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Modalities of Bullying in Children's Everyday Experiences of School

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Abstract

This poster examines where bullying exists in children's everyday experiences of school. Observations, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in state schools, a private school and a pupil referral unit. A postmodernist perspective is used to problematise the concept of bullying and examine it from a broader perspective than most current definitions do, which distinguish bullying as a specific form of aggression, experienced by a minority. Rather, bullying is examined as multiple modalities of maltreatment that are experienced to some extent by all pupils and teachers. Teachers were not separate from the bullying process and were found to be part of the everyday experiences and interactions in school which contribute to endemic bullying.

Introduction: What is Bullying?

Importance of Bullying Definitions

How bullying is defined and perceived underpins how it is experienced, recognised and dealt with e.g. anti-bullying policy

Traditional Definition of Bullying

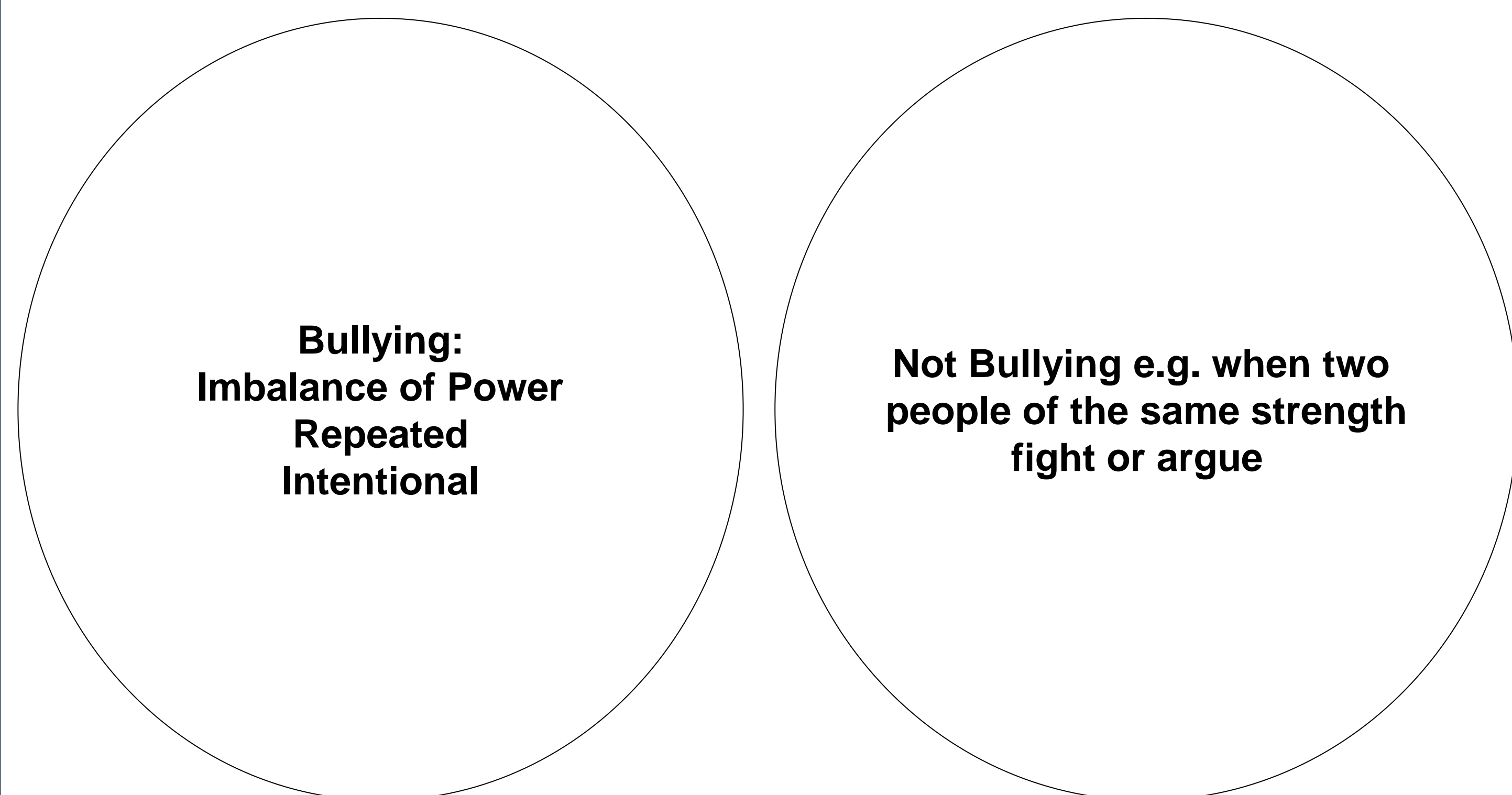
Most definitions of bullying involve the following 3 components pioneered by Olweus (1993)

