SCHOOL BULLYING:

THE INSIDE STORY

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Abstract

School bullying has been a chronic concern for educators since long before Charles Dickens documented its hazards in the schools of his day. Nevertheless, comprehensive school-wide anti-bullying programs representing extended and consistent effort have resulted at best in a 50% reduction of bullying, at worst a 15% increase (Roberts, 1997), and educators continue to search for solutions.

The purpose of this study was to search for a better understanding of bullying in order to develop more effective strategies for preventing it. Although there is general agreement in the research with the present accounting of the incidence of school bullying, and of the long-term negative consequences to self-esteem and mental health, the participants in this study suggested that our understanding of what constitutes or defines a victim or a bully, and the dynamics of aggression and power all need more careful scrutiny.

A review of the literature revealed that school bullying is usually attributed to maladapted individuals, and associated with aggression, primitive levels of moral behaviour, and the use and misuse of power. There are many theories and conceptualizations regarding the root causes and dynamics of this aggression, moral turpitude and power abuse. Past personal history, attachment experiences and the influence of cultural models may be included as contributing factors for aggression. But none of these factors tell the whole story.

Almost all previous research on bullying has been quantitative questionnaires or dependent upon external observation. In an attempt to develop a broader picture of school bullying, the researcher applied Grounded Theory, as developed by Corbin and Strauss (2000). This is a qualitative method of investigation designed to obtain the inside story from the point of view of participants. An advertisement in a local newspaper resulted in eighteen volunteer participants
who told their personal stories of bullying and being bullied. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed following the Paradigm Model (Corbin & Strauss, 2001). Applying the prescribed procedures associated with this model — open coding, axial coding, and selective coding — a conceptual model of bullying was developed.

The consequences of bullying as reported by these eighteen participants supported previous research regarding the long-term effects of bullying, such as early school leaving, reduced self-esteem, and depression, but long-term addictions also appeared to be a possible consequence of bullying. In this study a more dynamic picture of bullying was discovered than is usually believed, where individuals may be bullies and victims, depending upon the social context, and where individuals who administer or receive victimizing behaviours may be enmeshed in contextual and systemic factors, with their behaviours to a considerable extent being co-created by group dynamics and patterns of power in the contextual situation.

The picture of bullying that emerged from this study seems to suggest that to eliminate school bullying, interventions may require a wider appreciation of the embeddedness of individual behaviour in group dynamics. Quality of attachments, group dynamics, power systems and social context emerged as factors of equal importance to the characteristics of individuals in explaining bullying behaviours. To be effective, anti-bullying strategies need to include (a) respecting individual differences, (b) understanding social group dynamics, (c) attending to teacher-student relationships, and (d) including a consideration of the social-emotional environment as a part of responsible educational pedagogy. Subsequent consultations with teacher colleagues and participants supported the validity of these findings.
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When I initiated this study of school bullying, I was certain that I owed my consuming interest in the subject of bullying to my experiences as a school counsellor, where repeatedly, the story told by a supposed bully differed from the version of the same incident described by the victim, or the teacher, or the administration. I needed to know what caused such disparity in order to feel competent in disentangling the dialogue. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge all those students, whose identity shall remain confidential, who trusted me enough to tell the story nobody else would hear. They are the individuals who inspired this research.

However, in learning more about group dynamics and the social pressures to conform, I realize there are other situations and contexts which had a part in inspiring my interest in this topic. In my personal experience as an adoptee, never fitting in to my designated family, I perpetually faced the three choices described by social psychologists to change their mind (argue), change my mind (succumb to the group) or be excluded (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). These are also the choices often facing victims and bullies. I thank my adoptive parents and the circumstances of my life for enabling me to see this process from the inside, for enabling me to question the received view of bullying and embarking on this study.

Thanks is also due to my advisor, Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, who patiently tolerated my inevitable tendencies to diverge from customary procedure, quietly guided me in the application of qualitative methodologies, and coached me in developing this interpretation of my research. Thanks is also due to my two academic advisors, Dr. Marla Buchanan and Dr. Wm. Borgen, whose valuable feedback enabled me to offer this final document with confidence that it may prove to be of some value to academics and educators.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Recent dramatic and tragic stories of school violence and related suicides have made school bullying a priority to the news media, and has put bullying high on the agenda of needed school reforms. But bullying has been a feature of school life since before Dickens’ days, when boys regularly beat each other up on the playground, and teachers routinely bullied with knuckle-rapping and ritual canings. The movie *Bully*, a modern version of the familiar bullying story is a horrifying docudrama of a retaliatory murder and subsequent harsh prison sentences for half a dozen teenagers. The movie producer must have read the data accumulated by the US Secret Service and other researchers (Garbarino, 2001), which confirms a growing understanding that tragic bullying stories are often the result of enraged retaliation from long-term victims. However, neither the existing body of research on bullying, nor this movie, tell the whole story; and to prevent violence and bullying, we must first understand it. As an initial step in understanding, it would be useful to examine the individuals involved in bullying.

*Definitions*

**Bullies**

In many discussions of bullying, individual participants in bullying are assumed to have acquired a stereotypical identity as either bully or victim. Bullies, in general, are considered to have abusive and aggressive backgrounds where “might is right” and where force and power are considered tools for promoting success in getting one’s own way. Bullies are often assumed to have low self-worth in relation to intellectual and school status and to often be underachievers (O’Moore, 2000). They are often assumed to be reactive to slights and prone to temper tantrums, (Olweus, 1999) and as a result to frequently be instigators of harassment and intimidation (Curcio & First, 1993; Nansel, 2001; Roberts, 2000; Tattum & Herbert, 1997). Their role is to wield power and control over others, identified as the victims of bullying.
Victims

Victims, on the other hand, are often assumed to be misfits. Any obvious difference from peers can be a trigger for victimization -- victims may be poor or rich, short or tall, athletically talented or awkward, academically slow or gifted (Cowie & Berdondini, 2001; Casella, 2001). Once recognized as a victim, they may be labeled – nerd, wimp, sissy, fat, stupid, gay, some racial epithet, or worse. There is some evidence that victims may come from over-protective or enmeshed families, or already be victims of sibling bullying (Smith, 2004). Vulnerable and isolated, victims are often presumed to see themselves as weak and ineffectual, to be below average in popularity and to be more likely to be socially rejected, more isolated and lacking a network of friends. (Cowie & Berdondini, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Generally, they may be less integrated socially and lack the protection that friendship provides (Smith, 2004). Bullying is thought likely to occur when individuals characterized as victims and bullies encounter each other.

Bullying

The term “bullying” describes a wide variety of behaviour that can be considered a subcategory of aggression (Hymel, Bonanno, Henderson & McCreith, 2002; Tremblay, 2001). Bullying may involve the attempt of one individual to induce fear and intimidation in order to gain power and dominance over another. Such dominance can include open aggressive attacks upon an individual target in behaviours like hitting, pushing or kicking, or direct verbal assault in the form of name-calling or threats (Jerome, 2001; Labi, Nealy, Hequet & McKenna-Parker, 2001). Or bullying can involve more covert strategies like social isolation, spreading rumours, or exclusion from the group (Cowie & Berdondini, 2001; Curcio & First, 1993; Leo, 2001; Orecklin & Winters, 2000). Other methods of bullying are appearing that apply the relatively new
communication technologies of the internet in the form of e-mail and chat room rumours and gossip (Smith, 2004). Whether physical, verbal or social, such aggression may lie along a continuum from mild annoyance and teasing to severe life-threatening school massacres (Casella, 2001; Nansel, 2001; Roberts, 2000; Tattus & Herbert, 1997). Recently, many different types of social interactions that might have been tolerated or ignored in the past have come to be regarded as bullying, including any intentional act that induces feelings of hurt, humiliation, inferiority, fear or alienation in another individual (Cash, 1995; Harris & Petrie, 2002; Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 1999; Labi et al., 2001). Bullying is now widely considered a ‘systematic abuse of power’ (Rigby, 2002). In addition, bullying may occur as a part of authoritarian management, for example when teachers shout at students, publicly humiliate them, exclude them from activities, or impose some types of deliberate punishment (Hazler, 1996; Smith & Brain, 2000). Some researchers protest that the definition of bullying has become too broad, sometimes pathologizing normal conflict (Tremblay, 2001).

Alternative Definitions

Recent research, has found that many bullies do not necessarily fit the stereotype of a psychologically maladjusted, marginalized individual: the world of bullying may be more complex than educators have assumed. Some authors suggest that both bullies and victims often demonstrate poorer psychosocial adjustment than do their classmates, and both groups tend to be over-represented among the rejected children in the classroom or social group (Hazler, 1996). Bullies have been identified as nuclear members of social clusters, similar to the average student though less popular than average in the social network (Cowie & Berdondini, 12001; Monks & Smith, 2000). There has been little investigation of the links between bullying and power, and
little appreciation for the fact that social power reflects an interaction between the individuals within a social context (Vaillancourt et al., in press).

Recent research challenges some of the accepted assumptions of bullying. A sample of 555 Canadian students from grade 6 to 10 was examined, distinguishing subtypes of bullies on the basis of social power. They were given peer nomination and self reports, including the Social Self-efficacy scale (Wheeler & Ladd, 1982), the Self Description Questionnaire (March, 1988), and the Child Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992/92). Results showed that many bullies are considered both popular and powerful by their peers. Further, overall the bullies reported a positive sense of social self-efficacy, positive social self-concept, and also reported feeling well-integrated with the peer group. In addition, powerful bullies were frequently viewed as being physically attractive, wearing stylish clothing, and being good athletes (Vaillancourt, Hymel & McDougal, in press). These findings indicate that bullies may be a part of the social dynamics of the classroom, and not simply anti-social outsiders.

Aggression

The concept of aggression may also be more complex than is generally assumed. In the 1960's and 1970's, children and adolescents with depressive tendencies were seen as different from those with aggressive tendencies, and distinguished as internalizers versus externalizers (Tatum & Herbert, 1997). More recent research, however, indicates that children who commit suicide also often exhibit antisocial, violent behaviour toward others. A study at Seeds University Elementary School, Los Angeles, California obtained data on aggressive and depressive tendencies among 67 eight and nine year olds, and 76 ten and eleven year olds. Forty-four of the eight and nine year olds were retested two years later, at which time a third sample of 40 ten and eleven year olds was also tested. They were assessed by the Children's Depression
Inventory (Kovacs, 1992/92), self-report measures of aggression, and a teacher's inventory of aggression and depression. There was a strong relationship between depressive tendencies and aggression. On the other hand, there was a negligible correlation between children's self-report and teacher's ratings of depression. It appeared that differential attributions to disturbing events may foster either an aggressive or a depressive reaction. (Feshback & Zagrodska, 1997). The prevalence of these co-morbid diagnoses suggest that violence against the self and toward others may be related phenomena (Shafii & Shafii, 2001), and by implication, the distinctions between victim and bully behaviours may be indeterminately intertwined.

*What do Bullying Behaviours Mean?*

A little investigation beneath the surface of bullying incidents frequently reveals that a specific confrontation may be only the latest in a long stream of reciprocal violent interactions that may include teasing, insults, and threats (Casella, 2001). By the time aggressive groups end up attacking one another, there have usually been uncountable smaller insults that, in the absence of active, intentional conflict resolution, demand revenge. At that point, it is difficult to identify precisely who are the perpetrators, and who the victims. Bullying becomes a circular phenomenon, and the line of demarcation separating victim and perpetrator becomes impossible to determine (Cullingford & Morrison, 1995; Hess, 1998), a dilemma perhaps representing the state of human nature, as so well expressed by Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1982):

> If only there were evil people out there insidiously committing evil deeds and it was only necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who among us is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?
This conception of human behaviour begs the question whether bullying is dysfunctional behaviour in itself, or whether represents a symptom of a dysfunctional systemic context.

Consequences of Bullying

Bullying behaviours in schools have consequences beyond the immediate effect they may have on individuals. It is an extensive problem throughout our culture that can have lifelong effects upon both individuals who experience victimization, and upon those who perpetuate bullying behaviours.

Incidence of Bullying

Bullying occurs commonly throughout Western society, in homes, schools and the workplace. School bullying has been found to involve about 20% of the school population in European studies, about 23% in America, 20% in Canada, and 17% in Australia (Hazler, 2000; Tattum & Herbert, 1997). In one study of 308 seven to eleven year-olds in England, 96% reported that teasing happens in their school, and 66% said it happens to them (Boulton & Hawker, 1997). A study conducted in 1988 in Great Britain K-7, in 33 schools, found that two-thirds of children were distressed by teasing, name-calling, and involvement in fighting (Tattum & Herbert, 1997). More recently, the National Institute of Health surveyed over 15,000 students in grades six to ten in public and private schools throughout the US, and found overall, 30 percent of the students reported being involved in bullying as either a bully or a victim (Hazler, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001).

Victimization rates appear to range from 3 to 10% for a limited time span, perhaps 6-12 months, but rates increase if the time span is extended, so that in a study of 1100 university students, over half of the respondents reported past bullying (Krahé, 2001). In a preliminary study to examine what adults remember about the hurtful effects of teasing, and how they feel
about it now, 68.6% reported being teased at school (Boulton & Hawker, 1997). If so many individuals are involved in bullying, it would seem that the risk of victimization may be embedded in the social context where it occurs, as much as it may reside within the characteristics of the individual who is currently being victimized. Bullying appears to be part of the social reality of contemporary school life in Western society.

Effects of Bullying

The presence of bullying in schools represents for many students a compromising influence upon both their psychological well-being and their academic achievement. In one study of adults reporting past bullying, 72% reported sadness at the time, 33% said they still feel sad about these experiences, 58% remembered being depressed as children because of the teasing, and 11% indicated they still feel depressed when they recall this childhood teasing (Boulton & Hawker, 1997). For these victims, past events still influence their present emotional state of mind. Some children are bullied and teased consistently until they feel depressed, have low-self-esteem, and eventually drop out of school (Curcio & First, 1993). There are some estimates that over 15% of absenteeism may be a result of bullying (Chamberlain & Houston, 1999; Tatum & Herbert, 1997).

The presence of bullying in schools represents for many students a compromising influence upon their academic achievement. Many teachers may see teasing as inconsequential and normal interaction among children (Curcio & First, 1993; Goldstein, Harootunian & Conoley, 1994; Labi et al., 2001), and may flippantly advise students to ignore the bullies, or, unrealistically, advise them to stand up for themselves. As a result some victims become paralyzed with fear in the ambiguity of conflicting advice to ignore the abuse, or stand up for themselves – a state that can significantly interfere with their ability to concentrate on academics (Hazler, 1996). In addition,
negative behaviour on the playground may openly enter the classroom and result in conflict and disruptive behaviour that competes with academic pursuits. Such withdrawal from the process of education can have long-term negative career consequences.

*Bullying and Criminality*

Olweus (1990) found that approximately 60% of boys who were characterized as bullies in grades six to nine have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24, and therefore concluded that bullies are more likely to become persistent criminals. But this conclusion is challenged by other research that indicates 40 – 50% of all adolescent boys have at least one criminal conviction by age 19, such as drugs & alcohol, assault, or petty theft (Patterson, 1997; Van Willigenburg, 1995). Statistics demonstrate a dramatic surge in frequency of crimes from age 12 to 19, and an equally dramatic decline by age 25-30. Longitudinal studies have shown that individuals who commit crimes before age 12 are the ones whose criminal history is more likely to persist into adulthood, and individuals age 12-15 who engage in crime will likely cease their criminal behaviour by age 25 (Patterson, 1997). Since ages 12-15 also represents the years of most intensive bullying, it would seem to fit into a realm of adolescent limited behaviour, rather than a prediction of life-time criminality. Furthermore, a review of the extensive literature for a variety of crimes reveals that the distribution of crimes by age has shown the same characteristics over the last century and does not support the idea that anti-social behaviour of adolescence is increasing. Generally, according to Patterson, those identified as bullies are not much different from average adolescents, and aggressive adolescent behaviour does not appear to be increasing, despite the impression presented by the media (Patterson, 1997). It appears that individuals identified as bullies are slightly more likely than average to be involved in criminal behaviour during adolescence, but the certainty of them remaining criminal is tenuous.
Developing a Clear Definition of the Problem of Bullying

A preliminary step in successful problem solving is a clear definition of the problem, so the matter of delineating precisely what we mean by bullying merits some deliberation. Many educators and researchers would agree with a definition of bullying as "physical or psychological abuse toward individuals who are typically not able to defend themselves" (Tice, 1994, p.39), or as intentional aggressive behaviour repeated over time with no provocation (Olweus, 1991). Or bullying and violence may be defined as any intentional act performed by one or more human beings who use or threaten to use force in order to cause physical or psychological damage to other human beings, this intentional act being perceived as such by the victims (Condor & Brown, 1988).

However, the matter of abuse may be an interpretation of a given behaviour falling on a continuum from excessive teasing to life-threatening assault. And if the ability to defend oneself defines abuse, it is possible that the same act of teasing, for example, could be enjoyable for one individual, but threatening and abusive to a weaker one. A precise definition, then, is difficult. Nevertheless, much public debate about school violence and school responses to it restrict the problem to a concern over the classroom or playground disruption introduced by problem individuals, and the discussion becomes limited to a debate over how the students involved should be punished (Greene, 2001).

Generally, there is little agreement about the definition of bullying, no broad consensus of the causes of school violence, nor universally accepted recommendations for violence prevention (Mulcahey, 1999; Roberts, 2000). So discussions about bullying -- or about crime and violence -- can become contentious debates involving strong emotions around differing values and goals, contrasting philosophical stances, and assumptions concerning personal responsibility, various
moral understandings of justice, care and safety, or a hot dispute highlighting the artificial
dichotomy of traditional versus progressive viewpoints (Casella, 2001; Greene, 2001). The result
has been attempts to implement policy with a confusing array of strategies, and ideological
justifications without adequate theoretical support.

Current Anti-Bullying Strategies

With the publicity surrounding such dramatic bullying/retaliation incidents as the
Columbine shootings, the murder of Reena Virk in Victoria, the suicide of Dawn Marie Wesley
in Mission and Hamed Nastoh in B.C., an urgent interest in curtailing bullying has emerged that
is reflected in the education plans of many schools both here in British Columbia and across the
Western World (Hazler, 2000; Labi et al., 2001; Morill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno & Bejarano,
2000). School administrators typically respond to bullying problems by establishing clear rules
of conduct, enforcing the rules consistently, punishing those individuals who break the rules,
teaching pro-social skills such as conflict resolution, and rewarding good behaviour (Bey &
Turner, 1996; Labi et al., 2001; McCormick, 2001). The cure for bullying is usually thought to
involve reducing the aggressiveness of the bully, and increasing the assertiveness of the victim.
The emphasis rests upon changing the behaviours of individuals, and upon providing staff with
skills necessary to handle violent situations after the fact (Bell, Gamm, Vallas, & Jackson, 2001).

Fighting for “Violence-Free” Schools

The “violence-free school policy” of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training
encourages “the whole community...to play an active role in promoting violence prevention”, but
says little about the etiology of bullying, and focuses primarily on behaviours. The BC Ministry
of Education guidelines for “Effective Behavioural Strategies” stands as another example of such
an administrator top-down program – a rebirth of the familiar school response of structured
rewards and punishments, and maintenance of an authority in control. Administrators are
typically ambivalent about the effectiveness of counseling and psychotherapy (Nansel et al., 2001; Roberts, 2000), although there has been some support for the use of counselling and instruction in pro-social skills to improve the behaviour of those identified as instigators of harassment and intimidation (Bell et al., 2001; Goldstein et al., 1994).

Tattum (1997), a widely acknowledged authority on the implementation of anti-bullying programs, recommends a combined effort of strategies. He suggests expulsion from school to demonstrate to pupils and parents that a school will not tolerate bullying, reasoning with bullies to promote empathy, and bully courts and peer counselling. Except for the reference to increasing empathy through discourse, these remedies largely represent the use of power and control in the form of punishment and consequences as responses to bullying, with a little attention to cognitive instruction of specific skills.

*Effectiveness Questioned*

These administrative strategies represent responsible attempts to maintain acceptable school behaviour, but they are surely not new – teachers and principals have a long tradition of trying to make the school a safe place by teaching pro-social skills, talking sense into students, and enforcing rules of conduct (Bell, et al., 2001). However, major efforts toward implementing anti-bullying programmes following these principles have generally met with limited success (Noddings, 1992; Smith, 2004; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler & Charach, 1995). “Get tough” law-enforcement measures and “zero tolerance” requirements particularly do not seem to work.

There is a checkered history of the efficacy of anti-bullying programs in schools. Many programs of add-on units of social skills (like Second Step in the elementary schools, Career and Personal Planning [CAPP] courses in the high school) have not been found to produce significant change in school bullying behaviours, and carry the significant disadvantage of adding to
teachers' already ominous responsibilities. Traditional school remediation attempts and anti-bullying programs remain focused upon maintaining traditional interventions – behavioural rewards and punishment have proven insufficient (Casella, 2001; Chamberlain & Houston, 1999; Kirk, 1995; Strike, 1999). If we take the modern study of bullying as dating from Olweaus' first book, *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys* (1978), then we now have over a quarter century of research history. And still the problem remains a great concern to educators.

Generally, much is known about the incidence of bullying behaviour and its long-term negative effects on participants, observers, and the learning environment; but little is known about its processes. As long as our knowledge is limited as to the etiology and maintenance of aggressive bullying behaviours, we will be restricted to interventions directed at its symptoms rather than the roots (Krahé, 2001). Without more information we will remain stuck in a power struggle with bullying.

*Possible Negative Effects*

Not only is present anti-bullying policy ineffective, but it may have unintended and undesirable implications for student behaviour. Ironically, strategies of battling bullying by enforcing standard rules of conduct somehow mirror beliefs characteristic of bullies – that "might is right". There is a puzzling reluctance to modify the top-down management approach to bully management. Responsible educators try to meet students at their level of academic ability and knowledge, and consistently encourage those having difficulty, to help them to progress to ever higher levels of academic skill and competency. Yet these same educators commonly set up authority-based behaviour discipline protocols that punish or exclude those students who do not (or cannot) comply (Roberts, 2000).
Aside from being tactics that are pedagogically questionable, punishment and exclusion of unwanted behaviours may be contraindicated if social responsibility is the goal (Noddings, 1992). As we continue to implement punitive responses modeling the acceptability of force as a strategy for conflict resolution we should perhaps not be surprised when bullying and power assertion continue to characterize schools (Krahé, 2001). Moreover, if schools respond to violence with overzealous consequences, the mission and values that educators commonly hold regarding traditional values and attitudes of caring are frequently relinquished as the school becomes progressively more diligent in enforcing inflexible rules (Curcio & First, 1993).

Current Anti-Bullying Strategies

Perhaps the dispute continues because basically nothing we are doing at the present time seems to work as a consistent and significant deterrent (Krahé, 2001; Noddings, 2002; Roland, 2000; Shariff, 2002; Tice, 1994). Although the responses of the educational community to the problem of violence in the school have been energetic, creative, sustained and costly, they have been effective in only a limited number of cases (Tice, 1994). In one study, school-wide programs in nineteen schools, sustained over a three-year period produced at best a 50% reduction, and in some schools an increase in bullying (Roberts, 1997; Roland, 2000). There have now been over 12 large-scale multiple-school intervention studies against bullying carried out in various countries (Norway, USA, Australia, and several European countries). The results varied, but reductions of victimization rates from 5 to 20% were typical (Smith, 2004). Programs identified as demonstrating some success tend to reflect a number of strategies, including promoting problem-solving skills, increasing students’ academic programs that deal with individual student needs, structured interaction programs among peers, social skills training, and increasing student responsibility roles in the school and community. Harris polls summarizing
the opinions of students, parents, teachers and law enforcement officers indicate that significant proportions of all groups perceived only small decreases in levels of violence at school despite implementation of various anti-bullying strategies (Greene, 2001). Evaluations of dozens of programs produce little evidence that they may reduce serious violence, and the growing concern is that they may be well intentioned, but too simplistic (Shariff, 2002; Tice, 1994). Generally, there remains significant dissatisfaction with progress in creating effective prevention-oriented interventions (Casella 2001; Goldstein et al., 1994). The evidence indicates that incidence of bullying is not decreasing significantly, despite the recent emphasis on developing anti-bullying policies (Krahé, 2001; Shariff, 2002; Tice, 1994). Concerted efforts by schools, administration and government education ministries have resulted in virtually all schools now having an anti-bullying policy (Smith, 2004). Yet there is still no clear evidence that the quality or content of anti-bullying policies in themselves predicts victimization rates. The continuing commitment of schools to take action against bullying is encouraging, but at the same time, the lack of positive outcomes is somewhat discouraging.

A Deficient Definition Prevents Successful Intervention

A deficient definition of a problem will inevitably lead to a confused consideration of alternatives. The problem of aggressive bullying behaviours cannot be clearly delineated until researchers and psychologists can agree on some of these questions: What qualifies a particular behaviour as bullying? What function do these behaviours serve? What features of a social environment influence an increase or decrease in the incidence of bullying? Is aggression always a negative thing? Understanding the origins of aggression in children represents a significant challenge for researchers. Research on the development and prevention of violent behaviour has been described as “a booming industry” (Tremblay, 2000, p. 129) with negligible results.
Despite a proliferation of mainly quantitative studies, questionnaires and surveys, substantial gaps in research remain (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; Tremblay, 2000).

The Purpose of the Study

There have been many studies quantifying the amount of bullying in schools, and providing static descriptions of the participants, but the development of effective strategies to prevent aggression and bullying may be hampered by the fact that the causes and moderating variables leading to aggressive behaviour are still far from being fully understood. The purpose of this study is to produce a theory of bullying in our schools that incorporates the student’s world of bullying as seen from the insiders’ view.

Goals of this Study

The goal of this study is not simply to reflect and explicate the reality of bullying in a descriptive account, or a simple diagram, but to open awareness into possible interpretations of it in order to increase our understanding of bullying, to clarify our intentions in combating it, and to increase the effectiveness of our efforts at prevention. Research into school bullying can be expected to be a continuous process of growth and deeper understanding: this study cannot hope to provide a fully complete interpretation of the complexities of bullying and aggression. Inevitably, further research will uncover an alternative, perhaps unsuspected perspective on this problem in a continuous process of growth and deeper understanding. My hope is to show how a fuller interpretation of the complexities of bullying can spawn a broader understanding of the issues of social relationship, moral development, power and status, and other dimensions inherent in it, and that the results of this study will have practical potential for influencing professional educators as they struggle with defeating the influence and power of bullying in schools.
Application of Qualitative Research Methodology

This study examined the processes of bullying through the application of grounded theory methodology. It would seem that a useful methodology for studying bullying needs to get beneath simple observations and quantitative descriptions and move toward an inside picture of the meaning of the social roles and networking involved in bullying, as seen from the participants' point of view. Therefore this study was an interpretive inquiry that focused on bullying behaviour situated in the context of the school, in order to enable educators to see more clearly the layers of experience of those who have participated in the social world of bullying, and been influenced by it. Through the analysis of accounts of bullying experiences from various viewpoints, including the viewpoint of bullies, victims and teachers, the study sought to construct a grounded theory of bullying that provides a rich description of the symbolic meaning of bullying behaviours. An initial step taken in order to uncover more about the social construction of the bullying culture in schools was the examination of the point-of-view of individuals who have experienced a bullying relationship in the school context, using qualitative research methods geared for getting the "inside" story. Such a methodology, grounded in empirical data resulted in a mid-range theory that both verifies some previous understanding, and debunks some aspects of the accepted version of bullying.

A Quest for Practical Applications of Academic Research

In addition to accumulating knowledge about the different facts of aggression and bullying, psychological research is faced with the challenge of transferring this knowledge beyond the scientific community to influence public opinion and policy makers. (Krahé, 2001). Part of the purpose of this research was to elucidate the processes of bullying in a manner which will enable teachers to make practical and doable changes in the classroom environment as they struggle with
these difficult issues. It can be frustrating for professional educators to see the school system steadfastly maintain its traditional practices in spite of academic research suggesting improvements. This frustration with the lack of transfer of educational research into classroom practice has partially motivated the initiation of this research, and shaped its form. When the etiology and processes of bullying are clearer and a new perspective developed based on a new theory of bullying, then schools may be enabled to more effectively intervene and alter educational practices. From these accounts of personal experiences of bullying, this study sought to construct a theory that can open up a wider range of approaches and specific effective interventions with which educational practitioners can successfully respond to the bullying problem. This study was intended to better understand the social contexts and the active processes through which bullying occurs, in order to inform educators of specific processes that perpetuate bullying, and to better enable them to implement changes in classroom and school culture and practice that can effectively deter those processes.

Chapter two is a literature review summarizing the most common theories and interventions currently in use in the “War against Bullying”, and an analysis of the successes and failures of such interventions. Chapter three provides a rationale for qualitative research using grounded theory, and clarifies my own approach to interviewing participants within the bullying problem. Chapter four provides a theory of bullying grounded in the analysis of the interviews. Chapter five explores the implications of the narratives and how they can illuminate our understanding of bullying, and practical possibilities for changing anti-bullying practices in schools. Chapter six outlines some tentative conclusions that can be made as a result of this study, and Chapter seven is an Epilogue containing some personal comments by the researcher.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature discussed in this chapter provides a review of accepted theories of aggression and of some theories of power and moral development, followed by a critique of the most commonly espoused solutions for bullying. This discussion of school violence and bullying is meant to be an introduction and overview of the issues, a background providing a context for the research question and for the purpose of this research – a mid-range theory of bullying derived from interpreted interviews of participants situation within a social interaction.

Theories of Aggression

Violence and aggression are complex social phenomena that require examination at different levels of analysis. (Farmer, 1994; Ferguson & Cillessen, 1992). We can postulate the three levels of interaction referred to in our definition of bullying: the physiological arousal of the individual, the intentionality versus automatic response of the individual’s aggressive act toward another individual, and the context of the group or community in which the aggression occurs. In schools and in our social culture, aggression is usually considered an individual response attributed to an intentional antisocial act, due to a genetic predisposition and/or learned response. These theoretical considerations of motivation for aggressive behaviour will be discussed under the headings of Genetic Predisposition, Social-Interactionist Theory, and Social-Developmental learning theories. More recently, bullying is being re-conceptualized as a relationship issue occurring within a dyad, and as an expression of the social context. These views will be reviewed in the discussions of Attachment Theory, Neurobiology, theories of Moral Development, and Social-Environmental theories.

Genetic Predisposition

Traditional viewpoints often tend to conceptualize aggression as an individual’s intentional misbehaviour, and bullying as a genetic predisposition (Duhon-Sells, 1995; Harrison, 1995; Kirk,
1995). It is surely a tautological argument to assume that aggressive behaviours are simply acts performed by aggressive individuals. Some researchers have linked high rates of violence to biogenetic differences associated with racial and ethnic groups. (Ferguson & Cillessen, 1992; Guelotta et al., 1998). Critics have argued that the attribution of violence to biology constitutes an abdication of social responsibility – that poverty, discrimination and the failure of the school system cause violence, not the genes of individuals (Morill et al., 2000; Noddings, 1992).

Controlling for environment and isolating the genetic component, however is difficult. Scientists emphasize the complex nature of the interaction of biological and environmental conditions that may lead to violence.

There is some evidence that individual differences in negative emotional reactivity may be associated with aggressive reactions, but early instinct and drive-related conceptualizations of aggression lack empirical support (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992), and there is no evidence in behavioural research for an individual personality trait for aggression (Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1992). Critics have argued that the attribution of violence to biology constitutes an abdication of social responsibility, that poverty, discrimination and deficiencies within the school system cause violence, not the genes of individuals. The genetic effect may not be rigidly deterministic, but evidence for genetic influences on antisocial behaviour is strong enough to include it as one of the factors accounting for violence. Nevertheless, the complexity of processes in which genetics and experience co-vary and interact require caution in drawing implications for social policy (Bjorkquist, 1997; Leone & Graziano, 1992).

Twin studies have been informative. Five twin studies from 1976 to 1998 of antisocial behaviour showed significantly higher concordance rates in identical twins over fraternal twins — evidence for a significant genetic contribution to rates of violence (Bjorkquist, 1997). Other twin
and adoption studies indicate that an individual's genetic make-up may dispose them toward becoming aggressive, but environmental factors also play a crucial role in determining whether that disposition will be reinforced or counteracted (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1992). In a study of 220 children (Viermó, 1992), 105 boys and 115 girls were interviewed at age seven to nine, again at age thirteen to fifteen, and again at age fifteen to seventeen. Parents were also interviewed. Overt aggression was measured by questionnaire and peer nomination. An average of approximately 48.1% reported participating in some kind of aggressive or criminal behaviour. Aggression proved stable from age seven to fifteen. Parents' behaviour had some small predictive value. In all phases of the child's development there was an interaction between individual and environmental factors.

There were correlations between earlier parental punishment and later aggression, but there were also correlations between early aggression and later punishment. It was deemed impossible to disentangle the interrelationships (Viermó, 1992). The study concluded that aggression is partly individual predisposition, and partly family socialization. Generally, genetic effects on antisocial, criminal or violent behavior can be expressed as probabilities for action of a given type rather than being rigid determinants of behavior (Guelotta et al., 1998). Four prominent studies on delinquency show little to support a genetic orientation, and point more toward social context as root causes for violent behaviours -- base rates of delinquency varied from 33% (in Philadelphia) to 100% in some cities (Patterson, 1997). In their efforts to separate the effects of race and poverty on rates of violence, sociologists have largely come to the conclusion that poverty (social environment), not "race" (genetics), is the greatest predictor of violence (Cohen & Vandella, 1998; Tremblay, 2000).
Social-Interactionist Theory

Traditional conceptualizations of aggression tend to support a social-interactionist model of aggressive behaviour which assumes coercive strategies like threats, punishment or bodily force are deliberate and intentional responses employed by individuals, and for which they should take personal responsibility. These aggressive strategies may be used for the purpose of getting a target victim to comply with direct demands in order to control others, to protect themselves, or to restore justice (Cohen & Vandello, 1998; Felson & Tedeschi, 1992). This social-interactionist approach assumes aggression is a conscious decision for a specific purpose, not a matter of predisposition, not an instinctual reaction or deficit in character, but as an intentional act. This intentionality implies there is ample opportunity for individuals to choose non-aggressive behaviour, and individuals should bear direct responsibility for their actions (Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1992).

It is undoubtedly true that in some instances resorting to violence is not necessarily irrational or pathological – that violence can indeed be a rational and calculated response to certain circumstances, a power ploy to obtain personal benefit, with the consequences duly considered (Tremblay, 2000). However, the social-interactionist model of aggression tends to assume all acts of violence are likely intentional, and therefore focuses prevention strategies on law and order, school discipline, and teacher authority and attempts to manage the behaviours of individuals with rewards and punishment or increased surveillance. This theory results in punishment of aggressive behaviour, designed to act as a deterrent. But there is little evidence to support the deterrence hypothesis, and the existence of a policy of punitive consequences undoubtedly influences the social climate where it is in place – if school employees are overzealous in their administration of sometimes severe consequences to aggression and bullying,
they may risk jeopardizing the values of caring and encouragement that educators commonly hold (Barrett, 2000; Edwards, 1993).

A social-interactionist model of bullying justifies a law and order solution, so accordingly, school policies that are based on assumptions that bullying is intentional social interaction in general advocate and perpetuate a law and order approach to reduce bullying, despite the problems inherent in these strategies. Specifically, "Zero tolerance" is the label that has come to describe a traditional law and order approach to reduce bullying commonly applied in the high schools of North America. Much evidence indicates that Zero tolerance strategies have not reduced bullying. Rather, the implementation of "zero tolerance" is widely considered to be a pronounced failure that effectively increases negative behaviour and carries the risk of pathologizing normal behaviour (Barrett, 2000; Casella, 2001; Tremblay, 2000).

Zero tolerance policies can result in pushing problem students outside of the educational system and into the streets where they may be more likely to become initiated into crime. Or, students whose behaviour may be mildly problematic can have their behaviour criminalized -- as in the case of a student who brought a nail file to school, and found himself expelled and in the criminal justice system (Tremblay, 2000). A social-interactionist theory of violence and bullying, and subsequent "zero tolerance" anti-bullying bullies assume individual responsibility for aggressive acts. But a disproportionate number of students expelled or suspended from school have been from ethnic minorities, so that suspensions may be more representative of students who are not included in the social matrix of the school than of individual students who are violent (Casella, 2001). Moreover, focusing only on discipline and physical behaviour management has been found to be insufficient in the long term without the establishment of
rapport and good relationships (Barrett, 2000; Bell et al., 2001; Tobin, 1999). Rather than diminishing the problem of bullying, existing strategies of law and order and zero tolerance can have an unduly negative effect on individuals and on the social climate. Yet such policies that advocate immediate and often severe consequences remain a favoured strategy, especially in schools.

Traditional viewpoints often tend to favour these two theories of aggression – either a genetic predisposition inherent in the individual, or an individual’s intentional misbehaviour (Harrison, 1995). And despite their noted shortcomings, theories of social interaction and genetic predisposition dominate the rationale behind current school anti-bullying practices. These and other psychological explanations for violence generally tend to focus on individual factors and individual pathology, without consideration of how these factors may be influenced by contextual events and circumstances. Both psychological and sociological factors need to be woven together if we are to understand the complex mechanisms by which societal factors influence violent behavior (Schatzki, 2002). Other explanations of aggression suggest that both biological and sociological factors need to be woven together if we are to understand the complex mechanisms by which societal factors influence violent behavior (Kruger & Tomasello, 1996). Rarely is violence simply lodged in one person, or even in one place (Tice, 1994). Postmodern constructivist explanations of aggression assume that the likelihood of aggressive behaviour depends less on an individual’s intentional aggressive nature, and more on the operation of a variety of promoting and inhibiting factors located both within the person and the environment (Beyer & Liston, 1992; Bjorkquist, 1997).
Social-Developmental Learning Theory

Social-developmental theories represent a viewpoint that looks beyond individual behaviour as the source of bullying. Rather than attributing responsibility for acts of aggression and violence solely on an individual’s genetic character or deliberate social intention, this approach is more likely to assume that students have learned violence through their life experiences. Strain theory, first advanced by Robert Merton in the 1950’s (Merton, 1994), is a social-developmental theory that acknowledges the important interplay of nature and nurture, genetics and social learning in the probability of aggressive behaviour.

