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What Cultures and Values Inherent in Schools Perpetuate Bullying?

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Bullying Still a Major Problem

- **Anti-bullying campaigns-largely ineffective** and an increase in relational bullying (Woods and Wolke 2003; Smith, Ryan and Cousins 2007)
- **Establishing typologies of victims and bullies** pathologises bullying
- **But what underlying systemic elements make bullying so prevalent?**

Olweus' Definition of Bullying

- **Olweus' (1993) definition on bullying widely influential** states that bullying:
- Involves 2 or more pupils
- Is repeated exposure to negative actions
- Is intentional
- Involves an imbalance of power (unequal strength physical or psychological)
- Distinguishes psychological and physical bullying

Limitations of Olweus

- **How do you distinguish if bullying is intentional?**
- **Psychological factors in physical** e.g., fear
- **Bullying involves more than just pupils** e.g., teachers
- **Imbalance in Power**-Power imbalance exists in natural relationships e.g., teacher pupils but pupils bully teachers
- **Need to consider systemic bullying because no-one owns power**, dissociated from individual might (Foucault 1980)
- **Emphasis is beyond individuals to how power is used through school** and the affect it has on individuals

School Culture

- A focus on the school in England has not gone much beyond **school size** and **location**
- Research in England needs to address which **features of school** may be **related to student bullying**

(Yoneyama and Naito 2003, p.319)

Methodology

- **Focus: Where does bullying exist in the everyday experience of school?**
- **Children's Perspectives**
- **Qualitative Methods**-Observations and in-depth interviews (individual and group)
- **Schools:** state schools private and a pupil referral unit (PRU)
- **Stepping outside one culture to understand the other**
- **Presenting-** group interviews in state school and private school and 1-1 interviews in PRU

Emerging Issues

Feeling Thick

“When I’m getting answers wrong and stuff like that they laugh at me, I get annoyed and angry and that just sends me proper mad so I can get up and hit ‘em”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Emphasis-being right in school-teasing, violence

However, higher set teased and personal distress:

“When I get something wrong I get really embarrassed and people laugh because they think I already know stuff”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Feeling ‘not good enough many shared
e.g., ‘I feel thick’ and ‘I’m thick’

“We’re like bottom ‘cos we’re thickest”
(Year 7, female, private school) and staff
‘we call them the diddliwonks,’ ‘they’re not
the brightest’

Hostility between Sets

Bullied for being clever:

“They get called geeks, they like don’t do any sport and all they do is listen in class and stuff”

(Year 7 male, private school)

‘Bottom’ set pupils:

“J: Can’t walk around with your hands behind your back and being a swot can you all time”

I: “Why not?”

J: “Because you get the mick took out of you and beat up”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Higher sets-lower opinion of lower sets and hostility:

“I think the lower they are they think they’ve only got themselves and their low achievement says that they’re not bothered about themselves, they just like do anything”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Stigma: higher sets justified streaming:

“So you’re not mixing with them people that’s lower than you”

(Year 7, female, state school)

Not Good Enough

At private school emphasis on not being good enough-achievement not effort and punishment:

“Like if you do revise but if you’re literally really rubbish at it, they don’t like give you a chance in it, you don’t like get half marks for it you get a red card for it”

(Year 7 male, private school)

Rewards

Rewards e.g., class of the week always brought out bad feelings for the others.

Jealousies, conflict and resentment:

“Like normally it’d be like brainy groups that they’d pick for best work but ‘cos y’know like right low forms y’know like people that needs and stuff they tend to pick them cos they’re not right good”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Punishment

“Can’t do isolation me, never done it, never can, I’ve always walked out of it, I can’t just sit there and look at a black-board cos you have boards don’t you like boards going up, you always sit there, in rows and sit at this board and then you don’t do shit, sit there for six hours, what’s point. All day you sit there. Me, I get migraines me big migraines”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

“It is a student prison...all detentions I had, they were all piss taking bastards”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

Affects of Punishment

- **Should this be allowed?** Improvement?
Mental health?
- Aggression imposed on them
- **Punishment makes angry children angrier**-Causes more anger to take out on others (e.g., teachers, pupils) and more punishment

“She locked me in, she took keys and like she was sat at her desk, she left her keys on table so I decided to go out of window and she pulled me back so I threw her out, got keys and went home”

(Year 11, female, PRU)

Waiting to be caught out:

“Teachers are strict, you can’t do owt, you get like 3 comments and you get a detention and then it just leads up and leads up and leads up, I just think they try getting you kicked out me”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

Putting all bad pupils together makes their behaviour worse:

“You get used to like listening to ‘em talking about being naughty and that and then you be naughty and you can’t help it here, you can’t help it, you come here and you just mess about and you can’t help it”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

Exclusion a dumping ground and adverse affect on perception of self:

“We get treat like shit, we’re like at bottom of world, we just get thrown in rubbish really”

(Year 10, male, PRU)

Punishment does not teach children how to reflect on their behaviour and be better people:

“Sometimes when you’ve been naughty they give you a detention and they won’t actually tell you what you’ve done wrong”

(Year 7, female, private school)

B: “I think if somebody came in actually and really told them ‘what are you actually trying to achieve here’ they would have a second thought”

I: “Don’t you think people do?”

