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A Study on Indirect Bullying among Girls

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Sammanfattning

Denna studie behandlar ämnet mobbning. Inledningsvis ges en kort generell beskrivning av problematiken kring mobbning och vidare en mera ingående, kategoriserad beskrivning riktad mot flickors indirekta mobbning. Metoden jag använt för att uppnå min studie är en semistrukturerad kvalitativ undersökning. Genom att analysera givna data illustrerar jag företeelser förknippade med flickors mobbning och går igenom dessa under olika teman. Likheter och skillnader mellan mina resultat och existerande litteratur har belysts närhelst relevant.
Abstract

This study is looking at the topic of bullying. Initially, there is a general description of bullying then follows a more detailed description of girls’ indirect manner of bullying, which is split into different categories. The method I have used in order to accomplish my study is a semi-structured qualitative inquiry. Upon analysing given data I illustrate phenomena pertaining to girls’ bullying and list these under various themes. Similarities or differences between my study and existing literature are highlighted whenever relevant.

Keywords: adolescent girls, indirect aggression, expectations, and exclusion
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1. Introduction

Today, there is a constant outpour of information about bullying. Research arrives at new conclusions clarifying and making more accessible the aspects of unresolved relationship problems among peers in schools, all over the world. In the media, readers can regularly find stories concerning school children being subjected to harassment. It is a topic much debated and highlighted lately since it can lead to devastating consequences for the individual who becomes the victim. The Swedish Statute in the Education Act 1985:1100, found in Läroplanen för den Obligatoriska skolan (Lpo94 p.3), stipulates that;

No-one should be subjected to discrimination at school based on gender, ethnic belonging, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability, or subjected to other degrading treatment. Tendencies toward harassment or other degrading treatment should be actively combated.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to detect bullying since according to Eva Larsson (2000, p.135) bullying takes place out of sight of grown ups in the school environment, and even more difficult among girls. According to researchers, girls’ bullying is different to that of boys’. Dan Olweus, a Swedish pioneer on the international research scene of bullying, has published literature and highlighted phenomenon around the subject since the 1970s. He has said that girls bully their victim by using indirect aggression such as creating false rumours around their target, talking behind each other’s backs and excluding peers from the group. Boys use direct and more physically aggressive behaviour, such as verbal abuse or name calling and hitting of their victim in order to achieve power and status (Olweus 2001a). Girls’ also use verbal aggression but usually not directed at their victim. Through manipulation of their peer groups, girls try to establish a higher status for themselves.

An individual is considered bullied when, without being provocative he/she, repeatedly over a period of time, is subjected to other individuals’ deliberate attempts to hurt him/her in ways of mental or physical abuse, or social isolation (Eriksson et al. 2002, p.26-27).

This study is about adolescent bullying among girls. It is based on grade eight and nine pupils’ perception and experience of school life within female peer groups and their relationships to other female peers. The information in the essay has been obtained from pupils in a compulsory Swedish secondary school. Since the inquiry is concentrated on girls’ bullying, female pupils at the school in question supply all information.
1.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to gain an insight into girls’ understanding of girls’ bullying in schools in Sweden. By approaching adolescent girl-groups and looking into their views of what is going on in their peer world, it is easier to get a picture of young pupils’ perception of the ways conflicts are handled in their everyday life at school.

2. Previous Research

When hearing or reading about the term bullying one automatically associates it with violence of some kind. Bullying on the one hand entails physical aggression such as hitting, punching and kicking. Bullying also entails non-physical behaviour such as verbal abuse, talking behind peoples’ backs and the spreading of damaging rumours about other people. In the research field, bullying is seen as a collective term for unacceptable peer behaviour in various social contexts, such as the school. Unacceptable bullying behaviours can consist of; exclusion from peer groups, acts of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, verbal threats, blackmail, oppression and damage of other peoples’ goods etc.

People involved in the bullying act can, according to Olweus (1978, 1993), be divided into the bully, the followers (take an active part but do not initiate), supporters (support bullying without taking an active part), passive supporters (they support bullying but not openly), disengaged onlookers (watch but do not take a stand), possible defenders (dislike bullying but do not help victim) and finally defenders of the victim who dislike what is going on and try to help the victim. Reasons for supporting the bully can be one; the admiration of the power the bully possesses, two; by watching the bully get away with aggressive behaviour the bystander loses his or her own blocks for applying aggression, three; when the negative action is divided between a few there is a diminished sense of individual responsibility (Olweus 2001, p.33). An answer to why peers do not actively step in and defend the victim is that there exists a sign of self-protection in bystanders due to the vulnerability of becoming the next target themselves (Owens, Shute & Slee 2001b, p.35). Robert Thornberg (2009, p.255) says that if we look at bullying as a group-oriented behaviour, we need to approach the whole group concerned. He bases these assumptions on Salmivalli (2001, p.413) who says that if we want to help change the bully’s typically destructive behaviour we need to consider not only the
bully, but we also need to include the other group members to be part of a change. In other words, the bullying scene does not consist of only the aggressor and the victim but involves a whole group of people participating in various roles, for the act to reach desired effects. When looking into my own research I find the respondents to be of the opinion that, without the group there is no bullying. The bully needs the group to witness the action for him or her to establish the goal strived for. Therefore it also seems necessary to address the whole group concerned when applying anti-bullying strategies in order to try and stop the already on-going bullying.

Larsson (2000, p.135) reminds us that the method the bullies use to obtain power is far more refined than the method the victim can access. She says bullying always takes place out of sight of grown ups, but the opposite is true when the victim is trying to pay back. The presence of grown ups is a requirement for the victim to dare try and take revenge on her attacker she adds, this is why it is rarely discovered when a victim is molested, but she herself is always noticed and caught in her clumsy attempt to hit back. The imbalance of power in this bully-victim relationship leads to the much less powerful victim to mobilize all her efforts, in order to try and get noticed by others, she says. Larsson adds that this is seemingly how humans function; if we are frequently offended and infuriated, our feelings eventually are so well known to us that we tend to exaggerate our reactions, when harassed. It might be enough with one glance from the bully to trigger the want to retaliate. Larsson says that only the victim and the bully know of the intention behind a subtle hint from the aggressor. For a bully with a lot of power, the slightest message might be sufficient to violate the victim. Therefore it is impossible for the outside observer such as, a teacher to estimate the emotion and reason behind the counter attack (Larsson 2000, p.135). This is one reason that bullying passes unnoticed by teachers and other grown ups in schools. Bullies who want to attack someone usually know how to access their target without being seen in action. The bully is a person who possesses the social skills to manipulate others, perhaps not only the victim but also a whole group of people.

Ken Rigby (2002, p.146) says, that it has long been thought that being conspicuous or looking different in some way is a reason for being bullied. However, substantial research has shown that this does not apply to looking different on the surface, such as being fat, having red hair, wearing glasses etc. On the other hand, Rigby says psychological differences such as being introverted, anxious and low in social competence can lead to being bullied. When it comes to boys, the fact that the bully is physically larger than his victim does make a difference. However, mainly the fact that the bully is psychologically and or socially stronger
than his/her victim is a typical sign of the bullying act, he says. Laurence Owens, Shute and Slee (2000a) say that it is known that bullied children, as a result of victimization, suffer from low self-esteem, unhappiness at school, isolation from peers and high levels of depression. They say these symptoms are not short lived but can stretch up to adult life and show signs of poorer mental health in their victims than other people (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000a, p.363).

Over the last decades researchers across the world have looked into this social problem and today, there is a wealth of research and study into the bullying phenomenon. There is also a lot of material collected about girls’ bullying, the main arguments of which can be divided into some major categories: Indirect aggression, Institutional factors, Stress-factors, Expectations and Prevention strategies.

2.1 Indirect Aggression

Research suggests that girls are more relationally oriented than boys, so their type of bullying is of a kind that damages friendships, breaks confidences and practices exclusion. Owen, Shute and Slee (2000b) say that girls tend to form pair-based relationships that rely on confidences between the two, and these kinds of relationships are vulnerable to inside and outside influences. One partner may break the bond between the two and start to associate with someone else, and equally someone from the outside may associate with one of the two partners and consequently manipulate and hurt the other (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000b, p.20). The same authors argue that the inclusion of group membership appears to be of utmost importance and a means of identification and feeling of power for girls, the power to exclude girls. As I understand it, the group inclusion phenomenon partly explains the reasons for the practices of exclusion acts among girls. By identifying with the norms and values of the group the included girls share gossip, rumours and jokes around others and thereby intensify their own feelings of mutually shared identification. The more they exclude other girls the more included they feel in their own group. Owens, Shute And Slee (2000a, p.33) say there is a notion of promoting and enhancing their own perception of the group norms that make the girls perceived to be cool. The same authors give an overview of more recent research by a Finnish team into the phenomenon of indirect aggression. They sum up female indirect aggression as “a kind of social manipulation: the aggressor manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in the attack” (Björn Bjorkqvist, Osterman &
The same authors found that girls tend to mask their anger towards someone, for instance by smiling at popular girls they did not really like, in order to achieve popularity themselves. They say jealousy and talking behind girls’ backs as a measure to affect the popularity of other girls are meant to hurt and therefore seen as aggressive. In Laura Crothers (2005, p.352) survey, one respondent had noticed that, “accepting the validity of rumours provides permission to dislike another female peer of whom one is envious and prepared to express overt anger towards”. Crothers noted that the use of indirect forms of aggression allowed girls to assert power in relationships, and yet meet with the existing expectations of adults that girls are not to initiate or participate in conflict.