This relatively early theory, proposing an interaction between genetic predisposition and social experience, is remarkably consistent with new findings in neurobiology. Strain theory contends that people who perform anti-social actions are frequently living in a lower socio-economic social strata where they encounter barriers preventing them from reaching economic goals emphasized by Western society, and so may become frustrated with their entrenched circumstances, and develop an inclination towards violence to forcibly get what they want and need. This reasoning fits the idea that unpleasant emotions frequently generate agitated negative affect, and that an individual’s aggressive behaviour may be strongly influenced by circumstances over which he or she has no control. Aggression is then seen as an attempt to end this frustration (Krahé, 2001).

There has been some research to test the theory that social learning is at the root of aggression. A large-scale bullying prevention study in Chicago, the Metropolitan Area Child Study, examined the interrelations of some psychological factors with poverty to help account for the development of aggressive behaviour in young children. Using data collected from a large sample of children, the study investigated the joint influence of (a) poverty, (b) stressful events,
and (c) individual beliefs approving of aggression. Results showed a child's aggressive behaviour correlates very significantly with aggressive environments (Bjorkquist, 1997). More impoverished children experienced more neighbourhood violent stress and more life events stress, and those children who experienced more stress engaged in more aggressive behaviours. Thus, childhood experiences of parental neglect and coercive cycles in families, may teach children inappropriate skills for solving interpersonal problems (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; Mazuno, 1999). Pre-natal, pre-school and early school experiences of learning successes and failures or social acceptance and rejection are seen as crucial in the development of pro-social attributes – such as empathy, emotional well-being, attachment patterns, emotional reactivity and cognitive growth. These are all attributes which can influence impulsivity, the character of social interactions, and a proclivity for bullying (Goldstein et al., 1994; Greene, 2001; Lento, 2001). In addition, past childhood experiences of parental neglect and coercive cycles in families may heighten anxiety and teach children inappropriate skills for solving interpersonal problems (Bjorquist, 1997; Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992).

There appears to be a relationship between aggression and violent social models, such as families, where a social model is a characteristic organizational scheme and structure of a society (Carsten, DePreu, Harinck, & Van Vienen, 2001). A study of 404 randomly sampled adolescents from Finland investigated the extent to which they imitate their parents’ patterns of behaviour when angry. The results showed that the modeling effect of the same sex parent is relatively stronger than the effect of the parent of the other sex, indicating identification increases learning. However, it was found that mothers have an overall greater impact than fathers, perhaps because children typically have more exposure to the mother (Bjorkquist, 1997). In another study, sons who had a poor relationship with a physically aggressive father were found to be less aggressive
than those with a positive relationship. Apparently the positive relationship facilitated identification with the abusive father's aggressive behaviours and values and subsequent acceptance of the abusive father as a model (Feshback, & Zagrodska, 1997).

Cultural models can also influence the acceptability of aggression. Violence can be examined from the viewpoints of assuming a relationship between violence and social models, where a social model is the different organizational schemes and structures of a society (Louis & Kruse, 1998). Today's youth have numerous high-profile models of violence, sometimes from individuals in prestigious positions or power and influence, like politicians and sports heroes and movie stars -- and skilled and talented mass media are incredibly powerful at making and selling images. Within this context, the violence of children can be interpreted as merely evidence of their victimization by the culture, and as a response to what is happening to them in a society that has raised violence to a level of admiration and celebration (Greene, 2001). Bjorkquist suggests that in learning from models such as parents, teachers, or society there are four factors considered to be important: a) the degree of similarity between the model and actual situation, b) the degree of identification, c) the success of the modeled behaviour, and d) the amount of exposure to the model (Bjorkquist, 1997). Other theorists emphasize the importance of relationships in the effectiveness of discipline and modeling efforts (Barrett, 2000). Parents, schools and the media sometimes attribute youth violence to too much violence on television and in video games. Studies do not support a direct correlation, but suggest that an individual who strongly identifies with the media story, and an individual who is angry and intent upon committing violent acts may copy observed violent behaviours (Barrett, 2000). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that bullying and violence have been glamourized in modern society, so we should not be surprised at
corresponding changes in our students' behaviours and values, as they strive to be admitted as adults into that society by imitating the models we provide.

A social-developmental theoretical view of bullying proposes that aggression is largely learned, and therefore that directly teaching students basic social skills like conflict resolution, anger management, social problem solving, stress management and career counselling can give them practical skills for avoiding violence, resolving conflict and developing self-control and socially proactive behaviours (Bell et al., 2001; Goldstein et al., 1994). But anger management methods appear to work best with individuals who are aware of their failure to control their aggression, and reactive bullies may feel their anger is justified (Krahé, 2001). While such instruction is undoubtedly worthwhile, it appears that those in most need of learning the skills frequently benefit the least from the instructional approach (Goldstein et al., 1994). Furthermore, explanations of aggression and bullying as the result of faulty learning implicitly stress the role of reinforcement and punishment in regulating and reducing aggressive behaviours – strategies that have not demonstrated their efficacy (Krahé, 2001) – and minimize or ignore the importance of the relationship of the authority figure in the relative efficacy of these methods (Barrett, 2000; Duff, 1995). Specifically, the hope of teaching social behaviour with a cognitive methodology may fall short of expectations because it neglects the psychological and emotional dimensions of behaviour.

A research project in Britain illustrates the shortcomings of a learning-based approach to prevent bullying. Interventions included a bully court, developing play activities, and a consistent whole-school policy of rules and consequences were implemented in nineteen schools. Only nine schools showed an average reduction in levels of bullying over two years (Smith & Brain, 2000). In another study, after three years of intensive intervention there was a 50%
decline in reported bullying, but only in the schools which vigorously sustained the programme. In schools where the programme was less vigilantly enforced, there was an actual increase in reported incidents (Tattum & Herbert, 1997). From the viewpoint of social developmental theory, bullies are not seen as intentionally "bad" kids, but merely unsocialized – and therefore still teachable.

*Neurobiology and Social Aggression*

Research in neurobiology is reaching the level of specificity where it can inform psychology and other social sciences concerning the physical functioning of brain structures. Recent discoveries in the field of medical neurology have found both hardwired and learned pathways toward aggression in the brain’s complex of nerves and biochemistry, confirming the interaction of genetic and social factors in explaining aggression and violence. Most brain activity appears to be unconscious – fear and anxiety being natural reactions to novel or threatening stimuli that automatically activate the “fight or flight” response. However, conscious thought may modulate the nature of the response through brain chemistry, which in turn has been pre-programmed by previous experiences (Hobson & Leonard, 2001). Studies in neurobiology have confirmed the process by which the brain transforms sensory stimulation and experiential learning into meaningful cognitive information and applies and adapts it to unique life circumstances. Internal representational models and patterns of behaviour are therefore biased by innate and universal tendencies of mental functioning, but are repeatedly and continually modified according to feedback from past experiences, changes in maturation and changes in circumstances. Thus neurological discoveries confirm that early environment and experiences are important in interpretations of present conditions, that internal representational models of behaviour are emerging phenomena, ongoing processes rather than static definable states, and
that specific aggressive behaviour is the brain’s response to a complex interaction of internal and external information, including both genetic and learned patterns (Hobson & Leonard, 2001).

There is indisputably a biologically-rooted disposition, a hormonal, biological process in humans and other mammals to react with a “fight or flight” response in threatening situations. This means that the combination of high arousal and the cognitive interpretation of the situation as threatening can be expected to automatically activate an aggressive reaction without the individual actively or intentionally choosing a hostile act (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1992; Hobson & Leonard, 2001; Wright, 1992). The research on the correlation of children’s early stressful experiences and aggressive behaviour cited in the previous section to support a social learning basis for aggression (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992) can also be used to support a neurobiological explanation, assuming that children who experience more neighbourhood violent stress and more life events stress could be expected to develop neural pathways that support more aggressive reactions to current stressful events. Past experiences, degree of arousal of negative affect, and the individual’s interpretation of the possibility of alternate responses to the automatic adrenaline response of fight or flight all can mediate aggressive responses (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1992). Thus low or unrealistically high self-esteem may sensitize an individual to perceived threats to the self. Or repeated exposure to an arousal-inducing stimulus can increase the intensity of the aggressive response, so that a history of exposure to stimuli perceived as threatening may increase the tendency for the individual to become highly aroused and erupt in aggressive behaviour. (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992). Thus on-going frustration may predictably lead to aggression, and a history of angry interactions in the family may be a significant factor in the etiology of children’s aggressive behaviour at school (Van Willigenburg, 1992).
Attachment Theory

According to attachment theory, aggression occurs in the relationship between two individuals – a level of complexity a step beyond individual responsibility. Attachment theory introduces a second person, each in a reflexive relationship with the other, the behaviour of each individual influencing the behaviour of the other. Attachment theory, posits that children need to feel emotionally safe and secure, and that failure to form secure attachments may inhibit an individual’s ability to trust people, and therefore increase their reactivity, defensiveness and potential for violence (Barrett, 2000; Bowlby, 1989; Cook, 2000). Thus an individual’s attachment experiences evolve from social learning experiences at home, and mediate the effectiveness of subsequent social learning experiences in school and in society. Generally, it appears that aggressive children do tend to show more insecure attachment styles and are more likely to be either victims or bullies (Boulton, 1996; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Roberts, 2001). Studies in neurobiology support such a variable effect of stress on behaviour, depending on attachment experiences (Hobson & Leonard, 2001). From close family relationships accrue the satisfactions of personal bonds with others and decreased sensitivity to the “fight or flight” biological response (Barrett, 2000; Cook, 2000).

Unfortunately, in modern society, many children may feel abandoned as their parents have had to turn their focus away from their children toward making enough money to adequately support their children and meet the family’s basic financial needs (Cook, 2000). Such “abandoned” children may fail to feel secure in their own homes and communities and may develop a propensity for hyper-vigilance and super-sensitivity to real or imagined danger (Borum, 2000). Low levels of cohesion and acceptance, and high levels of conflict and hostility whether in the family context or at school, may also render children prone to violence over reactions to normal
stress with an exaggerated need to defend (Bell et al., 2001; Curcio & First, 1993; Patterson, 1997). Therefore, violence, from the point of view of attachment theory, may more likely be a symptom of problems of rejection within the family -- or the school -- rather than an act of intentional criminality.

The worst years of bullying (grades 6 to 8) coincide with a naturally-occurring transition in early adolescence where students are negotiating matters of self-identity and relationships with others (Gilligan et al., 1988; Kegan, 1982). In one study of fourth to eighth graders in four Midwestern schools, 90% reported abusive victimization (Tice, 1994). In another study, interviews with delinquent girls revealed that the root of their anger and aggression was based on a feeling of being vulnerable (unprotected), friendless (excluded) and surrounded by an anonymous and powerful adult world (Gilligan et al., 1988). In a study of school shootings, virtually all violent youths were living in a social context where they felt treated as outsiders (Twemlow et al., 2001). Thus strong feelings, even rage, at being excluded, left out and abandoned, may be behind desperate actions performed by both bullies and victims. Adlerian psychologists suggest that when students are excluded from membership in the social group they may become bullies or victims whose power struggles represent a self-defeating attempt to be accepted by their social group (Dreikurs, Cassell, & Ferguson, 2004). This frustration about group membership can develop into power struggles of revenge-retaliation dynamics in which the roles of bully and victim interchange (Twemlow et al., 2001). It would appear that concerns regarding attachment and belonging may be part of the etiology of bullying.

Despite the primacy of subjective issues of relationship and social context, as described here, schools still persist in framing the problems of aggression as objective issues of control of individuals. Advice to “just say no” to violence and bullying or “just stop doing it” lest
punishment follows, neglects the importance adolescents place on belonging and connection, as revealed by their tendency to join cliques to meet those needs for attachment (Gilligan et al., 1988; Roberts, 1997). Positive student bonding, attachment, and connection with the school have been associated with such positive behaviours as better attendance, better academic achievement, and less violence (Jackson & Meadows, 1991; Devries & Zan, 1994; Farmer, 1994). An acknowledgement of students’ deep sense of outrage and despair over social disconnection seems to be lacking in current discussions and recommendations for preventing bullying. Such feelings are often simply deemed illegitimate in the context of the school, and issues of exclusion and abandonment addressed only perfunctorily, if at all -- it is the anger and rage that is more likely to be addressed and punished (Gilligan et al., 1988), often with such consequences as “time out”, being banned from the classroom or excluded from more desirable activities. Current school policies of focusing on visible behaviours, and punishing with unpleasant consequences may be a serious oversimplification of the complexity of internal cognitive and affective realities that find expression in bullying. Furthermore, strategies that build community, belonging and safety might be more appropriate than the simpler strategy of administration of punishment and consequences.

Social-Environmental Theories

The environmental context of the social group where aggression occurs can be considered as a third level of complexity spawning aggression, beyond simple individual responsibility and dual or relationship interactions. The social-environmental viewpoint sees aggression in children and adolescents as originating in the social environment, not in the minds of individual children (Farmer, 1994; Patterson, 1997). If we accept that aggressive behaviours occur within the relationships of a dyad, as in attachment theory, then in an important sense, the behaviour of one person constitutes a determinant for the behaviour of the other. This implies that the behaviour
of each individual could not only alter the reaction of the other, but contextual environmental stress could also alter the social interactions of the dyad. Thus, if parents or schools increase the rate of commands and expectations, the rate of deviant child behaviour (depression, withdrawal, violence or aggression) will increase – the greater number of stressful events, the more irritability, the more aggression, and the less compliance (Barrett, 2000; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Patterson, 1983). The likelihood of aggression occurring in response to stressful stimuli depends partly upon whether an action is interpreted as violent and threatening, or overwhelming and intimidating, which in turn depends partly upon the presence or absence of a social support system, and the individual’s personal history of aggression (Hobson & Leonard, 2001; Patterson, 1983). This notion of the environmental context includes such factors as on-going family violence, community instability, peer culture, cultural interpretations of masculinity, and an institutional culture of individualism and competitiveness (Carter, 2002; Curcio & First, 1993; Duhon-Sells, 1995; Tobin, 1999). Thus the environmental context constitutes a more complex and deeper process than simply learned behaviour.

This idea of an environmental context influencing individual behaviours can be considered as an application of systems theory, paralleling concepts included in family systems theory, where the “identified patient”, or IP, may be exhibiting behaviours that can be considered symptoms of a dysfunctional family system (Framo, 1992). In other words, a bully might be considered the IP, and his behaviour seen as a symptom of social problems that exist within the classroom or the school. Traditional theories of bullying and aggression may admit the influence of the environment upon an individual’s aggressive behaviours, but typically do not consider the integrated nature of an individual’s behaviour within the context of their environment. One explanation for a seemingly growing number of random, vengeful acts of aggression is that many
young men see fighting as the only way to establish their masculinity in a culture that is increasingly favouring an androgynous ideal (Ko, 1999). The 16-year-old who thinks that fighting makes the him look tough in front of girls and friends, who believes that when someone is scared of him he is respected, and who hopes that with intimidation he can prove himself a man, may be responding to a cultural context (Carter, 2002; Ko, 1999). The individual can be seen as exhibiting the dysfunctional values of a cultural context.

A stressful social environment in itself may incubate aggression. People sometimes attack others, not because they have been offended or frustrated by those persons, but only because they happen to be feeling very bad at the time. In a great many experiments with non-human subjects, when two animals are cooped together in a small chamber and exposed to negative stimuli like shocks, heat, physical blows, or pain of any kind, they frequently begin to fight (Mahady, Craig & Pepler, 1999; Smith & Brain, 2000). It appears that anger and aggression result not merely from sensations of pain, but from internalized and generalized experiences of distress and suffering. Thus an agitated, negative affect from a negative environmental context can be a fundamental root of aggression (Feshback & Zagrodska, 1997; Hobson & Leonard, 2001). In a study of aggressive behaviour, women university students kept one hand in water that was either painfully cold or at room temperature as they evaluated a fellow student’s problem solutions. The evaluations could be rewards (coins) or punishments (loud noise). The women with one hand in temperate water administered fewer punishments and more rewards than the women with one hand in cold water (Mahady, Craig & Pepler, 1999). A variety of external, environmental influences including painful or otherwise stressful circumstances can strengthen or even generate aggressive inclinations. A school environment characterized as stressful may indirectly be encouraging aggression responses from vulnerable individuals.
Theories of Moral Development

For a full understanding and description of bullying behaviours, surely a moral component must be included. It would be easier if we could begin with a simple uncontroversial definition of morality, but that turns out to be impossible. Every historical era and cultural location appears to have a different interpretation of Socrates’ simple query of “How we ought to live and why” (Rachels, 1993, p. 1). The moral domain consists of several theoretical threads, including concerns of regulatory rules, etiquette and custom, justice and care, and spiritual and religious dictums (Edwards, 1993), which need to be disentangled before we can proceed with a discussion of how our concept of morality might intersect with bullying. Nevertheless, morality is recognized as a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relationships (Walker et al., 1995), and thus falls well within the questions of psychology and behaviours considered bullying.

Classical Theories of Morality

Conventional morality tends to rely upon authority as the source of moral behaviour, and is perhaps exemplified by Kant’s idea of the “categorical imperative” – the existence of absolute rules and principles of moral behaviour. Conventional morality then, defines a moral person as one whose conduct is guided by universal moral rules that hold without exception. Since Kant, many other moral theorists have supported the claim that morality is an effort to guide one’s conduct by reason, so that moral behaviour consists of doing what there are the best reasons for doing – the emphasis resting upon reasoning and logic (Rachels, 1993). This cognitive approach to morality – where a moral judgment must be backed by good reasons for doing something – reflects a strong tradition of rationality in western society, and is rooted in assumptions that logic can be relied upon to determine the best decisions – including moral decisions (Crittenden, 1999). But students who are taught such cognitive, logical moral reasoning principles tend to believe that any moral decision is permitted if there are logical reasons to justify it (Goldstein et
Moreover, viewing morality as a matter of acting on reason can still lead to inconsistencies, as complex situations often involve two or more conflicting moral principles (for example, abortion and euthanasia or running into the school to report an injury) where logical, moral reasoning and the application of universal laws does not result in an unequivocally correct response.

Cognitive-Behavioural Views of Moral Development

In the 1980's, Kohlberg (1984) integrated previous thought about moral behaviour into a developmental cognitive-behavioural schema of moral understanding in which it is assumed that individuals change in their mode of moral decision-making as part of a maturational-developmental process. Paralleling Piaget's (2000) ideas of cognitive development, he proposed a universal sequence of stages of justice reasoning which he labeled pre-conventional (ego-centric), conventional (following accepted authority and custom) and post-conventional, (autonomous). Kohlberg developed his theory by analyzing previous theories of moral behaviour, and tested it through hypothetical dilemmas which were presented to a large population, unfortunately consisting mainly of college age males. He considered moral development to be a process of restructuring modes of role-taking according to an increasing cognitive ability to understand an increasingly more complex array of situational factors and increasingly diverse points of view in moral decision-making (Crittendon, 1999). According to Kohlberg's theory, the basis of moral decisions changes in discrete developmental stages as individuals become increasingly cognitively aware of a wider context. Kohlberg places Kant's moral theory in the category of conventional morality, as described below. Currently popular school programs for teaching agreed upon virtues would also fall into this category.
Kohlberg’s theory represents preconventional morality as a self-centered viewpoint holding that a behaviour is morally acceptable if it feels good and meets one’s own needs. Conventional morality equates morality with respect for authority and the following of rules. Authorities like parents, teachers, law enforcement officials, and God provide the rules to obey. Following God’s laws (or those of another accepted authority) is then generalized to be the essence of morality, so that following the rules meets the requirements of moral behaviour (De-Li, 1999; Duff, 1995; Gibbs, 1985). This moral stance is common in “disciplined” schools (Hunter, 1994). However, when authority figures lose their position of trust and become unreliable sources of moral wisdom, then the idea that moral behaviour is simply obedient behaviour fails and can no longer be relied upon as a reliable source defining moral behaviour (Rachels, 1993). For example, consider the situations where a corrupt government like Nazi Germany initiated questionable laws, military commanders carelessly risk lives, C.E.O.’s require the accounting department to file misleading reports, or teachers intimidate and publicly embarrass errant and annoying students. In situations where authority is not adequately looking after the interests of individuals, other guides for moral behaviour must be found. Thus we cannot measure students’ level of morality solely by the degree of conformity to school rules.

While Kohlberg’s work is highly respected, there is a growing awareness of the limitations of his approach. There have been many concerns about his restricted definition and assessment of morality, and questions regarding the theoretical assumptions of his stage theory (Tappan & Parker, 1991; Walker, et al., 1991). The goal of moral development according to Piaget and Kohlberg has been moral autonomy, by which is meant individuals acting upon moral rules, laws and principles until they have become internal rather than external laws and authority (Tappan, 1990). This view of the goals of moral development has been challenged as not acknowledging
the degree to which individuals are embedded in their particular relational, community, and socio-historical context (Leone & Graziano, 1992).

Some recent moral theorists have considered the matter of social relationship crucial to understanding morality, and there is a growing consensus that the moral encounter is inherently an expression and a communication that stretches out toward the other person in the relationship (Habermas, 1998; Noddings, 2002). For these moral theorists, morality is not simply rational decision-making, nor a set of principles, nor a method of following a professional ethic. Rather, a key ingredient of moral behaviour and morality is an ethical orientation of caring, a kind of responsibility toward the “other” in a relationship (Bauman, 1995; Gilligan, 1988; Habermas, 1998; Okin & Reich, 1999; Puka, 1994). Thus the idea of a rational moral autonomy as proposed by Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984) has been largely supplanted by a version of moral behaviour that includes a greater understanding of the social dimensions of human existence, and the importance of a culture of care in promoting it (Noddings, 1999; Tomasello, 1996).

**Relationships and Moral Behaviour**

Traditionally, a psychological approach to morality focuses on individuals as the source of moral thought, emotion and action, whereas social psychologists focus more on situational and interpersonal factors as sources of morality (Leone & Graziano, 1992). The principle of treating others with respect, as characterized by the Golden Rule, is a move toward a more complex inter-relational interpretation of morality where the inclusion of the interests of others becomes the basis for ensuring moral behaviour (Rachels, 1993). Doing what is in one’s best interests is then considered morally acceptable, only while giving equal weight to the interests of anyone who will be affected by one’s conduct, and only when there is dialogue and communication about the acceptability of behavioural responses. Such a dialectical approach to morality parallels
Kohlberg’s idea of post conventional morality, and embraces considerations of universal principles and the common good.

*Post-Modern Theories of Morality*

Perhaps morality can be viewed in terms that address an understanding of not only caring in relationships, but also the broader issues of social order (Hoffman, 2000; Roeser, Midgley, & Urban, 1996; Sprod, 2001; Turiel, 1997; Zahn-Waxler & Smith, 1992). This revised interpretation allows new responses to aggressive behaviours.

The active practice of a virtue or principle occurs in a relationship within a social context of a social relationship-process falling anywhere on a continuum between authoritarian to consensus, and on a continuum of individualism to collectivism (Barrett, 2000; Beyer & Liston, 1992). The acceptability of a behaviour located on any specific position on one continuum or the other will depend upon a number of factors, including the characteristics of individuals, their social experiences, and the historical outcomes of previous behaviours. Rather than seeing moral behaviour as content dependent and logic based, and requiring a static response, we can see it as process based and context dependent, with power and status seen as important constituents of the social context. Thus we can see moral behaviour as a dance of mutual reciprocity presenting a wide range of possible responses. If aggression is seen as a result of encounters with a challenging environment, rather than labeling and excluding the “other” as oppositional and defiant, we can see the “other” as struggling with issues; perhaps of insecurity (Erdman, 1998), of attachment (Bowlby, 1988), or of self-identity (Erikson, 1994), and of social identity.

From this point of view, participation in moral relationships becomes a more appropriate activity for teaching positive social interaction than cognitive reflection on moral questions (Penelhum, 2005), and the nature of morality becomes contextual and socially constructed.
(Chamberlain & Houston, 1999; Jacob, 1997). Postmodern moral theorists focus on the person within a social context, and ask whether there is a clear distinction between matters of morality, social convention and personal choice (Knowles & McLean, 1992). Moral behaviour is then seen as evolving out of the environment, dependent upon experience and awareness, not simply rational philosophical thought (Huesmann, Guerra, Miller & Zelli, 1992). Thus the resolution of moral conflict requires a special combination of logical reasoning, imagination and empathic compassion, in a culture of care. And moral behaviour requires personal self-control and agency in order to effectively adjust to and adapt to the social equilibrium of interpersonal transactions – it involves a reflexive understanding of self, the other and the context. Schools typically have not embraced this complex and fluid conceptualization of moral behaviour, and remain for the most part, firmly loyal to a more conventional view of morality that relies heavily on authority and logical virtues for its base.

**Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Strategies**

As schools have begun to recognize that none of the theories just reviewed seems to provide an entirely adequate explanation for aggression and bullying, a comprehensive approach that examines all components of bullying and their interactions has been developed (Goldstein et al., 1994; Greene, 2001). But this is often a sort of “shot-gun” approach that fails to apply a coherent, focused approach to managing bullying. With the implementation of a broad, comprehensive approach it is difficult to determine exactly what does or does not work, beyond the recommendation that multiple perspectives and combination approaches will ensure covering all possibilities (Casello, 2001; Curcio & First, 1993; Goldstein et al., 1994; Roberts, 1997).

**Current Efforts to Curb Bullying Produce Inadequate Results**

Specifically, the results of the experiment of applying “zero tolerance” and teaching social skills have been disappointing. The EBS (Effective Behavioural Strategies, 2000) currently
promoted in BC schools is an example of such a program, where many of the historical remedies for bullying have been assembled into a total plan, with few new ingredients added. Although a variety of interventions are in place in many schools and school systems, the theoretical base underlying most of the anti-bullying strategies they use tends to be limited to the traditional genetic, social-interactionist and learning (developmental) theories. Rather than innovation, it looks a lot like more of the same old methods the school has been applying for decades.

*Confronting the Status Quo*

If what we’re doing isn’t working, should we simply continue to try harder? Research has repeatedly demonstrated that teachers underestimate the amount of bullying that occurs -- indicating that 80% of bullying often occurs in corridors and classrooms in close proximity to teachers, without them being aware of it (Hazler, 1996; Roberts, 2000; Tattum & Herbert, 1997). If two out of three children report that schools handle the problem of bullying poorly (only 6% feel school handle these issues well); and if many students believe teachers are not aware of the bullying that occurs (Hazler, 1996); then it is hard to understand how doing more of the same will work any better. Despite great attention to the problem, and much effort expended toward its demise, bullying persists. Much of the research literature on schools has focused on managing aggressive individuals, and developing a curriculum for teaching pro-social skills. If top-down, administrative remedies are failing, perhaps it is time to look for new insights and new possibilities of deterring bullying (Cullingford & Morrison, 1995).

*The Developmental Dimension – Genetic and Cognitive*

Antisocial or aggressive behaviour can have many developmental roots including such individual characteristics as robust constitution, high energy level, sensation seeker, fearlessness, high testosterone and serotonin receptor densities and other such predispositions. Each tendency
can have multiple and divergent outcomes depending on childhood models, attitudinal and
cultural factors. The most proximal causal factor in the spiral of influences leading to an
aggressive act is the situation surrounding the act. The next most proximal cause is the social
history of coercive cycles in the specific context. Genetic predisposition would probably be the
least important factor (Hunter, 1994). The old and familiar nature-nurture dichotomy, between
biology and society – is misleadingly simplistic in terms of bullying. All living, including the
moral life of interpersonal interaction, is best understood from the perspective of constant
learning and reform – a process of evolution. From this perspective, violence can be person to
person, aggression and violence against groups, and innumerable inter-combinations thereof.
Differences in environment, between individuals and groups, and the different impact of these
environments on psychological development is an evolutionary process of genetic and social
environment interactions (Thornberry, 1997). There is a tendency on the part of some social
analysts to seek underlying causes and remedies for violence through a study of the attributes of
individual actors, including studies of personality, family history, norms and values and genetic
traits. Findings from these studies, although there is obviously a place for such information, may
be of limited value in improving our understanding of reasons for violent group interactions.
Something more than individual level research and public policy derived from it is needed to
explain and curtail violence.

Administrative Attempts to Stop Bullying Predominate

Anti-bullying strategies tend to be developed by educators, with minimal credibility
given to student input. What little research there is tends to be largely constructed by adults
representing traditional political and professional interests, and generally neglects to solicit the
point-of-view of students, who may well be the best experts on the situation (Leo, 2001; Morill et
al, 2000). Despite great efforts to control bullying, there has been little effort to seek the point-of-view of individuals who have experienced a bullying relationship within the school context. To date, research on bullying has compiled a lot of descriptive information about individuals who become involved in bullying, but to effectively prevent bullying and violence in our schools, we need to know a lot more about how bullying relationships develop, and what sustains them in our school system (Casella, 2001; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 2001; Nansel et al., 2001). Though schools have little control over the elements of the community and society that interfere with students’ feelings of security and safety, they are still obliged to make the school environment a psychologically safe one. So a search for prevention and a remedy for unwanted levels of bullying and violence continues.

_A New Understanding may Yield New More Effective Strategies_

If much of the school’s effort to curb bullying is producing disappointing results, perhaps we do not yet have a broad enough conceptualization of what the problem really is. If our practices are ineffective, perhaps we need to re-conceptualize the nature of the problem, perhaps we need a new theory to build upon. This research is such an inquiry -- an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of the problem, by directly soliciting the views of participants in order to develop a new theory of bullying that may have the potential to permit schools to step out of the present perplexing cycle of the insanity of school bullying.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Social scientists, including psychologists, have a history of ‘courting respectability’ by carrying out research that applies empirical scientific methods based on quantitative assumptions (Addison, 1988, p. 39). But such research has frequently shown itself to be limited for capturing the meaning of social activity for individuals in social contexts. Awareness of these inadequacies has recently fueled a renewed interest in qualitative and interpretive research approaches. In this chapter, the qualitative methodology applied in this study will be delineated – a grounded theory developed by Strauss & Corbin (1998). This is a methodology focused upon the objective of discovering the meaning of a social activity as interpreted by individuals within its context.

Current Bullying Studies

While a few qualitative studies on bullying are now appearing (McCarthy, 1998), the overwhelming majority of investigations into bullying are quantitative. A favourite method appears to be surveys and questionnaires, some of them self-compiled, many of them using a Likert scale, or multiple choice format (Boulton 1996; Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002; Fontana, 2000; Smith, 2004; Tattus & Herbert, 1994). Some of these surveys and questionnaires have been elicited from pupil self-report data (Olweus, 1978), from teachers (Hess, 1998) and even from school board members (Tice, 1994). Quantitative methods for researching bullying have often employed psychometric tools, such as sociograms or standardized questionnaires on aggression, depression, and suicide. Structured codes of observations have also been used to derive quantitative descriptions of bullying behaviours (Lento, 2001; Mahady et al., 2000; Roland, 2002). Generally, literature on the function of bullying and aggression can be considered limited by an over-reliance on questionnaire-based quantitative methodologies (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).
Shortcomings of Quantitative Methods

Quantitative research methodologies have provided credibility and much valuable information to the field of psychology, but also, as has been noted, exhibit shortcomings in the context of social interactional problems. Perhaps because much of the research concerning bullying has been primarily quantitative, the processes of bullying remain poorly understood. Quantitative studies are perhaps ill-suited to address issues of process relations and social context – well established as central factors in aggression theory (Tremblay, 2000). Survey research on attitudes, beliefs and relationships characteristic of bullying, although attempting to address more interactional aspects, typically provides a shallow comprehension of a complex process. Self-report measures and questionnaires are generally inadequate for capturing an understanding of the social practices and contexts of participants embedded in on-going social situations (Addison, 1988; Torrance, 2000). So, quantitative research may have been useful in answering questions concerning bullying percentages and incidence rates and in providing profiles of the typical bully and victim, but has taught us little about the nature of bullying interactions. As a result, there is little interpretation of the meaning or etiology of bullying, little is known of the underlying mechanisms of its occurrence, few hypotheses have been made concerning the processes of bullying and little effort to develop a broader theoretical explanation for bullying. (Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; McCarthy, 1998).

Methodology Guided by the Nature of the Problem

The choice of a method of investigation should rest on the nature of the problem being investigated, with the method fitting the definition of the problem and the goal of the investigation. This study will venture beyond the usual parameters of quantitative research, and embark upon a qualitative approach that solicits insights and commentary from actual
participants who have experienced the bullying situation. This study asked the familiar question ("What is bullying?") in a new way, generating from the point of view of participants an insiders' account of the context and processes of bullying. Although bullying is often seen as evidence of individual pathology, there has recently been acknowledgment that bullying may be a relationship problem, with tentative suggestions that point to the influence of a pathological societal context (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). If we are to consider that bullying behaviours are exhibited by individuals within relationships and embedded in context, then a method that is sensitive to diversity of experience, process and context seems most appropriate. Grounded theory is such a method.

A research methodology that fits the definition of the problem and the goal of the investigation requires a researcher with some pre-understanding of the problem being investigated. As the researcher, I framed the problem of bullying as one of relationship, and the goal of the investigation as the development of a theory. A method of research which solicits information gleaned from interviewing participants and respects that information as a valid interpretation of events seems inherently respectful, and therefore appropriate for this study. Development of a theory begins with a full description of the matter under study. Therefore this study began with a description of bullying according to our current understanding, but that description was enhanced by a broader interpretation of the data provided by a careful analysis of interviews of bullies and victims themselves. Descriptions of events and phenomena can be subdivided into hierarchies of data, sometimes termed as "properties, dimensions and categories."

Formulating a theory requires ordering and organizing such hierarchies of data and integrating them into an explanatory scheme of observations describing bullying. Based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach to grounded theory, this research was intended to go beyond a set of
observations describing bullying to provide a mid-range theory that explains the social processes of bullying from the point of view of participants.

The Grounded Theory Method

Grounded theory represents a systematic, interactive, and inductive procedure for gathering and analyzing information, and provides a systematic and interactive process for generating a theory to account for complex behaviour. Grounded theory solicits information by interviewing participants within the interaction of a phenomenon, and respects their account as a valid interpretation of events. This method of research, like other qualitative methods, considers the data provided by participants to be situational, personal, experiential, contextual, and therefore valid (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A grounded theory approach is a discovery-oriented method of research well suited to investigate an area of inquiry where the concepts have not yet been identified, and where relationships between concepts are inadequately understood (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Grounded theory is an emergent process rather than a fixed design, where phenomena are not thought of as static entities, but rather are considered as evolving processes in interaction within contexts. It is an emergent, naturalistic inquiry where appropriate questions evolve as the study evolves. The emphasis on discovery and theory development in the grounded theory method allows the researcher to be flexible and open to the unexpected. In contrast to the logical deductive reasoning of quantitative research which relies on prior theoretical frameworks, a grounded theory study is open-ended, the questioning relying on the participants' particular concerns for determining the direction and focus of the research. The participants' view of the problem of bullying then emerges throughout the study, guiding theoretical sampling and directing the focus. Bullying is an area of inquiry well positioned to benefit from the advantages of the Grounded Theory methodological approach.
Initial Development of the Theory

The description of the grounded theory of bullying that emerged from this study was derived from a careful analysis of individual interviews of volunteer participants who described their own experiences of being bullies or being victimized themselves. The descriptions of their own experience were then organized into hierarchies of data, including dimensions and categories. Formulating the theory required ordering and integrating these hierarchies of data into an explanation of bullying by applying the paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Application of this model allowed this research to explore beyond a simple set of specific observations of bullying toward the development of a mid-range theory that explains the more complex social processes of bullying from the collective point of view of a number of participants. In this study, bullying emerged as variable actions and interactions that develop in a process responsive to changing conditions and contexts.

Participants

Participant Recruitment

In order to contact prospective participants for this study, an advertisement was placed in the local newspaper (The Burnaby Now/The Record) in April, 2004, and distributed through Burnaby, New Westminster, Tri-Cities, and Maple Ridge – towns located in the suburbs of Vancouver, British Columbia. (See Appendix A.) Over the next six weeks, eleven interested individuals left telephone messages. The same advertisement was placed on the bulletin board at the New Westminster campus of Douglas College, and two further responses were received. One respondent was unable to schedule an interview, but recommended a friend who would like to be interviewed. Colleagues from local schools referred four students, making a total of eighteen respondents. When the researcher returned phone calls, respondents were eager to begin the
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<th>Gender/age</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. F10</td>
<td>at home</td>
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<td>2. M10</td>
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<td>3. M10</td>
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<td>4. M11</td>
<td>school office</td>
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<td>5. M12</td>
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<td>6. F14</td>
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<td>school office</td>
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<td>8. F16</td>
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<td>9. F20</td>
<td>researcher's home</td>
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<td>10. F35</td>
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<td>11. F36</td>
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<td>12. F37</td>
<td>researcher's home</td>
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<td>13. M40</td>
<td>coffee shop</td>
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<td>14. M42</td>
<td>restaurant</td>
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<td>15. F45</td>
<td>coffee shop</td>
<td>college bulletin board</td>
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<td>16. M50</td>
<td>at home</td>
<td>newspaper ad</td>
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<td>17. M52</td>
<td>public park</td>
<td>referral by participant</td>
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<td>18. M56</td>
<td>researcher's home</td>
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interviewing process. (For a brief summary of circumstances of locating the respondents for interviews, see Table 1.)

