressing this issue.
This study found that the bully, the victim and the bystanders all uphold the concealment surrounding bullying behaviours. This is a crucial prop in strengthening the bullying culture, similar to the wider community where the press reports that criminals enjoy the same guardianship from those around them. The students’ secrecy bond is central to the shaping and affirming of the Year 8 students’ understandings and behaviours surrounding bullying. The secretiveness delivers a safe environment in which to engage in bullying. The bystanders’ silence shields the bullies from adult and peer intervention and allows them to hone their bullying skills and formulate a sense of identity and belonging in a negative, aggressive group.

The school culture subscribes to this secrecy, with teachers tolerating the silence of bystanders, so the students’ expectations are no different. This secrecy would be harder to maintain in an environment where all members of the school community are expected to counter bullying. Within the guidelines of the school’s duty of care to individual students, bullying behaviours need to be exposed wherever possible, to contest this protective code of silence. It is recognised that creating such a model would be challenging because of the difficulty of changing a long-standing culture within the school of the acceptance of bullying as inevitable. However, it is not impossible with the appropriate, collaborative approach by the leadership team encouraging full participation in the quest to counter bullying (Breheney et al, 1996). It must be the task of the school leadership to commit to comprehensive training for staff to enable them to challenge
the acceptance and defence of bullying and find ways to break down the
code of silence. The school administration could help with this by making
announcements at assemblies, communicating with families through the
school newsletter and incorporating anti-bullying expectations through the
curriculum (Breheney et al, 1996). If bullying were to become a more talked
about and communal issue, instead of being secured by silence, it would
then become a risky behaviour to engage in. Additionally, by unmasking
bullying in the school’s community, the confusion would be removed for
new Year 8 students about what is the “right” thing to do, according to the
school culture.

The research found that bullying and bystander behaviours could be seen as
a reflection of adult macro-culture within global, state and institutional
contexts, where bullies and violence are popular. For example, aggressive
sports heroes, especially football and boxing are venerated; rap and rock
music frequently contains vicious themes, where winning and revenge are
paramount. Reflecting the glorification of strength and dominant
masculinity in our culture, movies and the media constantly elevate these
heroes. The wider culture endorses physical strength and dominance, which
naturally marginalises the victims, or anyone “weaker” than the bully.

Mirroring the wider society, students are drawn to the stronger, dominant
bully, in turn giving the bully more and more power. Power in schools often
seems to equate negatively with the ability to marginalise others, or
overpower them. The implicit permeation of these broader cultural
structures can be detected within the students’ viewpoint of bullies and victims – the admiration of the bullies and the sneering at the victims. For example, the male students considered mental activities to be feminine, thus inferior. The prevailing interest in being tough and looking after your mates needs to be interrogated. Teachers and whole school communities should draw these constructs into their consciousness and work towards deconstructing the hegemonic masculinity and thus reducing the dominance of these students. Without addressing these institutionalised, aggressive attitudes, any attempts to introduce anti-bullying programmes would almost certainly be futile. Unless challenged, these behaviours marginalise anyone who does not conform to the ideal of masculinity - teachers, women, other races, and learning, particularly literature - inviting disdain from the dominant group of males (Mac An Ghaill, 1994).

With both boys and girls upholding the desired image, constructing a “tough” representation to fit in to the dominant masculine culture, victims and bystanders are likely to remain silent about being bullied. If they ask an adult for help, they are viewed as being weak, tending towards the feminine, thus inferior, as exemplified by “girl” as an insult for a boy. In view of this, it would be invaluable to teach students that being tough does not have to mean aggression and dominance, but that there are alternative, more positive ways of being strong, independent and resilient.

The present study’s exposure of the students’ reluctance to take responsibility to counter bullying has made obvious the need to raise
awareness of this attitude and develop ways to address it. Potential exists for reworking the students’ perspectives on their roles as bystanders. The obligation of bystanders to intervene or report bullying becomes apparent, and should be incorporated in anti-bullying training. The school’s expectation should be that all students adopt the self-image of being an interventionist, instead of an onlooker. For the students to achieve this, it will be necessary for the principal, the leadership team and staff to enthusiastically adopt this approach.

One of the most insidious aspects of bystander support for bullying is the excitement felt by students at watching bullying. Teacher training on confronting this aspect of student behaviours is critical to reducing the motivation for students to encourage aggressive behaviours. Anti-bullying programmes for students need to raise their awareness and expose the obscenity of enjoying watching someone being hurt, either verbally or physically. They should be reminded that these actions have only one purpose, and that is to cause harm.