There are many ways in which girls can stay reasonably anonymous (indirect) in how they strike their target person. The person who wants to access someone can find ways, and is usually the type of character that possesses the social skills to manipulate and steer the action in her favour. Due to the sheer constellation of girls’ groupings, the ability to practice indirect aggression is facilitated. Owen, Shute & Slee (2000b, p.20) confirm my understanding that the social structure of girl groups support the emotionally close pair based membership form. In other words, although the group consists of singular members, each member usually has her own close relationship with one other girl in the group. Therefore a victim belonging to this kind of social structure can be left in an extremely vulnerable situation, since the victim runs a risk of losing her partner to some intruder of their intimate relationship.

According to what Crothers (2005, p.353) has said about the spreading of false rumours, and a reoccurring aspect referred to among the respondents in my inquiry, is status and hierarchy.

### 2.2 Bullying and Institutional Factors

Audrey Osler (2006, p.577) says that up until the late 1990s the term ‘violence in schools’, used to be referred to as ‘anti-social behaviour’ in order to identify the problem. Furthermore, she says that in England the term ‘disaffection’ is widely used, by using these terms, attention is focused on the individual or group behaviour rather than considering problematic schooling conditions. She says that by looking only at an aggressor’s behaviour, it being physical, verbal or psychological, and its victim, we’re looking only at an act between individuals. However, Osler suggests that there is a possibility of institutional or systemic violence, in policies,
customs and practices of the school that may lead to feelings of insecurity among students or staff. She argues that there commonly exist power relations and inequalities within institutions, which often do not highlight how boys and girls are treated differently. She says that institutions also often ignore power relations within the wider society such as racism, sexism and other anti-democratic discourses, which influence school cultures. The author adds that according to their research, violence in schools among girls is institutionalised since verbal abuse and psychological aggression among girls is considered normal and thereby does not present a concern for school authorities (Osler 2006, p.577).

Over all, there appears to be less focus on girls’ behaviours and the consequences that lead to their exclusions from schools. Usually, there is a predominant focus on male physical aggressive behaviour, ignoring other expressions of aggressive behaviour that are less obvious. Although conflicts between girls can entail nasty consequences for the girl or girls involved, the individual or group conflict does not affect the class members’ learning situation as such, since it can’t be heard and therefore need not be addressed in teachers eyes. Boys’ mostly loud, and to the learning culture interfering, conflicts need immediate attention to maintain classroom order. School violence or acts of incivilities do not have to entail the extremes of violence acts, but simply everyday aggressions.

Acts of violence, says Osler, are usually built up by a complex series of experiences and exclusionary practices by peers and school alike. She says that when looking at school violence and acts of exclusion we need to listen to the experiences of girls and boys in order to acknowledge both everyday incivilities, and the structural barriers these pupils encounter. She talks about the “contradictions within the education system between inclusion policies and intentions on the one hand, and exclusionary practices on the other”. She adds that in order to seek to prevent exclusionary acts from schools, these institutions therefore need to cultivate a climate as inclusive communities (Osler 2006, p.586).

Olweus (1979, p.872-873; cited in Eriksson et.al.2002, p.41) has said that a factor that influences the extent of bullying problems at any school is the staff’s attitudes and reactions towards bullying incidents. He says that although an individual has to have inherited aggressive tendencies in order to develop into a bully, there are factors such as lack of warmth or engagement in the up-bringing climate, but also the school’s lack of facilities for anti-bullying strategies including attitudes and reactions within the staff. Rigby (2001, p.324; cited in Eriksson et.al.2002, p.91-92) argues that bullying is reduced if a “whole school approach” is used. This means that all the staff at the school has the same attitude on how to combat bullying.
Researchers in Japan and Hong Kong, who suggest that institutional factors is a source leading to pupils’ practice of bullying, have also highlighted stress factors as an influence on bullying in schools.

### 2.3 Bullying and Stress Factors

Tam and Taki (2007), suggest that there are two major categories girls’ bullying can be divided into: the *aggressive-motive* behaviour and the *frustration-aggression* behaviour. Teachers, being scolded by parents, or being ridiculed by peers, trigger the former behaviour where the individual is aroused by stressful external circumstances such as unfair treatment. This works more as an immediate response to external influences. The latter frustration behaviour is seen as a psychological *defence*, triggered by external stress factors, in order to reduce anxiety. The condition consists of a build-up of unventilated emotions. The individual is reacting to this build-up as a necessary defence or outlet when build-up is too much. The pressure contributing to this build-up of emotions is institutional or parental. This outlet can take its form in ways of bullying peers. The results of Tam and Taki’s (2007, p.384-394) inquiry show that Japanese girls bully partly because they are *frustrated* and have this build up of emotions. Indirect stressors from performance expectations, teachers and parents lead to a build-up of frustration, and in the Japanese girls’ case, to indirect bullying.

My understanding is, and according to the girls asked in my study, there are situations where girls seemingly project their own frustrations onto their peers. Because of some emotional build up of emotions not getting expressed where they belong, certain girls will pick a target person and project their frustrations onto her. According to Tam and Taki (2007), peer stressors also lead to direct bullying among the Japanese girls. Competition, which can be intense in Japanese schools, can be a contributing factor to girls’ stressors, say the authors. Competition is usually an institutionally instigated factor encouraged to affect performance and achievement among pupils.

The same authors’ findings show that among the Hong Kong girls, symptoms of frustration do not contribute to bullying, which is instead provoked by irritation with peers, and stress coming directly from teachers and study. They say that bullying among girls in Hong Kong can be explained by the aggressive-motive theory, whereas in Japan girls’ bullying can be explained both by the aggressive-motive theory, and the frustration-aggression theory.
The researchers go on to say that the frustration-aggression type of bullying may be a consequence of Japanese girls’ employing relational bullying when emotionally unhappy. They conclude by saying that if this is the case, then relational bullying is a psychological defence mechanism used by Japanese girls in order to project their frustration onto their victim (Tam and Taki 2007, p.394). Furthermore, Crothers (2005, p.352) found that some of the primary motivators behind girl’s relational aggression were emotional such as jealousy, envy and deflection. One respondent in Crothers’ survey had answered that “everyone gets into it until they call someone else a slut, so they’ll just push it off onto someone else”.

All these emotions and frustrations do not seem to get a natural outlet among girls at school. There appears to be a lot of interpersonal and emotional dilemmas in some young girls’ minds. Girls find it hard to address these issues or else they feel expectancies that they should resolve such issues by themselves. There may be some links between this emotional build-up and the next category.