All but one of the respondents resided in suburbs of the city, due to the fact that the newspaper advertisement appeared in the local paper (*The Record/Now*. May 2004). (See Appendix A.) It is possible that placing the advertisement in a different publication might have resulted in participants from within the city with different experiences of bullying. However, such variation could be considered unlikely, as some respondents in this study had their bullying experiences in inner city schools, and have subsequently moved elsewhere. The participants in this study represented a range of ages and personal characteristics. The ages of the eighteen respondents ranged from 10 to 56, nine male and nine females, eight current public school students and ten adults. Five respondents were elementary school students, three were high school students, and the remaining ten were adults who had experienced bullying in their childhood. (See Appendix B for a more detailed written description of the respondents.)

**Student Participants**

The student participants were intermediate students (ages 9 – 13, grades 4 – 7) from several elementary schools in Surrey, who either identified themselves as victims of bullying, or a parent or teacher identified their problem with bullying and encouraged participation in the study. Parental written consent to be interviewed as well as personal student consent was obtained for all student participants. (Consent Forms are included in Appendix C.) There is precedent in previous research for using interviews of children, and even pre-school children have been found to be reliable witnesses, able to recall and reconstruct events accurately when they are carefully questioned, treated considerately, and have an adequate trust of the interviewer. As the researcher, I was aware of the necessity to take time to build trust and rapport before expecting
students to reveal their personal stories. However, student participants proved to be eager to tell their stories, with my role as the researcher being mainly to listen. My ability to listen empathically seemed enough to help students maintain fluidity in relating their story. In addition to the students’ descriptions of bullying behaviours, their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and interpretations of the bullying events were solicited. The interviews were open-ended and free flowing, with leading questions and excessive guidance avoided.

In later interviews, however, in my role as researcher, I asked more direct questions to solicit student opinion on comments previous participants had made, and to get more information about specific aspects of bullying. For example, since early interviews emphasized the importance of teacher behaviours in promoting bullying, in later interviews I asked what the role of the teacher had been in their bullying story. I found students to be surprisingly perceptive about bullying processes. I had expected students to be more self-centered, and unaware of the larger drama of bullying. Students proved to have much to say about the big picture of bullying. The longest interview, in fact, was a student interview.

**Adult Participants**

Nine participants were school-aged, with the remaining nine being adults. The bullying stories of adult participants mainly consisted of retrospective accounts of bullying experiences, although *The Welder, (M40)* described on-going problems at work. Previous research studies have used retrospective accounts as a source of information – including some examples of research on the subject of eating disorders (Cash, 1995; Schwartz et al, 1999) and on the subject of teasing (Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002), and a grounded theory study of child sexual abuse (Morrow & Smith, 1997). The retrospective stories told by adults were admittedly reconstructions of personal memories, whether of the recent or distant past, but seemed to be
freshly visited and never-forgotten memories. In actuality, all the bullying stories, whether students or adults, were reconstructions of personal memories, whether of the recent or distant past. Many adults reported telling me things they had never told anyone before, and most seemed to find the telling of their bullying experience somewhat cathartic, and helpful for enabling them to finally set aside their past pain to better face the future. Several expressed their pleasure in being able to contribute to possibly improving the school bullying situation for future students.

*Unique Characteristics of Participants*

Although the participants were self-selected, describing themselves as simply as having ‘bullied or been bullied’, most participants had other unique characteristics. Two of the five elementary school students were new immigrants of minority ethnicity, and two had some form of speech impediments. One of the high school students was blind and two were new immigrants from Eastern Europe. Two of the adult participants were members of an ethnic minority. One adult participant revealed that he was mentally ill and on a disability pension. Two adults considered themselves to be moderately overweight, and reported having been so as children. Many of the adult participants exhibited atypical gender characteristics. Three of the male adult participants who now appeared as being of average build, were slow to mature, and a small size in high school, while the fourth described himself as a “refined” boy. By this term, the respondent meant a boy with a more gentle manner and averse to physical violence. In contrast, three of the female adult participants considered themselves to have been stronger, bigger and more aggressive than most girls, one being very “athletic” and a “tomboy”.

*Symptoms of Mental Health Issues and Addictions*

The majority of the adult participants reported that they had experienced long-term mental health issues such as depression and possible psychosis. Of the ten adult participants, only two
revealed no evidence of mental health or addiction issues. Five of the adult respondents had battled alcoholism in their past and now attend Alcoholics Anonymous. Two of them had suffered long term and severe alcohol and drug addictions. Four adults had suffered depression for which they presently were taking medication, one of them suffering an enduring battle of a combination of depression and eating disorders. One suffered from mental illness, probably schizophrenia, and had spent some time in a psychiatric hospital. These mental health issues were self-reported. In my role as interviewer, I made no effort to obtain a history of mental health. These observations are interesting, but more research is required to determine if mental illness and addictions are more common among victims of bullying than among the general population.

Academic Achievement

Matters of academic performance were mentioned by many participants, although no objective test results or subjective evaluation of academic ability or achievement was solicited in connection with these interviews. Of the five elementary students, one male participant described himself as an avid reader, and one female participant described a need to disguise her good marks. Of the three high school students, one had a physical learning disability (blindness), but still managed average marks, while the other two experienced taunting due to their superior academic success. Of the ten adult participants, seven described themselves as academically proficient, and three reported that they had subsequently been diagnosed as learning disabled. Five adult participants, despite their academic ability, had dropped out of high school. One participant did not attend school in Canada, and another did not comment on her academic record.
Resolution of Bullying Problems

At the time of these research interviews, some participants had resolved their bullying issues, but others were still experiencing difficulties. Four of the school-aged participants were still involved in bullying, primarily as victims, although one, as mentioned above, played a transitional role between being a bully and supporting his friend, and two of the elementary school-aged participants claimed to have resolved their difficulties. One of the adult participants found the bullying problem and experiences of victimization followed him throughout life, especially in the workplace. Other adults reported they observe bullying still happening in the workplace around them, although they no longer felt victimized. Many of the adults interviewed showed considerable insight into their past problem and had their own theories concerning what had happened to them. All seemed eager to express what they thought should be done to prevent bullying.

Interviewing Process

Before each interview began, respondents were informed of the nature of this research, and signed appropriate consent forms. (Appendix C.) The interviews were semi-structured in that the researcher was prepared to employ a standard selection of simple questions (Appendix D). However, the questions were rarely referred to, and used in a limited manner to trigger respondents' recall of bullying experiences, including details and circumstances of the interaction, a personal account of how the bullying stopped, and an interpretation of the nature of the experience and its personal impact. The questioning developed as a dynamic and fluid process, providing four functions: sensitizing participants, theoretical inquiry, practical questions to guide my procedures, and guiding questions to elicit from participants the specific information I was seeking (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The sensitizing questions were presented to participants for the purpose of putting them back in time into the bullying situation as they recalled it, in order
to gather information. In most cases, answers to these questions stimulated a free-flowing tale that required little interruption from the interviewer, but occasionally, I presented more questions to illicit more details, including feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, meaning-making and personal reactions. Productive sensitizing questions sometimes led to more interesting complexities, raising unanticipated concepts. These questions represented the initial and primary investigative purposes of the research. The question format stimulated a steady stream of commentary with both adults and students eager to tell their stories. Interviews were recorded on audio-tape.

The interviews were held in a variety of venues. Three interviews were taped in restaurants or coffee shops, three in the researcher’s home, four in school facilities, and the remaining eight were interviewed in their own homes. The location of the interviews was determined by the convenience and comfort of both respondent and researcher. (See Table 2.) The interviews recorded in public places presented some challenges in terms of the quality of recordings. However, the public venue in some way seemed to enhance anonymity. Participants interviewed in the researcher’s home appeared to be relaxed and comfortable, with in each case, additional discussion extending after the tape was filled. Where this could be arranged, students were interviewed in their home school. Others were interviewed in their own homes. Interviews conducted in the participants’ homes tended to be peripherally observed by other family members. In the case of younger participants, parent observers at times provided prompts which served to both encourage more elaboration on the story, and illustrated the support of parents.

Interviews Conducted in Public Places

The first interview, (The Welder, M42) was originally planned to take place at the participant’s home, but the researcher had difficulty locating the remote address,
and requested they meet in a public place, and the respondent suggested a nearby restaurant. At first he was self-conscious at being overweight, and expressly requested to the waitress that she find us a table and chairs, rather than a booth. He was also initially somewhat concerned about privacy, but was soon satisfied that the table where we sat was isolated enough. After the interview began, he became so involved in telling his story that the general conversation around him seemed to be soon forgotten. The story he intended to tell soon expanded into other incidents he had not thought about for a long time. He paused in his long monologue only when the waitress asked if we wanted more coffee. As the researcher, my role became mainly to listen to a story this person seemed eager to tell, and few prompts were necessary. All of the themes that emerged in this study were present in this first interview, which was over an hour in length. The tape recording from this restaurant interview was quite difficult to transcribe due to background noise, and I took note to take precautions to ensure that further interviews in public venues would be quieter.

Two other public interviews took place in coffee shops. In the second public interview, a table was selected in the back corner where other customers would not be likely to notice, and where background noise would be minimal. The Martial Arts Instructor (M40) described himself as “the original 98-pound weakling,” and had developed a long term interest in the problem of bullying as a result of his own unhappy experiences in school and brought with him an article he had written (as yet unpublished) based on his work in the prison system, the theme being that criminals are usually revenge-seeking victims. His outrage at the persistence of bullying in schools was evident in his initial comments, and only after allowing him time to describe his conclusions and judgments did the researcher gently guide him more to telling his own experiences. Through the process of the interview he began to recall more examples of his own
past bullying, by students and by teachers. The responses of the researcher, reflecting and summarizing his stories, seemed to reduce the amount of his outrage, but did not reduce his strong belief that schools need to make some changes.

In the case of the third interview conducted in a coffee shop, the participant (*The Tomboy, F45*) lived some distance away, and did not want the interview to take place in either her home or the researcher’s home. She suggested a location near where she worked, and the researcher agreed to meet her there. The participant began with a little light humour before starting her story. Talking about her history of bullying seemed to require some effort, as it still carried considerable emotional distress for her. Through the course of the interview, the affective quality evolved from being passive and objective to being more active and assertive, even somewhat outraged at what had happened. At first the participant seemed embarrassed and ashamed about her past behaviour as she remembered how she had acted as the bully, but as the interview progressed, her embarrassment changed into the pain she felt at not being accepted. As an athletic tomboy, she had been actively shunned by her peers, and while still holding a sense of outrage at what had happened to her, she also felt a desire to do something to provoke changes in schools so others need not suffer as she did. The process of being interviewed about her past experiences for the purpose of better understanding bullying seemed to fit into her sense of doing something about making positive changes in schools. This participant did not simply tell the tragic story of her victimization, but also had a well-considered theory of her own regarding what she thought should be done to prevent bullying.

The last interview in a public place occurred in a park near the participant’s home (*The Bright Loner, M52*). He had no transportation, was reluctant to use public transportation, did not want the researcher to come to his home, and yet wanted to be interviewed. The park near his
home was settled upon as a reasonable compromise. The voices on this tape were considerably easier to hear than those of the interviews that had occurred in restaurants, but this participant was less verbally fluent than the previous three mentioned above, and the interview was shorter, (i.e., less than an hour in length). Like other adult participants, at first he wanted to tell his conclusions about bullying rather than to simply describe his experiences, and the researcher needed to prompt for more specific details of what he remembered happening. As he began to remember more incidents, his story unfolded, and he remembered stories of alienation, changing friendships, and pretending he had friends so his mother wouldn’t worry. As he began to remember more details, he remarked that the story he had been telling himself over the years did not quite make sense. For example, he could not account for the many students who visited him when he was committed to the mental health hospital in his adolescence, when his dominant memory of school was one of being shunned and lonely. Although he had many cognitive explanations for bullying and many suggestions for preventing it, he seemed to be still struggling to make sense of his own experience. (This respondent is presently receiving a disability pension.)

*Interviews Conducted in Researcher's Home*

Three interviews were conducted in the researcher's home – each of them over an hour in length. The eloquence of these interviews could be an indication that all three of these respondents felt comfortable with being interviewed in this location, that the researcher was more comfortable here, or it could be simply that these three individuals happened to be less anxious than some of the other respondents. The youngest of the three, *(The College Student, F20)*, recounted a history of mild to moderate depression. She brought with her a thick file of photocopied articles about “nerds in high school” for the researcher to read, as she had done some
of her own research on the subject of bullying. Throughout this interview she spoke with a quiet voice, a rather matter of fact attitude, and little facial expression. At the beginning of the interview she described her concern that at the university where she attended, she still encountered some of the individuals who had tormented her in high school, but at the conclusion of the interview she remarked that she should not care what the others thought of her: The experience of being interviewed seemed to have promoted a shift in her feelings about her bullying experiences, and in her evaluation of the importance of the opinion of her peers.

The second woman interviewed in the researcher’s home (The Strong Woman, F37) had experienced many years of difficult times with relationships and employment in her early adulthood subsequent to her bullying experiences. Only recently had she had been able to gain more self-respect, after belatedly being diagnosed as learning disabled, and successfully training for a responsible and well-paying job. A special education teacher for whom she had been house cleaning suggested she be tested for learning disabilities – she wondered why nobody in her school days had investigated her learning difficulties. She wanted to be part of this study, in the hope that schools might change and bullying be better managed for students in the next generation, especially for her own children. There was a tone of outrage that ran through her recounting of bullying events and the unsatisfactory way in which schools had managed them.

The man interviewed in the researcher’s home, (The Salesman, M56) described himself as a recovering alcoholic and drug abuser. This respondent spoke eloquently and fluently of his past experiences with bullying, as if they were fresh in his mind, or as if he is a gifted story-teller. He told a story of conquest where he had once succeeded in humiliating his tormenter. It was this event of successful revenge, combined with his knowledge about the unfortunate fate of some of his former tormenters that seemed to allow him to gain respect for himself. Although he
described alcohol as a reprieve for the torment he was experiencing as a teen, he does not explicitly blame his alcoholism on the bullying. This man was a proficient story-teller, whose tale was at times rather entertaining.

*Interviews Conducted in Schools*

Four respondents were referred by teacher colleagues, and interviewed in their schools. Two high school girls (*The Athletic Immigrant*, F15, and *The Academic Immigrant*, F16), were referred by their counsellor and interviewed in their counsellor’s office and in a library conference room, respectively. These students were both involved in the same group dynamics, although they were in different grades. As new immigrants to Canada, from two different eastern European countries (Bosnia and Russia), they were incredulous, disappointed, and outraged at both the treatment by their peers and the responses of the teachers and administration. They saw the researcher and the interviewing process as a way of getting their stories truly heard, and expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to speak to someone who believed them, as they had not found the interventions of the school counsellors or principal to be helpful. They were struggling for solutions, and wanted guidance and advice from the researcher.

Two Grade Six boys, (*The Stutterer*, M11, and *The Friend on the Edge*, M12) were referred by their teacher, and were interviewed in the counsellor’s office in their school. Like the high school girls mentioned above, they felt outraged at the behaviour of their peers, and felt betrayed by the teachers who would not listen to their side of the story. Like the girls, they expressed their gratitude that the researcher would listen to them and believe them. The first boy was embarrassed to be having these problems, and felt further humiliated because his mother did not believe him when he complained to her. His voice betrayed his frustration and humiliation that
his peers could be so mean, and that neither his mother nor his teacher could see how badly he was being treated.

*The Friend on the Edge* seemed confused about how he should react. He thought his friend (*The Stutterer*) was being treated badly, but could not risk supporting him against all the others, for fear of being bullied himself. His body language expressed his uncertainty as to which side he was on, as he sat on a desk chair and swiveled from side to side. Yet he spoke with a firm conviction when he declared that he could leave his friend if the others were just teasing him, but he had to support his friend when the whole group threatened him. And he spoke with similar conviction when he declared that the teachers were not helpful.

*Interviews Conducted in Respondents’ Homes*

The remaining eight interviews were taped in participants’ homes. The businessman (*The Businessman, M50*) initiated his story by describing himself as a bully and a delinquent. This participant characterized himself as having “an IQ of 140”, as being diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and as having a physically and emotionally abusive family. This respondent warned that he had problems with memory which he attributed to his history of drug and alcohol abuse, but he seemed to have a clear memory of his dysfunctional home situation, of his negative behaviours in his school years, and of the factors that allowed him to move out of delinquency and into a more successful life.

Three interviews were initiated by mothers who had seen the newspaper advertisement, and responded because they were concerned about their bullied children. One of the early interviews (*The Girl with a Lisp, F10*) took place in the participant’s home, with her mother hovering in the kitchen, occasionally interrupting with her own comments. This girl was quite fluent, despite her lisp, and seemed eager to tell her story, feeling quite hurt by her bullying peers and
misunderstood by her teachers. The process of being interviewed, rather than simply being a chance to telling her story, served as an opportunity for her to make meaning from her experiences. In spite of only neutral probes being used in this interview, at the end of the one hour and a half interview this respondent seemed to feel less victimized, and more resigned to the inequities of life.

The researcher met a ten-year-old boy, (The Avid Reader, M10), who had experienced several brief, but severe incidents of bullying by an older student who had already been identified as having a problem with aggression, and who attended a special “social development” class. The older boy had pushed him down and punched him repeatedly in the face, on two separate occasions, both incidents occurring on the soccer field after school. The boy told a brief story, and then wanted to retreat back into reading his book. His mother felt the whole story had not been told, and so elaborated on it, with the assistance of her son, who then added more details and supported or altered his mother’s version. This young boy was new to Canada, and his spoken English was not fluent. Therefore, the researcher found it appropriate that his mother should facilitate the telling of this boy’s story.

The mother of a fourteen-year-old blind girl answered the newspaper advertisement on her daughter’s behalf, and invited the researcher to interview her in her own home. This girl (The Blind Girl, F14) spoke eloquently both about her long experience with bullying, and her opinion of the teachers who seem to have such difficulty intervening effectively. During the interview, this girl displayed her finely developed sense of humour, and an apparent gift for story-telling. She seemed to enjoy being audio-taped, and demonstrated a healthy assertiveness and enthusiasm for participation in this study. This participant was very disappointed in the attitude of teachers
and their responses when bullying events were reported to them. At the age of fourteen, she considered herself quite a feminist and an activist due to her negative experiences with adult authority in school. It appeared that her bullying experiences had made a significant impact on the evolution of her identity – she was no longer a passive victim, as she had developed a level of positive esteem that enabled her to ignore the negative behaviour of the popular in-group at school, and to understand that teachers are not blameless or perfect in their responses to bullying.

For each of the two previous participants, after telling their story, the mothers of the participants wanted to tell their own stories of school bullying. The outrage the Chinese mother (*The Chinese Mother, F35*) felt at her son’s bullying experiences came as much from her dissatisfaction with the reaction of the school and the police than it did from the event itself. Her feelings of frustration with the school response were compounded by the contrast she saw with the more successful result dealing with her own experience with bullying events in the local community, and the co-operation she had experienced from police and community citizens. She attributed the difficulties both she and her son were experiencing to racism, as they were the only Chinese family in the area, her son the only Chinese boy in his class. Yet, she also spoke appreciatively of neighbours who had supported her, and she seemed trusting of the Caucasian researcher, graciously allowing her into her private home, and speaking comfortably for over two hours.

The Blind Girl’s mother, (*The Single Mother, F36*) listened attentively to her daughter’s story, and then volunteered to tell her own story. As the daughter of an impoverished single parent, with too many responsibilities at home, and a poor academic record, she had experienced bullying from her abusive mother, from her peers, and from teachers who seemed to want to dismiss her as unimportant. When she lost hope of ever gaining acceptance or respect from the
important adults in her life, she became an angry bully, who could do very nasty things because she had nothing to lose, with the end result being repeated suspensions from school. She told this story in front of her daughter, as a parallel story reflecting that they had had similar experiences, with similar outcomes in terms of their attitude toward peers and toward teachers and authority. There was an element of mutual support between mother and child, both in this interview, and in the one previously described with the Chinese mother and child.

Another young boy, in one of the later interviews, was recommended to be interviewed by his mother, who had read the newspaper advertisement. The researcher met him (The New Boy, M10) in his home after school. He had been subjected to bullying as a newcomer to the school, where he had been harassed, followed home, and threatened over a period of months. He avoided telling the teacher before confronting his tormentors, believing that he needed to solve his own problem. He seemed quite matter of fact in telling his story, showing little emotion, although demonstrating a sense of confidence in himself as he sat tall, holding his head up in a forthright manner and telling his simple story. He spoke English as a second language, and seemed unable to elaborate fully on his story, perhaps due to fluency issues, and as a result, the interview lasted only a half hour. However, he seemed quite proud of himself that he had solved his bullying problem without telling the teacher about it, and his story supported the stories of other participants.

The Recording Process

A small Sony tape recorder was visible at all times and used in all these interviews, whether conducted in public places or private homes. The interviews ranged from a half hour to over ninety minutes in length. The researcher transcribed and analyzed each interview before proceeding to tape the next participant. Transcription of some of the tapes was difficult at times.
due to the amount of background noise, and poorer quality recordings required listening several
times to ensure that the transcript was as accurate as possible. After experiencing particular
difficulty in transcribing the interview of The Welder, the researcher took more care in ensuring
that the environment was quiet enough to supply a more audible recording. Every interview
commenced with a simple request to tell their story about being bullied, followed by minimal
encouragers. The first interviews tended to be longer in length, and the later interviews shorter,
perhaps because these later interviews were not adding further data, the researcher asked fewer
open-ended questions, and made more specific queries requiring shorter clarifying answers. All
appeared to enjoy the process of being interviewed, several expressing their appreciation of an
opportunity to have someone listen to their story.

While at first consideration taping might be considered an objective record of events, in
this research it also involved a level of interpretation. While preserving the narrator's sequence
and organization of events, the process of retelling these bullying events placed the action
described by participants into a new time frame. Especially for adult participants, the distance in
time may have attributed a meaning to the event distinct from the meaning derived from their first
response at the time the bullying transpired. As the researcher, I considered this process of
attributing present meaning to a past event as both a justification and a benefit of including adult
respondents in this research study. Further, my process of interpreting the recorded accounts
evolved as the taped version of events was repeatedly heard, with different purposes. My
perspective included, as much as possible an awareness of my own preconceptions. For example,
although I am fully informed of the cognitive schema of the stages of moral development and
how they can intersect with issue of aggression, I endeavoured to distance myself from this
(perhaps) simplistic framework of morality in an effort to remain open to what emerged from the
actual recorded interviews. Because I am familiar with bullying as an everyday phenomenon, it could have been easy for me to consider the recordings of the research respondents as familiar and unexceptional events, and therefore to consider them in a cursory and perfunctory manner that matches my preconceptions. In order to make the specific activities and events of these bullying stories more evident, I needed to “uncover what I may have been ignoring” (Parker, 1989, p. 104). As I interpreted each narrative, I took note of oddities and anomalies that did not fit with my preconceptions. These gaps represented opportunities for enlarging the scope of my interpretation of events, and for asking specific clarifying questions. These gaps in my perception served to clarify my preconceptions and to enrich my understanding of bullying. It was important for me to avoid premature closure in taping participants’ own view-points, to allow them a generous opportunity to elaborate on their version and interpretation of their own experience, thereby permitting ambiguities to open new possible perspectives on my part.

Data Analysis

Following accepted procedures for developing a grounded theory, after recording the first interview, I immediately began the processes of transcribing, interpretation and analysis. So the task of interviewing and the process of analysis progressed in parallel, simultaneously. The transcribed interviews were then printed in hard copy. Subsequent analysis involved open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open Coding

The interviews were first transcribed verbatim, as accurately as possible, exactly as spoken by the participants, and the transcriptions reviewed several times to catch details and nuances, in an effort to make them as accurate as possible. The first interview was transcribed and printed in a column on the left side of the page, leaving room on the right side to write themes and commentary. Open coding began with a line-by-line analysis, examining each phrase and
specific words, generating concepts for possible categories. At times I coded single words, at other times a phrase, sentence or paragraph, labeling a major idea or concept for further analysis. In subsequent interviews I took note to ask specific questions about these derived concepts, comparing differences in different interviews, clarifying them with other interviewees. These labels were initially handwritten on the interview transcripts, but later they were written as code notes in a working journal.

After processing all eighteen transcripts in this manner, the researcher tabulated the concepts that had emerged from the interviews on a separate paper, and looked for ways of connecting concepts into categories. The same categories occurred repeatedly, and when new interviews were not adding new concepts or categories, the data were considered to have reached saturation, and no further interviews were solicited. The themes that evolved from this process of open coding are summarized in Appendix E. Each category included a range of concepts which was then specified and clarified in terms of properties and dimensionalized along a continuum of frequency, extent, and intensity. (See Table 2.) Such detail enhanced and clarified possibilities of relationships between categories and subcategories.

Some of the codes developed in this process centered around continua like individualism versus group dynamics, belonging versus exclusion, identity differences versus conformity, and higher or lower status, all in the context of teacher behaviours. The concepts and categories derived from early interviews influenced the selection and structure of subsequent interviews, as a theory of bullying slowly emerged from the data. In analyzing interviews toward the end of the research process, a developing theory emerged as I alternated between open and axial coding
### Table 2. Dimensionalization of Concepts (Open Coding)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Individual Bully/Victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M56 M55 M50 F45 M42 M40 F37 F36 F35 F20 F16 F15 F14 M12 M11 M10 F10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. unique</td>
<td>H H H H H H M H H H H M H H M H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. excluded</td>
<td>H H H H H H M H H H H M H H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. high IQ/LD*</td>
<td>H H H H M H H M H H H M M M M H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. few friends</td>
<td>H H M H H H M H H H H H M H M H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. fight/flight</td>
<td>H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. power</td>
<td>L M L L L L L L L M L L L L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. attachment</td>
<td>L L L L L L L L L L L L L L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. attendance/</td>
<td>M H H H M H H M - M - - - - - M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dropout</td>
<td>i. addictions/ment **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. blamed</td>
<td>H H H H H H H H H H H M M H M M H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. retaliate</td>
<td>H L H H H M H M L M M M H L M H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. respected</td>
<td>M L L L L L M L L L M L M L L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* LD = Learning Disabled -- IQ and LD status are self-described

** Descriptive state, not necessarily a clinical diagnosis

Scale: H=high M=medium L=low intensity of experience

1. Concepts derived from interviews.
2. Note that the researcher assigned these ratings of High Low or Medium on each of these concepts entirely based on a subjective assessment of the tone and content of the interviews.
3. School-aged participants made no comments regarding addiction or mental healths.
4. These respondent are remarkably similar in the areas noted above. It would be interesting to survey a group not involved in victimization and note the similarities and contrasts.
Subsequently, relationships were found between the categories of concepts that emerged through open coding, and these relationships were organized into a theory of bullying in a process of axial coding, using the paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The paradigm model places the phenomenon of bullying as evolving from a set of causal conditions, within a context, and resulting in a range of consequences influenced by possible actions taken or not.

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the term used to describe the process of finding relationships between categories and subcategories in terms of the paradigm model (Table 3: Paradigm Model for Developing a Grounded Theory). With the process of axial coding I made connections between a category and its subcategories, this process representing an intermediate stage between identifying categories (open coding) and selective coding, before the ultimate goal of developing a theory. With the process of axial coding I examined identified categories to specify the context in which they are embedded, the actions involved, and the consequences of those actions. Subcategories are shown in relationship to their categories through the paradigm model, which enables a systematic approach to conceptualizing complex relationships among data. Linking categories was accomplished by asking questions and making comparisons, in a complex process of (a) a relating of subcategories through statements, (b) a continued search of properties and dimensions of categories and subcategories, and (c) an exploration of variations in phenomena, by constantly comparing new data with each category and subcategory, and looking for different patterns.

With such questions of interrelationships among categories in mind, I returned to the data in the interview transcripts looking for further evidence, incidents and events to support or refute
my hypothesized categories and statements of relationship. Examining inconsistencies and differences allowed for further refinement, and added density. Even as I proceeded looking for evidence to support questions and statements of relationships, I continued to watch for other properties of categories. Thus the coding process was a constant interplay between proposing new categories and checking for support of previously stated ones. Such an integrated multi-tasking approach to coding served to make analysis systematic and efficient. The paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin was chosen to provide a structure for organizing the extensive data obtained from the interviews described above. The result is a rich texture of detail which has been woven into an explanation for bullying. The outline for the theory of bullying developed from these interviews follows the format of the paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). (See Table 3: Paradigm Model for Developing a Grounded Theory.) When the categories seemed saturated and dense, and further interviews failed to bring new categories, I began the complex task of integrating categories into a coherent theory, starting with the process of selective coding.

Selective Coding

When the processes of axial coding had developed a network of categories with their properties and dimensions and their relationships, I had already begun to formulate some conception of bullying behaviours. Now came the task of taking this rough conceptualization, and systematically developing it into a comprehensible picture of bullying, of generating a generic story of bullying grounded in data. This process is called selective coding, the first step in transforming the data into a theory involved developing a story line.

The descriptive story about the central phenomenon of bullying consists of a few short paragraphs describing the main problem, and developed into a more analytical conceptualization
Table 3:  
A Paradigm Model for Developing a Grounded Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. THE PHENOMENON</td>
<td>A description of the central event that qualifies it for the actions and interactions which are the subject to be investigated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. CAUSAL CONDITIONS</td>
<td>The events or incidents that lead to the occurrence of development of the phenomenon of bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. CONTEXT</td>
<td>The location of events pertaining to bullying, the social environment where action is taking place, and events around the management or response to the phenomenon of bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. CONSEQUENCES</td>
<td>The outcome of actions may or may not be predicted or intended. There may be consequences to people, places, or things, or consequences of actions, interactions or inaction which may subsequently become part of the conditions (context, intervening) which affect the next set of action/interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. ACTION/INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES</td>
<td>An explication of a purposeful and goal-oriented action, interaction, or inaction directed at managing or responding to the phenomenon, evolving in sequences, changing over time. Some actions may be more or less successful in terms of outcome.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of the bullying story. The story line includes a description of the properties and their relationships to other categories in terms of the paradigm model. The core idea of struggling for status and respect, although not spoken of directly, appears to stand as the central issue behind bullying with the matters of belonging, group dynamics, authority and standards (competition) orbiting it, as ancillary results of status and one's position in the hierarchy of school. A more elaborated descriptive story of the dynamics of bullying appears in Appendix F. I presented this tentative theory to a number of teacher colleagues and to three participants in the study. This feedback process provided some validating support concerning this initial tentative theory of bullying.

Development of a Theory of Bullying

Finally, the codes, concepts and their interrelationships were assembled into a diagrammatic representation of the elements and dynamics of bullying, showing the central phenomenon of bullying and categories arranged according to their logical relationships. This diagram represents the conditions, consequences, strategies, outcomes and of a theory of bullying – a tentative theory of bullying, and appears in Chapter Four as Table 4: A Theory of School Bullying.

Ethical Considerations

Interactions between the researcher and the participants in this research study appeared to be mutually meaningful and beneficial. While such positive affect and outcome is desirable in a research study, these conditions of research can pose certain ethical considerations. Indeed, the process of recounting painful events from the recent or distant past can emerge in qualitative interviewing. While as a researcher with counselling skills, I was prepared to manage issues and emotions that may surface while participants tell their stories of bullying, I was also prepared to, refer participants for further counselling if strong emotional issues emerged. In fact, those
participants whom I felt could benefit from therapy regarding their bullying experiences were already receiving counselling from other sources. Nevertheless, I expect that the interviews were a positive and beneficial experience for all participants, as they were given this opportunity for personal processing around painful experiences in their past.

In quantitative research, the knowledge and experience in a researcher's background and identity have been treated as bias that needs to be eliminated. Qualitative research methodology such as Grounded Theory considers the researcher's personal process in conducting interviews to be an essential part of the context and interpretation of data. Thus in conducting this research there was no effort to maintain an attitude of objectivity, since objectivity is recognized as unrealistic and impossible. Rather, as the researcher my many years of experience as a school counsellor and observations of school bullying provide a context or lens through which I was able to hear the stories of bullying reported by the participants of this study. In this qualitative study, the researcher was considered a valuable contributor as the instrument of research, with her personal experience as a student, parent, teacher and school counsellor embraced as a resource enabling this study to be more relevant and readily applicable to school practices than it would be with a naïve interviewer. Heidegger (1927) points out a basic tenet of learning theory – that in order to assimilate new knowledge, we need some pre-understanding of what is knowable. My pre-understanding of the school students involved in bullying constitutes a fore-structure enabling me to better integrate the data supplied by participants in this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

As the researcher, part of the pre-understanding I brought into this study was my underlying purpose for conducting this study. The primary purpose of this study was to apply the established protocols of grounded theory and methodology in order to (a) explain the process of bullying from the point of view of the participants, (b) determine more clearly the functions, roles
and dynamics whereby individuals become engaged in and persist in bullying behaviours, and (c) identify the social context in which bullying occurs. A better understanding of these three aspects of the bullying process will be able to inspire new interventions in schools to more effectively reduce bullying and its negative effects upon school children. However, as a professional within the school system, my purpose extended beyond simply understanding the nature and processes of bullying, as important as his purpose is. In addition, the purpose of this study extends toward a desire to be better able to develop effective anti-bullying strategies – application of the results of this research to improve classroom practices. Thus the purpose of this study is to construct a theory of bullying that can serve teachers and schools as a guide for developing effective anti-bullying practices.

Validity – Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of this Study

The matter of validity in this qualitative venture diverged from what is considered validity in a quantitative study. A qualitative study involving interpretive inquiry does not attempt to prove hypothetical statements as in the procedures normally followed in quantitative studies. In contrast, qualitative research such as the present study looks for other indications of validity and worthiness. In the present study, evidence of validity or worthiness was sought through the application of an accepted methodology, Grounded Theory. This methodology recognizes the validity of an individual’s personal experiences, situated in a context, and interpreted through recollection. The ‘truth’ in the context of this interpretation of bullying is not so much a matter or proving an absolute truth, but of uncovering personal contextual truth that may have been hidden from observers (such as parents or teachers). The findings of this study are valid in that they tell a full and rich story from the participants’ perspective.
To be consistent with this avowed principle of the primacy of participant's interpretation of events, as the researcher, I let the phenomenon of bullying show itself as participants saw it, never revealing my preconceived perspective upon it, although participants were aware of my experience as a teacher and a school counsellor. Traditionally, in quantitative research, the knowledge and experience in a researcher's background and identity have been treated as bias that needs to be eliminated rather than a valuable contribution of research. In the process of conducting this research, however, my background and personal experience as a student, parent, teacher, and school counsellor were embraced as resources with the potential of making my questioning more relevant than it might have been with a naïve interviewer. Heidegger (1927) points out a basic tenet of learning theory – that in order to learn to know anything at all, we must have some pre-understanding of what is knowable. In this research, my pre-understanding of the dynamics of bullying in schools constituted a fore-structure that usually remains in the background and is taken for granted in research, and provided an acknowledged fore-structure upon which to base my interpretations of participants' accounts of bullying. Rather than claiming objectivity, I sought to maintain my awareness of this fore-structure of preconceptions, and to keep in mind full recognition of its possible influences in my process of arriving at an interpretation or account of bullying that reflects the participants' theories, not my own (Addison, 1989). The grounded theory process of constantly comparing participants' accounts, and routinely questioning participants about gaps, omissions, and inconsistencies assisted in keeping my own pre-understandings in the background, and the participants' accounts primary. With these precautions I sought to avoid imposing my preconceived perspective upon the processes of bullying, and rather, through this delineated research process, let the phenomenon of bullying show itself as participants see it.
I embarked upon this research with a practical concern to improve preventative and punitive responses to bullying. As a consequence of my interpretation of participants’ bullying stories, I have uncovered some clarification of the complex social and psychological problem of bullying that points in the direction of possible solutions. The validity of the research involves a consideration of whether my concern has provided an interpretation that has the potential of producing real changers in school policies and classroom routines.

If the theory that emerged from this study is to provide insight, enhance understanding and result in a meaningful guide for improving school responses to bullying it needs to be grounded in primary data, as described above. But in order to fulfill its potential as a guide for educators, the research process also needs to include some processes for evaluation of its validity. This study of bullying included a process of communicating the products of my interpretation to the participants and to teachers currently practicing within the school system.

Among the 9 adult participants, six indicated an interest in receiving a brief version of the “Theory of Bullying” resulting from this study. (See Appendix F). Three participants provided verbal feedback via telephone, and three via e-mail which verified their concurrence with the main tenets of the theory developed from their interviews. All supported the findings, endorsing the accuracy of this description and analysis of the processes of bullying. No contradictory or challenging comments were received. The researcher also solicited comments from colleagues by distributing copies of the brief version of the “Theory of Bullying” derived from this study. A dozen classroom teachers – some experienced and some beginning teachers – from four different schools provided their comments. The comments of these teachers provided another source of data – triangulation and thereby contributed to the validity to the study, and bring a degree of confidence that the theory developed here has some validity.
Nevertheless, there are limitations to this study. The results can only be considered a mid-range theory, because of the small sample size, and theoretical sampling, and as a qualitative study, the results cannot be freely generalized. Further research on a larger scale and with random sampling is needed to replicate these findings.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, direct quotations from transcripts of participants’ interviews have been selected and organized into the categories as described in Appendix E. following the structure of the paradigm model of theory development. The paradigm model addresses the definition of the (1). The phenomenon of bullying, (2). The causal (pre-) conditions that allow the phenomenon to develop, and (3). The context in which bullying develops. The paradigm model then goes on to discover (4). The consequences of the phenomenon (of bullying), and an analysis of (5). Some effective actions/interventions, and (6). Some ineffective actions/interventions. (The direct quotations are numbered as shown above, with letters (a), (b) etc. to indicate categories and concepts within the subdivisions of the paradigm model, with ordinal numbers to indicate the number of quotations illustrating each category.)

