

**"I ALWAYS FEARED THE BELL":  
A QUALITATIVE, TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF  
WWW.BULLYING.ORG**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This cyber-research study involves a qualitative, textual analysis of the first 475 messages (as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2002) and the last 475 messages (as of August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006) posted on the Canadian-based anti-bullying Web site, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). The 950 messages—from bullies, bully-victims, victims, bystanders, parents, school personnel, and many others—were categorized and coded in NVivo, a computer software package used in qualitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed, including grounded theory, content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and statistical analysis in the SPSS. A number of the “truisms” about school bullying—e.g., that it is more widespread or more virulent today than it was in the past—are challenged through an in-depth examination of 125 narrative accounts of bullying dating back over 20 years ago (some from over 60 years ago). This provides a longitudinal perspective that is invariably missing from contemporary school-based studies. The study adds new insights into the nature and level of violence involved in female bullying, and questions whether female bullying has really changed all that much through the years. It sheds new light on why bully-victims routinely appear in lower numbers in school-based samples than they do in “real life”, by demonstrating that many self-portrayed “victims” actually engage in bullying activities themselves. While the negative consequences of bullying are usually highlighted by researchers, this cyber-research study shows that bullying

sometimes has neutral or even positive outcomes. An explanation is also offered for why anti-bullying programs have routinely produced negligible to modest results at best. Although this cyber-research study employed a “grounded theory” approach, the research findings offer new empirical support for explanations of bullying involving theoretical constructs such as social capital, social support, status and stigma (labelling theory) and institutional anomie theory.

**Keywords: bullying, bully-victims, anti-bullying programs, female bullying, bullying and suicidality, Internet research, Internet communities, cyber-ethnography, cyber-research, NVivo, mixed methods, grounded theory, discourse analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, anomie-strain theory, social capital, social support, labelling theory, institutional anomie theory**

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to Bill Belsey, the founder of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), and to the many people who posted their messages on this Web site. I would also like to dedicate it to Rosie, somewhere in Alberta, who posted the first message on the site. Rosie's message, "I Always Feared the Bell", inspired the title of my thesis.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As is invariably the case with a work of this size and scope, it seems that there is never enough room to properly acknowledge everybody who made it possible. That said, I am going to give it an honest effort.

I would like to thank Dr. Brian Burtch, the supervisor of my doctoral committee. I first met Dr. Burtch in 1980, when we were both graduate students at the University of British Columbia. When I informed him that I was planning to return to university at the age of 52 (after a 20 year absence from academia), he encouraged me in my scholastic endeavours, and was instrumental in me deciding to do my Ph.D in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Burtch contributed immeasurably to the successful and timely completion of my doctoral dissertation. His editorial suggestions and keen eye for detail proved to be especially invaluable.

Many of the formative ideas for this qualitative study of bullying came from Dr. Robert Menzies, another member of my committee, who was in fact the committee supervisor prior to heading for greener pastures as the J. S. Woodsworth Resident Scholar in the Humanities. Dr. Menzies played a major role in the shaping of my methodology, and in the interpretation of my research findings. I cannot say enough about his willingness to re-join the committee in the later stages of the game, or about his ability to pick up exactly where he left off, without missing a beat.

I am highly indebted to my third committee member, Dr. Margaret Jackson, who joined the committee partway through, at a time when she was probably trying to reduce her workload, rather than add to it astronomically. I apologize for (unintentionally) misleading her with respect to how much longer it was going to take for me to complete my thesis. Many of Dr. Jackson's insights on cyber-bullying and policy implications found their way into the finished product.

I am also appreciative of the efforts of Dr. Robert Gordon, the Director of the School of Criminology, who gave generously of his (highly limited) time to serve on my doctoral committee for a number of years, and who stepped up to the plate and served as the supervisor of the committee during a period when it was undergoing some major and unexpected changes.

I would like to express my appreciation to the external examiners, Dr. Charles Reasons and Dr. Wanda Cassidy, who came on board on very short notice (in the summertime, no less), and who offered many fine insights that were reflected in the final version of my thesis. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Reasons for travelling all the way from Central Washington to attend my doctoral defense.

I could not have undertaken a qualitative research project of this magnitude without the assistance of Chris Atchison, who patiently taught me the ins and outs of NVivo. Thank you, Chris. I am grateful for the input of Dr. Bryan Kinney and Chris Giles, both of whom provided substantial assistance with parts of the quantitative data analysis. I would also like to acknowledge the

contribution of my sister-in-law, Lynn Cartwright, who first drew my attention to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org).

Last and certainly not least, I wish to thank my wife, Rosa Cartwright, who kept me fed, clothed, groomed and (reasonably) sane over an eight year period during which I finished all of my graduate courses, wrote my comprehensive examinations, wrote a 417 page doctoral dissertation, and worked full time teaching university. I could never have done it without her support and encouragement.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, bullying has attracted ever-increasing attention from social researchers, educators, medical experts and legislators. Bullying is said to be linked to youth suicide and school violence in general, school shootings in particular, and to domestic violence and criminality later in life (Newman, 2004). It has also been the target of a multiplicity of legally mandated anti-bullying programs, with some anti-bullying advocates calling for tougher criminal sanctions and others for more therapeutic or “restorative” approaches (Mellors, 2002; Roberts, 2006). At the same time, bullying has captured the imagination of the public, resulting in “grassroots” movements such as Pink-Shirt Day. This movement started in 2007 in Nova Scotia, Canada, when a campaign was organized via the Internet site *Facebook* to encourage students to wear pink shirts to school in support of another student who had been subjected to homophobic bullying for wearing a pink shirt. The movement has since spread worldwide, and is variously known as Pink Shirt Day, Anti-Bullying Day or International Stand Up to Bullying Day (Austin, 2009; McGilligan, 2009).

My dissertation, a cyber-research study, involves a qualitative, textual analysis of the Canadian-based anti-bullying Web site, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). The data set consists of the first 475 messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) (as of December 31, 2002), and the last 475 messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) (as of August 30, 2006). These 950 messages were downloaded word-for-word from

the Web site, converted from html format and saved as Word.doc files, coded and categorized in NVivo (a computer software package designed to facilitate qualitative research), and then analyzed further in the SPSS (the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This approach could be described as a mixed or multiple methods study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) or as complementary data analysis (Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999).

The home page of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) claims that this Web site is the "number one site in the world about bullying". The site was established in 1999 by Bill Belsey, a high school teacher in Alberta, Canada, along with two of his students, Kaitlyn Jackson and Caitlin Ferguson. The Web site was a response to a shooting at W. R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta, in which one student was killed and another injured (Beran, 2008; Hainsworth, 2001; Honey, 2002). The Taber incident took place just one week after two high school students shot and killed twelve classmates and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. In each of these shooting incidents, the shooters were said to be victims of school bullying, retaliating against their tormenters.

[Bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is an on-line support or self-help group that hosts a bulletin board where people can post messages or ask for advice. Apart from the bulletin board, the site has areas where participants can post poems or drawings, take on-line courses about bullying, find links to helpful resources, or play an on-line anti-bullying game. The site has been the recipient of a number of international awards and distinctions, and has been featured on television and radio programs across Canada.

The sample taken from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) includes messages from bullies, victims, bully-victims, bystander-observers, school teachers and school principals, police and probation officers, parents of bullies and victims, other relatives of bullies and victims, and teachers, parents, and other relatives who were formerly bullies, victims or bystanders. The messages came from every corner of the globe, including:

- all ten provinces and three territories in Canada
- 22 States in the U.S.A.
- ten countries in Western and Eastern Europe, including the UK, Ireland, Northern Ireland, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden, Bulgaria, Latvia and Russia
- seven countries in Africa, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Egypt
- five countries in Central and South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico
- four countries in Asia or South East Asia, including Mongolia, Japan, Thailand and India
- Australia and New Zealand.

Apart from illustrating the vast potential of cyber-research, the diversity of these messages attests to cross-cultural and trans-national concern with the issue of bullying.

As much as possible, and in keeping with the tradition of narrative or discourse analysis, my dissertation adopts a "standpoint" approach, using the actual voices or stories of the Web site participants, both to add "richness" to the analysis, and to support the research findings (Barron, 2000; Goodwin, 2002; Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999). As noted in my dedication, the title of this dissertation, "I Always Feared the Bell", is in fact the title of the very first message posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org).

While many qualitative research studies tend to be exploratory or descriptive in nature (Palys, 2003), my dissertation is somewhat more definitive, extending beyond those levels of analysis. In particular, it will provide new empirical evidence that challenges the oft-expressed notion that bullying is on the upswing, or that current manifestations of bullying are more serious than earlier ones (e.g., Haber & Glatzer, 2007; Marsh, Parada, Craven, & Finger, 2004; Olweus, 1993). Furthermore, it will

- add new insights into the nature and level of violence involved in female bullying
- shed new light on why bully-victims—i.e., people who bully others and are bullied in turn—appear in lower numbers in many samples than they do in real life
- examine the relationship between the severity of bullying and suicidal ideation (and/or other negative life outcomes)

- offer an explanation for why anti-bullying programs have routinely produced negligible to modest results at best.

## **1.1 What is bullying?**

Researchers generally agree that for an act to be regarded as bullying, it must be frequent and repetitive in nature, require a deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological harm, and involve a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007; Morrison, 2006; Sanders, 2004). The definition of bullying has gradually expanded over time, to encompass indirect (covert, behind-the-back) relational or social bullying, as well as direct (overt, face-to-face) physical or verbal bullying (Rigby, 2002). Under some popular definitions, giving "dirty looks", making a face, or refusing to play with someone whom you dislike might well be regarded as bullying behaviour (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004; Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Cowie & Jennifer, 2008).

More recently, a number of other forms of bullying have been identified and studied as well, including adult bullying, workplace bullying, and cyber-bullying. Adult bullying consists of such behaviours as partner abuse and intimidation or harassment of neighbours (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Randall, 1997). Workplace bullying, an extension of adult bullying, involves verbal abuse, attempts to humiliate or embarrass other workers, intimidation or harassment of other workers, and threats to personal or occupational status (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Felblinger, 2008). Cyber-bullying, which came onto the scene shortly after the advent of the Internet, includes name calling in chat rooms, sending

threatening or insulting text messages or emails, or maliciously posting someone's picture on the Internet without their permission (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; P. K. Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007).

Of the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), only four were concerned exclusively with adult bullying (either at home or in the neighbourhood), five involved workplace bullying, and five involved cyber-bullying. The vast majority of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were concerned primarily—if not exclusively—with school bullying. This is not surprising, given that the majority of bullying is commonly thought to take place in schools, and that there is said to be an overlap between school bullying and cyber-bullying (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Shariff & Gouin, 2006). There were also 126 messages on the site concerning bullying that had occurred across time and place (e.g., in the neighbourhood, at home, in cyberspace, or at the workplace), but most were linked in one way or another to school bullying.