2.4 Expectations on Girls

Another argument why girls practice relational aggression and manipulate peer groups seems to have its explanation in how society, and in particular school have certain expectations of how girls and boys should behave. If the structure already on an institutional level and school expects pupils to behave in certain gender typical manners, it seems that young boys and girls are trying hard to live up to societal requirements. Crothers (2005, p.349-353) writes that teenage girls, who had been asked about the use of relational aggression in female friendships, said that the main reason for its use was that of fear of abandonment. The girls expressed a need for being consciously careful in maintaining their relationships, in order to avoid their dissolution. The girls asked seemed to have an apprehension about how girls are not expected to stir up conflicts. Out of fear of what other people might think of them, they are afraid of telling what they really feel. They said that they want to keep as many people as possible happy, so even if it hurts them, they shut up about matters. Many of the respondents expressed a belief that girls’ tendency for indirect aggression or to avoid conflict was supported by grown ups, who expected them to be ladylike, meaning calm and mature. Crothers (2005, p.358) claims that “lack of perceived freedom to relate authentically, often results in the masking of emotions and engaging in covert attacks against peers in the form of relational aggression”.
To go along with Crother’s ways of portraying how girls’ are expected not to stir up conflict, I found in my inquiry that the respondents were of the opinion that teachers do have expectations on girls to be quiet and just sit there. Boys on the other hand appear expected to be heard. One girl said that if a girl shouts out too loud or speaks her mind out loud she is almost sneered at and seen as going over the top, while a boy being loud in the classroom is considered normal. There probably exist remnants of traditional gender expectations. Since boys and girls traditionally have had different roles to play in society they are therefore, to an extent, still expected to behave in certain gender typical manners.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin (2002, p.716-719) claims, through a three-year study of American elementary school pupils, that there are generalizations of language and gender roles in literature. By lengthy video- and audio taped ethnographic observations and the methodology of conversation analysis, she demonstrates how asymmetrical power relationships among females in a multicultural and naturally occurring same-sex peer group are built in moment-to-moment interaction. This naturally occurring interaction in the life-world of a particular group, allows us to look at a range of diverse types of social organization taking place during various activities. Goodwin (2002, p.726) argues that when studying these alternating activities the stereotypical female discourse falls apart. Not only did she find situations of cooperative talks and interaction, but also situations of competitive and exclusionary forms of interaction represented, where females highlighted rather than mitigated disagreement. Studies of language and gender have documented how patriarchy is constituted in cross-sex interaction, whereas, she continues, few studies have examined how relations of power are constituted in all-female interaction. Goodwin says that most models of female interaction suggest that male speakers are socialized into a competitive style of discourse, and women into a more cooperative style of speech. She says that through various social expectancies, females learn to value relational closeness and avoid relationship-threatening discourse. This supports other research indicating that females’ “go behind each others’ backs” with their opinions (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000b; Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Kaukianen 1992).

Through Goodwin’s research we get another side to expectations on gender typical behaviour. She claims that girls strive for dominance not agreement. On the one hand, we are faced with females who speak out their attempts of dominating others, more like boys are traditionally expected to behave. On the other hand, we have the traditional female role that do not stir up conflicts because this is not considered the thing done, but ventilate their true feelings behind each other’s backs. This action is facilitated through the support of other girls.
in the group. Even if Wennberg (1997) has some valid points in her description of females’ and males’ ways of looking at status, it is possibly a bit limiting to put it down to just gender differences. What we can understand is that young schoolgirls have various ways of expressing situations of conflict between them.

2.5 Prevention Strategies

According to Thornberg (2006, p.262-263), when finding strategies for combating or preventing bullying one important help is for the whole class, teacher and pupils together, to set up a number of rules concerning bullying. Apart from the schools’ general rules on social life together, the class needs specifically and concretely constructed regulations for direct and indirect bullying. The class meeting is an excellent time to discuss matters of this nature, and naturally they should follow three simple principles according to Olweus (2001a); *We do not bully*, *We help pupil’s that are victims of bullying*, *We socialize also with pupils that have a tendency to stick to themselves*. However, Thornberg indicates that it is of utmost importance that the pupils recognize what kind of behaviour the rules refer to. This can be displayed through a videocassette, role-play or reading loud out of an example text. Through discussing the class-rules, the discussing of adjacent norms among the pupils such as *passive bullying*, is simplified. The pupils’ need be made aware of their own responsibilities (Thornberg 2006).

In order to get pupils to appropriate anti-bullying roles, three steps are suggested according to Salmivalli (2001; cited in Thornberg 2009, p.255); make pupils aware of the bullying act’s group-dynamics, increase pupils’ own self-reflection ability, facilitate for training programs that change behaviour from the ones they usually display. Through splitting down the various roles included in the bullying act, the pupils can easier see their own situation in the act, and easier understand that they may have contributed to and encouraged the bullying without intending to. It is easy for a bully and her supporters to reject personal responsibility since they are a few. Responsibility thins out, the more people involved (Thornberg 2009, p.255). However, girls were reported to be more willing to recognize the problem and consequently meet with a teacher to discuss the situation. Rigby (1995) also found that girls were more empathetic toward victims than boys (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000a, p.363).

The various categories that describe ways of looking at girls’ bullying are relevant material when looking at bullying among girls generally and trying to get an understanding of what it
is about, and how complicated and extended the problem may be. It is also relevant when looking to connect to existing literature the findings of what the interviewed girls in my inquiry had to say on their understanding of the phenomenon.

3. Method

The method used in this study is that of interviewing groups of girls. Through this method the interviewer gets a closer contact with the respondents. Within this space the interviewer can for a few moments study the opinions and feelings, plus body language of the respondents. I chose this method to progress with my inquiry since it seemed an insightful way to approach these young females. By being present in person during these moments of discussion, I realised how delicate some of these issues really are. This experience had perhaps not been available had I chosen another more distant way of inquiry such as pre-printed questionnaires.

Based on a semi-structured pattern, including main questions, the inquiry has been complemented by probing questions, dependent on respondents’ answers. The idea of having not only structured questions is to leave space for, and to encourage respondents’ spontaneous thoughts or ideas being mentioned during the interview moment. All the same, the interviewer has an interview guide with a list of questions to be covered in a specific order. This is a necessity when collecting reliable and comparable data (Bernard 2006, p.212). The advantage of open-ended questions, as used in this inquiry, is that it does not lead the respondents to answer in a specific direction, but allows for ‘free association’ and therefore facilitates unforeseen answers (Bryman 2002, p.158). The audiotaped interviews were recorded and a computer was used in order to process the findings. A reason for recording dialogues and discussions is for the reader to compare notes with what interviewees have said, and I have concluded.

3.1 Selection

The students’ interviewed were pupils in classes where I had conducted practice on the teacher-training program a few weeks earlier. All girls participating in the interview had volunteered after being approached by their class teachers. This was after having obtained
permission from the head of the school to contact respective class teachers. There were a total of nine girls interviewed, belonging to three different classes at the school. There were three groups consisting of two, three and four pupils. The interviewees were teenage girls in grades eight and nine in a compulsory, communal Swedish school. The girls’ ages ranged from 14-15 years. The forming of the groups was either done by me, the pupils’ class teacher or by the girls themselves. The interviews lasted for approximately 25 minutes per group, and were conducted in a study room. I stressed only interviewing groups of girls that get on well together or are close to each other. The reason for this was to try and avoid causing any unnecessary friction, between the individual girls and their perceptions of various individual, or peer situations at school. There was no intentional separation of girls, or grouping of girls according to ethnic origins or any other means.

3.2 Interview Questions

1) Which people are involved in bullying and what does it mean to you?
2) What actions do girls and boys take when bullying?
3) Are there different expectations on boys and girls at school and how they solve conflicts between them?
4) Can being bullied be connected with showing low performance at school?
5) Why do some people bully, and why are some people bullied?

3.3 Ethics

The interviewees were initially informed about the ethics considered throughout the interview, such as the respondents’ personal details being treated with confidentiality, and their right to stop the interview at any time. The only criteria for the grouping of the pupils was, as mentioned earlier, to try and obtain a group climate that would not in any way cause a threat to the participants by stirring up controversial issues that were likely to arise and create conflict between them. Due to the very vulnerable effects it could leave on the individual had I sought to address ‘true’ victims of bullying, this never was an option in my mind. If I had chosen to isolate individuals and press them for personal information this could have stirred
up not only unpleasant memories for the individual in question, but could also have caused consequences in their peer world.

As the interviewer I had, through figuring as a trainee teacher (during one month) in two of the classes, and in the third as a stand-in prior to interviewing established a relationship with the respondents, which would possibly have helped to facilitate a degree of trust between us. Of the girls asked, those participating had gained parental consent, a standard procedure when the respondents are under the age of 18. All respondents were informed of the interviews being recorded, and that this was done to ensure the correctness of the transcriptions to be undertaken. The interviewees were informed about the purpose behind the interview, and that all material collected would be used only for this study. All comments made in the transcriptions are covered by pseudonyms. Each group is referred to as group 1, 2 and 3 after order of interviewing, and each group-participant has been given a fictional name. Group 1 is made up of Wilma, Anna and Bea, group 2 is consisting of Ruth, Mia, Lisa and Vera and group 3 has two members, Emma and Stina.

3.4 Analysis Procedure

The analysis of data in this inquiry can be referred to as grounded theory. A method involving alternating collected data with analytical processes (Bryman 2001, p.373). The interpretation of data in this inquiry has consisted of looking at and analysing transcribed interviews. Through coding, the data has been separated, connected, labelled and re-organized. Several indicators are analysed and compared and then put into categories. Through linking or connecting various categories and matching them with contexts, consequences, patterns of interplay and reasons, themes are developed. According to Bryman (2001, p.375-384) themes can be divided into:
- basic viewpoints of respondents
- into actual contents of what respondents say, not only the language used but phenomena the respondents’ discussion associates to
- and into general themes, not necessarily closely linked to what respondents are answering, but through further association with what occurs as themes.

