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Biographies

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Helen Cowie www.ukobservatory.com is Emerita Professor at the University of Surrey in the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences where she specialises in strategies to counteract school bullying. She has over 100 publications in refereed journals on the subject of mental health in youth, emotional development, cyberbullying and peer support. She has also authored and co-authored a number of influential books. In *Managing School Violence* and *New Perspectives on Bullying*, she and Dawn Jennifer designed training for a whole-school approach that emphasised the importance of fostering positive relationships in the school community as a whole and provided a wealth of evidence-based good practice for professionals. *Understanding Children's Development*, now into its fifth edition, remains one of the most popular undergraduate textbooks in the field. Her most recent book *From Birth*

to Sixteen <http://www.routledge.com/cw/cowie/> is a useful resource for educators and healthcare professionals working with children and young people.

This study explored 10- and 11-year-old students' (N = 64) moral emotional attributions in relation to other and self in peer-to-peer bullying scenarios in primary school. Data were gathered using one-to-one semi-structured interviews facilitated by the use of a series of pictorial vignettes depicting a hypothetical story of peer bullying. The results demonstrated that worry and to a lesser extent shame were most often attributed to the other as victim character, indifference and pride to the other as bully character, and worry and shame to the other as follower character. Participants mostly attributed worry to self as victim, shame and worry to self as bully and shame to self as follower. The findings are discussed in relation to the role of peers in addressing school bullying, such as through peer support. There are implications for school-based interventions to address bullying that facilitate self-awareness and empathy in children and young people as a means of addressing such behaviour.

Key words: school bullying; moral emotional attributions; pictorial vignettes

Introduction

Research on general attitudes to peer-to-peer bullying suggest that the majority of children are opposed to such behaviour and supportive of victims (e.g., Boulton and Underwood 1992). Not only do children judge that it is morally wrong to hurt others or to treat others unfairly, they also perceive that aggression is wrong and harmful (Murray-Close, Crick and Galotti 2006; Shaw and Wainryb 2006). In addition, children of all ages are likely to be critical of behaviours that target others' well-being (Shaw and Wainryb 2006). Nevertheless, substantial numbers of primary school children report being bullied, and bullying others, on a regular basis (Shaughnessy and Jennifer 2007). More worryingly, sadistic types of bullying have emerged as a sub-type of aggression, suggesting that some children experience positive arousal from inflicting harm on another (Bosacki, Marini and Dane 2006). Research into school bullying that focuses on the area of moral reasoning could have important implications for interventions that reduce and prevent such conduct (Menesini et al. 2003).

A few studies have investigated children's understanding of others' emotions in relation to peer-to-peer school bullying. In a cross-national study using pictorial vignettes, participants from Portugal and Spain, aged 9-, 11- and 13-years-old, were interviewed regarding their emotional attributions to other and self as the bully and the victim characters (del Barrio et al. 2003). Participants attributed rejected (55%), sad (49%), and ashamed and afraid (13% each) to other as victim. Similar emotional attributions were made to self as victim. In terms of other as bully, happy (60%), pride (27%) and guilt (8%) were attributed. In contrast, almost half of the sample reported that they would feel guilt (45%) as the bully and, to a lesser extent, happiness (17%) and pride (11%).]

These findings regarding bullies and moral development are supported by the results from another European study, which explored bullies', victims' and outsiders' feelings in relation to the task of putting themselves into the role of the bully in a bullying situation (Menesini et al. 2003). The study focused on emotions of moral responsibility (guilt and shame) and emotions of moral disengagement (indifference and pride). Compared with victims and outsiders, bullies attributed higher levels of moral disengagement emotions to the bully in the bullying scenario. Analysis of

specific mechanisms of moral disengagement revealed that bullies possessed a main profile of egocentric reasoning. The authors suggest that, when putting themselves into the role of the bully, personal motives and the benefits of bullying behaviour were sufficient to justify negative and anti-social behaviours.