- A clear imbalance of power
- Repetition
- Intentionality

Some researchers acknowledge overlap between bullying and other forms of aggression (Cowie and Jennifer 2008).

10-20% have been bullied in the past six months (Smith et al 1999)

Inserted below is a diagram demonstrating this definition of bullying:



Alternative Definitions

Prevalence of bullying depends on how you measure it e.g. last month or last year (Monks et al 2009)

Green (2001) argues that all children are affected by bullying whether they are an active participant or not

“Bullying is an elusive phenomenon which has defied attempts to define it” (Chan 2009, p.185)

Spectrum of bullying from severe to mild e.g. teasing can be perceived as harmless but can also result in suicide (Morita 1996)

Measuring the prevalence of bullying is limited by the stigma of the term (Myers 2006)

Aim

Critically explore the concept of bullying by examining children's everyday experiences and interactions in school with pupils and teachers and where bullying may exist within this, starting from children's perspectives

Methodology

Positivist Approach (Prevalent Approach)

Bullying is an objective category that needs to fulfil a certain criteria (e.g. imbalance of power) and can be identified by the researcher regardless of 'pupil voice'

Therefore you are being bullied or you are not and this decision can be made based on observable behaviours

Social Constructionist Perspective (Used in this Research)

Issues to address:

- Is bullying what people say it is?
- Can bullying be experienced but not labelled as such?
- Social constructionist perspective involves the disruption of binaries that define things as either or and does not perceive bullying as a phenomenon that clearly exists or does not (Burr 1995; Atkinson 2002)
- This allows an examination into the 'grey' areas of bullying
- It focuses more on the victim's experience rather than the behaviour of the bully

Methods

Observations and interviews (84 participants: 10 group interviews and 32 children interviewed individually)