My doctoral study of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), then, is concerned primarily with school bullying, although instances of neighbourhood bullying, cyber-bullying and workplace bullying will appear from time to time. The standard definition of bullying (set out above) says that for an act to be regarded as bullying, it has to be frequent and repetitive, involve deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological harm, and involve a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. In most cases, the more flexible definition that I am using in my research permits Web site participants to determine for themselves whether they are or

have been bullies, victims, bystanders, or have otherwise been involved in or affected by bullying. Unlike some of the more standard definitions, for example, my definition does not necessarily require the bullying to be frequent or repetitive in nature (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Rigby, 2008; Sveinsson & Morris, 2007). This flexible definition fits with the "standpoint" or "own voices" tradition in narrative or discourse analysis. Apart from that, it ensures that privileged, expert, or more powerful voices do not monopolize the process of defining how reality is experienced or interpreted by other people (Alasuutari, 1995; Atkinson, 1992; Barron, 2000; Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

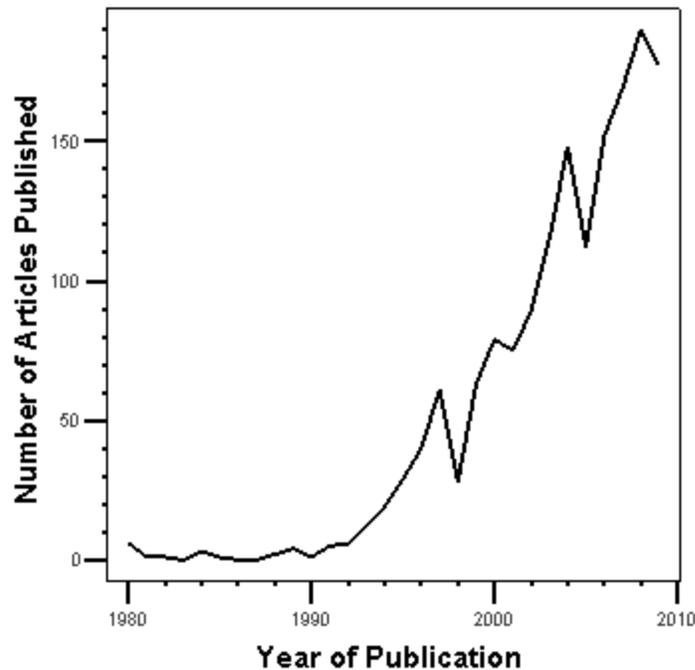
That said, I excluded 49 of the 950 messages from consideration because they were talking about issues such as dead hamsters, soccer hooliganism, one-time fights, or criminal offences that had nothing to do with bullying. Moreover, I coded, categorized and scored all messages for relevance and severity of bullying. Messages that were only tangentially related to bullying, or that recounted bullying experiences of a trivial or one-time nature were categorized as being mildly relevant.

## **1.2 How significant is the bullying "problem"?**

Until bullying was identified by Olweus in the late 1970s as a problem in Norwegian schools (Campbell & Morrison, 2007; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000), bullying was typically ignored, or if not ignored, then dealt with internally by school personnel (Brown et al., 2007; Roberts, 2006; Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007). Bullying has however attracted great attention from many stakeholders—legislators, researchers, policymakers, school

officials, media commentators—since Olweus' seminal (1978) work, but interest in the subject did not gather significant momentum until the late 1990s (Hazler, Carney, & Granger, 2006; Rigby, 2008; Sveinsson & Morris, 2007).

**Figure 1: Number of articles on bullying published between 1980 and 2009 (Source: Web of Science)**



A search of the Web of Science database, using "bullying", "bullies" and "bullied" as keywords, indicates that 1,588 articles have been published on this subject over the past thirty years, of which 1,306 (82.2 percent) were published in the last ten years alone (see Figure 1.1). Bear in mind that the Web of Science database does not include books of any description, nor does it include the vast number of "self-help" or "expert opinion" books or articles originating from sources outside of mainstream academic circles.

This growing interest in the subject of bullying has been accompanied almost in lock-step by the development of numerous anti-bullying programs. These programs cover a wide spectrum, from zero tolerance, to the whole school approach, to conflict resolution, to restorative justice and reintegrative shaming (Casella, 2003; Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Morrison, 2005; Rigby, Smith, & Pepler, 2004; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). The programs have many different names and originate from many different locales. These include, but are by no means limited to:

- the Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools program and the Bully B'Ware Campaign from British Columbia (Beran, 2008; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004)
- the Caring and Respectful Schools Program from Saskatchewan (Tunney, 2004)
- the Bully-Free Hamilton Program from Hamilton, Ontario (Beran, 2008)
- Bully Busters from the State of Georgia and Steps to Respect from the State of Washington in the US (Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, & MacKenzie, 2007; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004)
- the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program from Norway (Olweus, 2004)
- the SAVE Model from Seville, Spain (Ortega, Del Rey, & Mora-Merchan, 2004), and

- the Friendly Schools Project from Australia (Cross, Hall, Hamilton, Pintabona, & Erceg, 2004).

Despite the proliferation of programs, few have been subjected to rigorous evaluation and even fewer have been proven to work effectively (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). Even so, over the past 15 years, there has been a worldwide trend toward legally-mandated anti-bullying programs or policies (Smith, Ryan, & Cousins, 2007). In Canada, the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia have within the past decade each introduced their own *Safe Schools Act*, targeting bullying, amongst other prohibited behaviours. Apart from the United States government's *Safe Schools Act* of 1994 (Casella, 2003; McCabe & Martin, 2005), as of 2007, some 35 of the States in the U.S.A. had enacted their own state-wide legislation to prevent or reduce bullying (Phillips, 2007; Srabstein, Berkman, & Pyntikova, 2008). This situation is by no means unique to North America. Northern Ireland passed legislation in 2003 requiring all schools to develop and implement anti-bullying policies (Mc Guckin & Lewis, 2006); the United Kingdom's *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* specifically targets bullying behaviour (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Mellors, 2002); a number of the states in Germany have legal regulations requiring schools to implement anti-bullying and disciplinary measures (Schafer & Korn, 2003); and in 2002, the French government even formalized penalties for workplace bullying in law (Brousse et al., 2008).

## **School shootings**

Present-day concerns about bullying can be traced back in part to a reported relationship between bullying, victimization and a rash of fatal and nonfatal shootings that took place in schools from the late 1990s onwards (Burns & Crawford, 1999; McCabe & Martin, 2005). In quick succession, there were school shootings in Moses Lake, Washington (1996), Bethel, Alaska (1997), Pearl, Mississippi (1997), West Paducah, Kentucky (1997), Stamps, Arkansas (1997), Jonesboro, Arkansas (1998), Fayetteville, Tennessee (1998), Springfield, Oregon (1998), Littleton, Colorado (1999), Conyers, Georgia (1999), Fort Gibson, Oklahoma (1999), Mount Morris Township, Michigan (1999), Santee, California (2001), and Williamsport, Pennsylvania (2001) (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003; Newman, 2004; Webber, 2003).

The response from the public, the media and the government to these shootings was one of near panic, especially in the case of the highly-publicized 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two assailants shot and killed 12 students and one teacher, and wounded 23 other students and faculty (Leary et al., 2003; Webber, 2003). CNN ran non-stop television coverage of the Columbine shooting, while the 50 largest American newspapers ran close to 10,000 stories on the event (McCabe & Martin, 2005; Newman, 2004). Governments introduced new legislative initiatives, and schools implemented a variety of policies in an effort to prevent (or at least limit) school violence (Brown et al., 2007; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Casella, 2003). The US

Congress even asked the National Research Council, Institute of Medicine (affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences) to do a series of detailed case studies on lethal school violence (Moore et al., 2003).

Around this time, interest in the subject of bullying truly gained momentum (see Figure 1.1 above). It was widely held that most of the school shooters were victims of school bullying, and that the shootings were in fact retaliation for the treatment that they had experienced at the hands of their tormenters (Leary et al., 2003; Sullivan & Guerette, 2003; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). In particular, it was argued that the shooters, who were all young males, had been victims of homophobic bullying or "gay-baiting" (Fox, Smith, & Newman, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Few (if any) of the victims were actually gay, but it was observed that they were picked on for what was perceived to be their inadequate gender performance, or inability to conform to the code of masculinity. Most were shy, slight of build, non-athletic, and inclined to be bookish or artistic (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003).

Some researchers have cautioned that bullying was not necessarily a causative factor in all of these school shootings, and to the extent that it might have been a contributory factor, it was only one of many possible factors. Leary et al. (2003) pointed out that while bullying was a factor in 12 of the 15 shootings between 1996 and 2001, there were 10 cases where the shooters were known to have preceding psychological problems, and seven instances involving rejection by girlfriends (or unrequited love). Moreover, six of the shooters were fascinated

by explosives and guns, and all had easy access to the weaponry used in the shootings.

Authors of two detailed case studies carried out at the request of the US Congress by the National Research Council, Institute of Medicine, arrived at similar conclusions. Fox et al. (2003) considered bullying to be minimally related to the shooting at the 1998 Westside Middle School in Arkansas. Above all, the two shooters in the Westside Middle School incident had ready access to guns, liked guns, and knew how to use them—they had seven handguns and three rifles, and managed to hit 15 people with only 30 rounds of ammunition, firing from 93 yards away. In their analysis of the shooting incident at Heritage High School in Rockdale County, Georgia (which took place exactly one month after the Columbine shooting), Sullivan and Guerette (2003) concluded that it was primarily a "copycat" crime and that it too had little (if anything) to do with bullying. The Heritage High shooter was reportedly obsessed with Columbine, and referred to Columbine repeatedly in his writings and conversations with other people.

Indeed, some of the more recent school shootings have no apparent connection with school bullying, except perhaps for drawing their inspiration from the Columbine incident. On September 13, 2006, Kimveer Gill shot and killed one student and wounded 19 other students and faculty members at Dawson College in Montreal, Quebec. Gill wore a black trench coat and combat boots, similar to the outfits worn by the Columbine shooters, and allegedly enjoyed

playing the video game *Super Columbine*,<sup>1</sup> but he never attended Dawson College (KDKA, 2006; Tobin, 2006; Toronto Star, 2006).

On August 30, 2006, 19 year-old Alvaro Castillo shot and wounded two students at Orange High School in Hillsborough, North Carolina. Although Castillo had previously attended the school, there was no indication that the shooting was in retaliation for bullying. Rather, he had visited Columbine the preceding year, had driven by the homes of the two Columbine shooters, and prior to arming himself and going to his former high school, sent an email to the principal of Columbine High School, talking about the impending shooting (Schrader, 2006; E. Thompson, 2006).