Using a set of pictorial vignettes, Ttofi and Farrington (2008) asked 10- to 12-year-olds questions about the emotions they would have felt, including anger, shame, remorse or guilt, if they were in the position of the child in the vignette. Two types of shaming – disintegrative shaming and integrative shaming - had different effects on the ways in which the children anticipated managing shame. Children who scored high on disintegrative shaming scored high on maladaptive forms of shame management. Disintegrative shaming relates to rejecting parenting styles, usually associated with the suppression of empathy. The authors acknowledge the difficulty involved in enhancing children's moral competence by working with emotions of shame and guilt, but they propose that the management of emotions and behaviour are closely bound to the social context and the quality of relationships, both in the family and with the peer group. This study confirms the role of school in promoting moral values through restorative practices and through the teaching of emotional literacy.

Since research evidence suggests the social group context within which bullying takes place both promotes and sustains bullying behaviour (Salmivalli, 2010), a major limitation of the previous research is the focus on emotional moral attributions to the bully, or the bullies as a homogeneous group, and the victim, to the exclusion of other individuals involved in bullying. It is important to give attention to the wider social group context that influences whether aggressive behaviour between group members will occur (DeRosier et al. 1994). For example, bystanders in the bullying context have been described as “those who watch, avert their eyes, pretend not to notice, egg on protagonists, stand on the outskirts, and provide an audience” (Hazler 1996, 19). Research by Salmivalli and others (1996) suggests that bystanders play a number of roles in the bullying episode from simply providing an audience to becoming actively involved in the interaction between the bully and the victim. Hazler (1996) observes that bystanders make up the majority in any given bullying situation, yet they receive the least research attention and their potential contribution to influence such situations goes largely unnoticed.

In terms of moral reasoning, Jones, Manstead and Livingstone (2011), using a text-message bullying scenario with 10- to 11-year-olds, indicated the key role played by the group in shaping how children respond to bullying. They found that pride following a bullying episode was associated with affiliation with the bullying group and conclude that group identification influences the individual's response to a group-relevant event. Their findings indicate that children value the protection provided by affiliation with a dominant group of peers. This group affiliation plays a powerful role in whether members resist or support the aggressive intentions of others, and also influences the group-based emotions of pride, shame and anger experienced as a consequence and highlights the roles other than perpetrator and target that children play in the bullying process (Salmivalli 1999).

Therefore, the main aim of the present study was to explore children's emotional attributions and moral reasoning in relation to primary school bullying, and their understanding of the bullying relationship. Here we report the results concerning the nature of the relationship portrayed in the story, the moral emotional experiences attributed to characters in the story, and how children related to and empathised with the characters' emotional states.

Method

Design

One-to-one interviews were carried out using a semi-structured interview schedule devised to capture children's knowledge and reasoning about school bullying facilitated by the use of a series of pictorial vignettes depicting a hypothetical story of peer-to-peer bullying adapted from the Scripted-CARtoon Narrative of Bullying (SCAN) drawings (Almeida et al. 2001)

Participants

Letters were mailed to all primary and secondary school head teachers in a south-west London (UK) Local Authority inviting them to participate in the study. Following telephone conversations with several prospective schools, two primary schools agreed

to participate. A principle of consent was adopted that required the active consent of the child and the passive consent of the adult (Thomas and O’Kane 1998). Head teachers sent home a letter seeking ‘opt in’ consent for their child to be approached to participate. Following this, all students from Year 6 were invited to participate in the study at an introduction session; all consented to take part (66 children). However, not all volunteers were available to participate due to absence at the time of data collection; the final sample consisted of 64 participants, 30 males (47%) and 34 females (53%), aged 10- to 11-years-old.

Materials

The pictorial vignettes were adapted and modified for a UK sample from the *SCAN* drawings (Almeida et al. 2001) developed in Europe. The vignettes were redesigned by a young art student to reflect the UK sample in terms of: primary school age, ethnic diversity, and primary school culture (i.e., the wearing of school uniform). The intention of the story illustrated by the drawings was to convey the idea of an imbalance of power and repeated aggressive behaviours such that the interpretation of the story was in terms of intentional and hurtful actions, rather than isolated or irregular events. The set of 14 A4-size drawings included one neutral vignette, followed by nine vignettes [depicting mean and unpleasant behaviours] performed by one individual or by a group of peers (see Figure 1 for an example). A short caption describing the content of the vignette was included with each (e.g., “She sees the other children playing a game and wants to join in”; see Table 1 for a summary). The remaining four vignettes completed the set of drawings, each representing a different outcome to the story in terms of distinct roles taken by adults and peers (optimistic: the children all play together; pessimistic: the victim remains alone; peer social support: the victim seeks the support of a peer; and, adult social support: the victim seeks the support of an adult). A masculine and a feminine version of the same story were used for males and females, respectively. Where necessary, captions were re-written to address anomalies arising from translation into English, and to incorporate idiomatic vocabulary; for example, in vignette 5, “recess” was changed to “playtime”; and in vignette 7, “ground” was changed to “floor”.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