The tough image, already mentioned, commits students to maintaining a strong, independent and possibly ruthless and domineering representation. The popularity of bullies relies on the power they are given by bystanders to dominate others, thus a two-way relationship exists between the bully and his or her supporters that can be quite noxious. The revelation that bullying as a means to popularity is not desirable for the school community should be publicised within the school environment. Students need to be consulted
about how to re-educate the school community regarding what is admirable
behaviour and how to promote the conviction that it is not bullying. The
message needs to be advanced that it is possible to behave in ways that
generate more affirmative, but equally legitimate ways of being popular.
Popularity has to come from somewhere other than bullying. This
potentiality makes clear the justification for creating anti-bullying training
specific to Year 8 students.

The school should also address the issue of students being embarrassed
about confusing rough play with bullying. The obligation students feel to
mind their own business currently prevents them from acting on behalf of
the victim. The school culture should be changed and make it known that
working against bullying is every member of the school community’s
business. It should be made known that aggressive play is not a legitimate
way to interact and the students should be informed that if they are “just
mucking around”, to expect someone to intervene. Actively promoting
protective behaviour, which assumes that anything happening within the
school is everybody’s business, would help to change this attitude and
remove the fear of being seen as not minding one’s own business.

The present study found that the confusion that new Year 8 students feel
when they first arrive at high school seems to be much worse than was
realised. They feel under constant pressure to learn and adopt the ways of
the school culture. This is a time when they are at their most vulnerable
because daily school life for them is a minefield of uncertainty. It is in this
state of anxiety that they will adopt any behaviour that relieves the stress for them, and if the culture demands their support of bullying, it is not surprising that students of this age will conform. They rapidly adapt to the change from primary school, realising that now they are in high school, it is not appropriate to tell teachers if they are being bullied.

The dominant group’s disciplining forces quickly bring into line anyone whose behaviour is outside the limiting bounds of their cultural norms. The threat of ridicule and rejection is too big for the new students to resist. Employing anti-bullying education seems futile when the students, especially the Year 8 newcomers, are subjected to cultural forces, which run contrary to the education. They resist the adult teachings of anti-bullying strategies (Martino & Pallotti-Chiarolli, 2003). In a school climate where the dominant, bullying group of students oppose authority, it would be beneficial for strategies that confront bullying to be implemented by the students, rather than adults. As student members of the school community, particular training should be given to Peer Support Leaders to make them much more proactive in confronting bullying, and more visible and accessible to the Year 8 students in their care. Peer Support Leaders, as well as guarding Year 8 students from bullying, also provide an alternative, non-aggressive model for their charges to imitate. Although Peer Support Leaders are the obvious choice, they should not be expected to work alone. To stem the tide of bullying, it should be expected that everyone in the school employ these strategies.
Being torn between intervening, as they think they should do, and what they actually feel capable of doing, is the reason students’ verbal intentions do not translate into action. Additionally, they find themselves in a predicament because what they see others doing about bullying repudiates the anti-bullying education they have received. Teachers need to be conscious of this dilemma confronting Year 8 students, and be empathetic towards them. The students may have the intention of intervening, but they had not anticipated the enormity of the emotions they would have to overcome when faced with a bullying incident.

The present study found that bullying is supported by the bystanders’ lack of empathy for the victim. This is one barrier to bystander intervention that cannot be ignored, as students reported that they would only care enough to help the victim if they were a friend or sibling. Developing empathy for all victims is a necessary part of anti-bullying programmes. However, Kohlberg’s (1981) view that moral reasoning can be taught includes the adults modelling moral behaviour, which this study found does not happen when teachers engage in bullying behaviour. It follows therefore, that it will take more than simply an anti-bullying programme to inscribe a sense of justice – it would have to be a complete cultural change.

In conclusion, the solutions to bullying behaviours are not really complicated. It is clear that the school leadership needs to explore better ways of working with the dominant student groups within the school context. I acknowledge that to change a long-standing school culture is
difficult, with the various investments individuals have in perpetuating self-limiting and hierarchical relational structures. However, overcoming the negative culture can be done, and this urgently needs to be promoted as a possibility. Underpinned by an understanding that although the popular group’s disciplining of peers can be overpowering, its influence can be changed to being affirming, caring, responsible and nurturing. This task is too big a challenge for it to be accomplished by just raising awareness within the school community. The leadership needs to insist that every person in the community is enabled to promote effective anti-bullying behaviours through modelling, teaching and raising expectations of behaviours to ensure they fit into the new, caring and safe environment.