Inevitably, any attempt to separate a complex reality into a discrete and limited number of concepts will be an oversimplification of the life experience. Thus the theory of bullying derived from this study represents an oversimplification of school bullying as it occurs in various schools. And there will inevitably be some overlap and redundancy between concepts. For example, the causal conditions that promote bullying will also constitute part of the context in which bullying develops. Nevertheless, dividing a complex behavioural pattern like bullying into a limited number of concepts (as described in Appendix E) can assist us in developing a better understanding of the phenomenon.

It emerged from the interviews in this study, that bullying is an interactive process involving individuals participating in interpersonal relationships within a social context. Thus, any given incident can be understood from at least three points of view – that of the individual, the interpersonal interchange, and the interactive social system or context in which the incident occurs. For example, in the stories told in these interviews, power may be considered as a
### Table 4:
**A Theory of School Bullying: Adaptation of the Paradigm Model**  
(Corbin & Strauss, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Individual</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relational</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contextual</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Definitions</strong></td>
<td>Physically or psychologically intimidating behaviours</td>
<td>Individual roles are reversible and fluid, varying according to context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims unique, different in some way; Bullies often retaliating for past abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Causal Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Perceived need to defend Differences from others Fighting for acceptance</td>
<td>Group Dynamics—(in-group cohesion, out-group intolerance) Teacher Behaviours—(expectations of conformity, authoritarian style, intolerance for individual differences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse and/or neglect (feelings of insecurity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual differences (weak self-identity poor self-acceptance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher alliance with powerful students Nature of Group Leadership Competition and rigid standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparent vulnerability of individuals — unique or unattached to the group Expectations of Conformity</td>
<td>Lack of conflict resolution skills &amp; rituals Lack of conflict resolution Skills &amp; Rituals</td>
<td>Lack of Attachment Lack of Attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor attendance and/or school leaving Affective consequences (including depression, and suicidal/homicidal thoughts) Life-long mental health and addiction problems</td>
<td>Enduring low self-esteem, Career Difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retaliation and defense (perceived need to defend) Loneliness &amp; lack of friendships</td>
<td>Classroom Scapegoating Classroom Cliques Hierarchy &amp; Status Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enduring low self-esteem Career Difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Consequences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Successful Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Less Successful Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sense of Identity Assertiveness Skills Anger management</td>
<td>Identification and punishment of individual bullies Ignoring the bully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution rituals Mutual Respect and Moral Development</td>
<td>Telling the teacher Policies of “Zero Tolerance” Social Skills Lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher respect for differences (in ability and identity) Minimized Hierarchy &amp; Status Classroom culture of Cooperation</td>
<td>Competitive social/academic environment Authoritarian Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
characteristic of an individual, as a factor within a relationship, or as a function of roles within the larger social system of the school. Table 4 includes the designation of individual, relational or contextual as an additional dimension of the theory of bullying developed through the application of the paradigm model.

1. The Phenomenon of Bullying

Bullying, as defined by Olweus (1993) "is a pattern of repeated aggressive behaviour, with negative intent, directed from one child to another where there is a power imbalance." The phenomenon of bullying as described by participants in this study affirmed some aspects of descriptions of bullying found in the literature, but provides further precision in terms of the range of behaviours that constitute bullying, the overt intent of bullying behaviours, and the salience of power. The phenomenon of bullying (a) was further elucidated by descriptions of bullies and victims (b) and the influence of teachers (c) upon the phenomenon of bullying.

Bullying as defined by these participants could take the form of individual name-calling: ("Russian spy", "slut", "cheater", "dopey", "stupid", "skinny minny", "the brain", "suck up", "nerd", "stupid fruitcake"), and included aspects of power:

Examples:

1a-1. A constant sense of power. All the time. Physical things, like being physically intimidating in a lot of ways. (The Tomboy, F42)


1a-3. Choking. (The Martial Arts Instructor M40, Athletic Immigrant Girl F15, The Tomboy F45)

But according to these participants, bullying also includes more subtle social behaviours that resulted in social isolation or active exclusion:
1a-4. Like that native tradition of punishing a person by not having contact. *(The Refined Boy, M52)*

1a-5. It was parent’s day and I went ahead and um. Actually, it makes me cry to hear myself talk about it. I put on this act that I was talking to this kid beside me and I was just mouthing words kind of thing to make it look to my mother that I was popular kind of thing. *(The Refined Boy, M 52)*

1a-6. Again, I didn’t have anybody. I didn’t have any friends. *(The Tomboy, F42)*

Bullying may involve nothing more than small annoying behaviours, or might involve more potentially serious behaviours, as with a mob chasing a hapless victim home.

1a-7. I was walking along, and somebody comes up and says, ‘You’re ugly’, and slapped me....Like we were both surprised. You don’t just slap girls, and to top it off girls with glasses. *(The Blind Girl, F14)*

1a-8. I could go on forever about the stuff that happened in elementary school. People used to steal stuff off my desk. The teacher would be in the front of the class talking, and they would grab something and move it somewhere....I know somebody grabbed something and took it from me. *(The Blind Girl, F14)*

1a-9. Oh. They chased me home from school one day too. A whole mob waiting for me. Truly waiting for me. Again, I didn’t have anybody. I didn’t have any friends. *(The Tomboy, F 42)*

For those interviewed, bullying was often a physical experience, but also included an affective dimension demonstrated by individuals experiencing anxiety, loneliness, embarrassment, shame fear and alienation, lack of belonging and related issues of hierarchy and low status. Participants included in their understanding of bullying actions between individuals, between individual and group, and between groups.
Examples:

1a-10. I don’t think school was working for me. The whole social order of my life...Um. It didn’t work for me. I didn’t blend properly. (The Tomboy, F45)

1a-11. One day, I don’t know. We were chasing frogs and then they just turned nasty. I remember they tried to force my head down into the ditch. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M 45)

1a-12. In high school there are these little cliques – the jocks, the cool girls, the Goths, the nerds – different groups. They copy some popular music star, dress like them and act like them – they dress like prostitutes. They are always fighting in their little groups and between groups. (The College Student F20)

Traditional definitions of bullying identify a perpetrator and infer instrumental behaviours meant to intimidate someone weaker and more vulnerable. In this study, the descriptions of victims and bullies presented a more dynamic, interactive picture of bullying involving interplay in a social system that includes perpetrators, victims, and the social context in which they are situated.

Examples:

1b-1. ...but they [teachers] don’t really go into the core issue of the problem, which is that not only is there the bullier [sic], but there is the person being bullied and they are equally at fault, because they are allowing the bullying to happen. (The Refined Boy, M52)

1b-2. I’ve experienced a lot of bullying....I’ll stand up to somebody. I guess sometimes I’m becoming the bully. (The Blind Girl, F14)

Several respondents referred to adult bullying – parents and teachers misusing their authority and in effect modeling bullying behaviours.
Examples:

1c-1 The teachers participated in this. They allowed this to go on when it was blatantly obvious.

(The Welder, M42)

1c-2 I remember a guy standing in class making a joke about me, a few people laughing.

There’s the teacher with a great big stupid grin on her face too. I look at her and I think, ‘You’re part of this’. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

1c-3 Giving out the marks, he would say ‘Ppooor, very ppooor’ instead of ‘Hey, you can do better.’...I remember him coming up and saying, ‘This is not acceptable’, and ripping up my paper right in front of the whole class....He was leading by fear. Okay. That’s how you get results. Scare other people. Bully them. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M 40)

Researcher’s Comments. In this study, participants were not given a definition of bullying. Rather, they were requested simply to tell their story of bullying. Bullying traditionally has been limited to such behaviours as name-calling and intentional physical aggression. The participants in this study picture presented a more complex picture of bullying. The reports of these participants indicate that bullying behaviour may be physically aggressive, but it may also be socially alienating. They suggest that the relationship between bully and victim may be a reflexive one and that victims in some way may attract bullying behaviour directed toward them. The matter of reflexivity and vulnerability to victimization will be discussed later. Repeatedly, participants suggest that bullying involves a group dynamic rather than individual intent to harm. And they suggest that teachers may unintentionally model bullying behaviours that subsequently become part of the context of school bullying, in some way legitimizing bullying behaviours by students. The matter of group dynamics and teacher participation will also be discussed later. A definition of bullying derived from the stories of the participants in this study would be more like
Bullying can be physically abusive or socially alienating behaviours that occur between individuals or between an individual and the group, supported to some extent by a social context established by teachers within the school system.

2. Causal Conditions

Some of the themes derived from these interviews of people who have experienced bullying can be considered causal conditions leading to the phenomenon of bullying. The first two themes describing causal conditions confirm the results of previous research on bullying as described in Chapter Two: issues of (a) power and of (b) abuse and/or neglect. Other causal conditions described in these interviews included (c) retaliation and defense, (d) individual differences, (e) group dynamics, and (f) teacher behaviours.

(a) The Varieties of Power

As in the Olweus (1993) definition of bullying quoted above, it is generally assumed that individuals who are bullying are experiencing feelings of power, and that the action of bullying is basically instrumental manipulation of power over another person. The following quotes partially support the belief that bullying involves intentional, instrumental power.

Examples:

2a-1. I was just ruthless. You know I wasn’t that tough [strong or big]. Lots of guys were way tougher. I just wasn’t scared enough [to know when to quit, so I seemed like the meanest one]. (The Businessman M46)

2a-2. [I liked] a constant sense of power. All the time... And I would use that... being physically intimidating in a lot of ways. (The Tomboy, F 42)

The respondents quoted below, referred to the matter of hierarchy and status, saying that in the world of the schoolyard, “might is right”.
Like, you know, girls were sort of ‘girlsgirls’, and they were making them wear dresses to school...Oh, it was terrible....I was far more masculine, trying to gain power...empowerment. *(The Tomboy, F42)*

What I had at [age] 8, 9 or 10 when we were all about the same size, I was the leader. I was the guy; I was the top. I remember the girls in the class really liking me a lot because I was regarded as the leader. But as I stayed small and the rest of these guys got big, that power got taken away from me. I lost my status. So that was really hard for me, emotionally. You know, all of a sudden it was, ‘What do you mean you have something to say? Who gives a shit? Nobody cares about what you have to say. You can follow along if you want to, but you know, we don’t care whether you do or not.” *(The Salesman, M56).*

At school you get your hormones raging and your ego all bent and twisted out of shape because your parents haven’t brought you up properly. They haven’t validated you in any way shape or form, so you are looking to the outside places for that validation....It’s all about their personal power if they have no personal power at home. *(The Salesman, M56)* *(2.1.05)*

This last quote helps to elucidate the connection between the struggle for power at school and the observation that many aggressive students suffer abuse or neglect at home.

*(b) Abuse and/or neglect*

The widely held belief that most bullies have suffered a history of abuse and/or neglect from dysfunctional families is supported by many of the stories provided by these respondents. Five respondents described childhood homes characterized by anger, abuse, parental discord, and lack of acceptance which left them “primed” *(The Strong Woman)* for reactivity at school. One
respondent described growing up in a chaotic alcoholic household with much marital violence and abuse from uncles. Other respondents described similar situations.

2b-1. A lot of us came from broken up homes of abuse.  (The Poor Single mom, F36)

2b-2. “You’ll never be nothing”, my father used to always tell me for some reason… (The Welder, M42)

2b-3 I was all around in all these different homes. And I always lived in all these different places...like group homes. Nobody cared about me, especially my Dad. He was abusive or neglected [sic]. He threw me out of the house. The first time was when I was nine. I left my parent’s home when I was nine. (The Businessman, M46)

2b-4. I had a lot of bullying at home. My mother bullied me a lot. Any time she got pissed off at something, it was either a smack...or um, you know....My mother was always on the edge. Just on the edge, you know. (The Salesman, M56)

2b-5. Carry on at home. See Mom get smacked around, kids get smacked around. Whatever blah blah blah. You kind of get drawn to what’s familiar I guess, I don’t know...you get drawn into a similar situation, or you try to overcompensate. (Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

Part of this abuse seemed to involve participants being out of touch with their own feelings. Four adult respondents who had been bullies explained their aggression as rage erupting due to the unsatisfactory state of their home life and the family requirement to be numb. For these respondents, it seems that neglect and abuse at home resulted in a hidden rage, and a numbness of feelings which made them quick to anger, and oblivious to the emotional impact their behaviour might have on others.
Examples:

2b-6. We were always taught not to feel in the house. That was a big thing in our house. Don’t talk, you know. *(The Businessman, M50)*

2b-7. It took a long time for me to be honest about my feelings. *(The Welder, M42)*

2b-8. Expressing feelings, or talking about stuff, we never ever ever did that, you know. And regardless of how hard I worked at school, it was never acknowledged, you know. But the brutality that my parents put forward emotionally was just unbelievable, you know. It was a daily thing, you know. *(The Salesman, M56)*

Researcher’s Comments. These individuals have been victimized in many ways at home, and therefore may have arrived at school ready for defensive retaliation. One respondent, *The Strong Woman*, admitted that the need for power and the use of aggressive behaviours was associated with attempts to “feel in control in a confusing world”. The quest for power and a history of victimization and abuse are commonly accepted as precursors of bullying behaviours, often implying that bullying behaviours originate in the individual and their personal past histories. But these interviews seem to indicate that bullying can be a coping mechanism, a reaction to a situation where individuals felt vulnerable and undefended by parents, teachers, or peers. Bullying then appears to occur, not simply within an individual’s personality (the bully), but within relationships between people at home and at school in relationships of retaliation and defense.

c) Retaliation and defense

Many of the so-called bullies interviewed in this study had resorted to retaliation in an attempt to gain self-respect after repeated experiences of victimization. They felt that they needed to take matters into their own hands by retaliating, because the efforts of teachers and parents
seemed to be insufficient and ineffective in stopping the harassment, or because the abuse had just gone on too long, and they had reached their limit of endurance. Twelve of the respondents described acts of retaliation in their attempts to stand up for themselves in order to avoid further victimization. Of these, six admitted to retaliating to the extent of "sometimes acting like a bully".

Examples:

2c-1. ...they tried to force my head down into the ditch. So I bit down on his finger and I screamed and ran off. I just remember I didn’t take it any more. I didn’t care. I would stand up. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

2c-2. As an adolescent and a teenager it really started to affect me and I had to do something. So I decided I would beat the hell out of this guy. (The Welder, M42)

2c-3 He was mad. But I had him at his own game of bullying. But this relationship has played back and forth. (The Welder, M42)

2c-4. There was this one specific individual that would lay it on me constantly, you know. And eventually – and it wasn’t even with me, it was with one of the girls in our class -- I’m just sitting there listening to this a__, you know, just making mincemeat of this girl.... And I’m like this tall, and he’s that tall. I looked at him square in the eyes and I said, ‘Why don’t you just shut up?’ He says, ‘What did you say?’ I said, ‘What, are you deaf too, you f—ing jerk?’ He says, ‘Outside at break time…’ This was a culmination. This was the hundredth time, you know. And this time I just wasn’t backing off... So he is walking ahead of me, strutting ahead of me, you know. And he opens up the door, and as he turns around, I popped him three times, as hard as I could in the mouth. Right... And he went down like a ton of bricks.... And then I ran like hell. (The Salesman, M56)
2c-5. So one day I punched him in the face and then he didn’t bother me any more. (*The New Athletic Boy, M10*)

Other respondents admitted that their own reactions served to feed the retaliation cycles:

2c-6. He used to pick on me …and his friends around him saw this and they were like a pack of dogs, and when they saw they could get some razz out of me, they would dig. (*The Welder, M42*)

2c-7. We were like brothers, always with the putdowns and stuff, you know. I could never stand that. I hated that, you know. But I let it affect me, and that just made them want to do it more.” (*The Salesman, M56*)

2c-8 I just remember I didn’t take it any more. I didn’t care. I would stand up. Then they did more. They stepped it up. They stepped it up. (*The Martial Arts Instructor, M40*)

4.2.c-9 The kids shove me and trip me, and then laugh when I stumble. I ignore them as much as I can, but sometimes it gets to me….If I do anything back, they tell on me and I get in trouble. I’ve been suspended twice. One more time and I will get expelled. So I have to just let them do it. One girl grabbed me and started choking me. What am I supposed to do? Of course I had to fight back. Then we both got suspended. (*Athletic Immigrant Girl F15*)

Researcher’s Comments. These respondents felt that the teacher’s inaction and their own vulnerability had given them no choice but to react to the taunts. The result was a cycle of escalating harassment until the victims reached their limit and retaliated. Some found that a single event of retaliation reduced the harassment. Others who resorted to retaliation described a long process of enduring repeated harassment before changing tactics and fighting back, making school “a kind of hell” (*The Martial Arts Instructor, M40*).
These quotes bring into question our accepted definition of bullying, and put closer focus on the dynamics of what happens for individuals to shift their behaviour from assuming the role of the victim to taking on that of a bully. The respondents who shifted their role from victim to bully justified their aggression as deserved retaliation necessary in order to maintain a sense of self-efficacy. For one respondent, however, a preliminary role as the bully changed into long-term severe victimization involving depression, eating disorders, and deep psychological shame. She admits: “I had been the bully and I wasn’t functioning, right. And I made some stupid errors. Dumb things, right. And it got flipped on me.” (The Tomboy, F42)

This participant illustrates a pattern several participants described, where an individual apparently can take on alternating roles as a bully or as a victim. She had started school as a tomboy, coming from a family where tough athleticism was prized. But at school, her lack of femininity left her excluded from the circle of girls, so she found her social niche with the boys. She was stronger than most of the boys, too, and began bullying them, getting away without being punished because she was the girl. As puberty approached, (Grade Six) she wanted to move into a more feminine role, and thought she could capitalize on her friendship with the boys to have a romantic and sexual relationship with one of them. The boy went along with the sexual exploration for a while, then bragged to the other boys.

Suddenly she was shunned by both boys and girls. She endured severe social shunning and physical bullying, culminating in the day when the whole mob of two classes chased her home (Grade Seven). The teachers seemed helpless to change the situation, sometimes supporting her and making her a sort of “teacher’s pet”, sometimes ignoring the harassment. She finally dropped out of school (Grade Eleven). Now, at age 45, she finds the eating disorders, depression,
and difficulties with self-identity (as a masculine, non-gay woman), and aversion to classroom social dynamics have haunted her all her life.

One respondent suggested that bullying is a relationship involving two people; that individuals in some way 'choose' the role of victim; that if the victimized person would make a stand for themselves then the bullies would just back off. As one respondent put it, "...not only is there the bullier [sic], but there is the person being bullied and they are equally at fault, because they are allowing the bullying to happen." (*The Refined Boy*, M52). This perspective sees the passive victim as just as much at fault as the aggressive bully, that what is important is the dynamic happening between them. The causal condition, then, may rest, not merely in the individual personality and character of the bully or victim, but more in the relationship between individuals – in a relationship of active antagonism and retaliation, or in a passive relationship of alienation due to salient differences that serve to exclude them from the social context of the classroom or school.

It appears that the bullying problem is more complex than simply the misbehaviour of individuals. From these stories the idea emerges that bullying and victimization are coping roles taken or not, not simply individual personality characteristics or a matter of individual identity. The bullying seems to be rooted in what the tomboy called "primitive problem-solving" where the victim may be suffering from being identified as different in some way, and may be lacking the social skills to cope. The victim then may resort to retaliation and become the bully, or the bully may lose power and become victimized. In *The Tomboy's* words: "If you are not engaging properly, you either are going to withdraw or attack." This idea – that a bully or a victim is playing out a coping role, not expressing a personality trait – contrasts with the accepted understanding that places a nasty, aggressive bully attacking an innocent, passive victim.
Similarly, *The Bright Loner* sees the victim as a participant in the transaction of bullying, not merely innocently passive.

*(d) Individual differences*

All victims in this study identified themselves as being different in some way from the main popular in-group. Their differences covered a wide range of attributes – physical, (having a speech impediment, being blind, being unusually large or small, overweight, poor or too good an athlete), atypical gender characteristics (being a tough girl (tomboy), a sensitive, “refined” boy, or early or late in sexual maturation), intellectual (being learning disabled, “a nerd”, or intelligent), or cultural (being poor, or of a minority race or ethnicity). From this study, it appears that any difference from the main social group can be a *causal condition* with the potential of identifying an individual as a possible victim of bullying. In addition, victims who did not resort to retaliation often used coping strategies that involved avoidance. Thus the coping strategy of withdrawal sometimes functioned as a causal condition that exacerbated feelings of being invisible, lonely and isolated.

*Examples:*

2d-1 The way it started with me is that I [being overweight and not athletic] was always the last one picked for teams and such. *(The Welder, M42)*

2d-2 I didn’t blend properly….Not fitting in…not adjusting, not socially developing…I started to feel more isolation…But nobody wanted me. They didn’t want me. The girls didn’t want me. *(The Tomboy, F42)*

2d-3 Every year I would seek out that new kid in school and make a friend out of him, because I didn’t feel I had any friends otherwise. *(The Refined Boy, M52)*
2d-4. Nobody wanted to be caught hanging out with me in elementary school because I was blind... EEE, you don’t want to be hanging out with the blind girl.  (*The Blind Girl, F 14*)

2d-5. He says, ‘Oh you stupid fruitcake, you only have three friends.’ And then he kept just going on and on.  (*The Boy With a Stutter, M 11*)

2d-6. Mainly the kids would ignore me, not talk to me, like I was invisible or something. Or they would harass me, mostly call me names, and if I did anything back they would tell... I think they were offended I did better than they did [at academics].... I was a nerd. I used to wish I was an Oriental boy so I could fit in with that group.  (*The College Student, F 20*)

2d-7. ...in *Finding Nemo* [the movie] there’s this one fish with a bad fin or something. Well [at school] there’s one that won’t run quite as fast.  (*The Martial Arts Instructor, M 40*)

Several respondents, two high school students, and six adult respondents characterized themselves as academically bright, but rather than being an asset, intellectual prowess seemed to induce harassment from others. Here are some representative comments:

2d-8. ...I was good at school and got good grades without trying too hard.... That didn’t make me friends.  (*The Welder, M 42*)

2d-9. One time I remember we did individual projects and ...I got the best mark. The others wouldn’t show me their marks. I think they were offended that I did better than they did.  (*The College Student, F 20*)

2d-10. I was the intelligent one kind of thing...these two boys pointed at me and said, that one’s the brain, there’s the brain’ kind of thing. So you know, I’d never thought of myself as the brain before that. I did well at school and it kind of set me apart.  (*The Refined Boy, M 52*)
2d-11. It doesn’t help that the teachers like me and appreciate me. If they say my marks out loud, the kids groan. I asked the teacher not to say my marks. (The Academic Immigrant Girl, F16)

Researcher’s Comments. Although the main purpose of schools is supposed to be to teach academics, these students reported that success in this area does not carry with it any degree of social status. In fact, academic prowess seemed to be a mark of difference from the majority of the students, and becomes another reason for being discriminated against. Other respondents (The Strong Woman and The Martial Arts Instructor) reported that difficulties with school work made teachers frustrated with them, so that having learning disabilities became a source of harassment and low status among their peers. To get along at school, apparently it is desirable to be like the average, the norm, showing no difference in size, ethnicity, or academic ability, or there will be a risk of not being accepted in the group.

(e) Group dynamics

From these interviews, it appears that bullying is often a group phenomenon, and that the need to belong in the group, in some way facilitated bullying. Implied in this need to belong is an awareness of being different, which in some way legitimizes being excluded.

Examples:

2e-1. It wasn’t only him. Others were doing it as well. There was [sic] a number of other fellas doing it as well. Some of them on Ed’s lead. All these kids were getting well developed as they were moving up in their teenage years. And I was thin as a rake. (The Salesman, M56)

2e-2. There was this rebel group that accepted me. (The Refined Boy, M52)

2e-3. I always wanted to fit in. (The Tomboy, F 42)
2e-4. Mainly the kids would ignore me, not talk to me, like I was invisible. *(The College Student, F20)*

2e-5 There was (sic) Jocks, Greaseballs, Eggheads. I didn’t fit into any of them. There you go. Then you’re off on your own. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

2e-6. In high school there are these little cliques – the jocks, the cool girls, the Goths the nerds – different groups. They copy some popular music star – dress like them and act like them – they dress like prostitutes. They are always fighting in their little groups and between groups. *(The College Student, F20)*

2e-7. And the biggest thing is unattached. You can be very confident, aggressive, personal, but if you don’t have that social attachment. I’ve noticed in high school you don’t have to be a 200 lb. dragger, though that helps. I know the girls seem to have this popularity contest. But the routine, this and that – but wait a minute – they’ve got connections. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

2e-8. Like the guy I shoved, you know, he was just plain awkward. Rarely saw his parents around. Dad never seemed to come to any of the [school events]. Him? Yeah, whatever. But these other characters [in a group], they get bored and phoned me up. Just tie up the line. Just bugging me. Like what’s the problem? Like you got nothing better to do? Throwing dog crap at me, I just remember. Like what the heck? What is this? I don’t know, maybe something happened way back then when they were young, but it was just non-stop. That’s what bothered me. Just a non-bloody stop. *(Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

*Researcher’s Comments:* The concept of attachment and belonging incorporates and integrates notions of group identity, social alienation, and group dynamics. Students often carry
a deep conviction that the way things are done in their own group is the only reasonable way. Such a belief may produce a fragile tension between ego-centrism and group belonging mediated by and feelings of inclusion/exclusion. Indeed, an inclusive group with deep convictions of the merit of their own cultural practices defines cultural identity. But the downside of such a cultural identity is that it may serve to make individuals who are different feel alienated and excluded. Educational pedagogy often assumes the normalcy of in-groups in adolescent development. These respondents are providing a different picture – that in-groups with tight boundaries and exclusionary practices may provide a context for bullying.

For several of the respondents quoted above there was a social in-group of girls or boys who never accepted the newcomer into their social circle, but rather threatened, teased and humiliated the hapless newcomer/outsider, and sometimes engaged in physical altercations where several group members attacked the victim at once. In these examples, no one individual could be assigned the total responsibility as the bully guilty of the victimization. Rather, different individuals took quasi-leadership roles at different times, as the group collaborated in maintaining the exclusionary tactics.

The cultural world of the classroom holds individual students within its circle of influence. Those with intense identification within the classroom community can be called insiders, whereas those with little interactive contact can be called outsiders. Individual differences accompanied by weak identification with the group can translate into social exclusion. All the respondents in this study identified themselves as outsiders, and identified a central social in-group from which they were actively excluded. Some found an alternative group, ("There was this rebel group that accepted me.") , while others just remained excluded ("It was like I was invisible."). Belonging and attachment are recognized as universal psychological needs. But these students felt they
“didn’t fit in”, that “there was something wrong with me”, and that “nobody cared” – their basic need to belong was not being satisfied. Such feelings of alienation left them vulnerable to social bullying from the more popular group in the classroom. These respondents felt that having a sense of social connection, of attachment and belonging would remove much of the risk of being bullied. Traditional versions of the problem of bullying tend to emphasize the behaviour of individuals, and underemphasize the powerful influence of group dynamics in the perpetuation of bullying behaviours. The results of this study point to the importance of considering group dynamics as an important factor in the perpetuation of bullying behaviours.

(f) Teacher behaviours

A final theme or causal condition involving relationship was the persistent and repeated belief stated by participants that teachers either do not know what is really going on with the bullying, or that teachers are unable to help.

Examples:

2f-1. Since they [teachers] don’t seem to understand what is going on, their advice is not helpful, [“ignore them or tell someone”], and their lectures laughable. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

2f-2. Teachers are pretty dumb. I guess I have a very negative attitude about teachers [sic]. In elementary school you are in the same class all year. You’d think the teacher could tell [who the bullies are] by a quarter of the year. (The Blind Girl, F14)

2f-3. Teachers were a non-presence with all this interaction going on. They can’t help but observe it, but they don’t do anything about it. (The Welder, M42)

2f-4. Teachers don’t do anything. They think they know everything, but they don’t know nothing [sic]. (The Friend on the Edge, M12)
Victims claimed that when they tried to report on a bully, the teacher doubted them, and “blamed the messenger/victim.” It appears that teachers were either not able to accurately assess what was happening, or would ignore the problem.

**Examples:**

2f-5. When I was being bullied, I would go to the authority, and I would get the detention because I was told, ‘You must have done something to get that response’. And then I turned into the bully and challenged the person in control. (*The Poor Single Mom, F36*)

2f-6. ...I had to go to detention again. And I did nothing. I tried to explain to her [the teacher], and she said, ‘Stop trying to make up excuses.’ (*The Girl With a Lisp, F10*)

2f-7. I used to bother boys if they wouldn’t play proper football when I was on the field. I used to torment... I would beat the crap out of somebody. And they would be hurt.... What I would do? .... I would go up to the teacher and I would say, ‘He was picking on me, and you know, I had to fight with him, and I think he hurt himself.’ And Yeah. [The teacher would believe me.] I can’t believe it. That’s what I used to do. The teacher liked me. I was a cute kid, you know. I was an extrovert. They thought it was cute....So I never suffered. I don’t recall any consequences. (*The Tomboy, F42*)

2f-8. I got choked out one time. I forget. I got shoved, so I turned around and elbowed the guy in the face. And he threw me down and started to strangle me until I was passing out. And it was kind of like nothing was said. And then later on I got into trouble because I bumped into him. But it was my fault. This is what people do [blame the victim]. I remember stuff happening when there was a teacher standing there. (*Martial Arts Instructor, M42*)

Even if the teachers did intervene, their responses were often ineffective.
2f-9. Even when the teacher talks to them, or the principal or whatever, they don’t care and they don’t listen. They just say OK I’ll do that, but the next day they are still going again. And then it keeps going on like that. The teacher talks to them again and again, and they just don’t do anything. It just keeps going....The teacher yells at somebody, points out certain people, and then they bully them. *(The Boy With a Stutter, M12)*

2f-10. I would go and talk to the teachers, but I gave up eventually because I was tired of nothing being done. *(The Poor Single Mom, F36)*

2f-11. The teachers don’t help at all. They don’t seem to get it. The principal doesn’t help at all. There is no sense telling on them (the bullies). *(The Athletic Immigrant Girl, F15)*

2f-12. I don’t want to tell on them, because [if I do] they will bother me [and the teacher won’t be able to stop them]. *(Athletic New Boy, M10)*

Many respondents reported that lack of teacher intervention maintains the problem of bullying. A lack of intervention from the teacher felt like bullying and disrespect from the teacher, and the teacher’s lack of consequences served to invite students to continue bullying.

*Examples:*

2f-13. You know, it’s not only physical abuse, it’s verbal abuse. And the school teachers don’t stop it. *(The Strong Woman, F37)*

2f-14. In class the teachers give lip service. I remember a guy standing in class making a joke about me, a few people laughing. There’s the teacher with a great big stupid grin on her face too. I look at her and I think, ‘You’re part of this.’ *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

2f-15. The teachers participated in this. They allowed this to go on when it was blatantly obvious. *(The Welder, M42)*
Researcher's comments: Participants felt that the teacher and the school played a role in setting up a context amenable to bullying. Some victims assumed the teachers are not observant enough of the social interaction in the classroom and are unaware of the extent of the impact of the bullying problem upon their students. Thus the teachers' ignorance of social dynamics within the classroom and the school might be considered one of the causal conditions encouraging bullying.

Other respondents reported that teachers played a more active role in the persistence of bullying. They may have allowed the bullying to occur or aligned themselves with the perpetrators. At times the teachers seemed to act like bullies themselves, actively bullying by publicly humiliating students, criticizing academic results publicly, or making personal insulting comments about academic work. Some respondents (The Academic Immigrant F16, The Welder M42, The Martial Arts Instructor M40, The College Student F20) felt that even publicly announcing good marks can be detrimental, because the class tended to reinforce the teacher's attitude against poor students, or taunted those who were academically successful. From the victims' point of view, both the teacher and the classroom in-group were aligned against them.

Respondents reported that the teachers sometimes seem not only quite ignorant in not knowing the dynamics of what was going on, but actually mean-spirited in blaming and punishing victims when they tried to defend themselves. Several respondents reported the tendency for the teacher to blame the victim and allow the instigator to get off without consequences. It seems that a victim who reported an incident, risked the teacher's assumption that the person complaining of being victimized must have done something to provoke the bully for him to act that way. Thus if a victim finally stood up to confront their tormenter, they risked being reprimanded by the teacher, while the bully walked off protesting innocence.
One victim reported that the bully would be taunting her, and if the teacher noticed, the bully would change the story, blaming the victim. Another victim tried to destroy a nasty note written about her and the teacher noticing her lack of attention, reprimanded her. The instigator (the social bully who wrote the note) said, “She’s cheating on my paper.” and the teacher believed the bully, while the innocent victim faced punitive consequences. Again, the final result was that the wrong person was punished. Therefore, individuals often felt that they have no choice but to defend themselves with a show of force even at the risk of being labeled the problem (bully).

In general, respondents found the teachers to be unaware of the dynamics of bullying, and considered that at times teachers inadvertently participated in the victimization by administering consequences inappropriately. Those respondents who admitted their own bullying behaviours described a lack of acceptance and respect from the school – from both teachers and students. Feeling so disrespected, they often did not respect the teachers, resulting in a spiral of defeatism and hostility. The most discouraged assumed that teachers don’t care about the discomfort of victims.

Many students came to the conclusion that the teachers did not really care about them. (“The teacher doesn’t care about us friendship wise. He just cares if somebody is getting hurt physically.” *The Friend on the Edge, M12*).

Victimized respondents were prepared to concede that teachers generally believe they are fighting the bullying problem, and are only ineffective through ignorance of the dynamic quality of bullying—not by intention. However, because the victim tended to see the teacher as ignorant and inept with respect to bullying interactions, the victims’ respect and attitude toward teachers
suffered, and the resulting negativity on the part of the victim tended to further erode the teachers’ trust in their veracity, in a spiral of despair.

When participants felt that there was little likelihood of fair and just conflict resolution directed by the teacher, they seemed to feel an increased justification for attempting to resolve matters of disagreement with physical or social violence. Their justification for violent responses evolved from a belief that the problem with the other party would continue unless they took personal action. Whatever the rationalization, most respondents agreed that teachers are not very effective in deterring bullying behaviours.

The strong woman’s illustrates several of the causal conditions for bullying. She reports growing up in a dysfunctional family with much conflict. She went to school overdressed and oversized, a rejected outsider. Later in life she was diagnosed as learning disabled, and in school her teachers openly considered her a frustration. Predictably, her classmates called names, shoved her and generally bullied her throughout her schooling. The teachers were ineffective in stopping the harassment, so she took the law into her own hands, took judo and boxing, and defended herself quite aggressively. Soon she had earned a reputation as an aggressive bully, and was suspended many times from many schools before finally dropping out of school. Thus, causal conditions for bullying may involve characteristics of individuals, relational interactions with peers, and teacher mis-management of inter-group dynamics. The result is often classroom social dynamic of hierarchy and status that provides a context for bullying and victimization.

This study supported previous research indicating that teachers typically have difficulty both identifying bullies and recognizing classroom bullying even when it occurs within close proximity (Olweus, 1990). In addition, from these interviews, it seemed clear that bullying is usually a part of group dynamics and social exclusion, and that teachers often do not comprehend
the importance of the social context that encourages and sustains bullying, and may contribute to
the construction of that social context.

3. The Context

The context for bullying is often defined physically, as the classroom, unsupervised areas
like lockers, or outside the school. But these participants reported that the social context of
bullying is of even graver concern. Intolerance for differences, expressed by the teacher and
implied by the school organization, seemed to spawn the alienation and vulnerability that resulted
in group antagonism for those who are different in any way. A primary feature of a social context
that encouraged bullying was the expressed lack of confidence in teachers. Respondents doubted
that teachers would be able to manage the group processes to include those who had been
excluded, and held a lack of confidence in the teacher’s ability to manage classroom leadership,
or to establish and implement suitable protocols for conflict resolution that would result in
fairness and justice for those outside the mainstream. Thus, as a result of the findings of this
study, the context for bullying will be described from three different aspects: (a) group
membership and attachment, (b) group leadership, and (c) teacher behaviours.

(a) Group membership and attachment

While some respondents criticized and blamed the teachers for their failure to understand
the social workings of the classroom and their failure to stop victimization and harassment, most
identified the context of group dynamics as the root of the problem.

Examples:

3a-1. You have to have more than one friend. It's hard to stand up against everybody. (The

Friend on the Edge, M12)

3a-2. The normal people are the ones that get bullied, because they do not fit into the groups.

(The Blind Girl, F14)
3a-3. All of a sudden I thought, ‘Oh crap, I don’t need this crap. I can’t stand it any more – the in-group, the out-group. How people were pigeonholed! (and she dropped out of school).