To assess the modifications to the vignettes, pre-test interviews were carried out with twelve participants from the main sample. The majority of these participants (82%) described the nature of the relationship as bullying. The remaining 18% described the behaviours as aggression, without explicitly mentioning bullying. This was the intended outcome and supported the effectiveness of vignettes to study children's constructions of bullying in school (Ojala and Nesdale 2004). The data from the pre-test interviews were analyzed along with the data from the main study.

During presentation of the vignettes, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule devised to capture children's knowledge and reasoning about bullying in school (del Barrio et al. 2003). This included questions about narrative and causal attributions (e.g., "After looking carefully at the drawings, what would you say is happening in the story, from the beginning to the end?"; "What do you think is happening with this girl/boy? [*pointing to one character in two or three different drawings, then another character, etc.*]"); moral emotional attributions (worry, shame, indifference, pride) to the characters in the story (e.g., "Can anyone in this story feel ashamed. Why?"); and moral emotional attributions to self in the role of the characters (e.g., "And if you were one of these boys/girls could you also feel ashamed? [*pointing to the characters in turn*]. Why?"). Interview questions were re-written to incorporate idiomatic vocabulary where necessary. In addition, in consideration of bullying from a wider social group context, questions relating to the role of characters other than the bully and the victim were included in the interview schedule. The full interview schedule can be obtained from the first author on request.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted during lesson time by the first author, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. Each interview commenced with standardized instructions regarding the general nature of the interview, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw, and ended with a debriefing, including resources for outside support should the need arise. With the agreement of all participants, audio tape recordings were collected for later transcription.

The first ten drawings, which conveyed temporal and space continuity for the various mean and unpleasant behaviours, were laid out on a table one by one, in ascending order (see Table 1). The researcher did not enter into discussion with participants regarding the script headings. If any doubts were verbalised by the participant the researcher avoided personal interpretation; rather children were probed about what they thought might be happening in the particular drawing. At no point did the interviewer introduce the terms “bullying”, “aggression”, “victim”, “bully/ies”, or “follower”. Following presentation of the drawings, participants were interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule. The final stage of the interview required the presentation of the four story outcomes, which were displayed in a randomized order to control for order of presentation effects.

Data Analysis

Methods of data analysis and representation were adopted that would respect children’s rights to freedom of participation and freedom of expression (UN, 1989), and that would ensure that the children’s voices were heard and represented (Mauthner and Doucet 1998). Thus, audio tape recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysis of the interview transcripts was carried out using a qualitative approach to content analysis as described by Millward (2000) and Woods, Priest and Roberts (2002). A coding system was derived from the interview schedule with additional conceptual codes arising from a closer inspection of each interview transcript (Millward 2000). Previously coded data were revisited periodically to check the stability of the coding over time (Cavanagh 1997).

To address concerns regarding researcher subjectivity, and in order that the process of research might be tracked (McKechnie 2002), a research journal was

maintained throughout the study. Awareness of events during data collection, and of researcher feelings, insights and interpretations, together with decisions regarding methodology, data analysis and ethical dilemmas (Miles and Huberman 1994) were recorded to facilitate consideration of the phenomenon under study, as well the ways in which researcher assumptions and behaviour might have impacted on the investigation. These issues were discussed regularly by the two authors.

Results

The majority of participants (89%) described the nature of the relationship depicted in the vignettes as bullying. They clearly identified a victim role and a group of bullies with a dominant leader. They also perceived a role, which primarily reflected their perception of a tentative, yet supportive, character in the bullying process, variously constructed as a “follower”, “tagger” and “back-up-bully” and henceforward referred to as “follower”.