Duane Morrison, the 53 year old gunman who on September 27, 2006 took six girls hostage at Platte County High School—sexually assaulting some of them before killing one of them and killing himself—was evidently neither a student at the school nor a victim of school bullying (Economist, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; Tobin, 2006). Instead, Morrison was most likely inspired by news coverage of the other two school shootings in the previous few weeks, and by the fact that Platte County High School was within easy driving distance of Columbine High School.

On the other hand, a number of recent school shootings have a clear connection to bullying. Eric Hainstock, a 15 year old boy who shot and killed the school principal at Weston High In Cazenovia, Wisconsin on September 29,

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<sup>1</sup> Super Columbine is a video game designed by Danny Ledonne, who was himself a victim of bullying. Players assume the role of one of the Columbine shooters, and acquire points by shooting students, teachers, janitors, etc. Additional information about the game can be found at [www.columbinegame.com](http://www.columbinegame.com).

2006—the principal managed to intercede and stop Eric before he started shooting at students—had reportedly been the object of homophobic bullying and gay-baiting (Maxwell, 2006; Tobin, 2006). Jeff Wiese, who shot and killed a teacher, a security guard and five students at Red Lake High School on March 21, 2005, was apparently teased by other students, and was said to have no friends (Davey, 2005; DeMersseman, 2005; Freed, 2005). On September 28, 2003, 15 year-old Jason McLaughlin shot and killed two students at Rocori High School in Cold Spring, Minnesota, apparently in retaliation for being teased incessantly about his severe acne (Winona Daily News, 2003).

Although school shootings are statistically "rare" (Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998; Leary et al., 2003), over 40 have occurred since the Columbine incident in 1999. There was a cluster of six shootings in North America in 2006 alone, three in Germany (in Branneburg in 2000, and in Freising and Erfurt in 2002), one in 2004 in Vlasenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and another in 2004 in Carmen do Patagones, Argentina. More recently, a 2007 school shooting occurred in Tuusula, Finland, and another in Gurgaon, India (Time Line of Recent Worldwide School Shootings, 2008). While many of these incidents have no apparent connection to bullying, except perhaps for "copycat" behaviour, such as the aftermath of the Columbine incident, the reported relationship between bullying and some of these school shootings is simply too compelling to discount out of hand.

## **Bullying and criminality**

Dan Olweus, regarded by many as the "founding father" of bullying research (Campbell & Morrison, 2007; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Sraubstein et al., 2008; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2002), found in his studies of bullying in Norwegian schools that "approximately 60 percent of boys who were categorized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one conviction by the age 24". Moreover, "35-40 percent of the former bullies had three or more convictions by this age" (Olweus, 1993, p. 36). Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber argue that aggression is highly stable over the life course, and regard minor aggression like bullying as a pathway to delinquency and adult criminality. According to their research, over 60 percent of boys (74 percent, in one study) who were later convicted of a violent criminal offence—e.g., aggravated assault, rape, robbery—had previously engaged in "minor aggression" such as bullying or physical fighting (R. Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998a; R. Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998b). Even if they are not convicted of a criminal offence, researchers have suggested that both bullies and victims are more likely to engage in "problem behaviours" like smoking, drinking, and damaging property (Haynie et al., 2001).

Prison-based research has generally confirmed high levels of bullying and victimization amongst prisoners, again suggesting a link between negative school experiences and a risk for future criminality (Beattie & Arum, 1999). Estimates of the number of prisoners who are either bullies, victims or bully-victims range as high as 70 percent, depending upon the definition being applied, and the types of

questions being asked (Biggam & Power, 1999; Ireland, 2005; South & Wood, 2006). In her 1993 study of six prisons in the United Kingdom, Devlin found that prisoners were much more likely than non-prisoners to have been bullies or victims in secondary school, and in particular, that prisoners were twice as likely to have been victims of bullying in secondary school, when compared to members of the general population (Devlin, 1997). In her review of the extant prison research, Ireland (2000) found that in one study, 33 percent of prisoners who engaged in bullying while incarcerated had previously been bullies while in school.

An apparent link between adult incarceration and previous involvement in bullying or victimization must be treated with caution, however. Many prisoners already come from harsh and physically abusive family backgrounds, where aggressive (or submissive) behaviour is not only tolerated but encouraged (Devlin, 1997; Tattum, 1997). Thus, previous involvement in bullying might be just one of many factors when it comes to the risk for adult incarceration, and by no means the predominant one.

Clearly, some bullying behaviours themselves—e.g., theft, harassment, and assault—do rise to the level of criminal conduct, and could be dealt with as such under the criminal codes of most countries (Brown et al., 2007). Some observers have described bullying itself as a "hate crime" or "bias crime", and have argued that it should be treated as such (Blake, 2001; Englander, 2007). In many cases, bullies specifically target victims from identifiable groups, like

homosexuals or "geeks", in a manner which makes people in these groups tend to feel vulnerable and threatened.

Involvement in bullying can of course result in a criminal conviction. Kelly Ellard and Warren Glowatski were both convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment for the 1999 murder of Reena Virk in Victoria, British Columbia (Baglolle, 2005; Bell, 2002; Moretti, Odgers, & Jackson, 2004). It was reported that Reena Virk—who was beaten severely, then drowned under a bridge—had been teased and socially excluded, and that she was swarmed that night because she had allegedly been spreading rumours about or had insulted one of her seven attackers (Beran, 2008; Cernetig, Laghi, Matas, & McInnes, 1997; Coloroso, 2002; Pemberton, 1997). In another case, two teenage girls (whose names were not released to the public because of their age) were convicted of criminal harassment in 2002. They were sentenced to probation after their bullying, which included death threats sent by email, caused Dawn-Marie Wesley to commit suicide in Mission, British Columbia, in November, 2000 (Coloroso, 2002; Gillies, 2002; Knopp, 2002).

Victims of bullying—especially those who retaliate with lethal force—can end up with a criminal conviction just as easily as the bullies. The 14 year-old, described as an unpopular social outcast who shot and killed one student and wounded two others at W.R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta in 1999 was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced as a youth to three years in custody and seven years of follow-up supervision (Kiel, 2004; The Province, 1999). Eric Hainstock, the 15 year-old victim of school bullying who shot the

school principal at Weston High in Cazenovia, Wisconsin in 2006 was sentenced to life in prison (Dixon, 2008). In 2007, an 18-year old victim of bullying in Gurgaon, India, who shot and killed the student who was bullying him, was sentenced to life imprisonment (The Hindu News Update Service, 2007). As is the case with the school shootings, the ostensible relationship between bullying and criminality is too compelling to dismiss lightly.

### **Victimization and suicide**

According to Olweus (1993), the 1982 suicide deaths of three young Norwegian boys—thought to be caused by victimization at the hands of school bullies—prompted a nationwide anti-bullying campaign by Norway's Ministry of Education in 1983. There were similar instances in Japan, where 16 bullied students committed suicide between 1984 and 1985 (Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). In Canada, 14 year-old Hamed Nastoh committed suicide in March 2000 by jumping off a bridge in New Westminster, British Columbia. In a suicide note that Hamed left for his mother, he said that he been called a geek, a gay, and a faggot by his classmates, and couldn't take it any more (Coloroso, 2002; Jiwa, 2000). In November, 2000, 15 year-old Dawn-Marie Wesley committed suicide by hanging herself in her home in Mission, British Columbia. She left a note for her mother, saying that she had been threatened by school bullies, and that she felt that death was her only means of escape (Coloroso, 2002; Morrison, 2007; Owens, 2000). In December, 2004, Travis Sleeva committed suicide by shooting himself outside of his home in Canora, Saskatchewan. Like Dawn-Marie Wesley and Hamed Nastoh, Travis also left a suicide note for his mother, indicating that

he couldn't take being bullied any longer (Hughes, 2005). More recently, 15 year-old Ashkan Sultani committed suicide by hanging himself in the Nanaimo-Ladysmith area of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Although he did not leave a suicide note, Ashkan's parents told the media that he was being bullied at school, and that he had recently changed schools in order to get away from bullying at his former school (Cooper, 2010b).

Some school shootings are themselves intentional forms of suicide. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two shooters in the 1999 Columbine incident (both of whom claimed to victims of school bullying) planned from the outset to commit suicide—they wanted to go out in what they thought of as a blaze of glory (McCabe & Martin, 2005; Newman, 2004). Jeff Weise, the shooter in the 2005 Red Lake High School incident in Minnesota, also described as a victim of bullying, turned his gun on himself after killing a teacher, a security guard and five students (Davey, 2005; DeMersseman, 2005; Freed, 2005). In October 2007, a bullied 14 year-old named Asa Coon shot and injured two classmates and two teachers in Cleveland before killing himself (Dixon, 2008; Stephens & Dissell, 2007; Time Line of Recent Worldwide School Shootings, 2008). In November 2007, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, a victim of school bullying in Tuusula, Finland, shot himself and later died in hospital, after killing seven students and the school principal, and wounding 10 others (Dixon, 2008; Malvern, 2007).

The relationship between victimization and suicidal ideation has been investigated extensively in schools, prisons, and the workplace. In his 1998 study of school bullying in Norway, Roland (2002) found that both bullies and

victims exhibited suicidal ideation, with victims being more depressed and bullies actually being more suicidal. In a more recent school study in the New York area, students involved in bullying, either as a bully or as a victim, were at a much higher risk for depression and suicidal ideation than those who were not involved. Moreover, the researchers concluded that girls who were both bullies and victims (bully-victims) were significantly more likely than others to be depressed, and to attempt suicide (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2008). Brousse et al.'s (2008) study in France also found high levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation amongst victims of workplace bullying. Various studies in prison have also confirmed a link between victimization and suicide (Blaauw, 2005; Ireland, 2000), although it should again be kept in mind that there are any number of other factors in the prison environment (e.g., isolation from family and friends, feelings of hopelessness and despair) that could contribute to suicidal ideation.

### **1.3 Applying a qualitative, grounded theory approach to the study of bullying**

From the outset, the study of bullying has been dominated by the fields of psychology and psychiatry (Brown et al., 2007; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). This is not surprising, in view of the fact that Olweus—the best known figure in the field—is himself a psychologist. Typically, bullying studies have originated from departments of psychology, psychiatry, medicine and health sciences, or from institutes of child behaviour (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Eslea & Rees, 2001; Haynie et al., 2001; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998a;

Olweus, 1978; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1997; Stevens et al., 2000; Vaillancourt et al., 2008).