(The Tomboy, F42)

3a-4. My kind of close group is kind of quiet and we don’t really do anything. But the other group is kind of like loud and obnoxious and like they make fun of a lot of people and are bullies to a lot of people. (Girl With a Lisp, F10)

From the perspective of these victims, the context of group dynamics seemed to be the worst problem, not simply aggressive individuals or incompetent teachers. It appeared from this study that there was considerable anxiety about group membership in the classroom. If students were out of the main group, for any number of reasons, their choice of friends was likely to be limited, and it was risky in terms of bullying not to have a social network. In the elementary years, if someone decided to leave the group and make other friends, there could be a group social backlash. Another respondent expressed the context of victimization as follows:

3a-5. [They] started picking on me because I was hanging out with new people. (The Girl With a Lisp, F10)

3a-6. [the outsiders] Sure. Yeah. I remember Kim – very quiet, good student. And the quiet kid, maybe he is slow or maybe he is a greaseball and carves his desk, you know. And then there are the athletes, Mr. Popular. (Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

In the high school, there were typically several groups who might engage in varying degrees of rivalry. Those not identified with one of the groups were in danger of finding themselves limited to the social margins of the classroom -- with the dopers, the slackers, the newcomers, the skids, the rebels, Goths, nerds, or whatever variety of group happens to be at the local school. In this social context, among these respondents several bright, attractive and
perhaps more athletic and masculine women were shunned and actively excluded from the social group, as were two smaller men. One adult has put some effort into trying to understand what promotes bullying. He discussed this idea at several places in his interview:

3a-7. Think about it. Who would get picked on? It’s not the fairly good-looking girl..., (but) the one kind of hanging in the back there, physically a little awkward...And the biggest thing is unattached. You can be very confident, aggressive, personal, but if you don’t have that social attachment ..... *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

3a-8. If you are not part of the Aryan brotherhood, you will be preyed on by the black or Hispanic or whatever. It’s for survival. I know the military, as a paratrooper, you have to prove yourself. And then once you’re in that clique, you’re OK. You’re not picked on. It’s belonging. Belonging is a big one. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

3a-9. The only friends I could find were the ones on the out, sort of the troubled kids. Sometimes the only friends I could find were on the outskirts. And that’s the Dopers, the Slackers. Sometimes that was the only friends I could find. There you go. Friends of mine were the Straight edges. There was Jocks, Greaseballs, Eggheads. I didn’t fit into any of them. There you go. Then you’re off on your own. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

Another respondent agrees:

3a-10. I’m new at the school. I wanted to stick with them. Then they would get jealous....And they would push and shove me around. *(Athletic New Boy, M10)*

Researcher’s Comments: This study seemed to indicate that interactions between classroom subgroups of insiders and outsiders produces a context of conflict and competition with boundaries between and among groups maintaining hostilities and prejudice and sustained
bullying. For students, behavioural and emotional repercussions made the importance of learning fade into the background as they tried to cope with the immediate challenges of social survival.

From personal observation as a school counsellor, I have found that there appears to be a social shift in Grades four and five, especially among girls, where pre-puberty interest in boys begins to blossom and may highlight differences between girls. Those differences become associated with moral values of acceptable behaviour, and transform friendships into competitions for popularity. This social conflict is often emotionally acute, and can erupt into girl group bullying that can persist into high school.

With all respondents, it was alienation from the main ‘cool’ or ‘popular’ in-group and a context of alienation that led to their victimization. One respondent claimed that her failure to attend kindergarten with the others, with the subsequent ignorance of the classroom culture in Grade one led to exclusion and social bullying that increased in severity throughout her public school years. Being an individual who was different from the main group in any identifiable way seemed to be a risk factor for social and aggressive bullying. The trigger appears to be not any particular attribute of the victim, just the fact of their differentness. Seventeen of the eighteen respondents considered that the bullying involved a group of bullies, and could not really be identified with one individual bully. Surprisingly, the matter of group dynamics is rarely mentioned in quantitative studies on bullying.

(b) Group leadership

When there is a prominent individual who appears to be involved in repeated incidents of bullying, teachers may assume that this individual is responsible for the bullying, but these respondents seem to describe a more complex social configuration. Often there was no identifiable leader of the group, although there might well be a small inner circle that holds more
influence that the majority of the group, and sometimes there was a leader who seemed to direct
the antagonism of the group.

*Examples:*

One young respondent described the key bully as a rather unpleasant girl, mean to people, and a
poor student. In this case, the teachers did not like this girl either:

3b-1. She didn’t get respect from the teacher, [but] they didn’t want to disappoint her or make
her angry because she is a bully. (*interviewer:* They were afraid of her?) Yeah….Like
people didn’t want to sit next to her. They just kind of felt sorry for her and were afraid of
her…Like since she was a bully, people don’t want to hang out with her. They only hang
out with her because they kind of feel they have to….She had all the power and everybody
else were kind of like the back-up people. (*The Girl With a Lisp, F10*)

An adult respondent described getting himself fit and ready to stand up to his tormenter,
and when he succeeded in overcoming him in a physical confrontation, the hangers-on shifted
their loyalty, and wanted to be his friend. These respondents describe the leadership of their
tormenters to be more an effect of a group of kids looking for a leader than a desire for a
particular individual to be the bully.

3b-2. I thrashed him. Badly. And his friends abandoned him. They wanted to be my friends,
but I didn’t want to be their friends….[they] used to always be picking on me….and
anyway I’m tired of these people. They are bad people. (*The Welder, M42*)

3b-3. I do think there were a couple of key people who would egg it on. The little guy I took
home to have sex with in grade five was one of them. And he himself was not that
collected as a person, you know what I mean. So he would gain a great deal of power….to
get status. But the rest of them, I just think, you know, people are like ants, you know. I mean mob mentality, group think, all of that. (The Tomboy, F42)

3b-4. It wasn’t only him. Others were doing it as well. There was [sic] a number of other fellas doing it as well. Some of them on Ed’s [the lead bully] lead.” (The Salesman, M56)

3b-5. There’s hierarchy, pecking order. Kind of establish it. Guys are like this. I imagine girls are too. Fooling around among themselves, and then everything’s Okay. And sometimes with animals as well. I read about this study in Africa where they put a bunch of teen-age elephants moved to another part of Africa. And they ran rampant. Then they stick some of the older elephants in there and everything calmed down. They were looking for whatever, some kind of order. (Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

3b-6. I remember one time pushing back this one little creep, and right away about three came and ganged up on me. Eh, I didn’t put up any resistance, and it was Okay then. Everything is kind of back in the old order....You can’t step out of your classification. (Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

3b-7. If someone joins them, they will push and shove me. (Athletic New Boy, M10)

Researcher’s Comments. It appeared that ascertaining the identity of the leader of a bullying scene was not a simple matter. At times there might be a clear leader, but at other times there was a more complex interplay of group dynamics. One reason that teacher strategies for dealing with bullying appeared to be minimal and uninformed, (as indicated in respondents’ comments above), may be the tendency for teachers to focus on individuals rather than on group dynamics. In seeking to identify a particular individual as responsible for classroom bullying, teachers may be missing the more complex issues involved in classroom dynamics and the socially implicit rules governing the inclusion or victimization of classroom outsiders. In general, the peer group
seemed to carry more influence in interpersonal classroom relationships than the teachers' interventions, so when the teacher moved the classroom focus on to more academic matters, those outside the social groups remained vulnerable to abuse, in a context of social, emotional, and possible physical threat.

(c) Teacher Behaviours

Some participants believed that the teachers themselves were intimidated by the power of the bullying group, that the teachers were somehow afraid of confronting the social energy of the in-group, and therefore found it easier to blame the more socially vulnerable outsiders.

Examples:

3c-1. Case in point. I was teaching a fitness class, and there was (sic) three thugs in the back.

   What’s with that? [I asked the boss.] ‘Oh well, we have to keep them here.’ Are they learning anything? No. Like [I want to say to them] ‘Shut your mouth, and don’t pick on other people. What makes you so perfect?’ Why are teachers scared? They have to get a grip on the place...Go shut them down.” (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

3c-2. She didn’t get respect from the teacher, [but] they didn’t want to disappoint her or make her angry because she is a bully. (interviewer: They were afraid of her?) Yeah. (Girl with a Lisp, F10).

   According to the respondents in this study who identified themselves as bullies, defensiveness was frequently misunderstood by teachers and confused with simple aggression. One young respondent described her feelings of injustice and unfairness, and a desire to make things more fair.

3c-3. The kids would harass me...and if I did anything back they would tell....The teachers never figure it out. (The Blind Girl, F14)
3c-4 And the school teachers don’t stop it [the physical and social abuse]. The kids will be verbally abused in class about being gay or a faggot and this kind of thing, and there is nothing being done about it. *The Refined Boy, M52*

It may be that such a desire for fairness, for repairing injustice, tends to feed defensive reactions, which, according to these respondents, inevitably leads to trouble with the teacher. These vulnerable victims felt they had a right to defend, and felt unfairly treated when they were punished for aggressive acts that were in self-defense. Still others felt that the teacher themselves sometimes acted like the bully:

3c-5. This one guy [teacher], Mr. N. Nobody quote me. I’ll deny it in court. He used to rule with fear... My penmanship was bad. I remember him coming up and saying, ‘This is not acceptable’ and ripping up my paper right in front of the whole class. He was leading by fear... Scare other people. Bully them. There you go [modeling bullying]. *Martial Arts Instructor, M40*

This respondent described several other instances where he felt the teacher was modeling bullying, and made some suggestions where teachers can reduce bullying just by paying attention to their own behaviours, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

*Researcher’s Comments:* Previous discussion in this paper has identified teacher behaviours as culpable in some respects as a *cause* of bullying behaviours. These comments further criticize the behaviour of teachers as providing a *context* where bullying thrives. Students with different learning styles (whether intellectually able or intellectually challenged in some way) can be a frustrating challenge to teachers, but intolerance of learning differences and expectations of a narrow definition of normalcy seems to bleed into teacher and student intolerance of other differences. This intolerance of variation may start with standard academic
expectations, but can extend into social differences in such characteristics as variability in athleticism, gender norms, assertiveness, and ethnic identity. The tomboy was left alone to negotiate her relationships with disapproving peers. The academically gifted student had to cope with the public heckling of her presentation without the teacher intervening. The learning disabled students had to endure the teacher’s expressions of frustration. The martial arts instructor, self-described as a “98-pound weakling” was publicly humiliated in class, giving legitimacy to the humiliation he had been receiving from his peers.

The teachers’ implied expectation of conformity to standards was seen as a dynamic that produced a context of hierarchical relationships among students which determined their risk for bullying. Moreover, participants reported that teachers often reinforce the majority position and bond with those who conform. To these respondents it seemed that if the school does not accommodate differences, and the teacher does not appear to tolerate differences, then the students who closely model themselves after the teacher, will not tolerate differences either. Such intolerance of differences may reflect a biologically-based fear of the unknown (Hobson & Leonard, 2001). Or the school’s primary goal of maintaining standards may explain the disrespect and intolerance for those who exhibit differences from the accepted norm. Whatever the explanation for its origin, the result of a context that emphasizes standards is that those who are different are left as outsiders, and therefore vulnerable to bullying.

4. Consequences

The consequences of bullying are well documented in the literature. Depression, low self-esteem, absenteeism (Chamberlain & Houston, 1999; Curcio & Fairst, 1993) are among the most common immediate results, but bullying has also been associated with school leaving and poor academic performance (Bey & Turner, 1996; Chamberlain & Houston, 1999). The respondents interviewed in this study supported the findings of past research in their accounting of negative
repercussions of victimization, in respect to school attendance, early school leaving, and both
short-term and long-term mental health, addiction, and lifestyle difficulties. In terms of this
study, the consequences of bullying have been placed into three different subcategories: (a)
school attendance and early school leaving, (b) affective consequences, and (c) mental health and
addictions.

(a) School attendance and early school leaving

The bullying literature cites psychosomatic illness, absenteeism and school leaving as
symptoms of being bullied. This study supported these previous findings. In this study, four of
the respondents reported problems with attendance that escalated into finally dropped out of high
school, with lifetime consequences. Here are some representative comments.

Examples:

4a-1. I think I missed some of that year. It wasn’t that bad that particular year, but it was very
stressful. Grade Six was the worst. I betcha I missed half of Grade Six…It had been a
whole year and a half, but I had missed most of the year. It was actually Grade Seven
before things started to die down. (The Tomboy, F42)

4a-2. But in grade eleven, what did I do? I started working Fridays. And I went to a different
school from most of my friends again. I just wanted to get away. And then I didn’t go
back. I figured I would rather work for a living than go to school, so that’s what I did. I
got an incomplete. I didn’t get to challenge it. I don’t even know if I completed all the
grade eleven courses. I don’t have a blinkin’ clue. (The Tomboy, F 42)

Suspension is the ultimate result of poor attendance. Some retaliating victims became quite
skilled at fighting for revenge, quite abusive themselves, found themselves identified as the bully,
and subsequently suspended from several different schools. Two respondents who were
suspended from several high schools in their career as bullies reported that

4a-3. Nobody asked me where the behaviour was coming from. They just kicked me out...They
suspended me so many times I finally just dropped out. (The Strong Woman, F36)

4a-4. (The school) didn’t do anything. They just sent me to another school. First and foremost
(they should) try to find out why. (The Businessman, M46)

Researcher’s Comments: Suspension as a consequence for bullying was not highly
regarded as a deterrent for bullying. Rather it was seen as an automatic response by teachers,
with little thought behind it. Suspension from school mainly decreased empathy and increased
reactivity as the students suspended went on to repeat their aggressive behaviours in the new
school situation, until finally dropping out. One respondent remembered the aftermath of an
unfortunate event that resulted in two classes of students constantly teasing her, calling names,
making rude noises in class, excluding her, and generally making life at school socially
unbearable. Along with her anxiety and shame came a general reluctance to get up in the morning
and go to school, and frequent absences.

One respondent who described herself as a social misfit, quit school in junior high school
after being suspended many times, and drifted through menial jobs until one of her employers
suggested she might be learning disabled. Subsequent testing proved this to be true. So in her
thirties she went back to school, and to college where she earned a certificate that now provides
her with a decent income. A respondent who described himself as a bully and a delinquent, was
suspended from school many times, spent time in a juvenile detention center, and ended up not
completing high school, although he described himself as having an “IQ of 140”. He lost many
years abusing drugs, but at the present time is self-taught, runs his own business, and has a good
marital relationship. A third respondent quit school and joined the army and teaches martial arts. The fourth respondent described her journey out of school and back. She had changed job many times, and was currently attending college part-time, as the thought of attending full time brought back too many bad memories. For these adults, their experiences with bullying had a long-term negative impact on their working future, as well as on their self-identity and self-esteem. In this last example, the student was suspended twice for standing up for herself by fighting back. A third time would result in her being expelled from high school, something she wanted to avoid. Her tormenters knew her predicament, and harassed her even more, knowing she dare not retaliate. In this study, issues of power and abuse emerged as unequivocally important causal conditions of bullying, but bullying behaviours as being more complex than simply inappropriate use of power.

(b) Affective consequences.

Several victimized participants reported feeling embarrassed and ashamed of their helplessness concerning their social status in the classroom.

Examples:

4b-1. I didn’t say much (to the teachers). I was embarrassed…I mean, constantly embarrassed. I mean I was totally embarrassed about myself. I remember telling one teacher that I was quite lonely, and I regretted saying that because I was so embarrassed that I was lonely. I thought there was something wrong with me. .. I couldn’t tell my Mom. She didn’t want me to become a victim or a wimp….she didn’t want her children to be helpless. Like helplessness wasn’t good, you know. ( The Tomboy, F42)

4b-2. There’s one thing, if the victim and the criminal have something in common, it’s shame. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)
4b-3. We can’t walk across the cafeteria without people swearing at us under their breath, calling us commies and sluts. It’s embarrassing. (The Athletic Immigrant Girl, F15)

But the worst sort of alienation can be life-threatening depression and suicidal thoughts. Several respondents reported such negative and destructive responses to bullying. One respondent was probably projecting his own feelings and thoughts when he exclaimed:

4b-4. People are so amazed about the young girl in Abbotsford who hung herself, but if you or I went to work and as soon as you stepped in someone slammed you against the locker, kicked your books out of your hand, shoved you against the wall. If that happened, there would be a bloody outrage....the day in, day out torment. What were they thinking? (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

4b-5. When I was a teenager it was so bad I would stay up night after night thinking, “How can I get these guys? I’m going to kill this person. I’m going to get him.” (The Welder, M42) Another respondent reported depression and eating disorders that she attributed directly to the feelings of alienation left by her experiences of being bullied.

4b-6. You end up isolating yourself if you have been isolated, right? You know, not in all cases I suppose. But it’s just this perfect evolution of if it’s not working or these things start happening it kind of has this bad snowball effect where you get kids primitive problem-solving and then the compounding of problems and on and on it goes. And then, yeah, I really had depression, and then I had an eating disorder and had to switch schools...(That helped?) temporarily. Yeah it did. Actually, you know what, it did. But my eating disorder got worse. (The Tomboy, F42)

Researcher’s Comments. This respondent had experienced bullying that persisted from grade 3 to 11. Her parents and siblings had the belief that she should be tough and manage it herself. Some
of her teachers protected her, some of her teachers encouraged her to fight back in revenge, but none were effective in stopping her victimization.

The *Martial Arts Instructor* described his deep feelings of helplessness:

4b-7. I just lost that heart. I think a lot of it starts at home. You learn it. I just lost heart. What’s the use? I don’t know, you just shut down....something just turned off. I don’t know what it was. (*Martial Arts Instructor, M40*)

(c) **Mental health issues and addictions.**

Two adult respondents had experienced severe difficulties with addictions. One respondent freely identified himself as “a bully and a delinquent”. Although he grew up in a respectable family where his father was wealthy, and his mother well-loved by the community, he described the rejection he received from his family, including being sent to foster care at age nine, and the emotional numbness that was part of his family legacy.

*Examples:*

4c-1. My Dad was driven...He was a raging alcoholic. (and physically abusive to my Mom.) I didn’t know until he died. I blocked it all out. I never realized that. I never realized that. My Mom was loved by so many people. We were always taught not to feel in the house.

(*The Businessman, M46*)

Another respondent describes his emotional dilemmas at school – perhaps because he was a top student and an award-winning athlete who was late maturing and remained of small stature in high school – and his subsequent response to the opportunity for the emotional numbness offered by addictions.

4c-2. All these kids were getting well developed as they were moving up in their teenage years.

And I was as thin as a rake. Even at 17 when I had my big last growth spurt. Now I was
six feet and weighed in at 97 pounds. So I was. I’m over 200 lbs today. Obviously I was skinny. Now my brother gets into the act. He comes up with this cool little nickname for me, ‘Skinny Minny’….I just didn’t know. I just didn’t know how to deal with this stuff back then as a kid. My hormones are going crazy. I’m a mixed up emotional mess, you know. So I understand why a lot of kids turn to drugs and alcohol, you know. Because who the hell wants to feel like that. I know I didn’t. When alcohol came along, it was this great huge blessing, because all of a sudden, I didn’t feel anymore, you know. I didn’t have to be scared anymore. I didn’t have to be intimidated any more. *(The Salesman, M56)*

Thus began a significant battle with alcoholism and drug abuse. Bullying may not be the only factor that leads to substance abuse, but in the case of this individual, being severely bullied caused some of the pain that made intoxication a welcome relief, and may have put him at increased risk for substance abuse.

These matters of not being aware of feelings can be at least partially attributed to cultural norms of masculinity. As one respondent points out:

4c-3. But boys are not supposed to show their emotions. Boys are supposed to be strong and macho and keep it all pent up inside and that leads to ….drug abuse, suicide or taking things out on (somebody else.). *(The Blind Girl, F14)*

*Researcher’s Comments.* With this participant’s comments we are introduced to the idea that the complex problems of school bullying may have broad implications that reach into some of the widely-held assumptions about addictions and emotional health in schools and in Western culture. Strong negative affect inherently demand a personal response. That response can be retaliation, (attack), social withdrawal, or retreat into substance abuse. *(The Businessman M46)* believed that he became a bully because he had low self-esteem, and bullying made him feel cool
suffering from a lack of personal power and acceptance, he used bullying as a substitute source of power and belonging. He felt rejected at home, and unattached at school, because he had changed schools so many times. He "was looking for something I could never find" — acceptance. So as a teenager, he hung out with "the gang of losers and rejects". The group used him as the "gopher" to do dangerous errands, because he was small, athletic, and ruthless. After serving time in a juvenile detention center, and "seeing people killing people", he decided to leave that circle, and "I turned inward like a reclusive." This involved using and dealing in hard drugs. "I was loaded 24/7 for years." For this respondent, bullying seems to have been a way for him to numb his feelings. When that led him into life-threatening difficulties, he used drugs to numb himself. After drug treatment, and finding a satisfying love relationship, he found his way to becoming aware of his own feelings. Becoming aware of his own affect allowed him to make different life decisions that gave him a legitimate sense of power and control, and in the process made his life more successful.

*The Salesman (M56)* told a different story, with a similar ending. He suffered long-term bullying and intimidation from his mother, who was angry and overwhelmed from the emotional aftermath of war, immigration and marital abuse. At school life he suffered rejection from his community due to his small stature. Later an economic downturn cost him his job, and ultimately his relationship. With no personal, emotional support, alcohol and drugs offered apparent relief. A long-term friend finally connected him with AA.

Of the ten adult respondents, nine described struggles with mental health or addiction problems. The researcher did not ask any questions regarding either mental health or addictions — these reports were unsolicited. This study involves too small a sample to claim any statistical implications to the high rate of such difficulties among these victims of bullying. As the
respondents were volunteers, it may be that they represent more serious examples of bullying, or they may have had more difficulty than most individuals in recovering from their negative experiences of school bullying. Nevertheless, many studies have found the negative effects of bullying to extend into adulthood (Roland, 2002), and it may be that past bullying experiences can be a risk factor for developing addictions, depression, eating disorders, and other mental health difficulties. (This is a topic that merits further investigation.)

5. Outcomes – More Successful Interventions

After the respondents told their stories of bullying, in my role as the interviewer, I asked them how the bullying stopped. It follows logically from the explanation of bullying that has emerged thus far that successful interventions would need to inhibit the causal conditions that encourage bullying and would need to change the context where bullying thrives. Successful interventions would need to address dimensions of the individual, dynamics of interpersonal relationships, and issues of social and moral development in the nature of group dynamics in the classroom. Indeed, respondents reported that developing a sense of personal identity, and promoting familiarity and acceptance of the variety of individuals in one’s social environment (rather than restricting social involvement to a homogeneous in-group), could reduce bullying behaviours. With such an established sense of self identity and self-worth, assertiveness became an effective response to bullying, especially when delivered with an attitude of respect for the other. The solution is so obvious it can almost be expressed as a tautology: the way to reduce bullying is to increase respect. But according to these respondents, the deceptively simple matter of developing self-respect, requiring personal respect, and exhibiting respect for others represents the most powerful and reliable pathway toward bully prevention. Successful interventions are described under three categories: (a) identity development and self-acceptance, (b) assertiveness, and (c) mutual respect and moral development.
(a) *Identity development and self-acceptance.*

Respondents reported that the bullying stopped when they began to develop a better sense of self-identity, self-acceptance and self-esteem, or what may be described as a more internal *locus of control*. Highlighting the importance of matters of the self are several accounts of self-awareness quoted below that succeeded in defeating the bullying cycle.

*Examples:*

5a-1. Well, I’m thirty pounds heavier, believe it or not, and I’ve been in the boxing ring. I just…

I’m more confident these days. I’ve done a lot of things. (*The Martial Arts Instructor, M40*)

5a-2. I’m a tomboy, and I’m me, and I’m not going to be made into anything I am not. I tried to fit into the crowd and it didn’t work. I learned it’s not worth it anyway. (*The Blind Girl, F14*)

5a-3. You get more confidence in yourself. You don’t feel bad about being yourself. You know what; I’ve got stuff to do. I don’t care. I’m fine with myself. (*The Tomboy F45*)

5a-4. I don’t need to care what they think. (*The College Student F20*)

5a-5. I’m starting to realize that I shouldn’t need to do anything…It’s just between the bullies. I’m not going to care any more, cause that’s their problem in their bully role. (*The Girl with a Lisp, F10*)

5a-6. Even a shy person can stand up for themselves, if they know how. [What you need is] self-confidence. I say that, but I have no self-confidence. I’ll say in a joking form to myself, because I know deep in myself and I joke around with myself….You don’t even really need to be self-confident….I eventually said, ‘this is me. I’m staying this way.’ This. This. (*The Blind Girl, F14*)
Researcher's Comments. What this girl is expressing is a profound level of self-acceptance. She is not "self-confident" and doesn't think she is particularly great in any way. She just is the way she is, and is happy with that. Such an attitude of self-acceptance protects her from being victimized. The cure for her is not so much doing things to prove she is strong or brilliant, but simply accepting her limitations, including her blindness, and doing the best she can with it.

Others recognized that there was something in themselves and their reactions that could be encouraging their victimization, inducing others to continue harassing them. As they developed a broader understanding of the dynamics of their problem, they were able to extract themselves from their difficulties with others. These respondents are describing a process of becoming more self-aware.

Examples:
5a-7. I'm the person doing the bullying....trying to keep everything in control." (The Strong Woman, F36)
5a-8. You have feelings, and you're human, and you know what, crying makes it better....Then you're not stressed out any more. (The Blind Girl, F14)
5a-9. This is a slow process, coming out of this and changing your ways, and very few people stop, come out of themselves, look at (themselves) and say what...could be improved. (The Welder, M 42)

Researcher's Comment Several victims described a process of self awareness, and the subsequent development of a positive self-identity as factors that enabled them to ignore the taunts of others — and to escape from the cycle of bullying. For those respondents who were able to terminate their role as the victim, being self-aware of feelings combined with the development of self-identity and accompanying self-acceptance seemed to be the most important prerequisites
for stopping the bullying. A lack of such features of individual self identity can be inferred as part of the causal conditions that may have predisposed individuals to suffer victimization in a cyclical or reciprocal process of role-taking as victim or bully.

These reformed victims had in the past found teachers' initial advice to 'ignore' the bullies impossible and unreasonable, but once they had established a positive self-identity and self-acceptance, they found themselves oblivious to the criticisms of the bullies, and suddenly able to ignore them. It appeared that along with self-awareness came self-regulation and an internal locus of control, where the taunts of others lost their power. Thus, according to the participants interviewed in this study, the route out of the bullying cycle of violence and retaliation points to matters of self-identity and self-acceptance. Some of these participants were able to develop such self-awareness in their intermediate and high school years, and others not until much later in life.

Other respondents felt that increased self-confidence and the appropriate use of assertiveness skills during their school years was successful in eliminating the bullying.

(b) Assertiveness

The commonly given advice to “stand up for yourself” is usually not considered by educators to be an acceptable response. However, school recommendations to “ignore the bully” or “tell someone” were universally rejected by the respondents in this study as ineffective, and ill-advised because they eliminate the possibility of defending oneself appropriately. Several respondents felt that assertiveness and defending oneself was a helpful response.

Examples:
5b-1. They would follow me around... and they would push and shove me around. So one day I punched him in the face and then he didn't bother me anymore. (The Athletic New Boy, M10)

5b-2 My cousin is a “bully buster”. That's her expression. And she said there was this young boy who was... bullying the younger boys.... And she just kind of tired of it all... And went up to him and said, 'I'm kind of worried about this.' And she lit into him and beat him up. Yeah. And then he stopped. He never did anything after that. (The Refined Boy, M52)

5b-3. I stick up for myself all the time. I'm a person, not just a blind person. I don't care what people think about me. I'm independent. I don't get bullied anymore. (The Blind Girl, F14)

5b-4. This was the hundredth time, you know. And this time I just wasn't backing off... I had hit the breaking point.... As he turned around, I popped him three times as hard as I could in the mouth. And fast. Boom, boom, boom... And he vowed he would get me after that, but he never did come near me after that. It was really interesting, you know. (The Salesman, M56)

These respondents believed that if someone looks confident and projects strength, and feels positive about their self-identity, then he/she is less likely to be bullied. Another respondent believed the converse is also true, so that if someone looks weak, they may be more likely to be bullied.

5b-5 The one to get picked on... is kind of hanging in the back there, physically a little awkward... I mean you look at a herd, and usually the wolf will work the edge and look for the weak.... (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)
5b-6 I was just talking to my Tai Kwan Do instructor. He says that a lot of these black belts used to get their butts kicked, but now they walk around knowing that they’re tough. So right away they are left alone. (The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)

5b-7 ...a lot of people are studying bullying...to get the bullier [sic] but they don’t really go into the core issue of the problem, which is that not only is there the bullier, [sic] but there is the person being bullied and they are equally at fault, because they are allowing the bullying to happen. We [Buddhists] feel that if the person makes a stand for themselves...that they [the bullies] would just back off. Yeah. So that is the enlightened aspect. (The Refined Boy, M52)

Perhaps this is another way of explaining how bullying is an interchange, a relationship requiring two or more participants, where one is a foil for another, where an individual who looks easy to dominate seems to invite domination by another individual seeking power to bolster his insecurity.

Two of the adult male respondents pointed out that a certain amount of aggression is normal among children, perhaps part of the process of establishing status and position in the group.

5b-8. There’s hierarchy, pecking order, and they have to kind of establish it. Guys are like this, and I imagine girls are too -- fooling around among themselves, and then everything’s Okay. (The Refined Boy, M52)

5b-9. How would I deal with the intimidation now? Oh, I just laugh about it now. What I would do is I would support what they were doing. I wouldn’t fight it. Because the truth is, it is nature’s way. It’s culling out the weak. At that age group that sort of four through eighteen [years of age] is all about physical strength....That’s the truth about boys growing
up. It's all about their personal power if they have no personal power at home. (The Salesman, M56)

Researcher's Comment. For the respondents in this study, assertiveness was a useful tool for eliminating bullying, but only when applied with a sense of respect for others. These respondents are suggesting that standing up for oneself can be a successful intervention for eliminating bullying but the act of standing up for oneself needs to include a process for developing self-acceptance and a sense of personal power. Several respondents reported parental injunctions to defend themselves bolstered with newly acquired skills in boxing and martial art. Two respondents expressed their version of acceptable assertiveness as “Standing up for oneself without humiliating the other” (The Chinese Mother), and “getting the point across without getting the people upset” (The Welder). Schools are often reluctant to advise assertiveness as a response to bullying for fear it may deteriorate into uncontrollable aggression. However, with the understanding that it must be applied with a sense of respect for the other while demanding respect for oneself, assertiveness infers a context of respect that contrasts with the intimidation and ill-will that often lies behind aggressive acts. Such a context of respect contrasts with an attitude of bullying and abuse, and enhances an attitude of mutual respect that by definition eliminates the abusive potential of over-enthusiastic assertiveness.

(c) Mutual respect and moral development

If moral development can be described as a process where the individual gradually becomes more aware of himself, of relationships, and of one’s impact on the larger environment, then there is much in bullying that relates to moral development. The respondents in this study who admitted to bullying, all described how they stopped bullying. In each case, some moral
awareness had emerged, however belatedly, that their behaviours, even if motivated by self-defense, were hurting others, and therefore were not truly justified.

*Examples:*

5c-1. When I was a teenager, I just hung out with them. And they had stolen items. And we were together and I got busted.... It was seeing people killing people that got me out. I didn’t like that, so then I turned inward like a reclusive. (*The Businessman, M46*)

5c-2. I can calm down and reassess things. I never used to do that. (I) used to react without thinking. (*The Welder, M42*)

5c-3. Angie is really short and gets made fun of because of that. But it’s stupid, because she is just as smart as we are. What I look for is personality, I don’t go by looks. You can tell if somebody is putting on a mask. I’m more mature than a lot of girls. (*The Blind Girl, F14*)

5c-4. In some ways I developed very differently. This is the thing. In some ways I had become much older. You know what I mean, you develop differently. (*The Tomboy, F42*)

One respondent later compared bullying to hunting, perhaps the pleasure of conquest being the connection. Like the respondents quoted above, his difficulties with being bullied and harassed served to make him more empathic for the underdog, the weak and defenseless.

5c-5. I put myself in the position of the animal. There is just no need for this; they are just minding their own business. (*The Welder, M42*)

*Researcher’s Comments.* These respondents are making claims of enhanced moral awareness. Because they have developed a sense of their own identity and strengths, and no longer need to borrow an identity from the group, they have developed a more mature sense of themselves that is manifested as empathy and respect for others. The respondent who stopped his bullying behaviours when he realized how his behaviour was affecting others was demonstrating
empathy. For many of the respondents, it seemed that having been victimized somehow increased their compassion and empathy, and resulted in more social and moral maturity.

Some victims seemed to demonstrate a more highly developed social/emotional intelligence than either the bullies or the members of the "main" group in the sense that they had an appreciation and empathy for how others might feel:

Examples:

5c-6. I didn't want others to feel as bad as I felt. *(The Blind Girl, F14)*

5c-7. Don't they care how other people feel? Doesn't it mean nothing to them? Think about that? What would possess somebody to pound on somebody? You know? *(The Welder, M42)*

5c-8. She's been hurt somewhere along the line. I mean she's got problems. I think she's been abused in some way. *(The Bright Loner M52, referring to Kelly Ellard, teen charged with murder after a bullying incident)*

5c-9. I've been bullied a lot, and I've been friends of the bully, but I haven't been a bully. No. I know how bad bullying feels, and I don't want anybody else to feel that way. I want people to feel better than I do because I know how much it sucks [if you have been bullied]. *(The Girl with a Lisp, F10)*

One victim/bully, kept a tenuous relationship with the fringe of the in-group, escaping periodically when the group engaged in activities to which he personally objected:

5c-10. I'll stick up for my friend if there is a whole gang after him, but if I stayed with him all the time, they would harass me too....I get in trouble, but I don't get into big problems like this. I'm not all on one side. I'm in the middle. I try not to make like...If I go on [ the
victim's] side, I'll be enemies with them. If I go on their side, I'm enemies with [the victim]. I don't want to do that. (The Friend on the Edge, M12)

Researcher's Comments. The bullying tended to stop when respondents found a way to gain their own self-respect and self-identity without relying on the peer group or the teacher/school, when victims found a sense of belonging somewhere other than the in-group, or when victims found a way to stand up for themselves without alienating the enemy. The student quoted above has developed enough self-awareness and self-acceptance that he can risk defying the group when he considers that their behaviour has crossed a line of acceptability. He is not setting himself up as the little authority or the teacher's helper in trying to control others. He is saying to himself, "I don't think this is right. I will support the principle that my friend needs help at this time, but I am not going to take sides by making a loyalty-based decision." He shows considerable social maturity in constructing a compromise solution to keeps his friend safe: he maintains a tenuous relationship with the in-group that allows him to join the group when he wishes, but to escape when he wishes to avoid victimization. He has developed an internal locus of control that allows him to make his own decision in a specific context, independent of what the teacher, his friend, or the group, tell him to do. He is tolerating ambiguity in his relationship with the peer group. By relying upon his internal sense of what is right in a given situation to guide his decision-making, not power or loyalty to the authority of the group, he may be moving toward post-conventional moral development.

One respondent, The Businessman M46, described his process of extricating himself from his serious delinquent behaviours, (even spending time in a juvenile detention center). He saw his friends getting in trouble with the law, saw their lives threatened by their actions, and realized he could take better care of himself and his friends by changing his aggressive behaviours. It wasn't
his own punishment that made him change course, but seeing the negative effect of bullying and delinquency on his friends that changed his behaviour.

5c-12. It was seeing people killing people that got me out. I didn’t like that.

But it took both the negative consequences on his friends, and the positive efforts of adults who were important to him to truly change his path.

5c-13. There was somebody when I was about fifteen. Her name was [an English teacher]. She started talking to me. She was happily married and she was just cool. And there was this Judge. For some reason they went to bat for me. I was sitting in jail. I think it was the whole concept of jail in those days. They put people in jail, raised them to adult court.

This was jail, not Juvey [sic]. But they [the friendly judge and the teacher] put me in the Maples Detention Center. They believed in me. Yeah. For a few years after that… I ran into one guy recently on the ferry. I wanted to go up and hug him. *(The Businessman, M46)*

It would seem from this account of a reformed bully, that sometimes the teacher who can connect on a personal basis with the bully is more likely to change the negative behaviour than the teacher who expends much effort in administering punishments and consequences. Perhaps the fact that these two adults stood up for him made him see himself as possibly being a worthwhile person. Again, mutual respect seemed more effective in reducing bullying behaviours than the exertion of power and authority.

6. Outcomes – Less Successful Interventions

As reported previously in this study, many respondents expressed their frustration that in their experience the teachers in school seemed both to misunderstand the processes of bullying, and to be unable to take effective action against it. Some respondents attributed the teachers’ ineffectiveness to their preoccupation with behaviour, without understanding its source. The
policy of “Zero Tolerance” exemplified this preoccupation. Parents getting involved in a bullying incident did not seem to help either, and merely served to perpetuate the retaliatory nature of bullying. Bystander participation is the currently-favoured anti-bullying strategy, where good students are coached to stand up and intervene when they hear or see bullying. But the respondents in this study are doubtful that bystanders can stop the bullying. Respondents felt that the power of authority often inadvertently supports the bullying cycle. They would suggest that the greatest potential for eliminating bullying involves changing the manner in which teachers use their power and influence in the classroom. Unsuccessful interventions are organized into five categories: (a) “zero tolerance”, (b) parental assistance, (c) bystander participation, (d) teacher use of authority, and (e) teacher complicity.