This study, apart from taking up basic viewpoints of respondents, also leads the reader into further associations and developments of thoughts. It is my hope, as the author of this
study, to initiate a personal thought process in the reader into areas, or viewpoints not already discussed or brought forward in the text.

The researcher may generate some general ideas concerning the collected data. He or she then tries to sketch various connections between concepts and categories that have developed during the analysis process, and tries in detail to relate them to existing literature. Hypotheses develop regards connections made that need to be confirmed with the data at hand (Bryman 2001, p.385).

Themes have developed through the analysis procedure of the respondents’ transcriptions. After analysing collected data through the coding of separated, connected and reorganized categories of transcriptions; the findings can be divided into;

General understanding of bullying: 4.1.1
Differences in ways of bullying: 4.1.2
How teachers deal with bullying: 4.1.3
Effects of bullying: 4.1.4
Motives for bullying: 4.1.5
Criteria for choosing a victim: 4.1.6

These themes have come forward and can be related to a series of probing questions asked when interviewing. During the interview moment I have asked the respondents questions such as how to describe bullying, and which people are involved. Why nobody does anything to stop bullying. If there are differences in ways boys and girls bully, and if so, why? If there are different expectations on gender at school and any consequences these expectations may have on pupils. If teachers approach boys’ and girls’ conflicts from different stand points. If there are any connections between being bullied and low performances at school, and if there are any connections between being bullied and well being out of school. If parents get to know about bullying and if this is the case, what are the consequences? What brings certain people to bully and why some people are bullied?

Critical aspects when coding qualitative data is according to Bryman (2001) the potential disintegration of the context in what is said. The social situation where the text occurs can be lost when cutting and putting together selected pieces. Another critical viewpoint is that the coding results in fragmented information where the narrative flow in what is said disappears (Bryman 2001, p.385-387). Due to the format and the limitations of the study I have not used
all transcripts as according to the recordings. Although I can see the dilemma of losing the narrative flow of discourse when cutting transcripts, I have in this study been able to use the vast majority of transcripts when building the excerpts and the text around them. I would like to add that it is not a narrative flow that is sought in this inquiry but an understanding of girls’ perception of the various issues treated in the interview questions. On occasions where narratives have been cut, what would have followed and to what extent the narrative had developed has in my opinion not had any relevant interest for the actual problem area in question. However, it would have been interesting to progress and treat any neglected data occurring in the original transcripts, due to the informative impact it may have on readers.

4. Results

The results are presented in the themes that occurred during the analysis process. Readers are offered a categorised listing of mentioned themes, each containing excerpts of transcripts with accompanying highlights and discussions of issues involved.

4.1 General Understanding of Bullying

There were certain aspects around the phenomenon of bullying that all three groups of interviewed girls agreed on. For instance, they collectively had an understanding that the bullying scene involves a bully, bystanders and a victim. Bullying consists of a series of negative actions such as making fun of someone, racial or other name-calling, the sharing of jokes and rumours at the expense of the victim, and it is a repeated behaviour. They also agreed that among boys it often takes its form in physical fighting. The respondents were all of the opinion that the bully requires the attendance of the group to witness her manipulation of her victim or victims. The group gives her an incentive to carry on this negative behaviour since it is within the group the bully tries to raise her own status. Eriksson et.al.(2002) say the setting with spectators and possible supporters provide the ideal arena for the attacker to practice and demonstrate bullying, it creates a booster feeling for the bully.

It is not only what meets the eye that is bullying, as we learn to know in the inquiry. For instance, bullying can take place inside the classroom at times and with the teacher present.
The respondents said, just as Larsson (2000) says, it is the receiver that decides whether it is bullying or not. Anna, in group 1 said that during lessons pupils can do things to others that seem like a joke to the observer, but the victim can feel attacked.

Anna: They do things that look like a joke on the outside, but the target person feels victimized.
I: So, the whole thing appears as a joke?
Anna: Yes, right in front of the teacher.

The teacher does not recognise when someone is being attacked in this manner. Some of the peers may understand, but even so only the target person will really know if it is bullying or not. Even the girls in group 2 had experiences to share from bullying occurring in the classroom and with the teacher present;

I: So bullying can occur anywhere, but surely not in the classroom?
Mia: Oh yes, especially if the teacher leaves the classroom. If you face forward they can start talking behind your back. It goes on all the time, even when the teacher is present.

The information in the last sentence of the excerpt brings forward an aspect to bullying not commonly mentioned in literature; the aspect of bullying taking place in front of teachers. Larsson (2000, p.135) claims that bullying takes place out of sight of grown ups. It appears that occasions of classroom bullying are not necessarily something the teacher is aware of, or indeed notice. The girls said that classroom bullying often goes on when the teacher is in the classroom. They argued that the teacher does not perceive that bullying is occurring since the actions come across as jokes between pupils, whereas in reality the victim knows if it is bullying or not. The pupils know how to avoid making the teacher aware of the on going bullying. They know how to con the teacher. In other words, it is not always easy for a teacher, with the best of intentions, to try and prevent bullying from taking place among his or her students.

Emma, from group 3 finds it a good idea to have representatives from the class that report on any known bullying or harassment going on. This way it is perhaps easier to lift forward any masked bullying among peers, since the students appear aware of bullying taking place. The issue on class representatives is explored further in a later excerpt. The Internet was mentioned as another means of bullying peers. Although the respondents did not engage in
any lengthy discussions when mentioning the Internet, it was made clear that it is more
difficult to trace and bring to the light bullying on the Internet.

4.2 Differences in ways of Bullying

Bea, in group 1 said that boys are not afraid to initiate conflict so they bully their
victim directly. Girls go behind each other’s backs and talk to their girl-friend/s about their
victim. They hurt their victim indirectly, because they don’t dare enter directly into a conflict.

Wilma specified: “If I wanted to say something to someone it would feel like a
relief not to have to speak directly to that person. Instead I would show confidence in a friend
and tell her”. They said that girls are more withdrawn to open dialogue, and do not want to
appear to have something ugly to say about anyone. Owens, Shute and Slee talk about girls
striving to be popular by being friendly to others they do not really like (2000a, p.363), and
Crothers (2005) says about girls not being expected to stir up conflicts and consequently do
not directly show how or what they feel about someone.

Ruth, in group 2 says that although boys find it cooler to physically show dominance both
genders are in it for the same reason, which is to secure a position others can look up to and
not become a victim of bullying themselves. She suggests that the bully is in it to
achieve an image of someone worth being with, someone with status. Furthermore, the girls in
group 2 are of the opinion that girls are not as strong or direct as boys and therefore they
practice giving each other looks, looks of disapproval and with negative connotations, and
Osler (2006, p.579), talks about girls giving looks, starting rumours and whispering
campaigns as a measure of psychological bullying. This is further illustrated in the following
excerpt:

I: You’re talking about girls’ giving looks at others, what kind of looks are these?
Mia: I think girls’ bullying is worse than boys’ because of what we say about our victim and
the killing looks we give her.
Ruth: Looks of disapproval like; “you’re disgusting”. Girls exclude others with their looks.
I: Are there several girls simultaneously excluding their victim, or how does it work?
Ruth: I think it’s more like the ones that have groups stick together. They don’t let in an
outsider because she may not be good enough for them, with the result that they exclude
her.
Mia: She doesn’t fit in, even if she wants to enter the group.
Ruth: Girls also check in other individuals’ appearances, if someone looks different, with lots of pimples for instance.

The behaviour of ‘giving looks’ can exclude individuals says Ruth. When giving looks the bully does not have to say anything for the purpose to have an effect, since the receiver usually can read the message in the look, all the same. This behaviour is as powerful as any verbal or physical bullying. Perhaps the uncertainty in the look can be even more harmful when not knowing exactly how to interpret the message, than when something is being said or otherwise more clearly demonstrated to the target person. In a sense “giving looks” removes responsibility, who is to prove that one girl gave looks to another? It is the aggressor’s words against the victim’s. This behaviour is typical of that of girls’ indirect manner of bullying. By not openly addressing, but instead using more discreet ways of displaying disapproval, they manage to exclude their target person as for instance Owens, Shute and Slee (2000b), and Crothers (2005) in more detail have described.

In this excerpt we also get a sample of girls’ groupings, when one respondent says that groups of girls stick together and do not let in outsiders. These groups are formed at some stage but remain closely guarded by its members. Crothers (2005, p.353) says that out of own fear of social exclusion, girls threaten to exclude other girls, since there is power in group membership. Owens, Shute and Slee (2000b) cited one class teacher as having said; “the notion of promoting and enhancing their own perception of the group norms, make them cool or perceived to be”. She said that the group has the power to let people in or to exclude people from the group and that this power is psychologically and emotionally strong among the girls (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000b, p.32).