As a rule, these studies bear titles such as "Social cognition and bullying: Social inadequacy or skilled manipulation?" (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999), "Parental maltreatment and emotion dysregulation as risk factors for bullying and victimization in middle childhood" (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001), "Bullying, depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts" (Roland, 2002), "The relationship between bullying, psychotic-like experiences and appraisals in 14-16 year olds" (Campbell & Morrison, 2007), "Genetic and environmental influences on victims, bullies and bully-victims in childhood" (Ball et al., 2008), "Psychopathological features of a patient population of targets of workplace bullying" (Brousse et al., 2008), "Do bullied children get ill, or do ill children get bullied? A prospective cohort study on the relationship between bullying and health-related symptoms" (Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006), or "Associations between school bullying and psychosocial factors" (Jankauskiene, Kardelis, Sukys, & Kardeliene, 2008). These studies tend to appear in academic, peer-reviewed forums such as the *American Psychologist*, the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *School Psychology Review*, the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, the *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, *Social Behavior and Personality*, the *International Journal of Behavioral*

*Development, Behavior Research and Therapy, and Child Psychology and Psychiatry.*

With few exceptions, the studies described above have taken what might be described as a medical or public health stance. Researchers thus characterize bullying as a "significant threat" (Stevens et al., 2002), a "serious social problem" (Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004), a "serious health problem" (Dehue et al., 2008), a "mental health" issue (Brousse et al., 2008), and even as a precursor to "psychosis" and "psychopathology" (Campbell & Morrison, 2007; Jankauskiene et al., 2008). It was reported that bullies have higher levels of "psychoticism" (Sutton et al., 1999), that bully-victims are the "most neurotic" (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001), and that victims tend to suffer from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Unnever & Cornell, 2003). The overall approach is best encapsulated in Olweus' statement that "bullying can...be viewed as a component of a more generally antisocial and rule-breaking (conduct-disordered) behavior pattern" (1993, p. 35).

Most of these researchers have attempted to study bullying and victimization "scientifically", through means of pre-designed survey questionnaires, usually with measurement (and particularly computer-assisted statistical analysis) in mind (e.g., Bond, Wolfe, Tollit, Butler, & Patton, 2007; Eslea & Rees, 2001; Fekkes et al., 2006; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Stevens et al., 2000). They have employed a variety of pre-determined, built-in scales intended to measure individual and family dysfunction or dysregulation. These include the Social Anxiety Scale (Crick & Bigbee, 1998),

the Children's Depression Inventory (Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000), the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001), the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001), the Family Environment and Child-Rearing Inventory (Stevens et al., 2002), the Paranoia Scale (Campbell & Morrison, 2007), and the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (Vaillancourt et al., 2008), to name a few.

This is not to suggest that bullying research rooted in departments of psychology, psychiatry or medicine is lacking in value or substance, or that there is anything intrinsically wrong with the analytical techniques described above. These researchers have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate that bullying exists to a greater or lesser degree throughout the world. They also describe the phenomenon and what constitutes bullying and what does not, identify the various categories and sub-categories of those involved in bullying, explore some dynamics of bullying, and develop and test a wide variety of anti-bullying programs. However, they commonly invoke a medical model, where bullying is described as a disease or abnormality, a theory about the aetiology of the problem or a treatment for the problem is proffered, the theory or treatment is tested (often with negligible to modest results), and there is the obligatory plea for further research (cf. Cohen, 1985; Foucault, 1979; Garland, 2001; Pfohl, 1985).

Recently, there has been a shift toward alternative approaches to the study of bullying. These approaches include:

- Pellegrini and Bartini's (2000) mixed methods study, employing direct observation, self- and peer-reports and a qualitative examination of students' diaries
- Yoneyama and Naito's (2003) sociological explanation of school bullying in Japan, exploring structural problems within the school and the society itself
- Kimmel and Mahler's (2003) content analysis-based explanation of how homophobic bullying and the construction of masculinity contributed to school shootings in the United States
- Phoenix et al's (2003) qualitative, thematic analysis of narratives of masculinity, homophobia and bullying offered by 11-14 year old schoolboys in London
- Terasahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) discourse analysis, using a computer program similar to NVivo to investigate the types of interpretive repertoires used by schoolchildren when describing and rationalizing bullying
- Aquino and Lamertz's (2004) theoretical model of workplace bullying, premised on social roles, organizational culture and social capital
- Valerie Besag's (2006) ethnographic study of a girls' activity club at a primary school in the United Kingdom

- Debby Phillips' (2007) discourse analysis of how boys reproduce media interpretations of bullying and masculinity
- Nicole Landry's (Landry, 2008) discourse analysis of the motives that girls use to explain female bullying.

My study of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is more in keeping with the type of qualitative, discourse analysis tradition outlined above. Although not theoretically driven in the preliminary stages, it provides empirical corroboration for explanations of bullying that employ concepts such as social capital, social support, status and stigma, and labelling. Thus, these key concepts emerged through preliminary analysis of the data. At various junctures, the subject matter is also viewed through a Durkheimian lens, not in an effort to validate or invalidate Emile Durkheim's theoretical perspectives, but rather, because many explanations of (and social responses to) bullying invoke Durkheimian notions of community, social cohesion and social bonding.

While my present study is premised in large part upon a qualitative, "grounded theory" approach, it would be inaccurate to characterize it as being purely qualitative, or as exclusively rooted in grounded theory. All 950 text messages were analyzed qualitatively, because they were by definition qualitative in nature—the process required a combination of content, narrative and discourse analysis, implying a careful reading and re-reading of the texts. At the same time, the messages were harvested systematically and chronologically, collected in sufficient number to permit subsequent statistical analysis in the

SPSS, and an effort was made to obtain a representative sample of messages posted on the Web site.

To a large extent, patterns and themes were allowed to emerge "naturally" from the data themselves. However, I explored certain pre-existing theories about (or findings on) the subject of bullying from the outset. Indeed, it would be impossible on the one hand to be familiar with the extant literature, yet on the other, be totally unaware of the many anti-bullying programs in existence, or of the many studies that have linked bullying to school shootings, adult criminality, and suicidality (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). In other words, the data set was not approached as though it was a blank slate about which nothing was known—there were a number of pre-existing notions about bullying that were put to the test.

One area earmarked for in-depth analysis from the early stages of analysis was the widely held belief that bullying is somehow "new" or, if not new, then more widespread or more violent in recent years (e.g., Hymel, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Stevens et al., 2002; Sutton et al., 1999). Claims of this nature have been difficult to substantiate, given the dearth of research on bullying before the late 1970s, and for that matter, the comparative lack of research prior to the 1990s (Rigby, 2008; Sveinsson & Morris, 2007; Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002). There were well over a hundred messages in the sample I took from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that described bullying that occurred over fifteen years ago (many incidents took place 30, 40, and even 50 years ago), well before the upswing in bullying research in the late 1990's. Information gleaned from these

messages will challenge the notion that contemporary manifestations of bullying are quantitatively or qualitatively different from earlier ones.

Much of the extant literature treats female bullying as fundamentally different from male bullying. Specifically, females are said to engage in more indirect, social bullying, and males in more direct, violent bullying (e.g., Besag, 2006; Chapell et al., 2006; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008; Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005). As seen earlier, many bullying studies have focussed exclusively on male bullying, and in particular, how it is related to the construction of masculinity (Phillips, 2007). However, recent research suggests that females sometimes engage in bullying for reasons that are similar to those of males (Landry, 2008; Pellegrini & Long, 2002), and that the degree of female involvement in direct, aggressive bullying has probably been underestimated (Brown et al., 2007; Phillips, 2007). Females widely outnumber males in the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), and while it may be true that they are more likely to engage in social or relational bullying than males, the analysis of these messages will demonstrate that females do indeed engage in a significant amount of direct, violent bullying. As well, it will be demonstrated that the quantity and quality of female bullying has not changed all that much over the years.

While bully-victims have been studied quite extensively, they are most often identified by means of self-nomination, peer-nomination or teacher-nomination (Graham, Bellmore, & Juvonen, 2007). Depending on the definition

employed and where the research is conducted, bully-victims tend to comprise only a small percentage of the school populations under investigation (Roland, 2002; Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007; Unnever, 2005). During the analysis of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), it was determined—despite my overall adherence to the "standpoint" or "own voices" perspective—that an appreciable number of the Web site participants who categorized themselves as victims were in fact simultaneously engaged in bullying. Some of these "victims" were reclassified as "bully-victims", but many more self-described victims could arguably have been reclassified as well, because they spoke in detail about their personal involvement in behaviour that would easily meet any definition of bullying. Thus, it is anticipated that this study will offer new insight into why bully-victims tend to be underrepresented in most studies, and at the same time, demonstrate that there are in fact fewer "pure bullies" and "pure victims" than might be imagined (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; South & Wood, 2006; Unnever, 2005).

Substantial time and effort have been invested in the development, implementation and assessment of anti-bullying programs in schools throughout the world (Midlarsky & Klain, 2005; Molina, Bowie, Dulmus, & Sowers, 2004; Rigby, 2008; Scherz, 2006). As discussed earlier, a handful of these anti-bullying programs have proven to be modestly effective at best, with the majority producing minimal or even negative results (Rigby, 2002; Rigby et al., 2004; Schafer & Korn, 2003; J. D. Smith et al., 2004; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). Various explanations have been advanced to account for this outcome. These

include insufficient time and money, inconsistency of application, unenthusiastic implementation on the part of school personnel, the need for more research on (or "fine tuning" of) the existing programs, or the need to develop entirely new programs (Craig et al., 2007; Englander, 2007; Hirschstein et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2007).

This present study explores the issue from a somewhat different angle, by taking into consideration the accounts of those who are actually caught up in, and most affected by, the bullying phenomenon—the bullies, the victims, the bystanders, and their relatives. Despite the vast amounts of money (not to mention the expertise, time and energy) expended in finding a solution that works, it will be seen that the majority of the Web site participants seem unaware of the existence of anti-bullying programs in their schools, although they reside in places that theoretically have such programs in abundance. Even when they are vaguely aware that programs exist in their schools, they typically find it very difficult to obtain what they consider to be the desired level of sympathy and support from those who are supposed to provide it.

Most researchers acknowledge that bullying has always been around in one form or the other, and agree that it has often simply been ignored or tolerated in the past (Brown et al., 2007; Morrison, 2002; Morrison, 2005; Phillips, 2007; Zins et al., 2007). However, the current practice has been to treat bullying and victimization as "abnormal" or pathological (Brown et al., 2007; Morrison, 2005)—as Unnever and Cornell (2003) so succinctly express it, as "comorbid conduct". The results of this study suggest that bullying is perhaps more normal

than it is abnormal, that it is not necessarily dysfunctional, and that comparatively few bullies or victims are truly "sick" or in need of treatment.

While the tendency has been to accentuate the negative aspects of bullying—e.g., school shootings, suicidality, future criminality, and other life-course problems discussed earlier—I will demonstrate that not all bullying outcomes are necessarily negative. In some cases, they are at least neutral, if not positive (cf. Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Phillips, 2003). Moreover, it will be seen that many of the former bullies and victims who recounted their experiences on this Web site eventually "matured out" of this conduct (Pepler et al., 2008). They report being largely unaffected by what transpired, just as most individuals who engage in occasional, minor criminal activities during their youth do not go on to become adult criminals (Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1992). However, while some people may see bullying as a kind of crucible, there is a danger of romanticizing the resiliency of victims, and/or of adopting the famous assertion by Nietzsche: "That which does not kill us makes us stronger."