(a) “Zero tolerance” policies

A policy of “zero tolerance” for bullying seems on the surface to be a laudable one. However, the respondents in this study felt that the policy is unevenly applied, and that they often ended up being unfairly blamed for angry outbursts because the teacher was unaware of the social realities of the classroom, and oblivious to the context of previous events leading up to their reaction. Such a situation left students in an emotional state of insecurity, with no confidence that they would be treated fairly by the school authorities. (The following quoted comments refer to common Consequences (suspensions) of bullying imposed by school authorities, and have already been quoted as such in a previous section. However, suspensions are often considered by the school to be Interventions. These examples show respondents’ opinions about suspensions:

Examples:

6a-1. Nobody asked me where the behaviour was coming from. They just kicked me out...They suspended me so many times I finally just dropped out. (The Strong Woman, F36)
6a-2. (The school) didn’t do anything. They just sent me to another school. First and foremost (they should) try to find out why. *The Businessman, M46*

*Researcher’s Comments.* As noted previously, the school’s preoccupation with behaviour, rather than searching for causes and contexts of behaviour, was a constant theme in these interviews. Respondents felt that the punishments administered by the school are ineffective in intervening in the bully cycle of retaliation, because they neglect to address the feelings and reasons behind a student’s anger and frustration, and focus solely on the behaviour. The punishment was then not taken to heart, as it appeared to the student to be arbitrary, and not a rational consequence of their behaviour. “Zero Tolerance” policies in the case of several respondents in this study, resulted in less respect for the school, not the intended change in behaviour. It is a risk well documented in psychological literature that punishment is in most cases less effective than rewards in changing behaviour (Mayer, 1987), and may result in a deterioration of the relationship with the authority administering punishment. As one respondent expressed it:

6a-3 Giving a consequence is a good idea, but in the long shot it is just going to make them more angry. Somebody does something. You give them [a consequence]. They don’t like the consequence. They’re just going to be [angry]....Suzie’s Mom or the principal calls, and that little boy has now just lost telephone privilege and TV privilege and he is grounded for a week at home. Do you think he’s going to do it again? I think he’s going to be really angry at his parents. *The Blind Girl, F14*

It is instructive to attempt to assess where such universally applied consequences as “Zero Tolerance to violence” fit into Kohlberg’s theory of stages of moral development. Does it fit into the first stage of the social correlate, with the inability of the teacher to distinguish between the
other (the student) and the teacher's perception of him/her. Is there a difference in moral development between the child who sees her parents as "mean" whenever their behaviours deprive her, whether or not the parents intend to be depriving; and the teacher who sees her student as bullying without assessing the student's intentions? Has the teacher and/or the school failed to negotiate moral development to the extent of simple reciprocity – the ability to take the role of another person to see that their behaviours are the consequence of something which generates their behaviours? A policy like "zero tolerance" seems to forbid such discretionary considerations as the motives or antecedents of violent behaviours. The respondents in this study are declaring such standard punishments as unfair and ineffective. (Fortunately, many school districts are eliminating "zero tolerance" policies. The respondents in this study would welcome such a policy if it signals a more discretionary approach that involves listening to the bully and victim before administering consequences.)

(b) Parental assistance

Parental intervention seemed to be not effective. Two of the school-aged respondents had parents who got involved in advocating for them. In each case, they were unsatisfied with the response of both teacher and administration. Examples:

6b-1. I think the people [adults in the school] tried to protect themselves....I see a lot of problems in the whole education system...all the people, including the staff members and the people in charge should take some workshop to learn how to handle situations like that....I am really disappointed in how the principal and the school counselor responded....I lost respect. (The Chinese Mother, F36)

6b-2 I don't usually wear a skirt. I think it was the first time I wore a skirt. These three guys cornered me and pulled my skirt up and tried to touch me, you know. So I went down to
the office and told them what happened...I went to the office and they asked, ‘Who was it?’

.... I came home and told my parents, and they were just as mad too, but you couldn’t do
anything about it.....My Dad was going to go to the guy’s house, but he cooled down and
called the principal and consulted him about it. There was a letter of apology, but it didn’t
really do it for me.” (The Blind Girl, F14)

Researcher’s Comments. It is probably fair to assume that loving and responsible parents
instinctively act in defense of their children. But several problems arose for these respondents
when parents attempted to intervene with their child’s problems with victimization. First of all, it
may be embarrassing and even demeaning for a student to have parents defend them in their own
school territory – for such a child there is an implication of ineptitude in managing his own
problem. Secondly, as parents were typically angry at the school, in defending their child they
put themselves in conflict with the school authorities, who in turn defended themselves rather
than truly investigating the bully/victim complaints. The third problem is well illustrated by the
mother, a teacher herself, who was very disappointed to see how the school administration
appeared to deny the problem, and blame her victimized son. It seemed to these parents that
rather than deal with complaints, the school tried to deny that there was a bullying problem and to
defend their own way of managing it, or denying it. Note that the attention of all parties tended
to remain on the outward behaviour of individuals, with internal feelings and rationalizations of
the bully rarely gaining entry into the resolution process.

(c) Bystander Participation

There is a proposed intervention for resolving bullying currently popular in educational
circles that emphasizes the role of the ‘bystander’, and the importance of such an observer taking
an active role in curbing bullying by telling the teacher. According to these respondents, such a solution is not likely to help.

*Examples:*

6c-1. Nobody’s going to tell the teacher. They’re all too scared. If one person tells, then you’re the enemy. (*The Boy With a Stutter, M 11*)

6c-2. They say to tell somebody, just tell the teacher …but that doesn’t work. People don’t realize it. It doesn’t work. You turn around and get bullied. It might work outside or something, but for the whole year, it doesn’t work. (*Friend on the Edge, M12*)

6c-3 It was with one of the girls in our class….We called this guy Crazy Ed…..Anyway, he’s running this putdown after putdown after putdown, you know. He’s trying to look good in front of the rest of the guys. A couple of them are sort of on his side, you know. So they are laughing it up giggling and chuckling. I’m just sitting there listening to this ass-hole, you know, just making mincemeat of this girl. I just look at him, and I looked at him square in the eyes. And I said, ‘Why don’t you just shut up’. He says, ‘What did you say?….Outside. Outside at break time. Go outside.’ (*The Salesman, M56*).

*Researcher’s Comment.* From their perspective, the power of the bullies is more formidable than the authority of the teacher, despite what the teachers may believe. Moreover, telling the teacher is a primitive, power-based sort of moral development compared to the relationship-based moral development based on self-awareness and personal decision-making. In the last example, the participant’s successful attempt to stand up for himself was stimulated by his outrage when he heard the abuse directed toward another person. However, he saw his action as defending himself, and stopping the bullying toward himself, not in stopping the bully or protecting the girl.
(d) Teacher use of authority

The role of authority in the bullying cycle was discussed by several respondents. They felt that teachers need to deal fairly and openly with conflict in classrooms, to teach communication strategies that enable students to better deal with conflict between students, and to pay more attention to affective issues in the classroom. Limiting interventions to behavioural consequences was not seen as an effective way to manage the bullying.

Examples:

6d-1. Authority would be fine if you take time to explain it to the child. If you say, ‘Because I said so’, you are bordering on bullying. *(The Welder, M42)*

This respondent is suggesting that an increase in dialogue and discussion regarding negative peer interaction would be more appropriate than punishment. One respondent suggested that authority in school needs to be balanced.

6d-2. Everywhere I’ve been, this is what I’ve seen. I’ve taught recruit courses. And where there’s not a strong grip – now I don’t mean a dictatorship – a strong grip – then (bullying) flourishes. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

Researcher’s Comment. Often justice and moral behaviour is defined in the limited sense of conforming to authority. But if the authority does not deeply understand the situation, they may not be effective in generating changes in behaviour. In general, respondents felt that teachers needed to expand their focus on behaviour, and pay more attention to the social and emotional needs of individual students and the influence of group dynamics. Most felt that authority is unfairly applied, and that a context of mutual respect would be a more effective deterrent for bullying than is application of teacher-directed consequences. Some felt that the overuse of authority in dealing with bullies detracted from the development of independent
thinking, and ‘they don’t listen anyway’. The single mom suggests that authority should be just a “guidance tool”, and that teachers need to teach students more about respecting one another rather than just expecting obedience, that they need to focus more on modeling respect, not simply on making directed demands to follow the rules.

Respondents felt that teachers need to explore strategies that de-emphasize competition, hierarchy and status, and enhance a respectful context in the classroom. The consensus seemed to be that if exclusion and alienation of social outsiders continues to be tolerated in the classroom, and disputes not discussed until violence erupts, then victims and bullies will remain characteristic of the roles played by school children. Moreover, if a culture of fear and intimidation concerning outsiders is permitted to persist, if anxiety and alienation concerning newcomers is permitted to persist, then retaliation cycles of revenge will also persist, along with conflictual exchanges between in-group and out-group in a persistent culture of bullying.

Many of the respondents in this study have experienced bullying, and emerged with a broader concept of moral behaviour that includes consideration of mutual benefit and universal principles of justice and care. For these respondents, desirable behaviour is not simply obedience to authority, nor a set of precepts to follow, but an ethical orientation of care and respect for one another. The question emerges whether students can be led toward such an ethical orientation of care without having to experience the pain and inconvenience of being a victim of bullying, and whether teachers manage their personal and classroom relationships in a way that reflects a similar ethical and moral orientation.

(e) Teacher complicity

Some respondents felt that teachers were part of the bullying, and had in some way either been drawn into the social dynamics of the mainstream ‘cool’ group of social bullies, or were
afraid to oppose their social strength. They felt that teachers must have been intimidated by the 
power of the social majority, perhaps afraid of antagonizing them and finding themselves in 
opposition to the main social group of the classroom. Two young victims, a high school student, 
and an adult respondent agree:

Examples:

6e-1. ....I don’t know why, but teachers and bullies seem to have this thing. Like they always 
trust bullies. (The Girl With a Lisp, F10)

6e-2. The teacher yells at somebody, points out certain people, and then (later) they bully them. 
(The Friend on the Edge, M12)

6e-3. Even teachers are afraid of the bullies...The teachers chat it up with the jocks and the cool 
group, talking without raising their hand....Meanwhile behind the scenes they are harassing 
people, blaming them, getting them in trouble. The teachers don’t seem to figure it out. 
(The College Student, F20)

The college student had a theory that teachers who don’t know the students very well on a 
personal basis are likely to get conned by the socially attuned bullies in the in-group. One 
respondent wished for more wisdom from teachers. Perhaps she is describing here some of the 
negative repercussions of being the teacher’s pet (“I was the cat’s meow”). Perhaps the social 
damage had occurred earlier, and the teacher had no idea of what was happening socially in his 
classroom, or what to do about it. Anyway, at this time, in grade 6, she was experiencing severe 
harassment and bullying.

6e-4. I think I really could have used someone with a bit of insight. I don’t think there is any 
blame. I’m just trying to think. And in grade 6 my teacher was, he thought I was the cat’s
meow. I think he didn’t know what was going on, but I knew he liked me...it helped me get through the year. *(The Tomboy, F42)*

This respondent may be referring to part of the dynamics of being the teacher’s pet – it feels helpful, but may have negative consequences from peers. Other respondents thought that being a teacher’s pet made them more at risk for being targeted.

6e-5. Being called the teacher’s pet is not a lovely thing for a kid, you know. *(The Refined Boy, M52)*

6e-6. We don’t want to be teacher’s pet. Like people who kind of like always follow the teacher, always ask the teachers to do things. They’re kind of like a suck up. They get teased a lot. My friend, she’s kind of like a suck up and she gets teased a lot. And we get teased if we hang out with her. *(Girl with a Lisp, F10)*

Some respondents wondered if the bullies are socially astute enough to ingratiate themselves with the teacher, sometimes acting as ‘enforcer’ for the teacher. However, being disliked or publicly criticized by the teacher was not helpful either. One adult respondent recalled clearly, like a nightmare that has never faded, his teacher publicly humiliating him:

6e-7. My penmanship was bad. I remember him coming up and saying ‘This is not acceptable’ and ripping up my paper right in front of the whole class...saying, ‘ppoor, very ppoor’.

*(The Martial Arts Instructor, M40)*

He felt that the teacher was in effect modeling bullying – public embarrassment and shunning. It is disappointing and disheartening for students to see teachers behave this way, knowing that the students would soon follow suit. They yearned for more public respect from the teacher. Other respondents suggested that marks should not be announced publicly, that their privacy needed to be respected.
One respondent complained she was given a detention unfairly for speaking out.

6e-8. I said “Stop” loudly to someone who was pestering me. The teacher would not listen to me, saying I was “making excuses”. “Where was she when the boys were bothering me?” She complains. *(The Girl With a Lisp, F10)*

Another respondent declared,

6e-9. A criminal (or a bully) is someone who is a victim looking for revenge, in my opinion. *(The Martial Arts Instructor, M 40)*

*Researcher’s Comment.* Respondents in this study would like to see teachers listen more carefully to determine the source of outbursts of anger before applying behavioural consequences, in an effort to induce a context of confidence that matters of fair treatment will be managed competently. Perhaps the school does not know how to manage the bullying problem.

Generally we consider primary teachers as being quite successful in making the classroom a socially safe place, and socializing students into the expectations of the classroom. However, several respondents experienced alienation and bullying from the first day of Grade one. One girl did not attend kindergarten, and found herself on the first day of school in Grade one not knowing what was expected. The kids laughed at her awkwardness that first day, and continued to exclude her throughout elementary school. Another girl, large for her age, attended the first day in an inner city school dressed in fancy clothes. Two new immigrants to Canada came to high school the first day dressed in a suit and high heels, not knowing that most girls wore jeans and T-shirts. They were both scorned and teased from that first day, and mercilessly harassed on a long-term basis. Likewise, the tomboy found she did not fit in with the girls from the very first day of Grade One. In each case the respondent felt that the teacher seemed to either not notice their social distress, or neglected to address it. So it appears that even primary teachers, who
generally place the matter of social-emotional environment higher in priority than other teachers, are not necessarily successful in making school a socially and emotionally safe place.

Besides demonstrating more respect to students, these respondents felt that one of the best strategies the teacher could use to prevent bullying is to maintain structure and order in the classroom. *The College Student, (F20)* recalled that the most painful times were when the class was unstructured, as when the teacher simply instructed everyone to “get into groups.” She knew she would not be included in any group without the teacher’s intervention, and worried that wandering students might make negative remarks and sabotage her work. *The Martial Arts Instructor*, who now works for the military has a theory that probably corresponds to the attitude of many teachers:

6e-10. There has to be an authority figure. You need structure. [Otherwise] it’s a free zone open house for pecking order stuff. I don’t expect [teachers] to come in there goose stepping or anything….You don’t want it goose stepping, too structured, but not too loose either.

(*The Martial Arts Instructor, M40*)

*Researcher’s Comments.* The respondents in this study would not oppose the idea that authority is important, but they emphasized the greater importance of the teacher having a relationship with students, listening more, engaging in more dialogue, and limiting their reliance on punishment and consequences for maintaining order. The results of this study present an alternative view of the dynamics of school bullying. The accepted version of bullying assumes that bullying primarily involves an aggressive perpetrator abusing an innocent, less powerful victim. The picture of bullying that emerges from these interviews is more complex, frequently involving relationships between individuals and group dynamics. As one participant expressed it:
6e-11. It’s not an easy thing. I don’t know what the answers are. I just know that there’s some level of having children understand the fundamental human similarities – real basic stuff – and still respect differences. *(The Tomboy, F42)*

**Validity and Credibility of Data**

Several teacher colleagues and participants were asked to give their response to the findings of this research. In addition, three participants gave their verbal responses. All agreed with the findings of the study.

*Support from Respondents and Colleagues*

One respondent who read the abbreviated version of the results of this study embraced with enthusiasm the findings that teachers are a powerful influence upon the social realities of the classroom. His recommendation, aside from having teachers treating students with more respect, was that teachers should be more in charge, a stronger authority in control of the classroom to prevent continuing student harassment. On the other hand, a young teacher who read the results of this study reflected that his teaching style had gradually drifted toward being more authoritarian, perhaps bordering on being emotionally abusive at times. After reading the results of the study, he was determined to be more respectful toward students and more democratic, and more aware that they are whole people with lives outside the classroom, not just students obliged to obey him at all times. He considered that he would be contributing to a healthier social environment in his classroom if he were more flexible and tolerant of individual needs.

In discussing the results of this study with friends and colleagues, two additional stories came to the researcher’s attention. In the first instance, a retired church minister reminisced about his experiences as a new immigrant to Canada and being teased and taunted in school. But he also recalled a student in his grade four or five class who had academic problems, and who suffered the disrespect of his teacher. As a result, the whole class, including himself, engaged in
teasing and taunting this unfortunate student, calling him names and chasing him around at recess. In the second instance, a drama teacher described how in his grade four class there had been a boy who was at least a foot taller than all the others. The boys as a group poked, shoved and harassed this student whenever they got an opportunity. The boy at first reported this abuse to the teacher, who was incredulous, and assumed this large boy was the real bully. When the group of boys understood that the teacher would not intervene, they proceeded to harass this student even more, until he became a “whimpering wimp.” Both these men are now ethical and kind-hearted adults, and remember these stories where they participated in bullying with recurring feelings of shame and regret. The drama teacher commented that he wishes many times that he could go back even now to find this person and apologize for treating him so badly.

These two stories represent an addendum to this study. It appears that acting as a bully within a group that is engaged in bullying and harassment has long-lasting emotional implications, even as being the victim does. The two men who told these stories are now in their sixties, and still feel regret. If teachers were able to better manage the group dynamics of bullying, many students would benefit – the few who were victimized, as well as the many who became entangled in the behaviours of bullying.

Another teacher colleague who read the results of this study told a personal story of her own frustration with her social relationships with colleagues within her department. She felt belittled and disrespected, perhaps because of her youth, inexperience or gender. She was disillusioned because she was being given little choice in her work assignments, and was being given less desirable classes to teach. The hierarchical nature of her department made her feel as if she had no status, as if she was being ignored and treated like an outsider. In departmental meetings, she tended to sit quietly and offer little in dialogue, because she felt her ideas would
not be respected anyway. She received what she perceived as unwarranted and unhelpful
criticism from her colleagues about the way she managed her class and organized her material.
She then went into her teaching classroom with little enthusiasm, demanding compliance, and
with little patience for students with special needs. In effect, she was mirroring to her students
the lack of respect she felt in her department.

One might say she was the victim of social bullying — and her experience of socially
abusive teacher inter-relationships is probably not uncommon. Perhaps if her students are
treating each other the way she is being treated by her colleagues, they are simply duplicating the
hierarchical (and abusive) nature of the school culture. So the power of group dynamics and
issues of social hierarchy may lie beyond the classroom. Psychologically normal students can
perhaps be induced and seduced into participating in undesirable power coercion because this is
the hidden structure of the school as an institution.

Another young teacher who read the results of this study expressed his personal conflict.
He is uncomfortable with his authoritarian tendencies, and he knows some alternatives to
authoritarian teaching with no respect for individual differences, yet he seems to feel somewhat
pressured by his peers and by his superiors to maintain the authoritarian stance characteristic of
his school. This young teacher in regretting his past authoritarian tendencies illustrates his
insight into the implications of his authoritarian behaviour. As a result, he has gained some
motivation and courage to implement changes. He sees that although most teachers maintain the
authoritarian model, some teachers manage a better balance. He remembers some of his own
uncomfortable experiences in school. Somehow, through our discussion he gains a clearer sense
of his own identity, a renewed commitment to his desires for excellence, and a strengthened
confidence that he can make a difference in his own classroom. The results of this study seemed to resonate with his own experience.

Some Parallels with Workplace Bullying

Not surprisingly, workplace bullying bears some similarities to the problem of school bullying (Liefooghe & Davey, 2000). Professor K. Westhues from the University of Waterloo, Ontario, has published articles and constructed a website describing a phenomenon he calls mobbing. He compares workplace mobbing to the dynamics of bullying, where a group takes on the personae of the collective and harasses an individual for the purpose of robbing him of dignity and self-respect. The message to the victim is that everyone is against them. Professor Westhues describes stages in a hypothesized process of mobbing or group bullying. It starts with ostracizing the target victim, moves toward petty harassment that makes the victim’s life difficult, and inevitably results in a critical incident that triggers formal sanctions from those in authority. After hearings, appeals, and mediation, the victimized individual usually is eliminated – “the target quits, retires, is fired, goes on disability, dies of stress-induced illness, or commits suicide” (/www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~kwesthue).

Prof. Westhues attributes these behaviours to individuals expressing primordial aspects of human nature that instinctively strive for hierarchy and status. However, he also implies that the leadership in the workplace strongly influences workplace social relationships and may practice complicity in incidents of mobbing. Recognizing that there is no quick fix, he makes several suggestions for preventing workplace mobbing. For workers, he recommends education involving the development of self-knowledge, independent critical reflection, and an understanding of the complexity of judgments about right and wrong. He also recommends organizational procedures for eliminating mobbing, such as spreading the power around,
minimizing adversarial competitive procedures, discouraging a culture of complaints, and providing opportunities for dialogue. Professor Westhues’ explanation for “mobbing” seems to parallel the characteristics of bullying, and therefore would seem to support, the findings of this study regarding the dynamics of school bullying.

A Cautionary Statement

Because the data for this study was derived from participants’ subjective accounts of their bullying experiences, it is not possible to predict how much their subjective interpretation would correspond to that of other individual students, even given the same time and the same situation. But whether the specific events are recalled accurately or not, the story of the dynamics of bullying, and the meaning of bullying from the point of view of participants, appears to be similar across varying situations and over a time span of several decades. In addition, a range of current new and experienced, elementary and secondary teachers, agree with the basic finding that bullying is as much about group dynamics as it is about individuals. These similarities suggest that the conclusions drawn from these interviews may have some validity.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a brief outline of some definitions of bullying derived from the interviews. Then some theories presumed to relate to bullying are discussed in terms of their concordance with comments made by the participants in this study. In general, the participants in this study emphasized factors that tend to support the relevance of bullying behaviours to learning theory, attachment theory, group dynamics, and systemic features of the social-environment. Throughout the discussion, the findings of this study will be situated in a socio-cultural dimension of bullying and the findings related to the context of teaching practices and the pedagogy of education. Finally, this chapter discusses the implications of this study for teaching practices, educational pedagogy and directions for further research are outlined.

Definitions Derived from Research Participants

In the process of conducting these interviews, participants were not given a definition for what qualifies as bullying, but were left to respond to the word and the concept of bullying as they personally interpreted it. Their conceptualization of what constitutes bullying and of what constitutes a bully or a victim questions the foundations of the standard definitions of teachers and educators.

Bullying - a Range of Behaviours

The definitions of bullying embraced a range of behaviours including physical bullying; active and passive social bullying, relational aggression, and bullying emerging from systemic group dynamics. Respondents described a range of negative feelings, as a consequence of being bullied, especially when they felt the teacher was aligned with the bullies. In situations where the majority of the classroom participated in dynamic systemic bullying, often over a period of many years, the victimized individuals felt not only physically threatened, but psychologically devastated. (See Table 5: A Combined Summary of Participants' Descriptions of Bullying.)
## Table 5.

*A Combined Summary of Participants' Descriptions of Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Bullying</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Feeling/Reaction</th>
</tr>
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| 1. Physical Dimension | a) Pushing and shoving  
b) Calling names  
c) Sexually touching  
d) Chasing | a) Surprised  
b) Angry  
c) Threatened  
d) Powerless |
| 2. Social Dimension (Active) | a) Called names  
b) Possessions stolen | a) Insulted  
b) Helpless |
| 3. Social Dimension (Passive) | a) Ignoring **  
b) Excluding *** | a) Invisible  
b) Abandoned  
c) Depressed |
| 4. Interpersonal Relational | a) Bullied and unable to solicit assistance  
b) Falsely blamed, | a) Reactive  
(angry)  
b) Hopeless  
c) Helpless  
d) Abandoned  
e) Unfairly treated |
| 5. Systemic Group Dynamics | a) Perpetrator not an identifiable individual  
b) Leadership changes, behaviour(of group) continues  
c) Peer pressure seduces majority to participate  
d) Teacher joins with the “cool” group  
e) Socially risky to tell the teacher  
f) Victim low status, perpetrator(s) high status  
g) Socially risky to stand up against the group | a) Confused  
b) Helpless  
c) Angry  
d) Alienated  
e) Misunderstood  
f) Powerless |

* These categories and definitions were derived from the interviews of respondents in this study.
** Socially aggressive behaviours directed toward individuals
*** Behaviours of omission, directed away from individuals
A definition of bullying according to these participants included not simply concrete aggressive behaviours, but a range of troubling relationships differentiated by power, and the interactions of socio-cultural groups. This dynamic description of bullying is more inclusive than previous definitions such as that given by Tice, (1994) that limits bullying to “physical or psychological abuse [from anti-social bullies] directed toward individuals who are typically not able to defend themselves [victims]” (p. 39). The respondents in this present study produced a larger version of bullying beyond the actions of individuals, a version of bullying that includes the social context in which acts of physical and social bullying unfold.

*Individual Intention as an Inadequate Explanation for Bullying*

The school’s interpretation of bullying often assumes that perpetrators are individuals with an intentional agenda to abuse power in some way (Tice, 1994). Thus, the school’s suspension of students in accordance with policies of zero tolerance assumes bullying is an individual’s intentional choice and that the application of punishment and consequences is expected to encourage the individual to make a different choice (Casella, 2001). This policy was not highly respected by the respondents in this study, who reported that identified bullies were often the original victims who had reached a point of frustration before beginning retaliatory actions. The agitated victim was then likely to be reprimanded, punished and suspended, while the original perpetrator stepped back innocently into the group. The aggression of such “bully-victims” was described by participants as spontaneous defense where there was no hope of assistance from teachers or peers, with only the intensity of their angry retaliation implicating them as guilty of bullying. According to these respondents, the school tended to maintain the
point of view that bullying was always intentional, and that typically, the perceived need for personal defensiveness was not distinguished from intentional aggression.

This study seemed to indicate that it is fallacious to assume that individuals have identities as either bullies or victims, and that it may be more accurate to consider these labels as describing situational roles that individuals may assume from time to time according to the contextual requirements for maintaining self and status. For the participants interviewed in this study, the identity of the bully was not a salient concern. When asked who the bully was, most participants did not have a ready answer: Although a few could name a specific bully perpetrator most could not. Rather, the complaints were directed toward the group that harassed them, with the leadership of the group not necessarily clear. Other participants described a constant shift in the leader of the bullying. Furthermore, the victims who later became bullies described the motivation of their aggressive behaviours, de-pathologizing their bullying behaviours by pointing to situational and cultural circumstances that urged them to resort to bullying in order to defend themselves. To these participants, from the point of view of the victim, the particular circumstances from which the aggressive behaviour emerged appeared to represent a more important a factor in a bullying incident than did the specific identity of the bully.

It is worth noting that other research supports this controversial finding of the difficulty locating the source of bullying in an individual. Recent research in Europe (Caprara & Zimbardo, 1996) has shown how school children can develop maladjusted, aggressive behaviour patterns based on initially marginal deviations from other children that get amplified in classroom interactions and group dynamics, and may become exaggerated over time until the children involved become manifested as “problem children”, whether bullies or victims. These researchers found that a child originally no more aggressive or abusive than any other child, can
become enmeshed in a social dynamic that seems to require defensive actions of increasing violence. Other research in social psychology, focusing on prisons, an institution perhaps with some applicability to the school situation, has demonstrated how the power dynamics of social situations can overwhelm normal, psychologically healthy people and elicit from them unexpectedly cruel behaviour (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996).

Bully and Victim Seen as Roles Within a Social Hierarchy

The observation made from these interviews that bullies and victims tend to be different in some way from their average peers has been noted previously in the bullying literature, and an individual’s inability to fit in is often cited by teachers as the source of the individual’s conflicts with others. Data from these interviews, however, suggest that the problem may be more associated with social situational factors such as attitudes toward differences, and expectations of conformity to an established group, than with any individual’s presumed genetic, physical or social deficits such as the commonly acknowledged risks of being unusually large or small, rich or poor, or experiencing early or late puberty relative to peers.

In these interviews, respondents gave little support for individual intentional factors in the etiology of aggression as conceived in social-interactionist theories of bullying (Harrison, 1995). The bullying in the case of all these respondents seemed to be more a part of efforts to belong in the group, especially an effort to gain social status, or to maintain the group status quo by condoning the exclusion of outsiders. Stories told by respondents in this study represent examples of situations where the social context and group dynamics can invite victimized individuals into bullying scenarios and overwhelm them into behaviours that they did not necessarily intend. Many respondents blamed the group and the teacher’s management rather than placing the blame on the individual who bullied them. It may be that individual differences
complicate attempts to belong, but it seemed from these interviews that it was the dynamics of the group that represented the central problem.

Studies in social psychology have concluded that in a social context, each individual is engaged in a constantly evolving reciprocal process of interpreting the surroundings (Caprara & Zimbardo, 1996; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Thus, although aggressive bullying behaviours are not to be encouraged or tolerated, for participants in this study, at times they could be understood as normal reactions to stress, examples of the “fight or flight” adrenaline response, defensive reactions to the perceived aggression of others, or emotional responses symptomatic of a social context deemed unfair. Western culture is characterized by its individualism, and a systemic viewpoint that shifts responsibility for an incident from the individual toward a social context may be philosophically unpalatable. But if bullying is to be eliminated from the social contexts in which individuals live, perhaps schools (and other social institutions) need to reconsider their primary focus upon individuals, and consider their responsibility for making the social context a healthy one.

Theories Illuminating an Understanding of Bullying

Research on the development and prevention of violent behaviour has been described as “a booming industry” with explanations for aggressive behaviour being part of most theories of human behaviour (Tremblay, 2000, p. 129). Yet we still seem to be far from definitively understanding the function of aggression and violence. Before discussing some of these new possibilities in understanding the meaning of bullying, the dynamic definition of bullying described above will be interpreted in terms of possible theories of aggression, including learning theory, theories of moral development, and attachment theory – theories previously discussed in chapter two as possible partial explanations for aggression and bullying.
Learning Theories and Predispositions for Aggressive Behaviours

Learning theories propose that behaviour evolves from experiences of interaction with the social environment. School, however, seem to administer consequences following the truism that aggressive behaviours are the result of an aggressive person who is inherently, perhaps genetically, predisposed to being aggressive. Recent studies in neurobiology have provided a physiological explanation for learning, finding that neural pathways corresponding to behaviour are destined to be re-used as a result of prior learning experiences and behaviours through processes of brain physiology and chemistry (Hobson & Leonard, 2002). By suggesting that neural pathways that have been used as biochemical routes of communication in the past are easier for the brain to access in repeated experience, neurobiology is explaining how an individual's degree of reactivity may be co-determined by genetic predisposition (biological sensitivity) and learning (social experience). Neurobiology, then, whether genetically or experientially based, (nature or nurture), can partly explain the vulnerability and reactivity of participants who have already experienced stress at home, and would partly explain how vulnerable individuals may be more likely to interpret a mildly stressful school situation as threatening, and therefore may be more likely to react aggressively. Several participants in this study suggested that their reactivity to peer insults was rooted in home experiences, and that their sensitivity may have provoked further aggression against them in a cycle of retaliation.

Stress and Aggressive Behaviour

The results of this study generally supported the findings of the Metropolitan Area Child Study which showed children's aggressive behaviour correlates positively with aggressive environments (Bjorkquist, 1997). All aggressive respondents in this study had experienced previous stressful social events in their home life. It has often been observed that stressful histories seem to be characteristic of individuals who exhibit aggressive, bullying behaviours, but
it was informative to hear some participants in this study give an inside explanation of this observed connection as they explained how and why they resorted to violent and retaliatory behaviours. They described themselves as having already experienced their social boundaries being violated at home, and admitted being perhaps hyper-sensitive about not having them violated again at school. (For example; the respondent who had abusive uncles at home, the one who felt nobody in his family cared for him and so did not care about anyone, and the one whose mother was “constantly” verbally and physically abusive, so at school the day came when he could no longer bear hearing insults directed at a classmate.) Each of these individuals responded aggressively and was subsequently suspended from school as an abusive bully. Each felt they were really victims, misunderstood and re-victimized by the school. With the respondents in this study, pre-school and early school experiences of poverty, rejection, or neglect or abuse from their families did seem to be associated with reactivity, low attachment at school, low empathy, and learning anomalies (difficulties or high intelligence). These observations support the idea that an individual with a high number of social stresses may be expected to demonstrate a higher level of aggressive behaviour. Aggression, from the point of view of these respondents, can be seen as a biological response to feeling overwhelmed and powerless.

*Bullying Relationships and Theories of Moral Development*

Bullying is inherently a relationship issue, requiring at least two individuals, and therefore necessarily includes issues of personal relationship and moral behaviour. However, the word “moral” evokes a myriad of connotations and preconceptions, both intellectual and emotional, and not everyone defines the moral domain in the same way (Thomas, 1997). Therefore, for purposes of this discussion what exactly is meant by “moral” will be carefully explicated. Bullying may at first seem to be primarily about right and wrong behaviours. Indeed, schools
inferentially make such dualistic moral value judgments in labelling the bully as mean and bad, the victim as meek and innocent. Such dualism reflects Kohlberg's idea of the conventional stage of moral development where obedience is required both to the established rules and to the authority in a position to enforce those rules (Kohlberg, 1985). However, the respondents in this study have unanimously reported that from their perspective the practices of teachers in authority combined with the administration of typical school rules have generally proven inadequate in maintaining a fair and just school environment reflecting moral standards of right and wrong. Rather, the social reality of bullying as described by the respondents in this study seemed to be a complex interpersonal interaction embedded in a context of perceived unfairness.

According to Kohlberg's moral developmental theory and Kegan's general developmental theory (Kegan, 1982), when the conventional authority-based morality is experienced as inadequate, individuals are likely to move into a transitional stage in search of more universal moral rules. The result of this perceived inadequacy is often the development of an internal locus of control for making decisions concerning what behaviour is moral, fair or just in a given situation (Kegan, 1982). Thus, perceived injustice at school may promote retaliatory aggression, or, ironically, it may promote moral development and a transition to something similar to Kohlberg's post-conventional stage. Such a moral stance has been characterized as mutual respect in an environment of justice and caring (Gilligan, 1988; Noddings, 1992). The respondents in this study are suggesting that morality and justice in the classroom needs to advance beyond rule-following of conventional good behaviour, and move toward Kohlberg's idea of the post-conventional stage of morality where mutuality is the measure of what is fair and just, reflecting Gilligan's concept of justice and caring.
Recent thought in socio-cultural theory generally proposes that an individual’s social and moral development emerges from experiences of belonging, attachment, and shared social and cultural activities and practices (Rogoff, 2002). Thus, a school administrative culture that stands upon principles of rewards and punishment may in some respects be modeling principles of retaliation and bullying. If the school culture were to model principles of justice and caring, and advocate alternatives to punishment that support belonging, attachment and mutual respect, these values might be more likely to be reflected in the behaviours of students. This broader idea of morality as mutual respect is applicable to the social behaviours of individuals, of relationships between individuals, and of relationships between individuals and groups within a social context – group dynamics within the classroom. Respondents in this study who temporarily became involved in bullying behaviours, retreated and regretted their behaviour when they suddenly realized the impact on the other party – they shifted from a need to retaliate to an empathic understanding of the other, and a need for mutual respect.

*Self-Acceptance and the Social Interpretation of a Context*

A third prerequisite for post-conventional moral development, besides cognitive dissonance with established rules and expectations, and a context of justice and caring toward others, is an internally acceptable level of self-respect and self-acceptance (Kegan, 1982). Several respondents, believed that it was the development of their personal sense of identity that enabled them to overcome the bullies’ attempts to victimize them. However, they seemed to feel that their success in gaining such self-acceptance and identity was not encouraged by the school. One respondent who has struggled her whole life over gender issues of being a slightly mannish looking, athletic woman explains:
I think, had my, you know, uniqueness been just, you know. Yeah. Just watched. It’s a delicate thing. You want people to develop. And they are going to gravitate to similarities, like you know; females and males. And they are going to do these things, but there is also a great deal of diversity and that just is. Some people will always be socially awkward, even little kids. You see them, they are just very different. They are just not quite, you know. How is it that you give a person a sense of absolute OK-ness what is right and what is wrong? You know what I mean. It’s that kind of thing that sense of uniqueness, but acceptance. It’s a real fine line. (The Tomboy F45)

This respondent has suggested that one way for the school to encourage a sense of self in students might be to reduce stereotypical expectations of an individual’s appearance and behaviours, and to actively promote the development of unique self-identities, self-acceptance, and acceptance of others who are different. Ironically, such self-respect seems to promote respect for others. This description sounds like the essence of post-conventional moral behaviour, or an idea of morality that includes the idea of caring for self and others (Gilligan, 1988). Other respondents as discussed previously noted a similar process of self-knowledge, self-confidence, internal locus of control, and disengagement from what others say and think of them that enabled them to ignore their tormentors and behave in a socially responsible manner toward others who were being targeted.

Self-acceptance is seen by developmental psychologists as a function of maturity, and realistically, only a long-term goal for children and adolescents (Kegan, 1982). Yet, those participants in this study who escaped the bullying dynamics reported that their personal growth in self-acceptance and their ability not to care so much about the opinions of others (inner locus of control) represented the significant changes that made the bullying stop. Many respondents
found that when they were able to establish a healthy degree of self-acceptance, they were subsequently able to find internal resources for attributing to themselves a more honourable status, and subsequently their developmental requirements for approval and inclusion from the group, and their sensitivity to criticism diminished. Several participants reported that when they began to interpret their peers’ behaviour differently, they felt less vulnerable, less threatened, and less bullied. Several respondents gave personal examples where the bullying stopped when they began to value themselves and to discount their peers’ opinions – when they developed an internal locus of control. Thus these participants found that self-acceptance and an internal locus of control permitted a constructed interpretation of events that was less emotionally tainted by group-generated stereotypes or threats, and may in turn have influenced their interpretation of present events as less threatening. For many, self-acceptance seemed to defeat bullying.