Emma, in group 3 answers that boys speak out their opinions to their victim and the conflict starts there and then. Girls practice exclusion of someone through inter-relational movements. This is what Crothers (2005) found, with boys the victim and bully enter into a fight when conflict blows up. Girls tend to avoid conflict. They use their social intelligence and manipulate relationships instead (Crothers 2005, p.253).

I: The fact that boys are more physical, does that mean that they use their fists more often?
Stina: Yes, we talk behind each others’ backs it’s not the same as with guys.
I: Boys do not talk behind each others’ backs, is that what you are saying?
Emma: Yeah, they say things straight to the person and then the fight starts. We girls talk behind
someone’s back and then exclude her or treat her like thin air.

I: Is it usually one person behind the exclusion act who has something against the victim?
Emma: Yeah, and she asks the others what they think of X, lets call her X, and so they get together and they find faults with her.

I: Why do the other girls go along with this?
Emma: They may remember something that X has said or done in the past and then they blow that up and worsen it just so that they have something to act on.

These respondents indicate, as well as surveys in other literature that girls seemingly achieve a sense of fortified peer group inclusion and status through having a target person in common to exclude. Emma, in group 3 says that they exclude her or treat her like “thin air”. She conveys the idea of group pressure against one individual. From this excerpt we understand that there is one initiator behind the bullying then other girls recall reasons for building up a front against their target person. The respondent adds, “so that they (the rest of the group) have something to act on”. Peer group inclusion comes with status; there is a lot of power in group, and group formations. As researcher Ylwa Almquist (2009) says, the more you bully the higher status you gain. Nobody wants to belong to the more insignificant people lower on the ranking scale, with no authority or social status. Then of course, you get a category of people that does not need to look at life from an aspect of status or ranking as such, because they are strong enough individuals within themselves. However, if what Almquist says is that the class has its own rules of culture independent of outside values, then there are no already known patterns to how status and a ranking scale take shape in each classroom. Crick and Grotpeter (1995; cited in Owens, Shute and Slee 2000b, p.22) conveys that because girls are concerned with keeping close intimate relationships with other girls, the best way to hurt another is by behaviours damaging to that girl’s friendships or feelings of inclusion in the group. I found that the girls in my inquiry were unanimous about how girls’ spreading of rumours and practicing of exclusion were characteristics for how they bully others. Since they could talk together behind the back of the victim, they had a shared forum for topics of discussion. They argued that a strong feeling of belonging to the group was intensified through the exclusion of someone else. This is what Mia had to say;

Mia: Everyone wants to be that person in the centre, they do not want to be bullied themselves and that is why they bully others.

I: Are you saying that as a measure to avoid getting bullied herself the bully attacks a target person?
Mia: Yes, that way peers look up to her and do not dare do anything, she has power.

We get to understand bullying and the different ways it is expressed as direct and indirect ways of bullying others. Boys openly use direct verbal and physical aggression against their target person, whereas girls practice indirect and more discreet exclusion acts or the spreading of rumours behind their victim’s back. However, Olweus (2002, p.13) says boys are equally subjected to indirect bullying, as are girls. The respondents add that girls’ do not dare speak outright what they think of someone. Upon the question if girls are expected to resolve conflicts between them, they said that this is the case.

I: Are there different expectations on girls and boys at school?
Emma: Yes, actually teachers expect girls to be quiet and sit still but they expect boys to be loud.
I: Are girls expected to resolve their own conflicts?
Emma: Yes, that is actually how it is!

According to the respondents girls are traditionally not expected to have any conflicts between them since they should sort conflicts out in a discreet fashion. The respondents agreed that since girls’ bullying is more indirect, it is not as noticeable as boys’ bullying and consequently not as easily detected.

4.3 How Teachers deal with Bullying

As to whether teachers treat boys’ and girls’ bullying differently, Anna and Bea, in group 1 said that there are differences in the tone of voice in teachers. When boys fight, the teacher gives them attention, raises her/his voice and intervenes with the fighting. Teachers are tougher towards boys, pull in them and shout: “Stop it-!” If girls’ bullying is revealed, the teacher approaches them calmly, talks to them and expects them to solve their problems between them, since they are seen as more mature. Ruth and Mia, in the second group said that teachers have different expectations of males and females. Due to certain expectancies on girls from an adult point of view, girls probably find it harder to tell teachers of any harassment or bullying taking place. It may well be that a victim feels reluctant to tell due to the teacher thinking she wants attention. It may also be the case of a victim finding that she
deserves no better than the treatment she gets from peers, and therefore does not tell the teacher. The respondents say teachers speak softer and nicer towards girls:

Ruth: In the teachers’ eyes girls are always better. They take more responsibilities.
Mia: If boys fight physically the teacher comes and pulls them apart, but we don’t fight physically.
I: The teacher intervenes if he or she sees pupils fighting?
Mia: Yes, the teacher pulls physical fighters apart, but since girls don’t fight visibly the teacher can’t pull them apart.
I: So the teacher can’t tell when girls are bullying, is that what you are saying?
Ruth: Yes, girls’ bullying often passes unnoticed by teachers, particularly since girls usually don’t hang out in corridors at break times.
I: And bullying happens at break time mostly or…?
Ruth: Well, it can happen at home also via the Internet, and then nobody witnesses.

As a result of this excerpt, I think it is safe to say that often girls’ bullying does not get the teachers attention. Mostly girls’ fighting or conflicts are concealed and not noticeable on the surface. Due to the characteristics of how girls tend to manipulate their peer groups and more or less discreetly address their victims, there are no obvious criteria for detecting when it is bullying. This only puts even more pressure on schools to find ways of disclosing on-going bullying. The Internet is a forum where bullying is a growing problem according to media, and the respondents’ understanding thereof is that it is hard to detect bullying online. Osler et. al. (2002; cited in Osler 2006, p.573-574) says that, “teachers are often able to ignore types of behaviour girls exhibit when in conflict which may disrupt an individual’s learning, but have less impact on class-room discipline than for example physical aggression. The behaviours referred to may include withdrawal from participation in class, truancy and self-harm”.
Larsson (2000) says it is impossible for any outside observer like a teacher to estimate the degree of emotional impact the victim is subjected to, even if the teacher knows about conflicts taking place. In other words, it often happens that girls bullying goes on for a long time without being understood or simply ignored, and consequently cause psychological damage for the individual concerned.

The girls in group 3 had these arguments about teachers’ ways of approaching conflicts:

Emma: Girls’ bullying often passes unnoticed because there is only words involved, words passed between the people concerned including spectators, but teachers don’t know about it. It is a
rare occurrence that girls’ bullying is noticed. Boys bullying is noticeable since they are often
physically fighting.

I: So, if the teacher sees pupils fighting does she or he intervene?

Emma: Of course. Actually, teachers expect girls to be quiet and just sit there whereas boys are
expected to be heard. Teachers are prepared for boys’ louder ways of communication. If a
girl shouts or otherwise speaks loud she is seen as going over the top, whereas loud boys are
seen as normal.

I: So girls are expected to behave more mature and solve their conflicts themselves?

Emma: Actually, yes.

Again, we are informed that girls are often ignored when in conflict since they are expected
to be capable of resolving conflicts themselves. Less attention is given females because they
are not noticed when in conflict. There are, according to the respondents, different
expectations on the two genders at school. Since girls’ conflicts tend to be discreet and not
disturb classroom tuition, they are largely ignored. The interviewees say that in the case of a
girl being loud she is seen as disruptive or otherwise deviating, not that there is a possible
conflict going on. However, boys seem to call for the teacher’s attention since they are louder
than girls in general and as I can understand, respondents are of the opinion that teachers are
prepared for them to be loud. Connections can obviously be made that teachers treat girls and
boys differently since they have different expectations on the two genders. Osler (2006) says
that there often exist institutional power relations and inequalities that do not highlight how
boys and girls are treated differently. It is high time that schools analyse and revise their
views and expectations on gender, at least when it comes to social problems and conflicts
between peers.

4.4 Effects of Bullying

When asking the respondents whether bullying can interfere with an individual’s academic
performance and well-being at school, the following answers were registered:

Wilma, in group 1 answered that the exposed individual feels tense and only thinks about the
aggressor coming up and commenting on something. The victim often reports ill or plays
truant because she does not want to be at school. Generally, the victim loses confidence in self
and others. She isolates herself and loses contact with peers, which affects schooling and
performance. It also affects life as a whole; she may not want to go out among people because it feels as if everyone knows of her or looks at her. Osler (2006, p.580) explains how “interviewees in her inquiry felt it unfair that some bullies get to stay in school while their victims might be excluded or choose to stay at home”. Osler continues to say how girls found that self-exclusion took place as a result of bullying; sometimes it meant longer-term absence from school and also problems in concentration and learning. We can read about Owens, Shute and Slee (2000a) say that it is known that bullied children, as a result of victimization, suffer from low self-esteem, unhappiness at school, isolation from peers and depression, and that these symptoms are not short lived but can stretch up to adult life and show signs of poorer mental health in their victims than other people (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000a, p.363).