Clearly, then, I am not suggesting that bullying is harmless or that it should be ignored. As will be seen from the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), some of the bullies were in fact engaging in behaviour that could only be described as criminal—on occasion, serious enough for them to run afoul of the law. Quite a few bullying victims had contemplated suicide, a smaller number had engaged in self-harm or attempted suicide, and some, according to reports from parents and other relatives, had actually taken their own lives. Many victims said that they had retaliated against their tormentors in one way or another,

sometimes with violence, with even more having at least contemplated serious (sometimes lethal) violent retaliation. Clearly, such serious issues deserve ongoing exploration and explication.

## **CHAPTER 2: ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES IN CYBER-RESEARCH**

Billions of people now use cyberspace, and where people go, social researchers are bound to follow. Apart from eliminating the time and expense associated with more traditional field research, Internet research—often referred to as cyber-research—facilitates cross-cultural and trans-national comparison, in many instances eliminating the need for face-to-face interview venues or on-site access (Joinson, 2005; H. Lee, 2005). In fact, computer-mediated communication has probably done more for the study of discourse than the portable tape-recorder, making it possible to record and analyze a seemingly infinite number of electronic messages or conversations, without having to take field notes or engage in lengthy and time-consuming transcription (Herring, 1996; Kraut et al., 2004). Yet another advantage to the analysis of computer-mediated communication is that data can be collected unobtrusively, without interfering with or otherwise altering the behaviour of the research subjects (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002).

The Internet has expanded from only a handful of Web sites and less than 200,000 Internet hosts in the early 1990s, to over 230 million Web sites and close to a trillion URLs by 2008-2009 (Alpert & Hajaj, 2010; Netcraft, 2010; Zakon, 2006). The Internet has become the preferred means of communication for many people (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Thayer & Ray, 2006). With the

introduction of Webcams, *E-Bay*, text messaging, *YouTube*, *MySpace*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*, it could be argued that the Internet has become embedded in our everyday lives (Hine, 2005b)—that being on-line is part of being human (Capurro, 2002).

"Cyberspace" is not a particular spatial or geographic location; rather, the term connotes interaction with others by means of an Internet connection and a computer, including hand-held devices such as Blackberries and iPhones. It is a place where people imagine that they are going when they sit at their computers or communicate with each other via mobile computing devices—a conceptual metaphor that is used to describe the experience of computer-mediated communication (Thomas, 1996). Cyberspace encompasses a number of activities and forums, including email, bulletin boards, discussion groups, support groups, news groups, game rooms, "real time" chat rooms, and a variety of other places where people can meet, share or seek information, debate, shop, gamble, invest money, or fall in love.

Cyberspace is also a place where people go to commit a variety of crimes. These include identity theft, financial and credit card fraud, the production and distribution of child pornography, luring children for sexual purposes, stalking and criminal harassment, and even the planning of acts of terrorism (Broadhurst, 2006; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005; Oswell, 2006; Walsh & Wolak, 2005).

The development of the Internet has been responsible for tremendous social change—it has altered how we work, operate commercial enterprises, deliver government services, access information, provide education, and

communicate with others (Jones, 1995). Indeed, the Internet has become a social setting or social environment in its own right (Hine, 2005b; Jones, 1999b). The Internet has also become the world's largest database, and as such, has been attracting ever-increasing attention from social researchers (Kitchin, 2002b; van Wel & Royakkers, 2004).

The development and growth of cyber-research is comparable in many respects to the development and growth of bullying research (discussed earlier in this paper), or of the Internet itself. There have been numerous endeavours in the field of cyber-research:

- Correll's (1995) cyberethnography of The Lesbian Café
- Watson's (1997) cyberethnography of Phish.Net, an on-line community of fans of the rock band Phish
- Gurak's (1999) study of the social (Internet-mediated) reaction to an effort by Lotus Corporation to sell a database containing marketing information on millions of consumers
- Denzin's (1999) discourse analysis of the cyber-narratives on [Alt.recovery.codependency](#), a support group for the adult children of alcoholics
- Kitchin's (2002b) discourse analysis of the Alcoholics Anonymous Web site, [Alt.Recovery.AA](#)
- Kennedy's (2006) study of the home pages of the participants in Project Her (this list is by no means exhaustive).

Several researchers have conducted bullying surveys in cyberspace, for example, Ybarra et al.'s (2007) on-line survey regarding the overlap between school bullying and cyber-bullying, Hinduja and Patchin's (2008) on-line survey, again regarding cyber-bullying, and Craig et al.'s (2007) on-line survey (posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)) pertaining to victim strategies for coping with bullying.

This new interest in cyber-research has given rise to a number of books devoted to the subject: Steven Jones' (1995) *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, (1997) *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*, and (1999a) *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*; Christine Hines' (2000) *Virtual Ethnography* and (2005a) *Internet Behaviour and the Design of Virtual Methods*; Smith and Kollock's (1999) *Communities in Cyberspace*; and Mann and Stewart's (2000) *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online*. Interest in cyber-research has also given rise to a number of academic journals that are dedicated exclusively (or in large part) to the topic of Internet studies, such as *The Information Society*, *New Media & Society*, *Information, Communications and Society*, *Ethics and Information Technology*, and the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*. Again, neither of these lists is exhaustive.

From the outset, there has been a lively debate about the conduct of research in cyber-space. In fact, the journal *The Information Society* devoted an entire 1996 issue to this debate. Amongst the many issues argued extensively has been the question of obtaining informed consent. This includes whether

proper informed consent can ever be obtained when the identity of the person giving such consent cannot be verified off-line, whether people voluntarily posting messages on the Internet have a reasonable expectation of privacy, and/or whether such messages fall within the public domain, and thus should be considered fair game for social researchers. There have also been questions about who has ownership rights to the messages posted on public Web sites, and whether the messages can legally be downloaded for research purposes. It would be an Herculean task to cover all sides of this multi-faceted debate, so the following discussion will be confined only to those issues that are germane to the present study.

## **2.1 The issue of informed consent**

Informed consent is a central ethical principle in social research, especially in research scenarios that pose potential risk, harm, discomfort, or embarrassment to the research subjects (Thomas, 1996). Internet research has drawn attention because of the ease with which “personal” messages can be downloaded. They can then be subjected to in-depth analysis and quoted at length, without informing the research subjects that the study is taking place. It has been argued in some quarters that the type of Internet research undertaken in this present study abrogates the right of the research subjects to know about the nature and duration of the research project, the potential risks and benefits, and what measures are being taken to ensure confidentiality (e.g., King, 1996; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Sharf, 1999; Waskul & Douglass, 1996).

It would have been extremely difficult to obtain informed consent in the present case, because there were no means by which to verify with certainty the age or identity of the individuals giving such consent, short of conducting hundreds of off-line interviews in some 29 countries around the world. The process of obtaining informed consent would have been complicated further by the fact that many of the messages were posted anonymously. When they were not, the site operators of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) invariably anonymized the messages themselves, removing all identifying features such as names, locations and contact details. In a few instances earlier on, the site made exceptions if the authors were adults, and specifically requested that their names and other details be included in the messages.

In any event, informed consent is not normally required when conducting research on public behaviour in readily accessible public settings, where there is a limited expectation of privacy, and little if any risk of harm or embarrassment to the participants (Kitchin, 2002a; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Palys, 2003).

[Bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is a readily accessible Web site, where anyone can read or post a message, without having to register or obtain a password. One of the first Web sites to appear in an Internet search using the keyword "bullying", the operators describe it as "the number one bullying site in the world". It is linked to a number of similar sites—thus enhancing its visibility—and its operators actively seek publicity around the world. Clearly, it is a public setting, where there is a limited expectation of privacy. Moreover, the site operators had already anonymized messages that were not submitted anonymously, thus precluding the possibility

of identifying or contacting the authors of the messages. Anonymity was further ensured by (a) the Web site policy of not facilitating contact between site participants, and (b) the passage of time, as many people who posted the messages would have matured, finished school, found new jobs, changed residences, and changed contact details (as of 2010, the first 475 messages were at least eight years old, and the second 475 messages were over four years old).

In the final analysis, this qualitative, textual analysis of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) was deemed to fall under the minimal risk provisions of the Tri-Council's Policy Statement regarding *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2007). The Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University confirmed that the study is excluded from the requirement for an ethics review and thus from the requirement for informed consent. I have used readily accessible archival materials posted in a public arena. The research involves no interaction with the research subjects, and poses no greater risk than what might normally be encountered by the research subjects in their daily lives (cf. Kitchin, 2002a). Similar rules apply in the United States, where research is only deemed to involve human subjects and thus require informed consent if the researcher interacts with the subjects, for example, through interviews or correspondence, or collects personal information that would permit identification of the subjects (Kraut et al., 2004).

## 2.2 Privacy rights in the public domain

Although the research data employed in this study were clearly posted in a public arena, and the research itself has been categorized as "minimal risk" by the university's Research Ethics Board, some ethicists argue that Web site participants such as those on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) have a perceived expectation of privacy (e.g., King, 1996). Waskul and Douglass (1996) say that computer-mediated communication is neither private nor public, but rather, a bit of both. Correll (1995, p. 276), on the other hand, takes the position that "public posts are, as the name suggests, public". Boehlefeld (1996) opines that it is more likely an issue of perceived "obscurity"—individuals are aware of the vast number of messages posted or relayed on the Internet, and simply assume on the basis of sheer volume that their own correspondence will not come to the attention of an audience other than that for which it was intended.

The precise concepts of privacy and expectation of privacy can be difficult to pin down, because interpretations and expectations of privacy vary significantly from individual to individual, and from culture to culture—what some might regard as a highly personal secret, others might be willing to share publicly in cyberspace (Capurro, 2002; Pomerance, 2005). Millions of people are quite willing to share personal information like their age, gender, photos, and contact details on friend-networking sites such as *Facebook* and *MySpace*. In some instances, they also provide links to the Web pages of their friends which in turn contain similar personal information (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Indeed, many people are surprisingly forthcoming when it comes to the content of their

home pages or Web messages, freely sharing intimate details about their careers, their marital status, their family problems and their medical concerns (Kennedy, 2006; Lee, 2005). Even those who do not maintain their own home page or make use of friend-networking sites may voluntarily provide all sorts of personal information about themselves, for example, their name, email address, and residential address, in order to download free software or to gain access to a Web site that requires registration and a password (Klang, 2004; Woo, 2006).