Moral Emotional Attributions to the Victim Character

The victim character was most often characterized by worry. A major theme that emerged for this attribution related to the notion of fear of threat or harm from the bullies: “Because she knows that everyday something horrible is going to happen” (female). Another key theme that emerged was in terms of the victim’s anticipation of future danger or harm from the bullies with the most common concern related to the continuation and escalation of the bullying: “Um, I think he feels worried, the one who’s getting bullied...’cos he’s not sure at any stage if they’re gonna really, really beat him up, or like they’re going to spoil his life at school” (male).

The victim character was also characterized, to a lesser extent, by shame, more usually by males. According to participants’ responses, the main reasons for this attribution were the victim’s actual experience of being bullied and the notion that the victim had offended the bullies (broken up the bully group, done something bad to the bullies, hurt the bullies’ feelings, said something wrong to the bullies). Feeling humiliated was cited as another reason for attributing shame to the victim, usually in

terms of being laughed at or for falling over. Shame was also attributed to the victim in terms of difference, usually due to his or her appearance.

Moral Emotional Attributions to Self as the Victim Character

Self in the role of victim was most often characterized by worry, with participants' main explanation for this attribution in terms of fear of harm. Anticipation of future harm or danger was also mentioned when taking the role of the victim, in terms of the continuation of the bullying and anticipation of what might happen next. A number of participants expressed concern that the bullying might get worse.

Moral Emotional Attributions to the Bully Character

Pride was commonly attributed to the bully character, with engagement in bullying the victim cited as the main reason. For example, one girl reasoned: "Those three might be feeling proud... 'cos they're doing something to someone else". This theme was further illustrated by responses from some participants who suggested that being mean or hurtful or upsetting the victim was a reason to feel proud. One girl explained: "Because she gets pleasure, I think, out of doing this to people, it's just some people get pleasure out of hurting other people". A number of responses suggested that the bullies were feeling proud for being the leader of the bully group. For example, one boy stated: "Because he's leading the whole organization" and a female participant said: "I think the blonde haired girl's feeling proud because she's got a little gang around her". Feeling proud was also attributed to the bullies in terms of feeling "big", "cool" and "hard", for example, one boy reasoned that the blonde boy felt proud: "Because he's done most of the stuff and he thinks that doing that is going to make him all cool and Mr Nice Guy". Not caring was also cited as a reason for the bully to feel proud.

Indifference was also commonly attributed to the bully character, with participants mentioning this character's role as the bully and engagement in bullying the victim as the main reason for their attribution. For example, one girl reasoned: "Because they're not the ones that are, like, being bullied, like, they're the ones that are the bullies". A number of responses suggested that the bullies were making the

victim do things, hinting at a power imbalance. For example, one boy said, “Because they don’t really care, they’re just trying to vandalize everything he has and annoy him and try to make him do bad things and they might even be trying to get him into trouble”. This theme was further illustrated by another boy who articulated his response in terms of a power imbalance: “Because like they’re in control...like bullying him, yeah, and they realize that he’s quite weak and they gang up on him and they can, like, do whatever they want”.

Feeling indifferent was also attributed to the bullies in terms of their familiarity with bullying others, for example, one boy said, “Because he’s the one probably, like, in the story, like, the best at doing it because he’s done it so many times before”. This notion was further demonstrated by a response from a girl who replied, “Because she’s the one that’s doing it and people who usually get into the habit of doing things like this they just think it’s alright to do it ‘cos they’re powerful and they’re popular and they just think it’s alright to do stuff like this to them”. This response also alludes to the perception that popularity permits the opportunity to bully others.

A number of responses were constructed in terms of the bully feeling indifferent because he or she felt “big” or “cool” or was telling the other two what to do because he or she was the leader of the gang. Furthermore, participants attributed feeling indifferent to the bully in terms of feeling confident that there would not be any repercussions to the bully’s behaviour. For example, one girl said, “they know that they won’t get in trouble”. One male said, “‘Cos he thinks that he can get away with it and blame it on him, he’s got someone to blame”.

Moral Emotional Attributions to Self as the Bully Character

In contrast, shame was most commonly attributed to self in the role of bully, typically in terms of the bullying behaviours perpetrated against the victim. A number of participants mentioned that they would feel ashamed after the event.

