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Are current perceptions of
what constitutes as bullying
part of the cure or the
disease?

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Aims

- Discuss current perceptions of bullying and limitations of these
- Explain how often unassumed experiences in school may constitute as bullying

Objectives

- Discuss how bullying is currently defined and implications of this
- Provide evidence which questions this
- Describe where bullying exists in everyday school culture e.g., 'thick' 'swot' divide
- Analyse how societal factors e.g., beauty industry may be associated with bullying

Mainstream definition of bullying

- **Olweus' (1993, p. 9) definition on bullying widely influential today** states that bullying:
 - Involves 2 or more pupils
 - Is repeated (usually)
 - Involves exposure to negative actions
 - Negative actions-e.g., threats, name calling, hitting, pushing, kicking, excluding
 - Is intentional
 - Is psychological or physical
 - Is aggressive behaviour
 - Involves an imbalance of power (unequal strength physical or psychological)

Bullying is perceived as...

- Distinguishable from other forms of behaviour
e.g., fighting
- Being measurable-e.g., prevalence
- Intensity?
- Experienced or not experienced

Result: Abnormalising Bullying

- A 'neat' definition of bullying-and pre-defining bullying to participants-restrictions and static
- Statistics finding that bullying is experienced by a minority (e.g., victims 5-20%, bullies 2-20% Monks et al 2009)
- Characteristics of bullies/victims e.g., crime and bullying, 'passive' victims (Elliot 2002; Ahmed 2006; Olweus 1993)
- Focusing on most 'violent' and least sophisticated forms of bullying
- But what comes in between e.g., bully and crime?
- Pathologising bullying-i.e. bullying the victim and the bullied?

Found in Present Research

- **Observations and interviews in high schools**-state schools, private, and pupil referral unit
- **Bullying-everyday experience of school** e.g., name calling, pushing, shoving, kicking, intimidation, ostracism:
- **Children 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)

"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)

- Who does it miss? Beyond individual level to a societal level

Questions mainstream definitions of bullying

- **Bullying does not have to be repeated, can fear the bullying happening again:**
- S: After school, a couple of lads started hitting me in head and that with planks of wood and like bricks and that and chucking bricks at us...I got a mushed up face and that...I told teachers and that and police...They're alright now, now they've been locked up just start hanging out with us and that, having a joke with us
- I: How do you feel towards them now?
- S: Not so sure cos they could do it again
- I: Do you feel they might?
- **C: If you say one wrong thing**
- **S: Yeah, I think they'll do it again"**
- (Year 10, male and female, state school)
- Psychological i.e. fear in physical

Intent:

- How do you prove intent?
- Is it any less bullying if not intentional (Lee 2006)?
- Psychological affects of 'they didn't mean to do it'
- Psychological 'torment' of intent question?

Power Imbalance

- **Fluidity of power relations:** pupils can be bullied by teachers but pupils can bully teachers:
- *“We were having an History lesson about War and everybody was stood up looking at bomb so I stood up, looked at this bomb, everybody sat down, I sat down and then he goes ‘what did you get up for Jack ’ I goes ‘cos everyone else was looking’ he goes ‘don’t back chat me”*

(Year 7, male, state school)

Pushing a Teacher Over...

R: "She shouts at teachers, she calls Mr. Jones 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)

- *"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, Pupil Referral Unit)

Control? Fun?

More Complex Power Relations

- Experiences in school include:
- Divide and hostility between the haves and have nots e.g., ‘thick’ kids and ‘swots’
- **“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)

At the Bottom

- *“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)

“We’re like bottom ‘cos we’re thickest” (Year 7, female, private school) and staff ‘we call them the diddliwonks’

The Divide

Feeling 'not good enough' many shared e.g., '*I feel thick*' and '*I'm thick*'

Top sets-good enough?

However, for 'swots':

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)

Ostracism beyond Peers

- *“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 nothing”*

(Year 7, male, state school)

What are we teaching children here?

Voice in Children

- **Bullying associated with not having ‘voice’** and some taking it out on others
- **Teachers not listening to pupils** used to explain why there is so much bullying:
- *“I’ve told plenty of teachers in mainstream school y’know like when my friends have been bullied and that’s why there’s so much fighting cos they do not listen”*
- (Year 11, female, PRU)

Answering Back

- Not listened to e.g., *‘answering back’*
“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)

Whose Voice?

- **School council-more 'important'** and more influential, however:
- *"I: It seems interesting though being on the school council"*
- *S: Sometimes it is but sometimes it's a bit boring but like you get to know what people want and what you can't have"*
- (Year 7, female, private school)
- Where does 'voice' exist?

Female Right to Vote

- Girls have 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)

- Showing female. Exposure e.g., splits. Restrictions
- *“I don’t really mind wearing a skirt but loads of people say or I really want to wear trousers but if you wear trousers and a blazer and you’re a girl, you look like a boy, you’re allowed to wear skin-coloured tights which is good but you’re not allowed to wear jackets”*

(Year 7, female, private school)

Following Masters

“I’d like trousers but I’m fine with skirts, we’ve tried to campaign for trousers but the headmaster says no”

(Year 7, female, private school)

Overturing Protests e.g., petitions

Accepting ruling: a ‘good lesson in life? ‘Yes’

Following rules. Choice?

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

Punishment: treating symptoms?

- Punishments e.g., detention, lines and isolation do not treat the cause of behaviour but does it even treat symptoms?

“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)

Just Give ‘em Lines

- *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)*

Punishment: Fighting Fire with Fire

- A form of aggression imposed on pupils?
- Isolation 'the in thing' causing migraines and dizziness:

“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)

Affects of Punishment

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

(Year 11, male, PRU)

- **Should this be allowed?** Improvement?
Mental health?
- **Punishment makes “angry children angrier and ‘bad kids’ worse”**-Causes more anger to take out on others (e.g., teachers, pupils) and more punishment

Physical Appearance

Rejection from others-pressure for intervention e.g., cosmetic surgery:

“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)

- What impact does the beauty industry have on bullying?

www.bulliedvoices.com/culture/beauty/

Bullying: The Beauty of the Beast

- Pressure to 'correct imperfections'
- Ads-fight aging, lose weight, breast augmentation, 'perfect teeth=messages not good enough
- Buying low self-esteem?
- Who benefits?
- Can we then expect children to accept themselves and others as they are?

Rejection of Imperfection

- **People often want to change the things they are bullied for:**
- *I: “Why do you think people call you these names?”*
- *K: Cos of my voice and my weight and that*
- *I: Do you think if you had a different voice or a different weight then they wouldn’t bully you?*
- *K: Yeah. My mum sent me to doctor’s about my weight and they said that it will change in future but I’m like on weight watchers diet and that about my weight and I try to do my best about it”*

(Year 10, male, state school)

Summary

- Bullying a complex problem beyond individual level
- Emphasis on most unsophisticated forms of bullying-bullying the bullied and victims
- Need to examine beyond typical bullies and victims
- Institutional and societal forms of bullying-'thick' 'swot' divide, physical appearance, rejections and ostracism on a wider scale than individual bullying

Hypocrisy of Bullying

- Telling children bullying is wrong and expecting them to stop will have minimal affect when our society and schools are surrounded by it and some industries e.g., beauty industry are making profit out of it
- In school-excluding and stigmatising groups e.g., in sport and setting level causes friction, hostility and bullying
- Bullying in this environment is natural and something 'you can't get rid of'

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