When navigating in cyberspace, it is difficult to avoid the persistent evidence of the Internet's omnipresent, Panopticon-like persona (Cameron, 1992; Foucault, 1979; Klang, 2004; Woo, 2006; Wynn & Katz, 1997). Advances in computer technology, going hand-in-hand with the development and continued growth of the Internet, have added whole new dimensions to electronic surveillance, such as the ability of commercial enterprises and even government agencies to monitor, gather, store, process and share information (Klang, 2004; Woo, 2006). Even smaller Web sites have the capacity to collect information on their visitors, and many possess greater levels of sophistication than that, as evidenced by their ability to send unsolicited messages or advertisements to visitors who are no longer logged onto their sites.

Most Internet users are aware of the data collection practices of these Web sites, and of the spyware that often comes attached to software that they purchase or download for free. Many take precautionary measures, by using products such as Webroot's Windows Washer, Lavasoft's Ad-aware program, or Symantec's Norton SystemWorks, or by using their computer's pop-up blocker or

message blocker. Nevertheless, Wynn and Katz (1997, pp. 311-312) point out that "Internet users face prospects of micro-observation, and the data collected thereby have no finite end to their existence or availability to inspection at a later time".

While acknowledging that messages posted on publicly accessible Web sites are in reality open to micro-observation and later inspection, a number of researchers (e.g., Boehlefeld, 1996; King, 1996; Waruszynski, 2002; Waskul & Douglass, 1996) insist that researchers should disguise the source of the data in such a manner that members of a virtual community who subsequently recognized their own words in an article or Web site posting would feel that the location and identity of the group had been protected. However, many cyber-researchers are comfortable with identifying the source of their data. Examples of studies where the source is identified include Correll's (1995) cyberethnography of The Lesbian Café, Watson's (1997) study of Phish.Net, Kendall's (1999) study of the on-line forum called Blue Sky, Kitchen's (2002b) study of Alt.Recovery.AA, and Sanders' (2005) study of how sex trade workers communicate with prospective clients through a Web site known as Punternet. In the case of www.bullying.org, any attempt to obfuscate the identity of the Web site would almost certainly meet with failure, due to the site's prominence and public visibility. Apart from that, extensive use of direct quotations without properly acknowledging their author and source constitutes copyright infringement under Canadian law, as will be seen later in this chapter.

The participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were clearly aware that their messages were being read. Forty-eight of them thanked the Web site or the other site participants for reading their messages, 54 specifically said that they wanted their story told, 126 asked for some sort of response or advice, 28 attempted to provide their complete contact details (these details were typically censored by the site operators), and 10 mentioned that their stories had been published elsewhere. Of the 950 messages in the sample, 201 (around 22 percent) of them were in fact replies to earlier messages, often expressing sympathy, providing advice, or offering friendship and support.<sup>2</sup> As I will demonstrate below, the participants knew that they had an audience, and were in fact using the Web site to communicate with that audience.

### **"A Story That Has to be Told"**

The above heading is the title of message 468, posted anonymously on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) by an unidentified relative of a boy who committed suicide because of bullying.<sup>3</sup> The author of this message goes on to say:

This story has to be told. A shy, quiet 15 year old boy in Pennsylvania was harrassed and bullied for several years in his school. Richard never spoke back, only kept the pain buried deep inside. He was in counseling for 2 years to help handle the torment of being teased and verbally abused. Richard, unable to cope any longer, committed suicide April 23, 2002, leaving behind grieving family, friends and neighbors who knew how gentle and sweet he was. We seek answers and pray for this torment to stop for other young people.

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<sup>2</sup> This calculation of the percentage of replies is based on 201 out of 925 messages, because 25 of them were repeat messages.

<sup>3</sup> To preserve and accurately represent the voices of the web site participants, spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected, except in rare circumstances where the point is truly ambiguous or unclear. In such cases, a parenthetical addition is made using square brackets.

A similar note is struck in message 668, by Floyd, a 35 year-old adult in the United States:

If I can help save JUST ONE PERSON from suffering from the ultimate hopelessness I will feel like telling my story will be worth it. I don't want to bury any more kids that suicided because of being bullied. I don't want to ever hear of another Columbine High School shooting (again, the underlying motives were traced to bullying)<sup>4</sup>. I deeply care about this issue and I am willing to speak about it to whomever will hear my voice.

An interesting example of discourse that was interpreted as meaning that the author wanted her story told (although she did not say it in precisely those words) were three stories posted consecutively (messages 55, 56 and 57) by Rachel, an Inuk from Nunavut. The stories were entitled "Not Run Away", "Learning From Kaugjagjuk", and "Nunani: Ugly Girl: Parts One and Two". All three were well-developed "stories" or "narratives", each one close to two (single-spaced) typewritten pages in length. Her first story, "Not Run Away", concerned bullying that she and her sister encountered as teenagers in an English-language boarding school. The second, "Nunani: Ugly Girl: Parts One and Two", told about Rachel's experiences in adulthood, as an Inuk trying to conform to "the North American...ideal of beauty". The third, "Learning From Kaugjagjuk", recited with considerable elaboration a cautionary Inuit folk-tale about the disaster that can befall a community when it torments and excludes one of its members.

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<sup>4</sup> This is not my voice here, but rather, the actual comments of Floyd, the author of the message.

After considerable reflection, Rachel's messages were classified in NVivo under the sub-node "specifically says wants story told", and also scored as such in the SPSS, because of the following passage at the end of each message:

Pijariiqpunga.

Note: The word "pijariiqpunga" has no English equivalent. In traditional Inuit culture, each speaker is allowed his or her own isuma. Others won't interrupt until a speaker indicates that they've said all they needed to. There is no time limit: a speaker can sit in silence for quite a while, yet no one will speak until he or she ends with "pijariiqpunga." It means that they're finished, and someone else can have a turn to speak.

I determined from this that Rachel wanted her story to be told, that everyone was expected to listen patiently until it was completed, and that she had now finished her story.

While not all participants on the Web site were quite so loquacious, it was equally evident that most were aware that their messages were in public view, and that they were being read. In message 230, for example, Denis, self-described as a 38 year-old male from the province of Quebec, said that "I really wanted to share my story with the members of this courageous community". Denis further demonstrated his awareness of the reading audience, by saying "sorry for my poor english". In her message entitled " My Childhood Full of Despair", Tracy, an adult from Vancouver, Canada, concluded by saying that "I wanted to share this with you cause I feel that every one has a right to live and every one has a right to be different". In "Prejudice", Isla, a Black woman from the United States, started her message by announcing that she "wanted to share

[her] painful story" about having been bullied because of her race when she was a teenager.

### **"Need Advice, Please Respond"**

Message 303, entitled "Need Advice, Please Respond", was submitted to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) by Marie M., who said she was soon to be in grade 8 in New Brunswick, Canada. Her message reads as follows:

I am in need of some advice. This past school year I have been [sworn] at, hit, kicked and slapped. Every time I have hit back I get in trouble not them. When school starts this year I don't think I can go through it. I need advice. Please help.

This type of request for advice or help was found throughout the Web site, as illustrated by message 228, entitled "What Should I Do?":

Hi my name is Mustaqim. There is one kid in my class. who really bugs me. but when i tell him to stop he doesn't listen. He has put me in a headlock 2 times. I reported to my vice-principal. He didn't get suspended. Now he bugs me about my sore neck. He says "You go to the hospital you pussy" .I told him to stop. It seems that if I tell on him he gets worse and worse, and then he spreads rumors about me. Help me. What should I do?

Thank you very much.

In "Picking On" (message 753), Caitlin from Canada says that:

I get picked on every day because I am short. I don't appreciate it and they wont stop when I tell them to. I even wrote them letters telling them what I thought and how I felt and they laughed at me and ripped them up. I don't know why I need some one to help me. Please reply :(:(:(:(:(

The Web site participants were not only seeking advice and help, but in many cases, receiving it. As noted above, 201 of the 950 messages in the sample were in fact replies to earlier messages. Message 8, "SO THIS IS MY

LIFE - I Got Up For This?" by Alexandra, generated a series of responses, including messages 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 15, 16, and message 327 (much later in the first set of 475 messages). Alexandra, a 14 year-old from Kaslo, British Columbia, asked the following:

I'm just so confused and depressed I have no clue what I can do! I...I...I want to scream but I can't!! Why do they hate me so much!! Is it the type of music I listen to? Is how I talk? How I look?? WHAT'!!! Help me out here please! I've tried everything to stop this, every single way! Why should ANYONE have to suffer through this?!?!

Kayleigh, a 13 year-old Canadian girl attending grade 8 at a Christian school in Canada, wrote back to Alexandra: "Never consider suicide please because I know many do....I love you and God loves you". Also on a religious note, Deb Hamilton responded to Alexandra, saying that "I pray you find the strength to take one day at a time, and that a miracle of mercy meets with you".

Not all responses to Alexandra's were of a religious nature. Natasha, a 24 year-old "self professed survivor of bullying", offered the following advice to Alexandra:

I finally learned a trick. It sounds really simple -- too simple. But it's tough to accomplish at first. Then, once you get the hang of it, it's very easy. It also helps you regain your sense of self. The trick: concentrate on the imperfections and character flaws of the bullies. Every time they say something to you or push you or snicker at you or ignore you when you come their way, replace your feelings of insecurity and rejection with thoughts of their flaws. By recognizing that the bullies weren't perfect themselves, I gained a bit of power. Eventually, their taunting stopped bothering me. And they recognized that I wasn't as small as they thought.

In all, there were 40 such threads or series of responses in the data set, ranging in length from smaller ones with only two responses, to much longer ones, with as many as 11 or 12 responses, not including the original postings

that generated the responses. The average thread consisted of somewhere between three and four responses.

Not all responses were necessarily part of a series or thread. There were in fact 53 instances where there was only one reply. Message 425, "I Am A Former Victim of Bullying -Please Help", by Kimberly, an adult in Florida, starts by saying: "IF YOU CAN HELP ME OR OFFER ADVICE, PLEASE RESPOND TO MY STORY". Kimberly goes on to tell how she was teased and socially excluded in grammar school, junior high and senior high school, and how at the age of 33, has never really recovered. Tom, an adult in Illinois, was the only one who replied to Kimberly's message. He stated that he "got beat up three or four days a week from second grade all the way up to [his] last year in junior high", but that after many years, he had regained his self-confidence and sense of self-esteem, and was now leading a normal, successful life. He concludes his message by saying:

The reason being bullied hurt people like you and I so much is because bullies took away everything that was ours. They took away our dignity and our self worth. It's up to us to give it back to ourselves. Good luck, and, if you're reading this Kimberly, post a reply message on the site, just so I know whether or not my message reached you.