H and *B: “No”

A: “They just give ‘em lines or something”

(Year 7, female and *male, private school)

Being Valued

Not important, but some less unimportant

Not just peer-peer ostracism, lessons

“I play for football team and everybody treats me better like with teachers and that. Sometimes when they’re by themselves you tend to feel sorry for them when your just watching them and there’s no-one talking to ‘em or nowt”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Desperate measures for acceptance for those who don’t fit in:

“Everyone picks on him because he’s got really big ears. And so we tried to have his ears pinned back...but we don’t know how much it will cost, if it will cost a lot”

(Year 7, male, state school)

“They don’t exactly care” (Year 7, female, state school)

“My hands were turning blue and all my face went blue and I went ‘Miss can I go and wash my hands, no get jogging”

(Year 7, female, state school)

Having to wear P.E skirts and skirts in private school:

“It was a really, really freezing cold netball match and I had my trackie bottoms on and Miss, she gave me a red card”

(Year 7, female, private school)

What does this teach girls? Boys? Purpose-What and whose?

Boredom and Lack of Control

Unavoidable: not in control of behaviour and thoughts

Frustration and disruption:

I: “When we’re bored what happens to our minds?”

Z: “It sort of turns to jelly and we think about anything”

***F: “It sort of switches off”**

(Year 7, male and *female, state school)

I: “But why can’t pupils control themselves, why can’t they?”

A: “Work that you get given as well innit”

(Year 10, male, PRU)

“When it’s boring loads of people mess about and throw things around the classroom ‘cos it’s boring”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Boredom used to explain why people bully i.e. ‘nowt to do’

Perception of Bullying

C can't imagine a school without bullying
which is an accepted part of school

“It's natural for a school”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Older children teaching how to treat people:

“Year 9's are worst like registration this morning you're walking back, me and Mark had to go up to Science block and see Miss...and they're all there kicking us, pushing us out of way, 'get out of way'”.

(Year 7, male, state school)

Bullying too severe and abstract to warrant happening to the individual

Having a laugh but then bullying when probe deeper:

“All he does at school is mi mum’s bought me this, mi mum’s bought me this, and he’ll always say it to me, upset, and I just sit there and keep it inside, well what does your mum buy you, fuck all and I’ll know he’ll be winding me up but I won’t bite on that, or yeah if I do, I’ll honestly just punch him, if I just bite on that one”.

(Year 11, female, PRU)

Physical retaliation can make psychological bullying worse e.g., showing you’re bothered

Role of Teacher in Bullying

Teachers distant/abstract role-intervention often unsuccessful and makes things worse:

“Teachers do help you fit in a bit...we did this story and he was pretending to be the boy that got bullied”

(Year 7, female, state school)

‘Kes’

C fear telling tales, outsiders will make it worse e.g., fear of punishment for bullying and more anger to take out on the victim

M: “When teachers say ‘you can tell us anything’”

W: “For bullying like if you say tell a teacher”

E*: “They don’t do anything”

W: “You just get bullied even more then”

M: “And if you told you get called a grasser”

(Year 7, males and *female, private school)

Excluded children fight back to the bullying but then subject to punishment and further hardship (e.g., medication, prison, exclusion) :

I: “What were you like, why did people think you had ADHD?

C: “Because of my temper, anybody who used to call me knob-head or summat I’d just run over and hit ‘em”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

“I got bullied in primary school me. That’s why I don’t let no-one bully me now. It was all way, all way through primary school until about year 6 when I turned round and hit ‘em all and no-one’s bullied me since that. I think that’s what got me into fighting and stuff”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

Severe adverse affects of not dealing with bullying e.g., violence crime and suicide:

“I’ve told plenty of teachers y’know like when my friends have been bullied and that’s why there’s so much fighting cos they do not listen and school is a nasty place”

(Year 11, female, PRU)

“Michael’s brother right, he was in this school, summat happened to him when he was about our age in Year 7 something happened to him bad. A Year 9 whacked him so what he did, he took it out on all children and teachers and burnt school down and next day he got put in prison, y’know what he did, he started thingy, he were chaining his prison and he said he was gonna hang himself if he doesn’t get out”

(Year 7, female, state school)

Schools don’t respond deeply to this:

“People keep burning it down and they keep building it up”

(Year 7, male, state school)

Vicious cycle of bullying that ‘people bully because they are bullied’-but where does bullying come from and what results from it?

“Respect has got to work both ways you’ve got to give it to be able to get it”

(Year 11, female, PRU)

Aggression from teachers to pupils:

“You can’t win against a teacher. You can’t. They’ve always got to be right about everything, if they’ve got something in their head then that’s that you’ve done it, you’re not gonna change their mind and if you do try changing their mind then they start going leet and then I go leet”

(Year 11, male, PRU)

Teachers bullying pupils e.g., “[Sir] always shouts at Robert”

But children show hostility to their teachers

R: “She shouts at teachers, she calls [Sir] Spit-nose”

B: “Cos he’s gay, he shouts at you for getting your planner out”

(Year 7, *female and male, state school)

I: “It’s not nice to make fun of your teachers”

E: “Well they make fun of us”

(Year 7, females, state school)

Political power struggle of teacher e.g., ‘soft’ teachers:

“If teacher was a push over then that was it, that was just, one of the best lessons if you could push teacher over that was it, she just got it for rest of year”

(Year 11, female, PRU)

Concluding Questions

- How can much can teachers reduce bullying if the values of the establishment they work for are perpetuating bullying?
- However, prevailing perceptions of bullying are associated with the Olweus definition
- Is this why children can bully to the extent that they do perhaps because they are bullied? Individual identity replaced with an institutional one with the values of fitting in, following others, leaving people out, being better than and not feeling good enough or that they matter thrive in school
- Would there be less bullying in school/work/society if the children were treated better?

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