To a lesser extent, worry was attributed to self in the role of bully, the main reason being for fear of the consequences of bullying, that is, the victim would either tell someone or they would “get caught”, and “get into trouble” (“expulsion”,

“exclusion”, “suspension”). A number of participants were concerned that, as a consequence of engaging in bullying behaviours, self in the role of bully would themselves be bullied either by the victim’s siblings or by another group.

Moral Emotional Attributions to the Follower Character

Participants characterized the follower as someone who “tags along with” the bullies, someone who is “not really doing that much”, someone who is “following them, doing nothing”, or someone “who’s trying to fit in”. Accordingly, worry was attributed to the follower in terms of this character not being fully engaged in the bullying. Whether this indicated that participants were worried for the follower for not playing a bigger part in the bullying episode or for only playing a small part was unclear. For example, one girl said: “‘Cos they’re not really doing anything...because they might not be, like, into bullying her...they might be the ones who are feeling sorry for her”. On the other hand, another girl suggested: “I think that little one there is worried because she’s not really doing much, she’s just laughing and stuff, and I think that she thinks, like, I’m not going to really get involved in it that much, I’m just going to laugh about it”.

The follower character was also characterized by shame, with the main reason given for this attribution being this character’s ambivalence regarding their participation in the bullying. Primarily, shame was attributed to the follower in terms of being involved but not really wanting to be involved. For example, one girl said, “Because, like, she doesn’t really want to be a bully or anything like that”. Additionally, in terms of questioning his or her part in the bullying one girl said, “‘Cos she’s just looking away she might think in her head I shouldn’t have done that, I shouldn’t have done that to the new girl”. Other reasons cited included participating in the bullying while knowing that such behaviour was wrong. For example, one girl held: “Because she knows that they shouldn’t be doing it”.

A number of female participants reasoned that their engagement in bullying was as a form of protection against becoming the next victim. As one girl said, “She’s feeling a bit ashamed that she has to do this but she still wants to be safe because she knows she won’t get bullied if she can stay best friends with the bullies”.

Less specifically, shame was attributed to the follower for being involved with the bully group, for example, one girl stated, “Yeah, she’s been looking at what they’re doing and feeling ashamed that she ever joined the gang”. A number of participants suggested that the follower knew what it was like for the victim because they had themselves experienced bullying, for example, one girl suggested: “Because she might have been bullied before and she can know what it feels like ‘cos she wears glasses”.

Moral Emotional Attributions to Self as the Follower Character

In taking the role of the follower, participants overwhelmingly cited ambivalence regarding this character’s participation in the bullying as the main reason. Primarily, responses were framed in terms of self in the role of follower feeling ashamed for being coerced into participating, or assisting against their better judgement. For example, one boy said: “‘Cos the blonde one’s like telling me what to do and sometimes them bullies, like, they are all, like, if the head one says ‘yeah I’m gonna beat you up’ and then the other two goes ‘yeah, yeah, we’re going to beat you up’ they all agree with what he says”. A number of participants suggested that they would feel ashamed because they would not really want to participate in the bullying. For example, one boy replied, “Because, like, I wouldn’t want to, I would, like, I don’t want to bully them, these guys are pushing me into bullying”. Others explained that they would feel ashamed for not helping the victim, for example, one boy suggested: “Because whatever you do you have to help others”. Some participants questioned their role in the bullying; for example, one female replied: “Because I would be thinking to myself that why am I trying to impress the other children, I should be running my own life, welcoming the new girl, not being mean to her”.

Discussion

In attributing moral emotions to the hypothetical protagonists in the pictorial vignettes, the victim character was most often characterized by worry and to a lesser extent shame; the bully character by pride and indifference; and the follower character by worry and shame. In stepping into the role of each of the characters in the

hypothetical story, participants mostly cited worry in taking the role of the victim and shame in taking the role of the follower, attributions similar to those attributed to the hypothetical victim and follower. On the other hand, when stepping into the role of the bully, participants attributed shame and worry to the self, attributions that contrasted with the emotions of pride and indifference previously ascribed to the hypothetical bully in the story.

That participants attributed a positive emotion such as pride to the bully character is consistent with previous research (del Barrio et al. 2003). This might suggest recognition that the expression of pride in a bullying situation brings social success for the bullies in terms of personal and social gains and advantages and an awareness of a lack of consideration of the consequences for the victims (Jones, Manstead, and Livingstone 2011; Menesini et al. 2003).