Finally, to alter power structures, bystanders have to reclaim their independence and then it will be victims, not bullies who receive their protection. With the leadership promoting the new culture, it only needs members of the school community to confront bullying simply by quoting from the school’s Anti-Bullying Policy, “We don’t tolerate bullying in this school”.
Appendix A

Dear parents,

I am the school psychologist at Seton Catholic College and I am working on a research project for the purpose of investigating what motivates students to intervene in bullying incidents. My research will form part of a Doctorate in Communication at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

This plain language statement is sent to you because your son/daughter will be invited to participate in a study aimed at reducing bullying in the school. As part of the Year 8 normal curriculum, they attend several anti-bullying programmes. Some of the programmes are conducted by myself as part of my role as school psychologist and they are separate from the research project. The programmes focus on encouraging the intervention of people who, whilst they may not be directly involved in bullying behaviour, know about it or see it happening.

To gain a deeper understanding of the influences which surround bullying behaviour, in particular, bystander behaviour, your son/daughter may be invited to be interviewed about their experiences. This is entirely voluntary, and your son/daughter would only be interviewed if they felt comfortable to do so. These interviews will be conducted with the students individually and as part of a group of Year 8 students who have also volunteered to participate in the research project.

I will outline the project so that you can give your informed consent to your child/ren’s participation.
Project aims: to develop best practice procedures for countering bullying in the school. This research aims to generate knowledge about the behaviours of Year 8 students when they are confronted with a bullying incident. There is a great deal known about the behaviours of both the bullies and the victims, but less is known about the way bullying is experienced by those who witness it – the bystanders.

Participation:

- Your son/daughter will attend anti-bullying educational sessions at the Year 8 camp, at Special Programme and as part of the Peer Support programme. Information from these sessions is used routinely as part of the school’s normal efforts to reduce bullying. These sessions are separate from the research project.
- Attendance at anti-bullying programmes described above are part of the normal Year 8 curriculum, so no extra time is required for participation.
- If your son/daughter volunteers to be interviewed, the interviews will be conducted by myself both in a group form and individually. The information from these interviews will be used for the research project.

Time involved:

- If your son/daughter volunteers to be interviewed, a suitable time will be arranged with their House Co-ordinator and teachers, so that they are absent from class a minimum of time.

Confidentiality:

- In accordance with Deakin University guidelines, the records of interviews will be written by myself, and kept in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only by myself.
• Participating students’ names will be coded, and the coding information will be kept separately in a locked file, accessible only to myself.

• Identifiable consents will be stored separately to the data collected during the research

• When I am writing the research, no names will be used, nor any identifying information.

• Data will be kept for the minimum period of six years, after which it will be disposed of securely

**Study Results:**

Upon completion of the research project, I will provide the school with copies of the results. These results will be available to any members of the school community who would like to read them.

Dorothy Lenthall

College Psychologist
Appendix B

Dear student,

As you know, I am the school psychologist at Mayne Catholic College. I am currently working on a study to find out what things might motivate Year 8 students to take some action to help stop bullying. My research will form part of a Doctorate in Communication at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

This plain language statement is given to you because you will be asked to take part in a study aimed at reducing bullying in the school. As usual in Year 8, you will attend several programmes designed to encourage students to take action against bullying if they know it is happening, even though they may not be directly involved. This information is to be used by the school to try to reduce bullying, but does not form part of the research.

The information that will be used as part of the study will focus on the bystanders in bullying incidents – the people who are not involved, but see it happening. I need to know more about what things help some people to take action against bullying, and what prevents others from taking action. This information will be gained by inviting Year 8 students to be interviewed about your personal experiences of bullying. This is entirely voluntary, and you are free to refuse the interview if you do not feel comfortable to participate.

I will outline the project so that you can give your informed consent to participate.

**Project aims:** to develop some school procedures for countering bullying. The aim of the research is to discover more about the behaviours of Year 8 students when they
witness a bullying incident. There is a great deal known about the behaviours of both the bullies and the victims, but less is known about the way the bystanders feel about bullying.

Participation:

- As part of the normal Year 8 curriculum, you will be attending anti-bullying educational sessions at the Year 8 Induction Day and during the Peer Support Programme. These sessions are part of the normal Year 8 curriculum, to help the school develop better ways of dealing with bullying, and are not part of the study.

Time involved:

- As well as the above, you may wish to volunteer to be interviewed in a separate group and/or individually by myself, about your opinions of bullying. I am interested in your opinions of bullying, so that I can use this information for the study. A suitable time would be arranged with your House Co-ordinator and teachers, so that you are not absent from class for too long.