Group 2:

Lisa: Well, I don’t think school is a nice place to go to if you’re being subjected to bullying.
I: No, how do you think it might feel?
Lisa: Well, I’m not sure but you’re probably always on your guard. Maybe you avoid eating in the canteen or wherever the bullying is occurring.
Ruth: The victim takes a risk going to school every morning since she does not know what is going to happen.

These girls, we can see, are of the opinion that a victim of bullying has to be on her guard, and stay aware of any possible attack whilst at school. A lot of energy must be spent in anxiety around a potential confrontation, and consequently there will be less energy left to concentrate on school performance and achievement. Wilma, in group 1 said that bullying also affects the victim’s life outside school since the bully may show up anywhere.

I: But bullying takes place within the school building or…?
Wilma: No, it can take place outside school also, anywhere out of doors.
I: Such as on the way home from school?
Wilma: Yeah, perhaps the target person meets her bullies in other places too.

What may seem like a scene typically taking place at school and during the school day, can develop into a living nightmare for a victim who is exposed to a persistent bully. By law, individuals have to attend school including grade nine in Sweden. Where is the victim to go when school life is unbearable, and what is the next step to take for someone whose existence
is surrounded by harassment? Thornberg (2009) says that bystanders often contribute to hurting a victim without intending to.

It seems we need a lot of education around this subject or rather in aspects of relating to each other. By starting at an institutional level and look at how the existing school system possibly is structured to favour certain groups of students, and how employees in the school world possibly relate differently to genders for instance, the system can be revised and school managements be formed with integrating and including attitudes towards their students.

Emma stated that academic performance could become affected. If, for instance the victim is presenting a work for the class, it is degrading to have to stare into mimicking faces or hearing sighing voices. This will probably affect your marks. Emma said; “I think this is something that occurs frequently among girls, not boys. Girls pull back (withdraw), particularly if they already have problematic conditions at school”. The same respondent argued that bullying also affects your spare time, you might spend time at home wondering what to wear tomorrow or whether or not to wear make up. Even if you don’t care, you think about it a lot of the time.

I: You say that girls are expected to sort out their conflicts themselves at school. Do you feel girls have as many conflicts as boys although they may not get noticed?
Emma: Even more, because words hurt more than punches do. You forget blows and kicks but you do not forget words. It can be horrible to be subjected to bullying when at school because it may stay with you for life. When you look back you will remember it as your life’s worst period.
I: But doesn’t the victim go and tell the teacher of what is going on?
Emma: No, this is where we come into the picture, the core value peer team, we tell the teachers. We see bullying, we know a lot of people and yet we don’t hesitate to report what we see. It is nothing to feel ashamed or anxious about even if it concerns our best friend, we have to tell.

Here we look at an example where a school has possibly succeeded in finding a useful method to try and combat bullying. Instead of feeling embarrassed or simply not believed when having to go and tell the teacher yourself, there are skilled peers around you that can. As a victim, it can’t be an easy situation to go up and talk about what is going on. Usually, it would mean having to go on your own, since you’re on your own at the receiving end of the situation. The girls said that on your own you’re often not believed or perceived as fishing for attention. Most researchers talk about the efforts required at our schools to prevent bullying.
Larsson (2000) says that it is impossible for an outside observer like a teacher to estimate the degree of emotional impact the victim is subjected to. This is where the peer-group representative fills a very important function. Osler (2006, p.367) found a girl subjected to bullying say in her survey “the worst year in my whole life”, and another girl referred to exclusion from the group as “potentially damaging someone emotionally for life”. Clearly, this is what the girl in this excerpt also finds; that being subjected to bullying can remain with you for the rest of your days. She says how much easier it is for the representative to contact teachers and other grown ups at school, than for the victim to go on her own. The likelihood of being believed is clearly higher if you have a representative calling on your case. The representative is not biased or at least ought not to be, and acts as a witness to what is going on since she or he has a close contact and knows a lot of peers at school. For individuals that have experienced being a victim, school often becomes a memory not talked about. This in turn will no doubt create problems for victims when as an adult talking to others about the years at school, or having children of her own attending school. This excerpt confirms the importance of schools having functional prevention strategies, and strategies for detecting and addressing bullying.

Owens, Shute and Slee (2000a, p.363) say that the effects on the victim can be very severe: lost confidence, academic under-achievement and a near obsessive want of the girls to be seen as friendly. They continue by saying that indirect aggression hurts greatly when experienced at the hands of their peers. It is especially hurtful when girls have certain characteristics such as being new, having few friends or being unassertive. Owens, Shute and Slee (2000b, p.20) take up findings that girls feel more emotionally distressed by relational aggression than do boys. Girls in their survey found relational aggression just as hurtful as physical aggression, and more hurtful than boys found. Activities such as manipulation of the peer group through exclusion and the spreading of rumours are very hurtful to girls the authors say, and it has been found that relational victimization is closely linked to social-psychological distress. Relationally victimized children were found more emotionally upset and lonely since they felt rejected by their peers (Owens, Shute and Slee 2000b). Osler (2006, p.581-582) talks about structural exclusion practiced in our schools through for instance ability groupings, and how this leads on to individually diminished performance at school. “If you’re told that you’re crap, you’re going to act like you’re crap”.

On a more social peer level Owen, Shute & Slee (2001a) argue that many girls try to re-enter the group from which they were expelled, since they would not want to trade and join a group of a lower social status. Certain excluded girls try to enter another peer group but for
some, admission to any group is barred for the whole year level excludes her. This is where many girls start absenting themselves from school. Some victims exchange schools only to find that their reputation has been passed on (Owen, Shute & Slee 2001a, p.368). In these cases life becomes rather intolerable for a victim of indirect aggression. She is surrounded by harassment everywhere in her peer world. What started as a manipulative gesture from one of her peer has spread like a fire and caused her a misery out of reasonable proportions.

Here follows an excerpt on how telling your parents about being subjected to bullying can affect your situation negatively.

I: What about parents, don’t they get to know about the bullying?
Mia: It depends on how close to your parents you are.
Ruth: Most victims don’t tell unless they’re a very confident person.
Mia: If you tell at home, your parents may call the bully’s parents and the teacher. This way the word goes round and the whole thing escalates.
Ruth: That’s what you’re scared of too as a victim, I think.
I: The victim would want to reduce the bullying not escalate?
Ruth: Yes, you’d want the situation to just disappear.

Although victims are encouraged to tell grown ups about their situation, the situation can sometimes be worsened by parents’ involvement. Olweus (2001a, p.82) says that occasionally parents, with the best of intensions, go overboard with protecting their child. He says that this can unfortunately lead to the already excluded child to become even more isolated amongst her/his peers, and cause ties to the grown up world that worsens long lasting contacts with peers. Olweus adds that it is always better for parents to encourage out of school activities for their child with peers, but at the same time discretely keep up with incidents and when called for try to adjust matters.

It appears obvious how the girls in this excerpt feel that it could involve awkward consequences for a victim of bullying, if she tells her parents. They are of the opinion that most victims feel they would run the risk of enlarging the whole thing if their parents got to know about it. The school children and their class have their own culture as researcher Ylwa Almquist (2009) says, and it appears to have its own norms and rules.

It sounds like well-known jargon from the world of children that if you go and tell, you’ll just get into deeper trouble. Or maybe this is a silent understanding that school children share
between them. Unless the victim is a very confident and out-spoken individual she finds the situation shameful, to be subjected to bullying is not something the victim wants to blow up exactly, but rather hopes will go away. Literature does not talk a great deal about it but there appears, for the victim, to be a lot of shame attached to being subjected to bullying. Another perspective to bear in mind is where exactly the bullying starts and who actually initiates it. The bully is perhaps in her turn, the target person. The Japanese girls’ in Tam and Taki’s (2007) survey were seen to project their frustration, onto their victims.

Unfortunately, bullying does not usually just go away on its’ own though. When a situation of certain emotional prerequisites persists in the relationships between people involved, there is not likely to be any immediate changes of behaviour. This is where the children involved need help, and this is usually where the whole group comes in focus, since bullying usually is a phenomenon involving a group of people. The children are not going to resolve the situation on their own; they need adult and professional help with this. It is probably very true what one respondent says; “that it depends on how close you are to your parents if you are likely to tell or not”. It could be that with the situation and the relationships being as they are, the victim feels better off, not disclosing matters at home.