**"Thanx 4 reading my submission. Bye all."**

Switchblade, a 14 year-old from Winnipeg, Manitoba, ends his message "I Really Want to Put a Stop to It!" by saying: "Thanx 4 reading my submission. Bye all". In "Bullying is Hard", Darel, a 14 year-old female from Ontario, Canada, says that:

My mom was sharing with me that on the news there is this Web site. I have read all your stories, and now I would love to share my stories with you. thank you for being there for me and not just me, I have always thought I was alone but I guess I am not and either are you! I wished that this Web site was here a long time ago! But thanks anyways.

In her response to the message "Is Verbal Assault Bullying?" (posted by Colleen in Ontario), Emily, a grade 5 student in Tucson, Arizona, advises Colleen that "verbal assault is bullying, it's big time bullying", and concludes her reply by saying: "Thank you all for taking the time to listen to me". Whether it is Ed, a 38 year-old from Gander, Newfoundland, saying "thanks for letting me share this...I have never done this before....It does help", or Janet, an adult in Iowa, offering her "thanks in advance to those who read this long, (but probably unique) story", or Kat in Australia saying: "Thank you for hearing me out. I feel much better now as if I just got the voice to be quiet after years of them telling me I am useless", it is apparent that people who are posting messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) are well aware of their reading audience, and appreciative of the fact that their voices are being heard.

In fact, a number of participants were not only thankful, but clearly aware of the public visibility of the Web site. Kathleen, the mother of Darel (who posted the message "Bullying is Hard", mentioned above), says that:

I'm so glad that this Web site exists. I only heard about it tonight while watching the news on CTV. I will be sure to tell Darel about it in the morning. Many thanks for simply being there.

An unidentified adult, who "grew up with a lot of bullying" due to the fact that he had monocular vision, or "no right eye", mentions that:

I watched the special on CBC, last night; and found it very informative. Also, I took a quick boo at your site. GOOD GOING!! I wish that we had this kind of thing, when I was going to school, as this site does contain alot of the same stuff that I put up with, when I was going to school. Thank You for taking the time to read this e mail, and I do want to wish you, continuing success; with your site.

lone, a grandmother from Calgary, Alberta, whose grandson had been bullied, says:

I watched your show tonight Bill. I just want to add my "thank you" for caring so much about the bigger picture of your profession. The time, work and effort you put into the site every night is surely setting the tone for others to join in the fight about bullying.

Some participants even used the high profile of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) to increase the public visibility of their own activities or Web sites. Kathy from Canada said that she had written a book called "Tell Mommy or Daddy or Somebody", which she thought should be in schools, libraries, and doctors' offices. Kathy ended her message by offering copies of her book and saying "thank you". Brittany, a grade 7 student from Canada, and a self-acknowledged bully-victim, said that she had learned about [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) by watching the TV program "much music". Brittany submitted an entire, two page anti-bullying speech that she had been presenting at schools, and concluded her message by saying: "Thanks for your time!". Jean, a parent who had fought to have an anti-bullying program introduced at the Calgary school where her son had been bullied, invited people to email her if they wanted to "know more about the Dare To Care Program", and concluded by saying "Thank you for this Website".

A few went a step further in promoting their own enterprises. Kevin, an adult from Connecticut, said that he had solved bullying problems in his youth by

learning martial arts. He added that he was now "a child protection attorney and a martial arts instructor" and invited people to contact him if they needed help or advice. Another example would be Nick, a grade 9 student from Canada, who said that he had made a successful film about muscular dystrophy which had been shown at "numerous film festivals across Canada". He asked for stories and quotes from the site participants, in order to help him make a film about bullying and achieve his "dream...to become a film maker".

Arguments in favour of respecting personal privacy and obtaining informed consent still persist (e.g., van Wel & Royackers, 2004; Waruszynski, 2002). Nonetheless, it is now widely accepted—by courts in Canada and the United States, and by institutes and ethics review bodies—that individuals who are posting messages in these public venues are quite possibly seeking public visibility, or if not, are at least aware of the public nature of their behaviour and the limitations thereby imposed on their privacy (Capurro, 2002; Ess & the AoIR ethics working committee, 2002; Pomerance, 2005). With respect to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), it can be seen from the above analysis that the participants do want to have their stories told and their voices heard, that they are well aware of the presence of an audience, and that they are aware that the site has a high level of public visibility.

### **2.3 Copyright issues in cyberspace**

In its infancy, the Internet was somewhat akin to the North American "Wild West", where (as legend would have it) brave pioneers ventured out into unexplored territory, often with limited support in terms of road maps,

infrastructure, supply lines or any of the other trappings of "civilization" (Jones, 1995). As the so-called Wild West became more settled, the infrastructure and social structure followed, accompanied by commercial development and law enforcement. Much the same can be said for the development of the Internet and computer-mediated communication. In the early stages, there were relatively few explorers; they worked with very limited infrastructure and social structure, and even fewer rules and regulations (Flichy, 2006). As cyberspace became more travelled, densely populated and familiar, the infrastructure, social structure and social norms (or rules) followed (Gillespie, 2006; Jones, 1999b; McLaughlin, Osborne, & Smith, 1995; Reid, 1999; Verhulst, 2006).

At one time, the Internet could also have been likened to an "intellectual commons" where anyone was free to participate—assuming of course that they had access to a computer and an Internet service provider—and where creative expression and innovation could flourish (Spinello, 2003). Nobody actually "owned" cyberspace, or the free code that permitted the various users to construct or access Web sites. However, the Internet has been undergoing what might be described as a contemporary version of the "enclosure movement". It is rapidly becoming commercialized, with an increasing number of individuals and corporations attempting to control access to and assert property rights over territory and knowledge that in many cases they did not create themselves, or otherwise own in the first place (Gillespie, 2006; Spinello, 2003).

In recent years, legislative initiatives in the United States and Canada—for example, the *Digital Millennium Copyright Act* (1998) in the US, and Bill C-61 in

Canada (D'Agostino, 2008; George-Cosh, 2008)—have moved to further restrict user rights, while strengthening the rights of copyright owners (Gillespie, 2006). This has led some observers to question whether such initiatives are having the possibly unintended effect of discouraging innovation and entrepreneurship (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2006). As discussed earlier, Internet users often cannot access sites or services unless they first agree to supply personal information to the site owners. Even if they visit sites that do not overtly require such information, their activities—which sites they visit, how long they spend there, what they do on those sites—are recorded and reported (Woo, 2006). This comes down to a question of the private right to control access to knowledge, as opposed to the public's right to share and use that knowledge. Much of this knowledge was publicly constructed in the first place, or if not, then constructed by someone other than those who are asserting ownership rights (Willinsky, 2005).

A critical issue for cyber-researchers to address when downloading, analyzing and quoting personal messages or stories posted on the Internet is the actual ownership of those messages (Herring, 1996; Jones, 1995; Mann & Stewart, 2000). The home pages of many Internet sites, including [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), display a copyright notice or a copyright symbol, which has at times been regarded as proof that the site owners hold the copyright to the messages that are posted on the site. To preclude the possibility of copyright infringement in relation to this study of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), I sought advice pertaining to Canadian copyright law from Michael Geist, who holds the Canada

Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law at the University of Ottawa's Law School.

I also obtained a written legal opinion from Ann Carlsen, a British Columbia-based lawyer who specializes in trademark and intellectual property law.

As it happens, a copyright notice or copyright symbol does not imply ownership of the messages, or for that matter, ownership of anything, if copyright does not in fact exist. Indeed, copyright notices are not required in order to obtain the protection afforded by the Canadian *Copyright Act*.<sup>5</sup> While it is common practice for site owners to display a copyright symbol or notice on their home page, this usually indicates that copyright exists for the Web site itself. It does not, however, imply that the site owners hold the copyright to the personal messages or stories that are posted on their site (Carlsen, 2006).

According to section 13(1) of the *Copyright Act*, the owner of a written work is actually the author of that work. If the author was employed at the time when the work was created, the employer who paid for the work would probably hold the copyright, unless otherwise stipulated in the employment contract. Moreover, copyright can only be transferred in writing, accompanied by the signature of the copyright owner. There is nothing on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that would permit such transfer of ownership (Carlsen, 2006; Geist, 2006b). To put it differently, the site owners did not write these personal messages or stories that were posted on their Web site, and the ownership was not legally transferred to them when they allowed the messages to be posted on their site.

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<sup>5</sup> *Copyright Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-42.

Although the site owners of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) do not own these personal messages and stories, the copyright still belongs to the author of each posting. Evidently, it would be next to impossible to seek permission from the authors to use their postings. There were literally hundreds of individuals involved, living in various countries around the world, many of whom had no doubt changed their email addresses, residential addresses and phone numbers, and most of whom had posted their messages anonymously or had their messages anonymized by the site operators of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). Even if the means existed to make individual contact with the authors of the messages, the nature of the worldwide Web is such that it would be impossible to verify the identity of those who claimed to be the authors of the messages and thus to ensure that they had the authority to grant permission to use their messages for research purposes.

The issue, then, is how to make substantial use of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), without engaging in copyright infringement. Section 27(1) of the *Copyright Act* defines copyright infringement as doing anything that only the owner has the right to do, without the consent of the owner. Pursuant to section 3(1) of the *Copyright Act*, one of the sole rights that the owner of the copyright has is to reproduce their work or any substantial part of their work. When it comes to what constitutes a "substantial part" of the work in question, Canadian courts have placed more emphasis on the quality than on the quantity of what was taken from the original work. Courts have also considered whether the copyright holder was adversely affected by the copying, whether the person copying the material was doing so simply to save personal time and effort, and

whether the work was being used in a similar fashion to that of the copyright owner.<sup>6</sup>

In cases where only a part of a message or story is being quoted, it is doubtful that there has even been a substantial taking of the work, as long as the use of the posting does not adversely affect the copyright owner. While these messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) are likely subject to copyright, the authors voluntarily placed these postings in a public venue, with the intention of sharing them with others. It is a reasonable expectation that sharing of this material on the Internet might include downloading the messages, or making and retaining copies of them (Carlsen, 2006). Moreover, the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were not copied in order to save time and effort, but rather, with the intention that they would be used in a totally different fashion from that of the copyright owners. This present study is seeking to understand the postings in a different, research-related context. This is something that the owners of the copyright would be unable or unlikely to do themselves, and something that researchers, especially qualitative researchers who are engaging in discourse or textual analysis, would be unable to do properly without copying the postings.