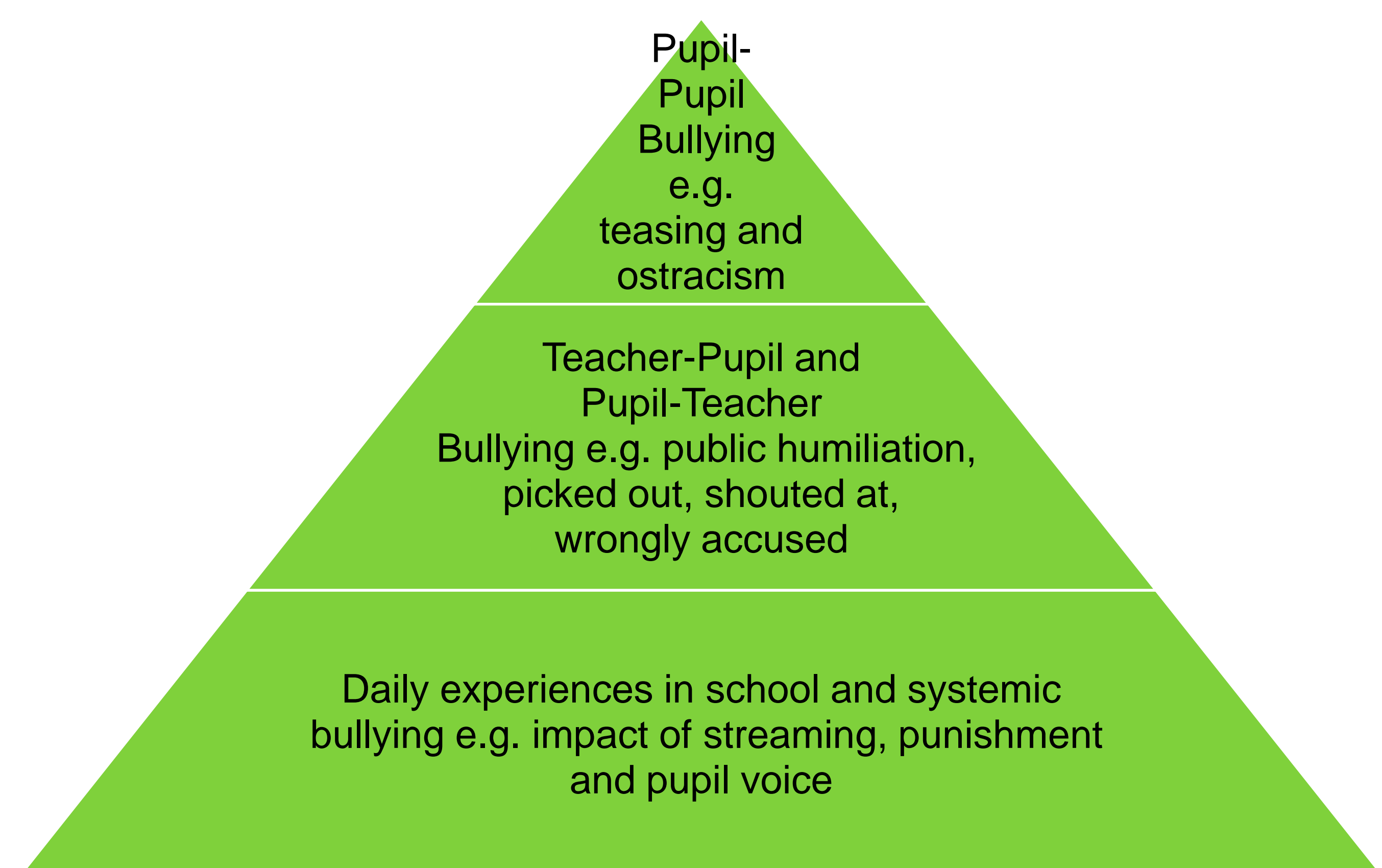
State schools (5), private school and PRU

Semi-structured interviews and informal observations

Developed themes for interviews from observations and focus groups

Results

Below is a diagram summarising the modalities of bullying that were found in this research:



Discussion

Bullying is not an isolated, binary phenomenon, as suggested by Olweus (1993)

Rather, as suggested by a postmodernist approach, there are different modalities of bullying e.g. on an individual and institutional level e.g. teasing, teacher-pupil bullying and institutional bullying (e.g. 'bad boy' sub-culture)

Teachers are not separate from bullying and are circumscribed by policies and procedures in terms of how they interact with children and handle bullying, therefore, their power to be 'the social engineer' of change in the classroom, as suggested by Chan (2009) is limited

Contrast with abstract and lived experiences of bullying-although participants often perceived teasing, ostracism and name-calling as bullying, when it happened to them they usually preferred to use the term 'picked on'

Popularity was cited as the main motivator to bully, however, violent bullying and working class male behaviour e.g. hitting the bully was more often likely to be identified as bullying and the 'victim' was then punished for their response

Conclusion

- Rejection of binary definitions of bullying to acknowledge modalities and spectra of bullying
- Children's daily experiences in school and where bullying exists within this should be examined as opposed to investigating bullying as an isolated phenomenon
- Further Work: How do you devise a threshold of what bullying involves with a definition of bullying that integrates different modalities, perceptions and 'grey' areas of bullying in school?