The attribution of negative emotions (worry, shame) to the victim character is also consistent with previous research (del Barrio et al. 2003), with participants perceiving the bullying behaviours depicted to be threatening and harmful. This resonates with Olweus' (1994) definition of bullying in terms of repetition and imbalance of power. The attribution of worry to the victim suggests that participants saw a power imbalance between the victim and the bullies and perceived the physical, emotional or social well-being of the victim to be under threat and/or attack, such that the victim was perceived to be unable to defend him- or herself.

The characterization of the follower as worried and ashamed is illuminating. This has not been previously documented and the present findings enhance knowledge regarding children's understandings of others' moral emotions that go beyond the bully/victim dyad to include the wider social group within which bullying takes place. While participants' responses demonstrate the follower's concern for the victim (feeling sorry, worrying about the continuation of the bullying, worrying about the intensity of the bullying), their responses also suggest an awareness that the follower feared the personal consequences of their bullying behaviour more than they feared the consequences of their actions on the victim (Menesini et al. 2003). Indeed, some of the participants in this study perceived the follower's behaviour to be justified, because it offered protection against becoming the next victim, suggesting that such behaviour was deemed personally and socially acceptable through a process of moral

disengagement, that is, in terms of personal gain (Bandura 1999). Conversely, some participants' citing of empathic reasons for attributing worry to the follower suggests an attitude of moral responsibility toward the victim (Menesini et al. 2003).

When participants were asked whether they could feel worried/ashamed/indifferent/proud if they were one of the characters in the hypothetical story, they mostly cited worry in taking the role of the victim, shame and to a lesser extent worry in taking the role of the bully, and shame in taking the role of the follower. When taking the role of the victim and the follower, participants' self attributions were similar to those for a hypothetical victim and a hypothetical follower; this suggests that they share these characters' feelings, that is, they empathize with the emotional states of both the victim and the follower in the story (Eisenberg 2000). On the other hand, when stepping into the role of the bully, participants attributed shame and worry to the self, attributions that contrast with the emotions of moral disengagement (pride, indifference) ascribed to the hypothetical bully. This finding concurs with previous research that has shown that children attribute more negative emotions to the self as aggressor than to a hypothetical aggressor (del Barrio et al. 2003; Keller, Lourenço, Malti and Saalbach 2003). This suggests that participants were able to differentiate themselves from the hypothetical bully and reject the bully's moral disengagement regarding the bullying behaviours (Keller, Malti and Saalbach 2003).

The present study offers ideas for strategies and policies to address the issue of bullying in real-life situations. Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand and Amatya (1999) found that having at least one good friend at school is a fundamental resource. It can be a very effective strategy if the bullied pupil starts a process of getting new friends in order to cope with bullying. Our participants indicated a capacity to feel empathy for the victim in a range of bullying scenes. The school can facilitate this process by establishing a system of buddying to offer emotional support to vulnerable pupils and to give the befrienders the opportunity to find practical ways to demonstrate the empathy for the victim that they might otherwise feel unable to express.

At a wider level, peer support systems have been shown to heighten awareness of the impact of bullying on individuals' emotions and to foster a sense of moral

responsibility in the whole school (Cowie 2011). Cowie and Smith (2010) demonstrate how systems of peer support not only help individuals to deal with the emotional impact of rejection and social exclusion at the hands of peers but also create a more positive ethos in the school community as a whole. They identify evidence-based strategies, including training programmes in active listening, peer mediation and befriending, to address emotions of distress, anger and fear. The capacity of peer supporters to listen and learn facilitates the recognition and effective management of emotions and is germane to the development of a caring school community.

Lessons on challenging group norms that condone abusive behaviour could directly address the emotions of bullies, followers and bystanders by, for example, exploring the reasons why some children might feel pride in bullying others or being associated with perpetrators' actions. Working with classroom groups may be a strong part of the solution by indicating that members of the peer group can work collectively to overcome bullying and to buffer its negative effects on the emotions and sense of moral engagement in the school community. By enabling children to explore emotions aroused by bullying situations they can be given the opportunity to reflect on how these feelings arise, where the origins of guilt and shame are situated and how collectively they can work to resist aggressive behaviour that targets vulnerable peers. Activities that use narrative approaches to raise awareness about bullying (Cowie and Jennifer 2008), for example, would provide a foundation for emotional literacy in the whole school grounded in real-life concerns of the children themselves.