*Internal versus External Controls and Moral Development*

Respondents in this study acknowledged the good intentions of schools and teachers who want to stop the bullying, but they were disappointed with the poor results of these efforts. The persistent and sustained effort that has been put forth by educators in an effort to solve the bullying problem may be at least partly misdirected because it is over-reliant on external controls. Social responsibility implies internal controls, whereas punishment and exclusion are external controls, so that the internal processes implied in social responsibility reflect cognitive and moral development beyond obedience and conformity to authority. It may be appropriate for schools to reconsider their emphasis on control and management and to refocus their energies upon practicing an educational ethic of internal controls, of social responsibility, caring and respect for self and others (Shariff, 2002; Steffenhagen, 2002).
There are examples of anti-bullying programs where principles for managing a non-violent school culture begin with a commitment to nonviolence through social responsibility and an effort to infuse principles of peace into all aspects of the educational curriculum, including the principal’s leadership, and with such values as cooperation, communication, tolerance and appropriate emotional expression being explicitly encouraged in the classroom (Bey & Turner, 1996). But these socially responsible schools and classrooms stand in contrast to the many schools characterized by competitiveness, intolerance, inappropriate expression of emotion, and misuse of power by the teacher (Bey & Turner, 1996). The social curriculum in many schools includes excellent information for students to learn, understand and follow in a quest for social responsibility, but methods of instruction for such a curriculum are often focused upon cognitive content, and fail to emphasize the processes of social responsibility and moral development.

The application of rigid policies and rules in response to a behaviour, whether academic or social, without consideration of the context of that behaviour can represent an example of moral disengagement, and disrespect for individual differences. Several participants in this study felt that their school as an institution did not value them and their identity, and their student peers mirrored this disrespect. As one respondent put it, “I just looked at the teacher and thought, “You’re part of this too.” School administrative practices that are perceived as unfair can make individuals feel justified in treating peers unjustly, because the institutional practices have established the norm for unfair behaviours. Previous researchers have expressed reservations about current anti-bullying and violence prevention programs, maintaining that it is not at all clear that they are working (Noddings, 2002; Roberts, 2000), and suggesting that the best course of action seems to be to transform the context – the general school climate (Bey & Turner, 1996).
Despite the acknowledged desirability of programs emphasizing a context of social responsibility, the preferred anti-bullying strategies continue to be authority initiated rewards and punishments, and an orientation toward obedience and control, with the problem being primarily approached from the point-of-view of the administration taking responsibility to make the school a safe place. From the point of view of the participants in this study, the result is that bullies continue to be punished, and victims get lessons in assertiveness and how to make friends, while issues of mutual respect, internal locus of control, and group dynamics remain conspicuously absent.

*Attachment Theory and Aggression*

Attachment theory, despite its individualistic psychodynamic roots, can be considered a theory of relationships and inter-relationships (Rogers, 1991). It is based on the idea that working models of attachment categorized as secure or insecure may function as inner structures around which people organize experience and handle distress (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Secure attachment may act as protective mechanisms in encounters with danger and threat whereas insecure attachments may serve to confound social relationships and too readily induce fear and retaliation. Thus elements of attachment style can influence a propensity for aggressive or for passive reactions. The stories of the research participants in this study painted a picture of bullying that included concerns about relationships, interrelationships, and the social context in which they develop and are maintained. Therefore, a discussion of how attachment theory influences the aggressive behaviour of bullying seems relevant.

There is normally a high degree of social tension and insecurity through developmental transitional processes (Kegan, 1982), and if students have attachment anxieties, these can readily translate into angry aggression and coercive attempts to maintain the status quo in a social
situation or interaction. The addition of a newcomer may challenge an established leadership circle, causing anxiety in the attachment affiliation system, and for those who are insecurely attached, resulting in reactive, sometimes aggressive, attempts to maintain the social status quo (Rogers, 1991). Securely attached individuals “have a more positive attitude toward new situations,” “a high tolerance for unpredictability and ambiguity,” “a reluctance to endorse rigid beliefs,” and “a tendency to integrate new evidence when making social judgments” (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998, p. 161). Insecurely attached individuals, then, can be expected to exhibit the opposite behaviours – anxiety in new situations, a tendency to hold on to present beliefs, and to make social judgments based on past stressful experience rather than current new evidence. Therefore, secure attachment can be seen as an inner resource that facilitates adjustment and well-being in times of stress (Rholes, Simpson & Stevens, 1991). By way of contrast, individuals with less secure attachment experiences can be expected to experience social change as stressful, as described by several participants in this study. Thus knowledge of how to enhance secure attachments in the classroom could be a powerful tool for teachers to prevent and manage bullying behaviours resulting from social changes in the classroom.

All respondents in this study felt alienated and rejected from the main social group in their classrooms, whether as a consequence of some current alienating behaviours, whether due to already feeling anxious, unattached and alienated, or whether they were socially vulnerable due to being new or different, or simply engaged in a transition between friendships. If a transition does not develop optimally it appears that students may feel that they are losing their friends, and conflict that resembles attachment anxieties may emerge. This social dilemma is reflected by one participant’s description as follows:
Well, there was all kinds of bullying and then people started bullying me because I was kind of like hanging out with other friends instead of them every day. They got really angry at me. And they started teasing me and then it started...It's like they got angry at me because I was not only friends with them, because they wanted me to be a bully too. *(Girl with a Lisp F10)*

This student's experiences with bullying can be conceptualized as being embedded in attachment anxieties and group dynamics. Several participants explained their victimization as a result of their being new or alienated from the group. Attachment theory would explain their difficulties either as a result of their own insecure attachment histories, or a result of teacher ineptitude in fostering attachments in the classroom, or both.

*Reframing Bullying as Systems Problem*

In this study, group dynamics emerged as a primary concern. Participants described systemic dynamics, not amenable to identifying individual responsibility. From these interviews, it would seem that bullying occurs within a context that supports its occurrence in a group dynamic.

Counsellors and therapists are instructed to be aware that often, “the problem is not the problem” (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1987), and to take time to listen to all sides of an issue before coming to a conclusion lest time be wasted resolving symptoms and putting energy into solving the wrong problem. Similarly, educators are not likely to significantly reduce school bullying as long as their definition of the problem of school bullying is inaccurate. Bullying has been called a “two-sided problem” (Nansel, 2001) involving two individuals, but, as the previous discussion of learning, attachment theory and moral development indicates, it is more likely a three-dimensional one, involving a bully, a victim, engaged in a relationship, within a social context. *(See Figure 1: Individual and Group Behaviour Embedded in the Context.)* The
Figure 1:
Individual Characteristics, Group Behaviours and Social Contexts Suggested to Reduce Bullying.

Note: The dual-direction arrows indicate that the characteristics described around the perimeter of the contextual oval apply to individuals as they are embedded in a group which is embedded in the social context which in turn enfolds the group and the individuals of which it is constituted.
acknowledgement in the literature of "reactive bullies" is a crack in the accepted version of bullying, a first recognition of the circularity and complexity of the problem (Hazler, 2000). And there have been some meager attempts to understand the features of the context of bullying relationships, and the conditions under which they thrive (Casella, 2001; Dess, 2001; Orecklin & Winters, 2000). The results of this study indicate that such forays into systems thinking should be encouraged, as they may prove more effective than continued effort directed with an individualistic interpretation of the dynamics of bullying.

All participants in this study perceived themselves as in some way not conforming to group norms, and felt that difference in some way to be an embarrassment or loss of face. On the whole they believed that their differences accounted for them being unacceptable, and therefore accounted for them being bullied. In extreme cases, the failure to fit in and conform can feel to those individuals like a loss of identity (self) and if excluded from the preferred group they may seek to belong to groups perceived as lower status where they may retaliate and represent a danger to members of the dominant or powerful group in a culture (Kramer & Jost, 2002). Thus bullying behaviour that may seem random may be retaliating, angrily grieving for a lost group identity. Several participants described shifts in group membership, and lost hopes of belonging to a preferred group as elements of their bullying experiences.

In one study (Stephan & Renfro, 2002), both individual and cultural differences were identified as frequent antecedents of bullying. Cultural comments perceived as threats to individuals included loss of face or honour, undermining of self-identity or self-esteem, and embarrassment at being different. Several participants in this study incurred the wrath of the in-group when the teacher publicly acknowledged their talents, thus differentiating them from the others, or became aggressive when their peers would not include them. In the Stephan and
Renfro study (2002), strong identification within the in-group was associated with sharper
distinctions between groups and ignorance or negative contact with the out-group and with out-
group members. Several student respondents described their awareness that association with the
winning group would improve their public status, and if they could not gain entry into the in-
group experienced anger and hostility or suffered aggressive abuse by an in-group that would not
allow them entry, even with repeated attempts. In the Stephen and Renfro study, perceptions of
differences combined with peer and teacher expectations of conformity and homogeneity
increased the propensity for exclusion and bullying – conditions characteristic of many
classrooms.

In another study (Devos, Silver, Mackie, & Smith, 2002), it appeared that strong social
identity within a group can lead individuals to see themselves as interchangeable within the
homogenous group rather than as unique individuals. Individual members of the in-group who
value conformity and homogeneity, can then exclude and reject outsiders who are perceived as
not only different from themselves, but different from the group of identical individuals with
whom they identify. Individuals even tended to embrace the emotional identity of their group
and experienced emotions, feeling happy or sad, depending on the success or failure of their
group, even if they were not personally involved. This tendency to over-identify with an in-
group has been theorized to lead to uniform behaviour that can account for many contexts of
bullying, including racism, stereotyping, cliques with impermeable boundaries, and group
polarization against individuals seen as not belonging (Uzerbyt, Dumont, Gorkjn, & Wigboldus,
2002). Such a process was described by several participants in this study. The existence of such
group processes in the classroom suggests that teachers need to be more cognizant of group
cliques and their influence on the classroom social situation, and need to be prepared with specific strategies for softening the boundaries of tight cliques.

A third study (Dovido, Esses, Beach, & Gaertner, 2002) that helps explain the dynamics described by the participants in this present research, showed videotapes of an experimental out-group which was manipulated in order to observe the emotional reactions of participants. Intergroup anxiety was high when there was lack of experience with members of other groups. Communication and clarity in recognizing differences between in and out-group members reduced anxiety and hostility. Within a recognized clique, practices that intentionally encouraged recognizing one’s own failures roused empathy for outsiders. Thus an insular clique tended to be anxious about newcomers, but as individuals became familiar with the newcomers (outsiders), and aware of their own imperfections, anxiety and hostility decreased. Positive affect expressed toward individuals outside the clique reduced stereotyping and promoted individualized responses to people of the out-group (Dovido et al., 2002). Other researchers (Devos et al., 2002; Uzerbyt et al, 2002) have described other negative features of insular in-groups. In the current study, four respondents experienced varying degrees of anxiety and hostility due to being newcomers excluded from cliques in the classroom. This study suggests that anxiety, hostility and alienation resulting from group dynamics may be among the root causes of aggressive behaviour, and therefore teachers can influence anxiety and hostility in the classroom by designing and managing inter-group communications and experiences, to moderate the insularity of cliques.

*Group Dynamics and Philosophy of Teaching*

It appeared to many participants that teachers were often confounded in their search for an individual bully to blame, and the wrong individual is blamed. The perceived reluctance on the
part of educators to abandon individualistic interpretations of bullying for an understanding of its interaction/relationship aspects may at first seem puzzling, especially if we assume most teachers are well-intentioned. But a brief reflection upon educational philosophy provides a possible explanation. Liberal educational reform in recent decades has tended to organize change as logical, sequential, and cognitive progress, with the teacher regarded as the agent of change. Contemporary pedagogy and educational politics continue the practices of managing classroom academic progress through identifiable and measurable objectives, with little acknowledgement of the juxtaposition of actor and recipients to describe the politics of power in social groups (Popkewitz & Breenan, 1998). By way of contrast, the postmodern idea of knowledge as a process of social construction incorporates the individual, whether powerful or powerless (bully or victim) into a system that engulfs both, as expressed by Popkewitz, (1998):

To place this convergence into contemporary American educational reform, the very systems of reasoning that are to produce equality, justice and diversity may inscribe systems of representation that construct “otherness” through concrete pedagogical practices that differentiate, compare and normalize children along a continuum of value. (p.39)

In other words, educational practices that differentially value individual students may infer power relationships that inherently exclude principles of “equality, justice and diversity”, and thus may inadvertently feed bullying behaviours within the student culture. It is possible that teachers functioning from a position of embeddedness in school culture and power may be unable to recognize symptoms of the social malfunctioning of their own educational practices. Being themselves insiders in the school as a social system, they may be unable to imagine what outsiders experience, and unable to consider that it may be the context (in which they are all
embedded) that spawns the behaviours of bullies and victims (insiders and outsiders).

Nevertheless, focusing exclusively on the individual actors – the bullies and the victims – may risk neglecting the context of power and status that is hidden in the accepted social construction of the bullying problem.

This is not to blame teachers or administrators for the maintenance of school bullying, but merely to encourage a shift of focus further and deeper than simply the behaviours of individuals, to notice how the power systems of the school culture appear from another point of view. A high school study found the power struggles and frustrations about group membership to be root causes of violence so that when the coercive power dynamic was rebalanced, the bully and victim roles disappeared (Devos et al., 2000). There is a danger that as long as our knowledge and practices in combating school bullying is limited to the punishment of individual aggressive bullying behaviours, we may be restricted to consideration of interventions directed at the symptoms of bullying rather than its roots (Krahé, 2001), and we will remain stuck in a power struggle with bullying.

*The Practices of Power in Education*

Power and status, including dimensions of control and leadership, or influence and coercion, can be considered important constituents of the equilibrium of a social context in all human relationships (Burbules, 1986) and therefore also part of the bullying scenario in schools. According to Burbules, by definition, individuals with some access to authority, including teachers, wield power instrumentally for intended outcomes. Tools employed to wield power may range from the use of courtesy and respect, persuasion and concern, to the application of threats, exchanges, or punishments and rewards. Power is implicated in the relationship between persons, where an individual has power over another, but some features of the other may
empower the first individual, so that the result is only partial success at attaining intended outcomes in an inter-weaving of power between the relationships. Thus, according to Burbules, the exercise of power implies a relationship in which both parties reciprocally influence each other in a context which supports power differentials. This theory applied to the particular case of bullying may partially explain how the roles of bully and victim can become blurred, and how teacher leadership styles may influence student inter-relationships.

A further dimension of Burbules’ theory of power addresses the social context in which power is wielded. The intention of exerting power may be directed at a specific outcome, or may be for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. The exercising of that power now implies the existence of a system of relationships taking the form of a bureaucratic, ideological, or authoritarian organization where the status quo is actively maintained and changes and objections actively punished. This description would seem to fit the context of schools where established professional standards of behaviour, including academic achievement, are set by teachers and administration, and where the established configuration of student social cliques actively defends against newcomers, or any individual whose particular personal differences represent a challenge to the social status quo. Power in this sense is not wielded by an individual, nor is it simply an element of a relationship, but it is more like a system or machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised. Several participants described school situations where the efforts of teachers seemed unable to shift a dynamic of abuse and victimization. When applied to bullying this analysis of power begins to explain the complexity of bullying behaviours and the difficulties schools are still encountering in their attempts to eradicate it.
Authoritarian Systems and Bullying Behaviours.

If the classroom is seen as a situation where individuals need to conform and co-operate with the teacher's requirements in an authoritarian context, then significant effort must be expended on the teachers' part to maintain the acceptable standard, and to discipline those who do not conform. Power and control are thus vested in the teacher and their role as the leader, and those students who do not or cannot conform to the narrow definition of expectations are seen as deviant, and of lower status. Since conformity is valued, then unique or deviant individuals tend to attract negative behaviours directed toward them, from both the teacher and the other students. In addition, students who wish to maintain their own level of status benefit from pointing out to the teacher the failures of others. Teachers often complain about all the tattling that occurs in classrooms, but this tattling to obtain status can be seen as simply a symptom of their authoritarian leadership style. Several respondents complained of being unfairly blamed by students who were seeking the favour of the teacher. It appears from the stories of these participants that in some cases the bully (or the victim) was a student who was less (or more) favoured by the teacher perhaps due to less than endearing academic or personal characteristics. The popular students, intentionally or not, then harassed and tattled to maintain this student as the low status "scapegoat" in the class. Where authoritarian leadership and conformity to standards subsume expectations of mutual respect between and among teachers and students, moral stance of mutual respect may be conspicuously absent, and risks of bullying increased.

Furthermore, in such an institutional context teachers who may be otherwise caring and law-abiding persons can inadvertently administer cruel and abusive treatment upon those in their power, because their role distances them morally and psychologically from the effects of their demands and attitudes. The Stanford Prison Experiments provide a classic illustration of how
easily abusive roles can develop. The Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE), a well-known research study in social psychology, was a role play experiment that went out of control. So called “normal” subjects were randomly selected to play the role of prisoners or guards, and with remarkable speed, designated guards became abusive and prisoners submissive. The behaviour of those playing their roles was so extreme and troubling to the researcher that the experiment was terminated days before planned. Other related studies (Caprara & Zimbardo, 1996) have demonstrated the power of social context and situational conditions to produce a dehumanizing ethic that allows damaging and abusive behaviours beyond the intention of individuals, or indeed, of the institutional management.

Power defined as authoritarian decision-making, male dominance, secrecy and manipulation of information, and an image of the other as an enemy can produce a culture of violence (Goodman, 2002). And bullying within organizations has been shown to develop and persist with leadership characterized by authoritarian management methods and communication problems (Carsten et al., 2001). The stories of participants in this study described teachers who seemed to target them in a hostile and unfair manner, whose behaviours seemed to constitute one of the risk factors promoting violence in their student peers. Research in a boys’ school in England conducted over four years in the late 1990’s describes how the school explicitly and implicitly created, condoned and sustained aggression through an authoritarian management style (Carter, 2002). In a review of the literature on workplace violence (Tobin, 1998), organizational structure and authoritarian leadership were found to be essential determinants of violence. Alienation, routinization, conflict, and competitive reward systems were found to increase aggressive behaviour. Alienation increases with lower levels of trust, characterized by a larger number of formal rules, with centralized authority, and when members have little opportunity to
participate in decision-making. Both formal structures -- like administration procedures and rules -- and informal structures -- like the social interactions within an organization -- may inspire conflict between individual and organizational goals, expectations and needs. Such conflicts can lead to escalating frustration, conflict and aggression (Goodman, 2002). These characteristics of abusive organizations were reported by participants in this study. Perhaps school organization and administration can contribute to school bullying.

Hierarchy and Status

The participants in this study have included in their explanations of bullying the dimension of hierarchy and status, as expressed through the teacher’s management style, group dynamics, and school culture. These findings reflect basic principles of social psychology, where hierarchy and status are an accepted dynamic of social behaviour (Sidanium & Pratto, 1999).

Participants of this study reported that the teacher was more likely to blame a low status victim than the more socially powerful perpetrator, that the teacher somehow always listened to the cool kids in the in-group; that students of low status repeatedly were assigned undeserved detentions; and blamed unfairly. It may be that a victim with low status in the teacher’s eyes represents to other students a low risk of receiving the teachers’ reprimand, and a high probability that the teacher would not believe the victim if they complained about the bullying. (For example; The Tomboy F45, who knew the teacher would not believe the boys who complained when she punched them.) It may be that if the teacher is not expected to intervene and the consequences are expected to be minimal, then more individuals might be tempted to join in with the bullying group (For example; The Martial Arts Instructor M40, was astonished at the ferocity of the group that chased him after the teacher had humiliated him in class.). The emphasis here was on low status as an interpersonal dynamic which could invite individuals to assume the bully role and reduce teacher concern. To avoid such errors, it may be that the teacher’s enquiry into
an incident of bullying behaviour should respect the perspective of those within the incident (as did this research study), and should also include an assessment of the reciprocal effects of individual roles and behaviours, group dynamics and hierarchical features of social contexts.

In their defence, teachers, being mainly socially responsible, attempted to intervene with negative peer-group social behaviour when they reached their personal judgment of unacceptability, but to the victimized respondents in this study, the teachers' tardy response felt not only like social rejection by peers, but also like an assignment of lower social status by the teacher, who had tolerated for so long the negative behaviour of the status-conscious students, and may have at times joined with it. Whether the teacher felt positively toward a student (because of personality dynamics or academic excellence, or any other reason) or negatively towards a student (because he was behaviourally or academically challenging or any other reason) affected that student's social status within the classroom. The result was sometimes a complex dynamic that involved differential status communicated between individual students identified as different but more often between such different students and the main social group. These dynamics at times emerged as group harassment of an individual perceived as an “outcast”, or in-group/out-group group conflict involving hierarchy and status strategic behaviours likely to include bullying. Several respondents in this study felt that they were bullied because the teacher disliked them, with the other students then reflecting that dislike. There seemed to be a complexity to group dynamics that involved an interchange between the intellectual and social identity of individual students, and their relationship with the teacher, and their status within the classroom.

Students are aware that association with the winning group improves their public status, and if they cannot gain entry into the in-group, they may experience anger and frustration.
Several participants in this study were angry and frustrated at being relegated to the position of outsider. According to Kramer and Jost (2002), failure to fit in and conform can feel like a loss of identity (self) to those excluded from the group. Respondents reported, felt distressingly “invisible”, becoming a social hermit, or finding solace with the fringe group of outsiders. These reactions to a loss of positive identity may explain the aggressive delinquent behaviours in which respondents participated as members of a low status group, or the victims who became warriors in their own defense. In the Kramer and Jost study (2002), the core of this angry rejection was found to be humiliation in the context of the coercive group dynamics.

Other studies support the centrality of coercive power dynamics, rejection, humiliation and shame as constituting a prime etiological cluster in the incidence of school violence (Twemlow et al., 2000). Perceived personal entitlement and the need to conform to the group, or to enforce the conformity of others to tradition and standards, vary with one’s place in a social hierarchy. When the expected entitlement is denied, individuals may react by withdrawing, or by acting out aggressively. In a study of school shooters, the obsessive violence-focused mental state of the offending children and adolescents was found to be very much affected by a school context that treated them as powerless outsiders searching for status (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2001). In a study of 118 cultures reported by Garbarino, rejection from the group had the greatest impact on increasing violent tendencies in children (Garbarino, 1999).

The social status gained through group relationships has been established as contributing to the behaviour of individuals, where individuals in turn influence their social setting, in a reciprocal feedback system (Condor & Brown, 1988). Applying this notion of reciprocal feedback, individual psychology and social context can be regarded as inextricably interdependent. The experiences of several respondents who described being victims in one
situation and bullies in another illustrate the power of changes in the social context to affect bullying behaviours. Perhaps teachers need to hold more respect for the circumstances feeding bullying behaviours, and to be more aware shortcomings of human nature uncovered in studies in social psychology – an inappropriate tendency to divorce circumstances of the social context from individual psychological processes, and reluctance to recognize individual behaviours as existing independent from the social setting.

*Academic Standards or Psychological Safety: The Teacher’s Dilemma*

A student’s social status was found to be partly a function of teacher behaviours and group dynamics, but also related to cultural expectations concerning academic achievement. In the last decade, a dominant trend in education has been to define academic learning expectations concretely, individualistically, and behaviourally, and to expect students who fail to meet these specific criteria to suffer the consequences. In other words, educational achievement has been conceived as an individualistic goal, independent of the classroom culture. But focusing solely on measurable academic achievement inherently arranges students in an hierarchical system where those whose learning deviates from the norm frequently find themselves also considered social deviates, and excluded from the social functioning of the classroom, like many of the eighteen participants in this study.

Accepted educational expectations implicitly encourage conformity within a narrow margin, where every student is encouraged to individually strive for externally-measured goals of academic excellence, usually defined as “A” on a report card. Several participants in this study experienced negative social results from academic success. Others experienced alienation for demonstrating poor academic performance, and being a frustration to teachers. If the prize of academic excellence seems unreachable, then alternative goals, possibly less socially acceptable
ones, may become the motivation for students, and the criteria for status in the in-group in the school, assumed to be academic excellence, may in fact become something else – perhaps athleticism, perhaps drugs and alcohol, promiscuous sex, or status and power derived from bullying (Arnett, 2004). The goal may have shifted from status resulting from academic excellence, but the process remains the same – individual conformity within a narrow margin. Failure to meet the standards results in lower status, and being considered an outsider with the associated social consequences – physical bullying, social exclusion, or both. Not only may these less desirable goals become high status in the peer group, but in some schools, the goal of academic excellence becomes a negative one (Arnett, 2004), and high intelligence becomes a social liability carrying the risk of becoming a possible target of bullying.

On the other hand, failure to meet academic or social expectations can leave individuals in an antagonistic position where they feel in disharmony with their social environment. Generally, people do not like the state of being in disharmony, and feel compelled to do something to relieve their discomfort (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Some may attempt to try to change their own mind and conform to group expectations, but dissonance between the individual’s opinion and the need to conform to the opinion of others may account for internalized discomfort ultimately expressed in mental health issues such as depression, addictions, eating disorders or other mental illness – a consequence reported by several participants in this study. Others in disharmony with their peers may attempt to change the other’s opinion, a strategy which may or may not escalate into cycles of violence. If some sort of agreement cannot be reached and those who are different fail to or refuse to move toward the central tendency of opinion, very often aggressive acts may be employed, or those who appear different may be rejected from the group. Examples from the respondent’s stories represent social values and social interactions that result from group
dynamics and atypical academic progress. Thus group dynamics and situational factors that can exert effects on individual behaviour may be more potent in promoting bullying than is generally recognized.

In judging academic pursuits to be of prime importance, teachers can be forgiven if they consider dealing with teasing and bullying behaviour as a distraction, potentially taking up too much serious learning time, and beyond their scope of responsibility. Thus they may overlook the psychological needs of the child in their efforts to achieve academic results despite evidence that such things as self-esteem issues – inherent both in bullying and in being victimized – can influence significantly both academic success and social and emotional adjustment (Noddings, 1992). However, when school becomes a place of humiliation and intimidation, students are placed in a position of ambivalence and defensiveness that not only can erupt into acts of violence, but also can disrupt cognitive concentration (Casella, 2001). If academic excellence is truly the primary goal of schools, then bullying may merit more careful attention. Bullying may be an unavoidable part of some aspects of society, but bullying in schools seems especially troubling, as its existence in schools conflicts with our fantasies about childhood being a time of innocence and our claims to parents and society that school is a safe place to send our children. Therefore, teachers need to be clear about their influence and responsibility regarding classroom bullying.

**Bullying Embedded in Social Context**

The results of this study support the views of many other researchers, including social psychologists, who are beginning to acknowledge that bullying is a relationship issue broader and deeper than the dysfunctional behaviours of individuals (Casella, 2001; Goldstein et al., 1994; Hazler, 2000; Roberts, 2000). These results suggest the advisability of looking at the bigger
picture beyond individual bullies and victims in the search for solutions, taking into account the historical, economic and cultural foundations of school violence, and possible links to structural issues of policy, discipline and social inequities (Casella, 2001).

Social psychology has developed a schema of levels of analysis to describe an individual's subjective representation of interactions occurring within social situations ranging from (a) intra-personal processes, (e.g. how we perceive other people), to interpersonal relations, (e.g. friendship, conflict) to (b) inter-group relations, (e.g. ethnic stereotyping and cliques) and (c) societal analyses, (e.g. the beliefs shared by large numbers of people within an organization or a society). The present study supported similar levels of analysis as those applied in social psychology, finding that bullying is affected (a) by characteristics and behaviours of individuals, (b) by interactions of individuals with groups and cliques in the classroom, (c) by the nature of the leadership, and culture of the school. (See Figure 1: Bullying: Embedded in Group Dynamics and the Social Context.) The accepted view places bullying as a behaviour problem that belongs primarily, or solely to individuals identified as bullies and victims -- to school misfits (Labi et al., 2001; McCormick, 2001), but it appears that biological, psychological, developmental and interactional factors may profoundly shape the social contexts of violence. In social psychology, situational context is seen as perhaps the most important harbinger of behaviour (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). These interviews support the idea that bullying may be embedded in relationship and context, and fits into an accepted schema for analysis, consistent with accepted principles of social psychology. Taking account of the context in this way does not deny the importance of the character and behaviour of individual bullies. But it does recognize the complexity of the sources of that behaviour and the many possible meanings such behaviours
can carry for either the perpetrator or the victim (Casella, 2001; Goldstein et al., 1994; Greene, 2001).

The stories of the participants in this study seem to suggest that bullying is a group dynamic mitigated by an individual’s level of self-acceptance and internal controls. Social psychology emphasizes that individual psychological processes are interactive with social and situational effects rather than being static individual personality factors (Hewstone, 1997). Thus social psychology addresses individual and social variables simultaneously, within the context of structural factors. An individual’s self-acceptance and an internal locus of control may increase the likelihood of their interpretation of a social context as benign, and can thereby decrease the probability of retaliation or defensiveness that could fuel a bullying event. Participants in this study reported that as the bullying behaviours lost their emotional salience for victims, the victimization seemed to diminish. This process sounds a lot like the common advice given by teachers to “just ignore them”. However, ignoring may be impossible until the individual has both a positive self-identity, and a lack of concern about how others view them. Thus an individual’s self-acceptance constitutes a contributing factor influencing reactions to social context.

**Beyond Individual Behaviours: The School as a Social Experience**

The stories of participants in this study confirmed what other researchers are suggesting, that anti-bullying interventions which ignore either the symbiotic relationship between the bully and the victim, or the school’s socially embedded processes of domination and subjugation, risk certain failure (Craige, 1992; Roberts, 2000). Western culture is characterized by its individualism, and a systemic viewpoint that shifts responsibility from individuals toward a social context may be philosophically unpalatable. Obviously individual responsibility is a factor
in bullying, but systemic influences should not be underestimated. A classic concept from social psychology, the fundamental attribution error, as reported by Ross and Nisbett, (1991) perhaps applies here:

A failure to recognize the importance of situational factors in affecting behaviour,
supported by the inflated belief in the importance of personality traits and dispositions in affecting behaviour. (p. 34)

This classic quotation emphasizes that just as group situational factors can affect individual aggressive behaviours, so institutional structures more powerful than any individual teacher can influence their individual behaviours. Feelings of safety or of vulnerability result as the individual personality, cognitive, and psychological processes interact with social and situational factors. The behavioural result may or may not be expressed in (defensive) aggressive behaviour – not everyone is afraid to be excluded from the group – but those who can risk dissent are likely to be those with a firm sense of self-identity. In this study, many participants attributed their successful exit from bullying to their personal growth in self-acceptance. However, they gave much longer and more detailed explanations of the complexities of group dynamics that had trapped them into bullying. It may be that school bullying could be effectively decreased by nurturing self-acceptance in students, thus eliminating the group dynamic of bullying. However, this study endorses an interweaving of individual, group and situational factors affecting bullying and indicates that an effective recipe for managing the problem of bullying in schools needs to reach beyond individual awareness and behaviours to include dimensions of social relationships and the social culture of the school.

Education is focused on individual development, but is also a social experience with tight links to status and power, and the community from which it emerges. To reduce bullying as a
strategy of power in schools, teachers and educators may be wise to examine their own strategies of power. The behaviour of educators can have a significant influence over the power equilibrium among students (Simola et al., 1998). The breakdown or order and presence of violence in schools can also reflect community issues (Curcio & First, 1993). Tice (1994) suggests three things all educators can do in their efforts toward school-based violence prevention: a) get clear about what constitutes violence and abuse, (b) set our sights on what is systemic about violence within the school and society, and (c) look at ourselves for our own contributions, to a system of violence (Tice, 1994). Teachers and administrators need to be aware of their community, and aware of their application of coercive management strategies of shame, humiliation and rejection (for example, detentions and suspensions). Otherwise they may inadvertently be encouraging the system of violence, alienation, and retaliation we call bullying.

So participants in this study would probably agree with the theoretical view that changes to prevent bullying ought not to focus exclusively on the behaviours of individuals identified as bullies or victims, nor simply on the intentions and behaviours of teaching staff and administrators, but would do well to look at both these aspects of bullying.

*Implications of This Study*

The stated purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of bullying, and to point the way for the development of more effective bully prevention strategies than those presently applied in schools. In the process of applying the qualitative methodology of grounded theory, this study uncovered a spectrum of individual behaviours, active processes and social contexts of bullying, and therefore has at least partially realized its original intention.

*The Problem of Bullying Resituated to Include Context*

While recognizing the individuals’ responsibility for their own actions, this study has re-situated the problem of bullying, away from the idea of total individual responsibility toward
considering the importance of the dual contexts of student social relationships and the socio-cultural environment. The theory of bullying gleaned from the interviews in this study points toward group dynamics as a major source of bullying, suggesting that understanding the complexities of bullying could benefit from the application of multiple levels of analysis. Thus this study points to the need for research in (a) developing individual student self-acceptance, (b) enhancing teacher-student social relationships, (c) understanding classroom social dynamics, and (d) attending to social climate inter-group dynamics within the classroom and the school.

**Development of Individual Student Self-Acceptance**

In this study, the development of self-acceptance, self-identity and self-efficacy seemed to be the specific means which allowed participants to exit from their bullying activities – whether as bully or victim. *The Tomboy* who felt her difficulties originated in her failure to “blend in” struggled for many years with issues of identity, only recently coming to some sense of self-acceptance, that her uniqueness is a positive thing. Now, as an adult with better self-awareness and understanding, she is on a campaign to enlighten others about stereotypes and the injustice of stereotyping people with visible differences.

“We [I] want to encourage people [teachers] to just recognize that people have their own experience, and...foster the individuality, yet include similarities of all of us, the basic fundamental needs...such as to belong.” *(The Tomboy, F45)*

She would like to see such issues as belonging, and social and moral development included, implemented and modeled as normal pedagogical practices in all classroom social interactions. Other participants in this study reported discovering that one way out of the bullying system seemed to be developing a self-identity of self-respect. Can teachers learn how to manage such self-development? Further research might identify the circumstances, processes,
and teaching strategies which can encourage such a transition from vulnerability and victimization to self-acceptance and social-emotional safety, and investigate the development and application of strategies that encourage the development of self-acceptance, self-identity, and respect for differences. Research might attempt to determine how such social and emotional development affects the achievement of academic goals.

Teacher-Student Social Relationships

Teachers are understandably preoccupied with academic performance. They are pressured on all sides – by parents, administrators, and the government Education Ministry – to produce “academic excellence”, however inappropriate or irrelevant the pursuit may seem to students. And teachers pressured in this way may not feel they have the mandate or the resources to explore the specific needs of their students. Without direct communication from the student involved, teachers may not realize that the student’s aggressive and intimidating behaviours are not necessarily intentional aggression deserving consequences, but may be the result of a social situation in the classroom that elicits defensive behaviours. The teacher is unlikely to attain that information in the absence of a trusting relationship with the victimized or defensive student.

From the reports of the participants of this study, there was no trust or confidence that the teacher would help.

I don’t recall any people [teacher] intervention there. There was nothing, you know…they just allow it to go too far…You know, it’s not only physical abuse, it’s verbal abuse. And the school teachers don’t stop it…there is nothing being done about it. (The Refined Boy M52)

It is unlikely that teachers in their professional role intentionally ignore bullying, yet many respondents echoed this concern that teachers did not seem to really know when victims
were distressed until the situation had progressed to an extreme concern. One respondent compared two teachers and their response, pointing to the effectiveness of a more personal approach:

The [new, young] teacher talks to them again and again and again, and they [sic] don't do anything, it just keeps going....[She] is kind of like new and you know she doesn't really know.... She kind of goes, 'OK, I'll talk to the boy,' but she just kind of tells the bully to stop it.....The other [experienced] teacher teaches really friendly there, and really gets down. ... She talks to the bully. She sits them down....And the bully actually stops the bullying. (The Girl With a Lisp, F10)

This girl is talking about the importance of the personal relationship, the nature of the trust between the teacher and individual students. Elsewhere in her interview she describes the trust bullies often seem to be able to gain from the teacher, and the difficulty the victim often has in getting the teacher to trust them. The level of trust in the teacher certainly impacts whether or not an individual decides if a self-defensive response is necessary, even at the risk of being accused of bullying. Vygotsky (2001) would suggest that the nature of the relationship between teacher and student, and the level of mutual trust may also impact aspects of the learning relationship. The issue of trust in relation to the teaching-learning context and the influence of such relationships on classroom bullying might be a subject worthy of research.

**Group Dynamics and Classroom Inter-Relationships**

It would seem from the results of this study that schools would be more likely to develop more promising prevention strategies if the matters of social context and group dynamics were included as features of bullying. What the results of this study are suggesting is not another anti-
bullying program, but rather a more intrinsic, process approach to managing classroom social relationships. As one respondent expresses it:

I teach life skills and...I have to encourage people to reflect and experience their own feelings, articulate a feeling, a simple feeling, a fundamental feeling -- express themselves regarding what their thoughts and feelings are. I mean this is really simple shit. I think and I feel. The critical importance of relation with somebody. If I don’t tell you, how do you know, and if you don’t tell me, how do I know. OK And this is about you being responsible towards each other in a loving, kind, decent, human way. I mean, now, is this really Einstein material that we have to wait until they are teenagers. No this is elementary. This is kindergarten. *(The Tomboy F45)*

In light of this study and its confirmation of the interconnected nature of individuals and their social context, it would seem apparent that schools need to broaden their repertoire of responses to bullying beyond strategies to assist individuals, beyond matters of simple classroom courtesy and beyond conflict resolution after a bullying situation emerges toward an intrinsic exploration of relationships and inter-relationships among classmates, much as an office manager might deliberately strategize to enhance office inter-relationships. The matter of settling interpersonal disagreements perhaps needs to be considered as an integrated part of the essential tasks to be completed within the classroom, rather than an isolated skill set applied after a hostile event. Educational research could explore pro-active methods of preventing or ameliorating some of the conflict and negative effect inherent in group dynamics and inter-group conflict. Or school classrooms where conflict is low could be investigated in an effort to determine what social and interactional characteristics of the individual behaviours in the classroom appear to be instrumental in reducing conflict. The field of organizational psychology and business
management may have developed principles of group management that would have applicability in the classroom situation. Research into which principles would apply and in what manner, might be a useful endeavour.