Victims of relational bullying may not be recognized as victims and consequently never receive the support needed. Considerable consciousness raising efforts within the school community need to be undertaken about the damaging effects of social bullying on girls, and how to resolve these conflicts during the school day. Even if the parents are not in each victim’s case the best of people to tell about what is going on, there is however a necessity for the victim of bullying to be able to disclose to a reliable adult what is going on, and for school authorities to have plans for how to successfully combat this for the individual overbearing problem. I would like to add how one of the interviewees said that the school counsellor is not necessarily someone to trust.

4.5 Motives for Bullying

The respondents share a view that jealousy often is a common denominator behind the reasons for bullying. If your target person has something you do not have but want to have, this can be a good enough reason for bullying. Reasons such as a victim having more supporting home conditions or showing better performance at school, or any personal
characteristics come across as often lying behind the bullying act, according to the respondents’ way of understanding the phenomenon.

Wilma, in group 1 answered that the bully seeks attention; she needs focus on her own importance or power. The bully may be jealous or pushed aside at home and seeks to raise her own status in the peer group through trying to lower her victim’s status. Bea, talked about the need to demonstrate the belonging of a group through excluding others. Crothers (2005, p.353) talks of bullies gaining status through the spreading of (false) rumours; this way the victim’s status lowers. She also talks about deflection of criticism away from oneself due to the risk of exclusion, through directing negative criticism onto someone else. An act of imbalance, it looks a bit as if the bully steals status from the victim in order to compensate for her own pending, or perceived pending status. Gunilla Björk (1999; cited in Eriksson et.al. 2002, p.69) talks about ‘action space’. She means that the bullies know how to manipulate social situations and thereby increase their space of action, which is the source of power. Björk continues with saying that “bullies seek new critical situations only they can handle, which therefore make them to the masters of the scene”. Björk adds that what the victim perceives as an offence is the decreased space of action where he or she no longer has any choice. Wilma also informs us that groups of girls can start to bully someone simply due to the lack of something to do:

I: Through excluding others, the girls belonging to the same peer group feel closer to each other?
Wilma: Yes, that way they have something in common. It can also be that they have nothing to do so therefore they start to bully someone. It happens a lot.
I: At lunchtime or during the break…
Anna: It can just as well happen during a lesson. They do things that appear as fun on the surface but the victim feels harassed.

That bullying is an occupation due to the lack of something better to do is clearly a problem that can and should be addressed at each school. Obviously, there are going to be situations where no matter how many pursuits to spend the break on is going to make no difference to peers that are in conflict. However, there will be other moments where having something to do can avoid conflicts from arising. Owens, Shute & Slee (2000b, p.39)
demonstrates how they found that alleviating boredom and creating excitement were reasons behind girls bullying.

On the question why some people become a bully Mia says:

Mia: It’s probably so bullies won’t get bullied themselves that’s how they bully others.
I: So, the bully does this as a precaution, to secure that nobody else attacks her?
Ruth: It may be that the bully has a weak point.
Mia: Some people may have problems at home for instance or have parents that drink or whatever and this brings them to attack others, as an outlet for their anger.
Ruth: Or some other weakness you disguise by building a wall, if someone should break through your wall you will be revealed and this may lead to you becoming a victim.

The girls are talking about deflection of attention or possible criticism, away from oneself. They say that a bully can be a person with frustrations and emotions that they can’t readily deal with, and in order not to appear weak they disguise the negative emotions through bullying someone. Socially skilled maybe, but as Olweus (1991, p.25) has said; the bully looks like a person lacking in empathy for her victim, with a need to dominate others. As Olweus (1999) also has said, the bully’s intention is to hurt someone else. What these respondents talk about looks very much like an egocentric act. The bully is so preoccupied with trying to hide her own problem or hurt that she can’t feel any empathy for her victim. By making the target person stand out in a negative light among the peers, the bully secures a safer position for herself, which consequently makes her feel better. Tam and Taki (2007 talk about defensive strategies girls use to protect themselves when feeling vulnerable. The bully needs to guard herself from a leakage of built up unventilated emotions and a potential attack from peers, by choosing an object and making this object into a target. This is a way of deflecting negative attention away from the self. When the need for defending oneself sets in, the ability for feeling empathy for others seems to lessen proportionally.

Emma says that the bully is someone that fears exclusion herself. She probably has problems at home with her family relationships, which she takes out on her victim. This is a good enough reason for trying to deflect attention away from one self. This group also mentions jealousy as an example of motivator behind the bullying act. Crothers (2005, p.352) has talked about emotions as being a trigger for bullying. She refers to a respondent declaring “that the acceptance of the validity of rumours provides permission to dislike another female
peer, of whom one is envious”. Owen, Shute and Slee (2000a, p.363) say that jealousy and talking behind someone’s back is a measure to affect the popularity of another girl.

Emma: The bully is scared of being subjected to bullying herself. She may have issues on her own appearance, or with the family that she wants to act out on her target person. She chooses someone that have more caring parents or better economy, for instance. She then bullies this person, out of jealousy really.
I: Are you of the same opinion?
Stina: Yes, the person who bullies is the person who has problems. I can’t understand why anyone wants to bully. The bully wants to destroy for her victim and not wishing her happiness at school.

Although some of the respondents have a clear picture of what bullying is about, some of them find it hard to understand why anyone would want to bully another peer. Stina said that a motive for bullying can be that the bully does not want to be seen together with her target person for reasons such as clothing or appearance, criteria respondents have mentioned before. Emotional or social conditions at home seem to be reasons mostly addressed when finding motives for bullying. However, even personal physical conditions can determine why some people bully others according to the girls in my inquiry. Although the physical aspects may consist of the target person not fitting the criteria of the bully’s requirements, it also appears that physical aspects belonging to the bully are matters of concern. These concerns are disguised by bullying someone. At a closer study of the respondents’ comments and views, bullying frequently appears to be a question of identification. The more remote your target person’s appearance, sense of dress, social conduct or living conditions are to the bully’s, the more likely the bully is to subject the victim for bullying. As long as the ‘right’ prerequisites exist and the bully has her own reasons for acting in an aggressive manner, the more vulnerable the target person is. If I understand and interpret, the respondents’ views on motives behind bullying, correctly, it appears that there are mostly underlying personal reasons behind a bully’s actions, and that the described characteristics in victims are only criteria that trigger the bully’s want or need for an outlet of inherent feelings of pain. Olweus (2001a, p.22) has said that it is likely that the bully will expose and take advantage of any outer deviating characteristics in her target person, though this is not the same as saying that the deviating or conspicuous characteristic is the reason for bullying. Olweus (1997) has also
said that a bully has to possess inherited aggressive tendencies in order to develop into a bully.

4.6 Criteria for Choosing a Victim

As we understand from the previous question on who becomes a bully – we have taken part of information that says the victim is, contrary to what many people think, not that individual with conspicuous characteristics. The typical victim according to Olweus (2001a, p.23) is a more anxious, precautious and quiet individual, and among boys someone physically weaker than the attacker. The pupil with a negative self-image, low self-confidence and who feels like a failure is the one that runs the risk of being subjected to someone’s bullying. The passive victim does not provoke or act in an aggressive way but on the contrary takes a distance to violence. Olweus means that it is the passive victims’ stature and attitude that gives off signs of anxiety and failure to her/his peers, which transmits that she/he will not dare hit back, if attacked. The provocative victim is more rare and is an individual who is generally anxious, lacking in concentration with tension often building up around her person, and because of her rather hot temper she is likely to run into conflicts with her peers (Olweus 2001, p.24).

This is what the respondents in group 1 had to say about the victim:

Wilma:  It’s probably someone who is different or looks different
Anna:  Or else she’s a calmer pupil that respects grown ups and others jump on her
to get the teacher’s attention.
I:  You say the bully wants the focus of attention and therefore tries to ‘steal’ it. From who?
Bea:  Yeah, from someone more perfect.
Anna:  Yes, from those a bit above the others.
I:  So the bully tries to raise her status through hurting someone else, what happens to the
victim’s status?
Wilma:  It is lowered.
Bea:  That is what the bully wants.