Finally, our research indicates the importance of working with peer group relationships as a fundamental way of addressing the issue of bullying. The findings support the view that members of the peer group may play a role in the development of bullying behaviour. This affirms the need for schools to establish a whole-school approach with a range of systems and interventions in place for tackling all forms of bullying and social exclusion. This suggests that action against bullying should be part of a much wider concern within the school to foster self-awareness and understanding of group processes within an emotionally literate community. Learning to regulate emotions and navigate relationships is an essential developmental task if

children and young people are to cope with the complex array of situations, some very stressful, that they will inevitably encounter in their lives.

There were a number of limitations with the use of pictorial vignettes as a means of facilitating one-to-one interviews. In the first instance, participants' responses to the interview questions were about how they believed they would feel or act in a hypothetical bullying situation and, as such, may not have accurately reflected how they would behave in actuality (Barter and Renold 2000; Schoenberg and Ravdal 2000). In this study therefore, participants' responses can only be considered as representative of how they might behave or feel in an actual bullying situation. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that participants may have presented social desirable responses about, for example, self as bully, or responses that reflected their school's ethos and anti-bullying work, in an attempt to appear pro-social in front of the researcher.

Associated with the issue of pictorial vignettes versus real-life bullying experiences, was the portrayal of bullying behaviours and bullying scenarios in the hypothetical story. The pictorial vignettes used depicted a range of types of bullying behaviours including direct physical, direct verbal and indirect verbal bullying behaviours, with same gender versions of the story presented to participants. Nevertheless, the content of the pictorial vignettes was problematic for a number of reasons. First, while a masculine and a feminine version of the hypothetical story were used, by intention and design, the pictorial vignettes did not provide for the notion of mixed gender bullying identified in the literature. Shaughnessy and Jennifer (2007) found that whereas girls rarely bullied boys, girls experienced bullying from both boys and girls. Therefore, future research may want to take into account scenarios depicting mixed gender bullying. In addition, the types of bullying behaviours portrayed in the pictorial vignettes did not include cyberbullying. Future research might consider featuring pictorial vignettes that illustrate cyberbullying, such as through the use of mobile phones and the internet.

The employment of a semi-structured interview schedule is worthy of comment. While the use of a semi-structured interview enables the modification, omission or addition of questions according to what the interviewer considers appropriate in a given interview situation, such an approach entails the relative control

of the researcher over the whole process (Robson 2002). On reflection, it could be argued that one of the primary limitations of employing a semi-structured interview schedule was that the researcher-participant interaction might have been influenced by the school context in terms of the adult-child discourse patterns established in the classroom (Robinson and Kellet 2004). For example, school children are used to teachers and other adults initiating a discussion or conversation, often with a question, in which they are expected to provide a response, followed by feedback from the adult (Westcott and Littleton 2005). Thus, when interacting with an adult researcher in the school context, participants in the present study may have had an expectation of how to respond to an interview situation based on their prior experience in the classroom. Future research might consider employing a less structured interview format to facilitate a shared and co-constructed process, through which children could create their accounts regarding school bullying actively and meaningfully (Westcott and Littleton 2005). Actively involving children in the design and implementation of such research as co- or peer researchers might help to remove such contextual expectations.

In conclusion, while this paper makes no claims to generalizability to wider populations, nevertheless, this study allowed for in-depth exploration of moral emotional attributions in relation to primary school bullying from the child's perspective. The results generally concur with previous research, supporting the notion of participant roles in the bullying process. In addition, the findings regarding moral attributions to the follower role are novel and suggest opportunities for future research. The findings also suggest implications for school-based interventions to address bullying. It may be prudent for interventions to focus on fostering emotionally healthy interpersonal relationships that include components such as understanding moral values, understanding emotional states and strategies for building empathy. Furthermore, it is apparent that researchers and practitioners need to take into account the perspectives of the children themselves if anti-bullying work is to be effective.

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