Accepting the idea that bullying is affected by more than the individuals' intentional behaviour permits many possibilities for teachers to better manage the social interactions and group dynamics defined as bullying. If teachers were to conceptualize the classroom as a complex matrix of group dynamics between and among groups, rather than simply a collective of individuals, then the wealth of information and theory available on the topic of group interaction and social psychology could perhaps find a fertile application in the classroom. If bullying is a function of inter-group relationships and youth school culture, then perhaps the school can be considered a social culture, and research and principles accepted in the field of social psychology be applied to the specific context of school bullying.

These are all areas of classroom functioning where teachers can have an influence, but which typically receive low priority compared to the teaching of academics. In their efforts to reduce bullying, teachers (and educational pedagogy) might be well advised to increase the perceived importance of efforts to develop self-acceptance in their students, to increase their personal awareness of classroom inter-group processes, and perhaps be less concerned about teaching a curriculum of specific interpersonal social skills. In these ways, the negative impact of group dynamics and low status can be somewhat modulated by changes in an individual's interpretations and reactions.

*Implications for Educational Pedagogy and Teaching Strategies*

Larger implications of this study are that the importance of an educational pedagogy which includes an understanding of the classroom culture and the multi-layered reciprocal
interactions between individuals and subgroups within and outside the school should be considered essential in our educational institutions, for it is within the complexity of these interactions that bullying thrives, not simply within the behaviours of individuals.

Currently there is a dichotomy between teachers who emphasize “standards” and those who strive to have a psychologically comfortable classroom. The importance of affective dimensions academic achievement could be a topic worthy of investigation. Vygotsky’s theories (2001) could be used as a platform for such studies. Constructive dialogue and mutual exchanges between people with different perspectives has been suggested as an effective strategy both for enriching academic studies and for making students more aware of the implications of social interaction (Habermas, 1979). Research in this area would help teachers debate what might determine the optimum emphasis in classroom management, considered on a continuum of academic/affective factors. How does teacher attention to self-acceptance and self-identity influence classroom levels of academic achievement? If the answer to this question supports the efficacy of affective factors in promoting academic achievement, it could provide a rationale for teachers who are increasingly being pressured by administration and government ministries to maximize academic achievement. Research in the area of relational aggression is sparse, but growing (Rogoff, 2003). These strategies need to be researched and refined before they can be considered an integral part of the process of teaching.

The individualistic and authoritarian practices that predominate in modern schools may represent a basic philosophical point of view that needs to be reconsidered if systemic problems of social relationships such as bullying are to be successfully resolved. The question arises from this study: Do teachers need to be more or less authoritarian or democratic to reduce bullying? Discussions about classroom management often oscillate between these two dualistic opposites.
Which approach will be more effective for maintaining a psychologically safe classroom with minimal bullying? Of course, there is no simple answer. Investigation of the positives in each approach might allow educators to look at a continuum of possibilities. As one young teacher has noted, some teachers do manage such a balance. His comment would also suggest that perhaps teachers are ready and willing to explore more possibilities in managing the social realities of the classroom.

*The Integration of New Research into School Practices*

Research has uncovered a rich field of data describing in-group/out-group conflict, but according to the respondents in this study, there has been little application of such research findings into the classroom situation. Social psychology has contributed to our understanding of social interaction with the *fundamental attribution error*, which holds that group social processes are more likely sources of conflict that individual intention. But the relevance of social psychology, it seems, is seldom considered in educational contexts, and schools continue to apply individualistic interpretations on bullying. A cultural psychology perspective suggests that the tighter and more cohesive a society is, the more prone it is to violence in defending social meanings of honour and insult, yet schools pay little attention to the group cliques that form in our schools. There is a large body of research framed in the field of organizational psychology which may have application in the classroom – the workplace of our children. In the workplace, working conditions are considered an essential aspect of the job. The classroom workplace should be no different.

University teacher education is beginning to emphasize the importance of social-emotional issues in the classroom, but according to the teacher colleagues who have read the results of this study, the instruction they received is inadequate, and difficult to implement in the established culture of a new school. There often seems to be a gap between what is known in the field of
psychology, and what becomes incorporated into educational practice and the training of teachers. Even if knowledge of social and cultural and organizational psychology becomes part of teacher education, it may not result in changes in the classroom. Too often the new learning of teachers fresh from their university education becomes subverted into the existing culture of schools in the field. Research into ways of facilitating the transfer of current educational pedagogy into the practical functioning of schools would be valuable. There is a need for further research in educational academia to identify and test strategies for implementing the findings of research and for applying new social technologies in the real-life context of the classroom in an effort to determine the effectiveness of these strategies in reducing bullying.

Discussing the preliminary results of this study with current teachers has provided further insight into this crucial problem of preventing bullying, and ensuring psychological and physical safety in the classroom. It would seem that teachers need to be aware of how their own attitudes, behaviours, and classroom leadership style constitute part of the social context. It could be worth investigating the relationship between the degree of abusive teacher peer interactions and the frequency of bullying in their classrooms. To what extent does an abusive hierarchical relationship with their own colleagues and administration affect the social, psychological and physical safety of their classrooms? Are teachers who practice the skills of social responsibility more likely to be able to teach students to do likewise? These are systemic problems which in light of this study, may be worthy of research.

This discussion may seem to imply that teachers need to be perfectly proficient at all times in all aspects of social communication with all students, group dynamics and moral behaviour – an unreasonable expectation. However, this study seems to indicate that if schools are serious about trying to eliminate bullying, the scope of educational pedagogy needs to be expanded
beyond methods of promoting academic excellence, to include preventative methods such as promoting social evolution and emotional intelligence including such dimensions as self-awareness, belonging, mutual respect, hierarchy and status, and to respect the vast array of intellectual, social and cultural diversity that exists in modern schools. For without an appreciation of such things as the salience of status and hierarchy within classroom, and the influence of power structures in the school as an institution, bullying in schools is not likely to be truly defeated.

Bullying may be the canary in the mine, communicating that all is not well in educational culture, demonstrating that educators need to learn and practice respect for ourselves and others, and teach our students to do the same. If conflict and aggression is an “inevitable feature of unequal social order” (Ray, 1990, p. 88) perhaps bullying is symptomatic of a pathological social order in our schools. The stories of participants in this study suggest that educators need to be paying more attention to school social situations, to be listening more carefully to those with complaints and to be noticing the context from which the complaints emerge. Admittedly, the participants in this study were self-identified as involved in school bullying, and therefore their point of view is embedded in the bullying culture. Students who are more removed from the dynamics of bullying may have a more positive view of both the teachers and the school as a social context. Nevertheless, complaints of the disenfranchised can be seen as fair warning of difficulties in a social system. We may not be able to change the whole education system, but we can listen and learn so that our own situation reflects tolerance for differences, self-respect, respect for others, and a healthy social culture that resists the abuse of power. As one respondent expresses it:
I find that people stumble along. They don’t understand the basic fundamentals of social interactions and relationships, and I don’t see how we should be missing those [sic]. I just don’t. *(The Tomboy F45)*

The results of this study indicate that it may be unreasonable to expect that bullying will ever be completely eradicated from the classrooms of modern schools, but if significant progress is to be made in reducing it, teachers will need to apply strategies beyond identifying and punishing individual bullies, and they will need a broader mandate of teaching responsibilities that includes a range of strategies for maintaining healthy personal relationships, student inter-relationships, group dynamics and classroom social contexts.
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The following descriptions of the individuals who participated in this study are meant to assist the reader to put the stories of these victims (and some self-admitted bullies) into context. The descriptions are the researcher's subjective assessment based on the interviews, but reflect as closely as possible the participant's own point-of-view and presumed self-evaluation. There has been no attempt to judge the veracity of these stories, only a concerted attempt to reflect what these individuals had to say. Similarly, the short phrase is not meant to be any sort of judgment upon these participants, only a convenient way of identifying the source of quotes made throughout this paper.

1. **The Girl with a Lisp, (F 10):** When a new girl arrived at the school, she disrupted the old friendship patterns. At first *The Girl with a Lisp* offered her friendship, but when the new girl became involved in mean bullying behaviours, *The Girl with a Lisp* decided to step out and go back to other friends. Once she left, she became the target of merciless bullying and teasing by the new girl and the gang she had formed around her. If *The Girl with a Lisp* complained, the teacher told her to ignore them, or the bullies would deny any wrongdoing, and *The Girl with a Lisp* would again end up getting in the detention room. If she tried to explain to the teacher, she was told “not to make excuses.” She came home and cried every night, feeling that she is not being treated fairly. The friends of her older sister also taunt her about her lisp, and call her a “Russian spy”. This she also takes to heart. She cannot understand why she repeatedly gets treated badly when she tries to hard to be a “good” girl.

2. **The New Athletic Boy, (M 10):** A good natured, athletic boy, he found himself targeted by a group of boys when he moved to a new school. At first the teacher did not seem to take him seriously when he complained about being followed home after school and threatened in the schoolyard. When the teacher did become involved, she did not seem to be very effective in stopping the harassment. After repeated incidents of harassment both on the way home after school and in the playground during school, he finally decided he had to stick up for himself. Despite the teacher’s warnings against this action, he confronted the boys, and punched one in the face – an action which he seemed to be quite proud of, as this seemed to gain him respect, and the boys don’t bother him anymore.

3. **The Avid Reader, (M 10):** Quiet and studious, this boy, many months after the incidents he recalled in our interview, seems still a bit in shock at his experiences. In a normal game of tag, he accidentally bumped a bigger boy, who turned out to have a flash-point temper. “He overreacted, pushed me to the ground, and pounded me on the back.” On another occasion, this same larger and older boy pushed him down, slapped his face “really hard” and punched him in the face. The smaller boy just wanted to forget the whole thing, and now spends most of his time in the library reading, avoiding further problems, watching for his approach near the bike racks. His mother went to the school principal, talked to the school counsellor, and it seemed to her they were protecting the abusive boy and did not want to address the situation or take any action. The counsellor told her, “Boys will be
boys." She was extremely disappointed with the lack of action on the part of the school, and wanted to attribute it to racism, as she had recently moved from Hong Kong. She decided to deal with the matter herself, because her boy seemed so intimidated and affected by the incident. She finally met the offending boy’s mothering at a public event, and politely asked for an apology, which, much to her surprise, she received.

4. **Boy with a Stutter, (M 11):** This student is still frustrated with the injustice of his situation. One central popular boy seems to control all the others as they join in teasing and harassing him. They will tease him all day, and then run to his mother’s car after school and be super polite. His mother then criticizes him for not being polite back. When they begin to physically attack him, some of the other kids will step in to stop things, but he wants “to stop them yakking and yakking.” (He begins to stutter when he says this.) They say “Oh, you stupid fruitcake, you only have three friends.” If he retaliates, they will tell the teacher, who believes them and he gets in trouble. This boy is tall and athletic, but seems to have a surprised look on his face, as if he cannot believe how life is treating him. He has an older brother who also teases him.

5. **The Friend on the Edge, (M 12):** This student is uncomfortable with the behaviour of his friends when they are teasing another student, but hangs with them most of the time, because “It’s hard to stand up against everybody.” However, when they get physically abusive, he removed himself from the group, and may even stands up for the one being bullied. “I can’t just let one of my friends get beat up. Three against one. They will (be on my case), but after a week they’ll get over it.” This boy has an inner locus of control to the extent that he doubts the teacher’s wisdom. He feels like the teacher does not know what is going on. If the teacher gets irritated at someone, the group will support the teacher – in other words, if the teacher bullies someone, they will join in. This boy has been able to develop a personal identity that allows him to decide what to do on a situational basis, without feeling he has to support his group. He describes himself as being “in the middle”.

6. **The Blind Girl, (F 14):** This girl describes having experienced harassment and bullying from the beginning of grade one. The boys would be physically abusive, but the girls would only “snicker.” Nevertheless, nobody wanted to be caught hanging out with her in elementary school because she was blind. The teachers did not support her. People would steal things off her desk right in class, and the teacher would not notice. She thinks the teacher must know what is happening, but either doesn’t know what to do, or is too lazy to do anything. There was an incident in high school where three boys cornered her and lifted up her skirt. She reported it, but the school said if she could not give their names, they could do nothing. So she said, “I don’t know because I can’t see.” Nothing was done about this incident. She has given up telling the teachers, because either nothing is done, or the wrong person is blamed. So she defends herself, saying “I guess sometimes I’m becoming the bully.” She is spirited and positive, no longer cares about the “cliquey little in-groups”. She attributes her good attitude to having a supportive mother who helps her talk about things and keep in touch with her feelings. She writes poetry. She is an average student, but exhibits above average social/moral development. She claims dealing with adversity has made her mature.
7. **Athletic Immigrant Girl, (F 15):** The first day she came to high school in this country, she was dressed up quite well with a short skirt. The girls called her a “slut.” At the time she did not know what the word meant. However, she soon discovered the meaning, so now she is careful to wear demure clothing, long pants and high neck T-shirts, although the other girls wear short skirts and tight tops showing their belly button. Nevertheless, she is attractive, and the girls continue to harass her. They gang up against her around her locker, shove her and trip her, and then laugh when she stumbles. She ignores them as much as possible, but occasionally fights back. If she defends herself physically, they tell on her and she gets in trouble. She has been suspended twice, and is afraid to defend herself now, as the third suspension will get her expelled, “So I have to just let them do it.” On one occasion, a boy grabbed her and started choking her. They were both suspended. She finds it useless to talk to the principal. The counselor tells her to ignore them.

8. **The New Academic Immigrant, (F 16):** The students have not been welcoming to this newcomer from eastern Europe. They accuse her of being a communist spy, and trying to steal their boyfriends. The students hiss at her in the lunch room and try to trip her. She finds it does not help that the teachers like and appreciate her. If the teacher says her marks out loud, the other students groan out loud, so she has asked the teacher not to report her publicly. The teachers say to just ignore the rude students, but she finds this difficult. She was doing a presentation in class and the boys were “razzing” and heckling in the middle of her oral presentation, so that she lost her train of thought. The teacher said “Shh to the students, but did not maintain order. She finished her presentation after school, and feels like the students got away with rude behaviour. If she tells the teacher or the principal, he just talks to them and says to stop. Then the kids come and retaliate. The teachers say, “Get used to it-- this is what high schools are like today.” She is frustrated that academics are held in such low priority, and wants to go to another school.

9. **The College Student, (F 20):** Creative, bright and mild mannered, this respondent started her school career in grade one as an outsider, because the other students had attended kindergarten together, they knew each other, and knew the teacher’s expectations. The teacher allowed her to maintain her individualistic ways, which only reinforced her role as the outsider. Mainly, the kids would ignore her, “like I was invisible”. In high school there were little cliques – the jocks, the cool girls, the Goths, the nerds. She felt she fit best with the nerds, but these were all oriental boys, so she did not really fit there either. Generally, the jocks and the cool girls (that “dress like prostitutes”) got special treatment from the teachers, meanwhile behind the scenes they harassed her, and if she reacted, blamed her so that she got in trouble. She proclaims that “The teachers never figure it out.” At university, she is shocked to find that the students from her high school still treat her the same way.

10. **The Chinese Mother, (F 35):** Moving from China to an unlikely remote community near the mountains, this petite single parent put an ad in the community paper to hire someone to clear some of the trees in her back yard. The men she hired then tried to exhort money from her without doing any work. They worked for a short time and demanded extra money, pounding on her door and shouting. They were large strong men, she a small woman alone. She phoned the real estate agent, the only other person she knew, who
promptly drove by and backed her up in her refusal to pay until the job was done. She felt that “standing up for yourself without humiliating the other one” was the best strategy for dealing with bullies.

11. **The Single Mom, (F36):** With a depressed and angry mother, she left for school already primed to react to the least slight. Kids called her names and teased her for wearing old clothes. Teachers didn’t listen when she complained, so she “took the law into her own hands” and became the bully. Her mother had no sympathy. Suspended from school many times, she finally dropped out of school and developed drug and alcohol addictions. Becoming pregnant got her back to taking care of herself. She now works, and has two teen-aged children with whom she has an open and respectful relationship. She believes open communication, being in touch with feelings, and being able to stick up for yourself are factors in bringing back self-respect, which makes you able to ignore those who would taunt and harass.

12. **The Strong Woman, F 37:** Born into a dysfunctional family with much conflict, this woman’s father was Latin, her mother blonde and beautiful, educated and cultured, and out of her element in East Vancouver. Consequently, she was sent to kindergarten dressed like a lady, with “good manners”, and also bigger than all the other kids. She was made fun of, called names, shoved and generally bullied from the first day of school. She also had difficulty with school work, so did not have the respect of the teachers either. They never listened to her complaints and were ineffective in stopping the harassment. Finally, she took control of the matter herself. Her Dad taught her boxing and judo, and being big and strong, the kids “didn’t have a chance”. Soon she was the one being blamed for the bullying, and was suspended several times until she finally quit school. Several years later, working at a menial job, one of her employers suggested she might be learning disabled. She then went back to college and now has a degree, and works in the legal system.

13. **The Martial Arts Instructor, (M 40):** Although now six feet tall and physically fit, in school this man was buck-toothed and of small build – the “original 98-pound weakling”. He came from a poor, abusive family situation, and lived “on the wrong side of the tracks.” His peer group taunted and harassed him until he could not bear it – forced his head into the ditch, threw dog feces at him, harassed him on the phone, and made jokes about him in class. When he felt he had to defend himself, they laughed at him more and told on him, and he would get the blame. The teachers seemed to participate in his humiliation, publicly criticizing his messy work, and not acknowledging effort. He is not surprised some teenagers decide to end their life as a result of school harassment. He gained self-respect by becoming physically fit, joining the army, and teaching martial arts, but is still outraged at how he was treated throughout school.

14. **The Welder, (M 42):** This man feels he has been bullied all his life, at home, at school and at the work place. He feels he has spent his life struggling to defend himself in all three venues, trying in vain to get justice. He attributes his unpopularity to the fact that he was not athletic. (He is also overweight.) When the boys realized they could get “raz” back from him, they increased their taunts, hoping to upset him more – fighting back did not work very well. He was bright in school, getting good marks with no effort, but his
intelligence didn’t gain him any friends. At times he retreated, building projects in the forest, but didn’t gain any respect for that either. In his job unfairness continues, with the union cheating him out of jobs, him having to repeatedly go to arbitration. He believes in doing a good job, and doing it the right way, and cannot understand how his co-workers can do poor work without consequences. Lately he feels the solution is to stand up for yourself plainly and simply without offending the other side. Having children also helped him become more compassionate.

15. **The Tomboy, (F 45):** She didn’t fit in with the girls starting in kindergarten, because they were interested in dolls and girly things, and she was more interested in sports. So she made friends with the boys. This was a somewhat satisfactory solution, and she joined the boys on the sports field for the most part, but she was more athletic than many of the boys, so some of them resented her too. As a pre-teen, when the girls seemed to be getting interested in boys, she thought she would be at an advantage, being friends with most of them. So she tried getting involved sexually with one of the boys, but the other boys could not handle the transition and turned against her. Suddenly she found herself harassed by both girls and boys and the rest of her school days were “some kind of Hell”. They made rude noises in class, chased her, called her rude names. Teachers seemed to like her more than the kids, but that did not stop the harassment. Her extreme discomfort with the social situation at school started in the intermediate grades with stomach aches and many absences. In high school, suffering from depression, and eating disorders, she finally dropped out. She is still struggling with identity issues around being an athletic and “mannish-looking” young woman, but attends college, and has a satisfactory and calm life.

16. **The Businessman, (M 46):** This man started the interview proclaiming that he was the bully, but his next sentence described how disrespected he was in his home. His parents were wealthy and well-known, and his two older brothers athletic and intelligent. He was sent to foster care at the age of nine, “because I was ADD”. He just wanted to belong somewhere, but, because he thought nobody cared about him, he didn’t see why he should care about anyone else. He was suspended from “every school in the district.” Nobody ever asked him why he was aggressive, or even made an attempt to listen to him – just imposed consequences. When he was a teenager he hung out with the delinquent gang, and soon found himself over his head – they were involved in theft, and perhaps murder. This frightened him, so he changed his ways from being a bully to retreating from life, and became heavily involved in drugs. There was one teacher, and a judge who took an interest in him, and amazed that anyone cared about him, he started to straighten out. It was when he fell in love (somebody cared) that he really changed his ways. He is now a successful businessman with “an awesome marriage.”

17. **The Refined Boy, (M 55):** This man remembers in his early years at school somebody threatening to beat him up, and him going to his father who taught him “the manly art of fighting”, and that was the end of the bullying. He feels strongly that victims participate in the bullying relationship, and need to learn to stand up for themselves. He also recalled when the boys were just fooling around, “I looked like I was fighting”, but it was a sort of boys’ game. Nevertheless, he was very much the outsider at school, “the intelligent one” where doing well at school “kind of set me apart.” He looked for friends in the new kids,
and the “rebel” group, and sometimes pretended to have friends. “It makes my cry to hear myself talk about it.” He recalls the country kids being sort of shunned “somewhat like that native tradition of punishing a person by not having contact.” He feels like the teacher’s can’t help but observe the bullying, but they don’t stop it. This man is on disability, probably with mental health issues.

18. *The Salesman, M 56:* This man was late maturing. Although now over six feet tall and physically fit, in high school he was short and teased unmercifully. He admits bullying his younger brother. At home, his parents fought endlessly, and his mother was “constantly” harassing both he and his younger brother. Although he got good marks at school and won several city championships as a competitive runner, his parents never acknowledged his successes, and he never felt he was “good enough.” After high school he attended college in engineering for one year, but there was little family support for this, and he soon joined the workforce, where he was very successful in sales. However, he spent many years in the grip of alcohol and drug addictions. Still working in sales, he claims that his past difficulties have made him more compassionate and spiritual, and he regularly volunteers for a local recovery house.
APPENDIX C: Consent forms

University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Ed.

Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Carol Battaglio, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology, Special Education and Counselling Psychology at U.B.C. is embarking on a research project entitled *Victim No More: A Grounded Theory of School Bullying*. The purpose of this research is to better understand the bullying that occurs in schools in order to more effectively prevent it.

Ms. Battaglio will interview approximately 20 participants, both students and adults, concerning their experiences with bullying. The interviews will be 1 to 1 1/2 hours in length. Subsequently, some participants may be contacted by telephone for specific questions. When the interviews have been analyzed and a tentative theory of bullying developed, participants will have an opportunity to discuss the results if they wish. At any time participants will have the right to refuse to participate further, or to withdraw from the study.

Participation in this study will be strictly confidential. Audiotapes and written materials derived from the interviews will not identify individuals. Audiotapes and any written materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only Ms. Battaglio and her advisor have access, and will be held securely for five years before being destroyed, as required by UBC regulations. Any segments of interviews that may be quoted in the final paper will not identify speakers.

Talking about these past experiences may at times be emotional, and if distress about this process is evident, Ms. Battaglio will refer participants for appropriate counseling. However, the process of talking about these events is expected to be a helpful and positive experience for virtually all participants.

If at any time you have any comments or concerns about participating in this study, you are welcome to contact either Carol Battaglio or her dissertation advisor, Dr. Ishu Ishiyama. If you would prefer not to discuss concerns with the researcher for some reason, you may also contact UBC's Committee on Human Research, which is concerned with the protection of research volunteers. These contact numbers appear on the back of this letter.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this research.

Yours very truly,

Carol Battaglio

12/11/03/3
Contact Numbers

Carol Battaglio, M.Ed.

Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, Ph.D.
(w)
(Counselling Psychology Program)
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology
and Special Education
2125 Main Mall
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

UBC Committee on Human Research
604-822-8584
8:30 to 4:30 Monday to Friday

Date ____________________________

Signature of Consent to Participate in Research Study

Having read and understood all on the previous page, I give my consent for my
son/daughter ______________________ to participate in the research study as
described. The study, entitled, Victim No More: A Grounded Theory of School Bullying,
will be conducted by C. Battaglio.

___________________________  ______________________
Name (please print)           Signature
Consent Form

Dear Student and/or Parent:

Carol Battaglio, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology, Special Education and Counselling Psychology at U.B.C. is completing the internship requirements for this degree by counselling students in the Surrey School System.

As part of the requirements for this internship, some of the counseling sessions must be audio-taped in order to be evaluated by Ms. Battaglio’s internship supervisor, Dr. S. Fitzgerald. All audiotapes and any written materials will be kept strictly confidential, with access only available to Ms. Battaglio and her advisor. All tapes will be erased immediately after being evaluated.

Thank you for consenting to participate in this educational endeavour.

Yours very truly,

Carol Battaglio

________________________________________________________________________

Date____________________

Signature of Consent to Tape Counselling Sessions

Having read and understood the above circumstances, I give my consent to have some counseling sessions with Ms. C. Battaglio audio-taped for purposes of her evaluation.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Name (please print)                     Signature

________________________________________  ______________________________
Parent (if applicable)                    Signature
Student Assent Form

Dear Student:

Ms. Battaglio is researching school bullying as part of the requirements of a doctoral student in the Dept. of Educational Psychology, Counselling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. The title of the research study is *Victim No More: A Grounded Theory of School Bullying*.

Ms. Battaglio will be interviewing you about your experiences with bullying. The interview will be about 1 to 1 ½ hours long. Ms. Battaglio may wish to contact you later by telephone for specific additional information. When the interviews have been analyzed and developed into a theory, you will be invited to comment her results if you wish to do so. Approximately twenty people will be interviewed, including both adults and students.

Participation in the study is confidential. The interview tapes and transcripts will not identify any individuals by name. All tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet until being destroyed in five years, as required by UBC rules. No names will be given in the written report.

If you find it emotional or upsetting to talk about your bullying experiences, Ms. Battaglio may recommend a counselor you can talk with, but the process of explaining your experiences of bullying is expected to be positive, and perhaps helpful. At any time you have the right to refuse to participate further, or to withdraw from the study.

If you have any comments or concerns about participating in this study, you are welcome to contact either Ms. Battaglio or her dissertation advisor, Dr. Ishu Ishiyama. If you would prefer, you may also contact UBC’s Committee on Human Research, which is concerned with the protection of research volunteers. Contact numbers are on the back of this letter.

Thank you for participating in this study. I look forward to working with you.

Yours very truly,

12/11/03/3

Carol Battaglio
Letter of Contact

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for responding to my request for volunteers to be interviewed concerning the important problem for bullying. As we discussed over the telephone, we will meet at _________ at ____________ pm for an audio-taped interview approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours in length.

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counselling Psychology and Special Education. The title of my research project is *Victim NO More: A Grounded Theory of School Bullying*. As the title indicates, the purpose of the research is to better understand the bullying that occurs at school in order to more effectively prevent it.

I will be interviewing approximately 20 participants, both students and adults concerning their bullying experiences. After transcribing and analyzing the transcripts, I may wish to contact some participants further by telephone for specific questions. When all the interviews have been analyzed, and a tentative theory of bullying developed, participants will have an opportunity to comment. At any time any participants will have the right to refuse to participate further, or to withdraw from the study.

Participation in this study will be strictly confidential. Audiotapes and written materials derived from the interviews will not identify individuals. Audiotapes and any written materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only Ms. Battaglio and her advisor have access, and will be held securely for five years, as required by UBC regulations. Any segments of interviews that may be quoted in the final paper will not identify speakers.

Talking about these past bullying experiences may at times be emotional, and if any distress about this process is evident, I will refer participants for appropriate counseling. However, the process of talking about these events is expected to be a positive and helpful experience for virtually all participants.

If at any time you have any comments or concerns about participating in this study, you are welcome to contact either me or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Ishu Ishiyama. If you would prefer not to discuss concerns with the researcher for some reason, you may also contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services, which is concerned with the protection of research volunteers. These contact numbers appear on the back of this letter.

Thank you for your interest in this research. I look forward to meeting you.

Yours very truly,

03/04/04

Carol Battaglio
Contact Numbers

Carol Battaglio, M.Ed.

Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, Ph.D.
(w)
(Counselling Psychology Program)
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology
and Special Education
2125 Main Mall
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

Research Subject Information Line
UBC Office of Research Services
604-822-8598
Ms. Carol Battaglio  
c/o Cedar Hills Elementary  
073  

Dear Ms. Battaglio:  

Re: A Grounded Theory of Bullying  

Please use this letter as confirmation of acceptance of your research project in principle. District-level endorsement does not imply commitment of individual schools, students or other participants and you are required to seek consent, sequentially, of those involved. We have agreed that your strategy is to identify a school through your counselor colleagues.  

I wish you success with your research and remind you that a final report is to be submitted to this department on completion.  

Yours truly,  

Dr. Barbara Holmes, Director  
Research, Communications & Safe Schools  

BH/rr  

Carol, may I please have a copy of your reference list. This is an area in which I would like to do some reading.
APPENDIX D: Guiding Questions

Possible Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

A. Sensitizing Questions:
   What do you know personally about bullying?
   Do you think much goes on in this school?
   Where? In the playground? The washrooms?
   What do the teachers do about it?

B. Experiential Questions:
   Have you ever been bullied?
   What happened? Describe the situation?
   How did you feel at the time? Later? How do you think others felt?
   Why did you get targeted? What did you decide to do?
   How did it stop?

   Did you ever bully someone?
   What happened? Describe the situation?
   How did you feel at the time? Later? How do you think others felt?
   What did you decide to do?
   How did it get started? How did it stop?

C. Theoretical Questions?
   Did you ever feel intimidated or frightened?
   What did you decide to do about it?
   Was it the right thing to do? What was at stake for you?
   Does/did the teacher know about the bullying?
   What would the teacher do if you reported being bullied?
   Why do you think bullying happens? Why to you?
   How do the other students feel about seeing bullying?
   What should be done about it? What works?
   Who does the bullying and why do you think they do it?
   When you think back over the situation described, what do you think you learned
   from this experience?
APPENDIX E:

Concepts derived from Open Coding

A. Individuals
1. Potential victims
   a. Unique and different in some way that is not respected by the teacher and/or others (socially, physically, academically)
   - gender anomalies – tomboy or refined boy, speech impediments, blind, poor, ethnic minority, creative and intelligent.
   b. Not included, invisible, don’t fit in with classroom/playground activities
   c. Looking for friendship, may want to be accepted and/or trust others too readily, resulting in vulnerability.
   d. Poor attendance leads to school leaving, and future problems with adult employment, addictions, and mental health.

2. Potential bullies
   a. Resort to primitive problem-solving (fight or flight)
   b. Have been hurt in the past – rejected at home/school, so are defensive and easily offended
   c. Have learning issues – bright, creative, or learning disabled
   d. Belonging-attachment difficulties may start at home, but continue at school, leaving them with no support system.
   e. Feel vulnerable, and defensive, so easily provoked to retaliate.
   f. Suspensions lead to school leaving, and future problems with adult employment, addictions, and mental health.

B. Group Dynamics
1. Students struggle to be included in main social group
2. Class struggles with inclusion/exclusion issues
3. Social dynamics characterized by hierarchy and pecking order
4. Leader may be followed by “back-up people”, a “cheerleading posse”
5. Social relationships in the in-group characterized by fluidity, instability, and transient interests in media stars
6. Tactics toward outsiders may include tattling & blaming, retaliation wars, or social shunning

C. Teachers
1. Don’t know what is happening socially in the classroom
   a. May not respect uniqueness,
   b. Looking for conformity to standards
2. Don’t know what to do about bullying and aggression
   a. Punishment and suspension not effective in the long run, and may lead to unforeseen negative consequences (leaving school)
b. Teachers trust and listen to the wrong people

3. Often unknowingly participate in the group dynamics
   a. Misuse of authority — shouting and intimidating students, public criticism of school achievement, models bullying
   b. Demands for conformity and standards do not respect individual differences and unique talents — models peer rejection
   c. May be seduced by the judgments of the popular group into classroom power dynamics (the target victim/bully, doesn’t know how to fit in.)
   d. Often results in blaming the victim.

D. Suggested Strategies for Interventions — Potential victims/bullies
   1. Avoid the aggression — withdraw, become invisible.
   2. Stand-up for yourself without humiliating the other, with at least an appearance of strength, perhaps gain skills from martial arts.
   3. Be nice to everybody, but only trust a few good friends (social responsibility)
   4. Abandon ideas about everything being fair — this is the teacher’s job
   5. Develop self-acceptance — nobody is perfect. Accept yourself and others as they are.

E. Suggested Strategies for Interventions — Teachers
   1. Treat everyone with respect, especially those who are struggling academically, physically or socially. (Race, handicaps, shy, bright or LD, etc.)
   2. Emphasize interactive processes such as dialogue, mediation and conflict resolution rather than searching for the guilty one. Always assume innocent until proven guilty.
   3. Better understanding of group dynamics, and inclusion of social-emotional development as a part of the learning that occurs in the classroom.
   4. Understand learning is a process, not a product — standards are goals, not judgments. Respect for individuals includes a respect for effort expended, even if the academic result is not as polished.
APPENDIX F: A Descriptive Story of Bullying From the Insiders’ Point of View:

An Abbreviated, Preliminary Version of Results

The stories told in these eighteen interviews are similar. Everyone tells a story of being unique and different in some way from the majority of students, and therefore left on the outside of the main social circle of the classroom and school. They tell stories of patiently putting up with social and physical abuse until they reach a point where they feel obliged to defend themselves. All respondents feel they have been unfairly targeted by their peers. Often at this point they were enraged and determined to retaliate, but if they do retaliate, they are usually unfairly treated by teachers and authority figures, who cannot accept that their anger has a reasonable source. However, some are able to successfully stand up for themselves without upsetting or humiliating their tormenter. Those who successfully defend themselves do so early in the course of events, with a single decisive battle. Those who are unsuccessful in defending themselves initially or who become involved in on-going aggression often come from a stressful home situation where they have suffered emotional and/or physical abuse, and arrive at school feeling vulnerable and therefore primed and ready to defend aggressively.

Typically the teachers are oblivious to the bullying problem until the victim tells them, and usually the teacher responds with advice of little practical use – “ignore it”, or “tell someone.” By the time the victim tells the teacher, they have probably already been ignoring the harassment for some time, so the first bit of advice is redundant. And when the teacher speaks to the bullies about their poor behaviour, the aggression often intensifies with quiet underground retaliation. With no help from the teacher, the victims finally explode in angry self-defense, but they are punished for their angry outbursts, while the bullies make evasive tactics and claim to know nothing that could have caused such a reaction.
The teacher then probably blames the victims – they must have an anger problem. The bullies are often members of the popular social group and often have the teacher’s trust. Often the group shares with the teacher a common disrespect for the victim as a misfit of some kind, and so different individuals may carry out the bullying role from time to time. The teacher, who already has little respect in the victimized individual, believes the victim must have done something to deserve the antagonism of so many members of the class.

If things get too threatening and alienating, and the victims feel no support from the teacher, they will probably begin to take the law into their own hands and begin to energetically and aggressively defend themselves. This affirms the teacher’s impression of who is the one guilty of bad behaviour, and the victim-turned-bully now loses all credibility with the teacher. Now the protagonists can become quite mean and violent, knowing the teacher will take their side, and believe that the victim/bully deserves to be harassed. If the victims are strong they may develop further strength and skills to retaliate effectively, but usually this does not stop the harassment. The bullying has become a game where people take roles and proceed with violent intentions fed by a mob mentality.

If the victim is not physically strong or not inclined to fight, the harassment will likely continue -- sometimes until the victim feels his life is threatened. The teacher having lost any credibility as a defender of justice, the victims tries their best to be invisible and avoid confrontation – ultimately with drugs and alcohol. Other victims give up and develop chronic mental health issues like eating disorders or depression, or even psychotic disorders.

When bullies develop a sense of empathy, understanding how distressing their behaviour is to others, they stop their abusive behaviours. This represents a shift in social and moral development from an ego-centric view, unaware of the feelings of others, to a position of mutual
respect for others, treating them the way they themselves would like to be treated. Or the bullying may stop when the victims shift their focus from defending themselves, toward developing their own identity. When they can say to themselves, “I don’t deserve this.” Or “This group/person has a problem, not me.” the shift in attitude appears to allow them to function as an individual, without the external approval of the group. When the victims’ reactivity decreases, typically the bully/group changes their focus and begins to harass someone else. However, some victims carry their defensiveness into other venues and the bullying may continue in relationships and in employment situations. Some reactive bullies (victims who turn to bullying) end up in trouble with the law due to aggression or drug and alcohol abuse. When victims develop a satisfactory level of self-acceptance and self-efficacy, they can disengage from the conflict and ignore the harassment – just as the teacher had advised so long ago.

However, participants all felt that teachers are not knowledgeable about bullying and aggression. Many felt that a certain amount of aggression and bullying is normal adolescent behaviour, and a way of establishing a social hierarchy or pecking order in the group, and that teachers are often too diligent at interfering in such tussles. Others felt that the bullying was a result of poor emotional and social development and that teachers need to take more responsibility for teaching such things as social and emotional development along with the usual academic curriculum.
**APPENDIX G: Home Social Stress and Aggressive Behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen/Sex</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Abuse</th>
<th>Attachment (need)</th>
<th>Score*</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M 56</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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</table>

*H=2  M=1  L= 0

**Note that three respondents with the highest score of social stresses exhibited the most aggressive behaviours. However, two respondents with high scores of social stress only exhibited moderate aggression. One respondent reported high levels of anger and outrage, but was small in stature – perhaps unable to successfully be aggressive.**

*Note that all scores are subjective and interpretive and based on interviews where questions concerning these factors were not specifically asked. Thus all social stresses were voluntarily self-reported without prompts of any sort. There appears to be a moderate relationship between social stresses and aggression.*