This group of girls have an idea that the victim is someone a bit above the rest. What the girls refer to as a somewhat superior position of the victim is what the bully or the bullies
want to change by attempting to alter the social order. Clearly the respondents see their social situation from a somewhat hierarchic viewpoint since they are using expressions such as “a bit above the rest” and “more perfect”. However, this is perhaps not the core issue in this discussion. According to the respondents, it appears the victim is someone that bullies can’t identify with since she is different somehow or perceived to be, i.e. ‘calmer’, ‘more perfect’. The victim, say the respondents, is someone with no need to assert her self since she feels good enough as she is. Girls may feel threatened by the victim, and need to assert themselves and claim their positions. However, due to my experience as a practicing teacher, I find the groupings of girls and their manners of using indirect bullying towards others undergo changes at times. An individual that at one term looked like a bully can at another time during the school year become the victim and vice versa. Owen, Shute & Slee (2001a, p.366) claims that the indirect nature of girls’ bullying, meaning the silence around its occurrence does not alleviate the victim’s surprise when it happens to her. On the contrary they say, she is even more unprepared for how to deal with her impending situation, and why her peers have singled her out.

The second group of respondents had this to say:

I: Who becomes a victim of bullying?
Ruth: Someone who is weak.
Mia: Someone who has not got so many friends, or who the bully knows is ‘safe’ to attack.
Ruth: Someone vulnerable.
I: So the fact that the victim may already have a tough situation only facilitates the bully’s intentions?
Ruth: Yes, because a strong person,…well the bully can’t be on the same level as her victim. The victim has to be weaker, or less powerful.
Mia: If the victim is as strong as her bully, then the victim may not get bothered and the whole thing falls apart.

Summing up what the respondents perceive are the criteria for who the bully chooses to victimize, the bully is wanting to hurt her victim and stands more of a chance with an individual that is not as socially clued up, or that in the bully’s eyes is not as powerful, as her self. Rigby (2002, p.146) says that the victim typically is psychologically or socially less powerful than her aggressor. It is even more difficult for the victim to have any influence against a whole group of harassing girls, should there be several. This is where the victim loses ground, confidence and possibly becomes isolated. We have understood from literature,
and the respondents’ previous answers that bystanders do not dare support victims of bullying due to the fear of becoming targets themselves. In other words, the victim can be put in an extremely isolated position where she has no one to turn to with her problem. Although she may act indifferent in front of her attacker/s and cover up her feelings in an attempt to shrug the problem off, she is no doubt in pain. This front means Owen, Shute & Slee (2001a, p.366) is only to pretend that she is not affected by her perpetrators’ actions.

Emma, in group 3 is of the opinion that the victim is someone with usually better conditions at home and at school. Probably she has parents that care a lot and earn good money and they say this is how the bully might choose her victim, because of jealousy.

I: You said the victim often is someone stronger within her self than her bully. She may have better conditions at home with parents that care and that have a better economy. Why can’t she put a stop to the bullying?

Emma: She has perhaps tried a few times but when it does not work the bully continues. Finally, the victim finds no strength to ‘hit’ back and starts to doubt her self.

I: Do you think that the victim sometimes feels weaker then her bully?

Emma: Yes, the target person becomes weak through having a few bullies around. She probably feels as if she has the whole world against her and that there is something wrong with her.

On the question if the victim can answer back or report the bully, Emma said that eventually your strength wanes, after repetitious efforts. This is when you seriously start doubting yourself and find that there is something wrong with you. Olweus (2001, p.23-24) stated that a victim is someone who is socially weaker (more anxious and quiet) than her aggressor and transfers feelings of failure to her surround. According to the respondents in this group, the victim does not necessarily start off as an individual who is weaker than her bullies, but after repetitious subjection to harassment she gradually becomes a weaker person than she was earlier. We have previously read about the effects of bullying and the powerless situation it seems to provoke for its victim. Nobody wants to help and nobody dares tell the teacher, out of fear of becoming a target herself. The effects can clearly be devastating for victims of this anti-social pursuit. In any way, there is more or less pain connected to being a victim of bullying. Owen, Shute & Slee (2001a, p.366) say the psychological pain, particularly if the victim is in denial, leads to a desire to escape the situation by joining other
groups, or absenting oneself from school and even leaving school. It also leads to loss of confidence and self-esteem and a fear for future relationships.

Criteria for choosing a victim, according to respondents, are that the target person has fewer friends than bullies and, or, is socially and manipulatively less skilled than her aggressor/s, without an apparent need to assert her self. There exists a condition of social imbalances between bullies and victims. The respondents’ understanding is that the target person does not necessarily start off as someone socially weaker than her aggressor. They perceive the victim to be an individual with better family relations and conditions than her bully. This is where the bully or indeed bullies becomes jealous; they say she or they want to raise themselves above their victim by any means available to them. Due to the bullies’ needs to raise their own status and their intentions to hurt the victim, they stop at nothing. The victim loses confidence and self-esteem with fading strength as a result and she becomes emotionally drained. Consequently the victim’s school day becomes affected, both performance and socially. Her peers avoid her. In the worst of scenarios the victim becomes totally isolated.

5. Conclusion

In this study teenage schoolgirls have been interviewed and asked to express their understanding and explanation of girls’ bullying. I will summarize what I found in my analysis of the given data according to the original aim and questions of the study.

Girls’ ways of bullying consist of going behind other girl’s backs while confiding in friends. Some girls said that they give each other looks of disapproval and that way practice exclusion. The respondents claim that when an individual’s own status is pending due to some emotional or personal problem, they deflect attention away from themselves through means of bullying a chosen target person. This, they continue is a measure to secure a place within their peer group. Owens, Shute and Slee (2000b, p.31-33) mean that girls perform acts of exclusion in order to gain acceptance within their group. The respondents say that girls do not want to appear to have something ugly to say, and so they confide in other girl-friends.

According to the respondents of this inquiry, conflicts among girls were mostly ignored and conflicts were expected to be resolved between the girls themselves. The respondents let us know that their kind of indirect bullying go mostly unnoticed by teachers at their school.
They argue that bullying also goes on in the classroom in front of the teacher without him or her noticing.

One of the effects of being victimized is that the target person loses her confidence and self-esteem and can start to isolate herself (self-exclusion) as a result of being bullied. She also loses trust in other people and often she does not know why she has been chosen as a victim. One of the consequences of this, said the girls, was academic underachievement. Owens, Shute and Slee (2000a, p.363) talk about girls under achieving as a way to avoid resentment from other girls and stay with the group. The respondents add that the victim’s pre-occupation with thoughts of being attacked when at school leads to a reduced amount of energy left for school work and learning. Because of the stigma and shame attached to being subjected to bullying, the subjected individual may choose to remain at home.

The girls in this inquiry have said that bullying reaches desired effect only if there are spectators watching the scene. They seem to think that it is the surrounding group that facilitates for the bullies to maintain their negative behaviour which is in line with what Eriksson et. al (2002) say about spectators providing “the perfect arena”.

The respondents have explained that the lack of something to do is a good enough reason for bullying someone. This is an issue for schools to look into when planning intervention programs. Furthermore, the girls say emotions on a personal and social level such as envy, communication problems at home, personal issues of character and appearance, lie behind the bullying act. Crothers (2005, p.349-352) equally found that some of the primary motivators behind girl’s relational aggression were emotional such as jealousy, envy and deflection.

This open-ended qualitative approach indicated understandings that are generally described in previous literature. The belief that bullying is an act taking place ‘out of sight’ of teachers has in these findings shown not always to be the case. Respondents have clearly conveyed that bullying sometimes takes place right in front of the teachers’ eyes in the classroom. However, due to the fact that this kind of bullying occurs in disguise, it is a scene that teachers are often unaware off. In addition, this study looks at girls’ more indirect ways of bullying and their group formation manipulative abilities. We found that two of the groups had an understanding of the victim being an individual with a stronger interpersonal disposition than her bully or bullies. This result is not the general understanding among researchers, who claim that the victim is someone socially weaker than her attacker. Olweus (2001, p.24) describes victims as more insecure or anxious, with a more negative self image, than their peers. However, one group of respondents claim that the victim indeed becomes
weaker with extended subjection to bullying. This study also treats the aspect of institutional bullying. The girls are of the opinion that due to teachers’ expectations on girls to resolve their own conflicts, girls’ indirect ways of bullying are mostly ignored at schools.

In conclusion, the key explanations for girls’ bullying, presented by girls’ in this inquiry, entail a series of personal and, or, group processes taking place, due to individuals’ fear or perceived fear of lost identity or exclusion. As I understand the girls’ explanations, these fears of exclusion and of becoming a target are rooted in family relationships and conditions, or personal, emotional characteristics in the individual. Efforts to support in-class relations must be beneficial to strengthen the group dynamics. However, there are many aspects around this topic and problem that can be approached from an institutional level, for instance pupil-inclusive policies and practises. The respondents mentioning of status makes you wonder why pupils should have to strive for status at school. All pupils are of equal value as stated in Lpo 94:s, (based on the Education Act 1985:1100) paragraph on core values at school.
References


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