Confidentiality:

- In accordance with Deakin University guidelines, notes from interviews will be written by myself, and kept in a locked filing cabinet, which only I can access.

- Volunteer students’ names will be coded, and the coding information will be kept separately in a locked file, accessible only to myself.

- Any consent forms which can be identified will be stored separately to the information collected during the research, so that names and information cannot be matched up.
• When I am writing the research, no names will be used, nor any information that could give away who you are.
• Information will be kept for the minimum period of six years, after which it will be disposed of securely

**Study Results:**

When the research project is finished, the school will be provided with copies of the results. These results will be available to any members of the school community who would like to read them.

Dorothy Lenthall

College Psychologist
Appendix C

Dear Colleague

This Plain Language Statement is prepared as a summary of the research project I am conducting as part of a Doctorate in Communication at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria. You have received this statement because you have expressed an interest in participating in this project. The summary that follows outlines the project for you so that you can give your informed consent to participating in it.

Research aims: to develop a best-practice model of countering bullying among Year 8 students by focusing on bystander behaviour in bullying incidents. Peer intervention is much more effective than adult intervention, (Cowie, 1998, Besag, 2000), therefore, this research seeks to use this effectiveness within the anti-bullying strategies used at the school. The research aims to generate knowledge about the psychology of bystander behaviour, so that the school will be better equipped to address bullying behaviour.

The Research project:

- Staff members who have indicated an interest in participating in the project will form a focus group to discuss perspectives on bullying behaviours. They will assist by contributing their observations of bullying and bystander behaviour, as they witness them in classes and around the school.
- I will be conducting the usual, semi-structured group interviews of Year 8 students at the Year 8 Camp and during Special Programme in Term 1, 2003. These interviews are aimed at gaining a better understanding of bullying and bystander behaviour as the students experience them. The students will be
informed that this year, the information will be used to contribute to this research project. Interested staff present will observe and make notes on students’ responses. This will address any researcher bias as well as provide information which I might not notice while I am interviewing the group.

- Some students may be reluctant to speak of personal issues when they are within a group. To gain more in-depth information, some students will be asked to volunteer to be interviewed as individuals.

- Case studies of students who are bullied, and/or who witness bullying, will also be studied for the research, with the aim of providing a different perspective on bystander behaviour.

- Participation is entirely voluntary and the key informants are free to withdraw at any time. Individual interviewees may also withdraw data gained to date. However, students in the group interview will be part of a collective and as such, their contributions will remain part of the research.

Confidentiality:

In accordance with Deakin University guidelines, the identity of all staff and students who contribute to this research will be kept confidential. Identifiable consents and research data will be collected without revealing any names or information which could lead to the identification of any person. Data will be coded and kept in a locked file accessible only by myself. Coding information will be kept separately in a locked file accessible only by myself. Data will be accessed only by the researcher and associates and will be securely disposed of after a minimum period of 6 years.
Results of the research:

Upon completion of the project, organisational management and participants, as well as the wider school community, will be informed of the results of the research. Information from the research may be used for journal articles and for presentations to interested parties and organizations.

Dorothy Lenthall

College Psychologist
Appendix D

Dear Parents

This letter is to inform you that the school psychologist, Dorothy Lenthall, is undertaking research into the causes of bullying. The research is being conducted for two purposes. Firstly, action to counter bullying forms part of her role within the school; and secondly it will contribute to her Doctorate in Communication at Deakin University, Victoria. This research will seek to generate knowledge about why some students take action to counter bullying and others do not. It is well known that students respond more readily to their peers than they do to adults, and it is for this reason that she is particularly interested in the behaviour of bystanders in bullying incidents. The objective of the research is to motivate students to take action against bullying. The action may be from anonymously reporting the incident, to taking a more direct approach to prevent the bullying.

This project will assist the school in its endeavour to counter bullying, in accordance with our Anti-Bullying Policy. The Year 8 students will be interviewed as a group, as usual, at the Year 8 school camp. Additionally, they will be interviewed in their house groups for Special Programme during Term 1, 2003. These interviews form part of the normal Year 8 curriculum and are separate from the research. Students will be asked to volunteer to be interviewed in a smaller group, and as individuals. The information from these latter interviews will form part of the research.
Research of this nature assists all school students and I believe it will benefit the Mayne community. Therefore, if your child/ren is eligible to be interviewed individually, I encourage you to support the research by giving your consent. If you would like to know more about this project, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Lenthall at the school.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Anderson

Principal
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