Even when "substantial" parts of these postings are used in order to illustrate a point, or to give "voice" to the research subjects, this does not mean that copyright infringement has taken place (Carlsen, 2006; Geist, 2006a; Geist, 2006b). Section 29 of the Canadian *Copyright Act* states that "fair dealing for the

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<sup>6</sup> [U & R Tax Services Ltd. v H & R Block Canada Inc. (1995), 62 C. P. R. (3d), 257, 97 F.T.R. 259 (F.C.T.D.); Tomas v. Boaden Catering Ltd. (1995), 68 C.P.R. (3d)275 (F.C.T.D.); CCH Canadian Law Ltd. v Law Society of Upper Canada, [2004] 1 S.C.R. 339 (CCH v LSUC)].

purposes of research or private study does not infringe copyright”. Section 29(1) of the *Act* states further that “fair dealing for review or criticism does not infringe copyright” if the source (the author or performer) of the work is acknowledged. In *CCH Canadian Law Ltd. v Law Society of Upper Canada*, [2004] 1 S.C.R. 339 (CCH v LSUC), the Supreme Court of Canada stated that under certain circumstances, the copying of an entire work might still meet the definition of fair dealing for research purposes.

A key consideration is authorship. If the researcher is making extensive use of text messages that have been downloaded from the Internet, but is putting them within the context of his or her own original thoughts, then this would be consistent with the principles of fair dealing (Drassinower, 2005). Quoting or making reference to the words or ideas of others is a cornerstone of academic research, review, and criticism. Evidently, cyber-researchers are required to properly acknowledge the source of the downloaded text messages, just as they would if they were making reference to books or academic journals (Craig, 2005). In fact, according to section 29(1) of the *Copyright Act*, fair dealing for the purposes of criticism or review requires that the name of the author be mentioned when using the original works of others.

It is evident that this qualitative, textual analysis of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) complies with the spirit and intent of the assessment criteria set out above. The 950 messages were downloaded and reproduced for purposes of research, private study, review and criticism. They are being included in a scholarly work in accordance with normal research standards within the academic discipline.

They do not compete with the original work for market share, and it would be difficult if not impossible in most cases to identify alternative sources that would achieve the same purpose. As a general rule, it can be said that a “fair dealing” is one where the dealing was reasonably necessary to achieve its purpose (Drassinower, 2005).

## **2.4 Deontological and teleological perspectives**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there has been an ongoing debate about research ethics in cyber-space, but there has been no clear (definitive) conclusion regarding what is acceptable and what is not. Some researchers have insisted that Internet users have a right to privacy—that messages posted on Web sites should be off-limits to social researchers, unless informed consent is properly obtained, and all members of the Web site have been notified that the research is taking place. Others have argued that public postings are by definition public—that they are no different from writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or calling into a radio talk show—and thus, that they are fair game for social researchers.

Either the deontological (rule-based) framework or the teleological (harm vs. benefit-based) framework can be applied when addressing ethical concerns of this nature (Thomas, 1996), regardless of whether the research is taking place in cyber-space, or in a more conventional social domain. This dissertation clearly meets the requirements of the deontological framework—it falls under the exemptions set out in the Tri-Council's Policy Statement regarding *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, and has received written confirmation

from the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University that it is excluded from the requirement for an ethics review and the requirement for informed consent. As seen above, it also complies with the requirements for fair dealing for research purposes under the Canadian *Copyright Act*.

As well, the study meets the requirements of the deontological framework. There is minimal risk of harm or embarrassment to the research subjects, and the likelihood of their being identified or contacted as a result of the study is virtually non-existent. It is anticipated that the study will make a significant contribution to the understanding of bullying and victimization, by bringing forward the voices, stories, impressions and advice of those who have had personal, firsthand experience with bullying. This contrasts with work that suppresses their words, fracturing them to the extent that they cannot be recognized, or attempts to superimpose numerical values on what they are saying. Additionally, an executive summary of the results will be made available to the research subjects (by posting a message on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)), thus providing benefits on two fronts (Lee, 1993; Wolcott, 1995).

## CHAPTER 3: MIXED METHODS IN CYBER-SPACE

The methodological approach employed in this cyber-study of bullying rests on the assumption that qualitative and quantitative methods are indeed compatible (Thomas, 1993). Rather than rigidly adhering to one particular method or another, I decided in consultation with my supervisory committee that the main consideration should be that of analytic power—i.e., whether mixed methods could be used in combination to produce valid and reliable results (Silverman, 2000). The methodological approach developed herein also assumes that research can begin at any given point in the research cycle, and that it is possible to move from induction to deduction, or vice versa (Popping, 2000; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000).

Cyberspace is a relatively new phenomenon. The study of cyberspace has fostered a variety of new research approaches, or at least, combinations of various existing methods, reconfigured and wrapped in new packages. Some cyber-researchers have analyzed cyber-talk or discourse (e.g., Denzin, 1999; Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999), while others have conducted cyberethnographies on the new communities that have been emerging in cyberspace (e.g., Correll, 1995; Kendall, 1999; T. Sanders, 2005; Watson, 1997). While my dissertation study of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is concerned with the analysis of cyber-talk or discourse, its primary purpose is to explore and understand the phenomenon of

bullying, using cyber-research as another means to develop new insights into a topic that has already drawn considerable attention from social researchers.

I analyzed the text messages from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) manually at first, using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This helped to create a general overview of the data set, and to develop a coding sheet. Once the preliminary analysis was completed, however, the messages were transferred into NVivo for a more systematic reading, coding, categorization, and assignment of attributes and values. After the data set was analyzed and re-analyzed (several times) in NVivo, the nodes, sub-nodes, attributes and values that existed in sufficient strength and number were assigned numerical codes and analyzed further in the SPSS, with the intention of triangulating the results (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). This helped to devise what is referred to as a "parallel" or "mixed methods" study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

The study methods were dictated by the data set itself. The 950 messages were all in text form, and did not follow any particular pre-set format in terms of length, content, or information provided. The messages were subjected to content analysis, because they contained manifest as well as latent communication content, and had elements or attributes that were physically present and thus countable. Moreover, it was possible to assign those elements to mutually exclusive categories, and to summarize the entire set of messages numerically (Berger, 2000; Bryman et al., 2009; Neuendorf, 2002). Apart from content analysis, the messages were subjected to discourse analysis—an

examination of how meanings, social identity and perceptions of reality were produced symbolically (Alasuutari, 1995; Silverman, 2003; Titscher et al., 2000). The messages were also subjected to narrative analysis, as a number of them were fully developed stories or narratives, with beginnings, middles and ends, often recounting experiences that occurred many years ago, or that took place over many years (Silverman, 2003; Titscher et al., 2000). I took significant measures to ensure that that the messages were coded and categorized systematically and consistently, and that the data analysis was done in a transparent manner, such that all of the messages and all of the coding and categorization were preserved intact to permit future inspection.

### **3.1 Sampling procedures**

All 475 messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as of December 31, 2002, were downloaded, converted from html, saved as Word files, and assigned numbers ranging from 1 to 475, in accordance with the order in which they appeared on the Web site, with message 1 being the first, and message 475 the last. This first set of 475 messages was not a random sample, but rather, included every message posted on the site since its inception. The second set of messages comprised the last 475 messages posted on the site, up to August 31, 2006. The second set was downloaded in reverse order, starting from the most recent, and going backward in time, until a sample of 475 messages, equal in number to the first set, had been obtained. The messages in the second set were also converted from html, saved as Word files, and assigned numbers ranging from 476 to 950. These numbers were assigned in reverse order, going

backward in time, to preserve the chronological sequence in which they were posted on the site. Thus, message 950 was the most recent, while message 476 was the oldest of the second set. Again, this sample included every message that had been posted on the site over the preceding 18 months.

All 950 messages were converted into RTF (because earlier versions of NVivo could not handle Word.doc files), and then formatted for insertion into NVivo. The formatting process consisted of justification of margins, conversion of text into the same pitch, font and colour, and the removal of hard tabs. This was essential since messages were submitted from many countries by people of all age groups and with varying degrees of computer literacy. For example, there were many messages where the titles stretched from one end of the computer screen to the other, which required formatting simply in order to fit the width of a standard-sized page. There were others where each line became progressively shorter as they moved down the screen.

As well, promotional information, notices and disclaimers routinely attached by the site operators to the tops and bottoms of the first set of 475 messages were removed, because they invariably provided exactly the same information, and added nothing to the actual discourse. In the process of removing the promotional information and notices from the tops of the messages, the actual titles of the messages given by the authors and the names of the authors and the dates of submission (if provided) were re-positioned at the top of each message. Beyond that, the grammar, spelling, paragraph structure and

content of the messages were preserved intact, exactly as they appeared on the Web site.

Much like an audiotape, video recording or photograph, this sampling procedure captured two extended snapshots in time—an exact picture of what the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) looked like as of December 31, 2002, and what the messages on a more recent portion of the site looked like as of August 31, 2006 (Riessman, 1993; Thomas, 1996; Titscher et al., 2000). Essentially, these two sets of 475 messages can be visualized as matching bookends, with a three-and-a-half year interval between them. This juxtaposition made it possible to investigate changes in the discourse about bullying over time. My investigation addressed whether explanations or interpretations of bullying had changed, whether there was greater awareness of bullying in the wake of the massive media attention, whether individuals affected by bullying were more informed about how to deal with the problem, and whether the many newly-introduced school programs were having any measurable effect in reducing bullying.

Capturing two equivalent sets of data at two different points in time also permitted me to examine what happens when a Web site changes from a bulletin board format to a chat room format, as [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) did almost immediately after the first 475 messages were downloaded. With the first set of messages, participants were invited to email their stories—or responses to stories—into the Web site. These messages were then converted into html, and posted on the Web. With the second set of messages, participants were asked to type their

messages directly into a dialogue box, and then hit the "submit" or "reply" button, depending on whether they were submitting an original message, or replying to an existing one. Thus, it was possible to evaluate whether the general content of the messages was altered as a result of these changes, e.g., whether they were shorter or longer, less relevant or more relevant, or involved a fewer or greater number of responses (Berger, 2000; Neuendorf, 2002; Titscher et al., 2000). It was also possible to examine whether the overall quality of discourse was affected significantly by being asked to enter comments into a small dialogue box, rather than sending an email of unspecified size and length. Another issue I pursued was whether the simplification of the communication process would encourage greater participation and more conversation, thus leading to the development of what might be classified as a full-fledged "cyber-community", with regular members, a sense of identity or belonging, and off-line as well as on-line communication (Hine, 2000; Smith & Kollock, 1999).

### **Chronological sequencing**

While I made a concerted effort to harvest the messages in chronological order, by following the sequence in which they appeared on the Web site, some were not in exact chronological order. Apparently, the Web site operators were able to post messages anywhere they wanted in the queue. For example, messages 276, 353 and 409, obviously posted by the site operators themselves, were identical, 11 page messages, each listing the titles of all 475 messages posted on the site since its inception. Presumably, no one could have known what the titles of all 475 messages would be when these earlier complete lists of

titles were posted. Moreover, the third message, which was posted on the site with other messages submitted in 1999, was dated November 2001. If everything was in perfect chronological order, message 3 should have appeared somewhere between messages 350 and 400, which were posted in late 2001. Message 327, written in response to message 8—which initially generated a series of prompt, sequential replies, including messages, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16—was posted some eighteen months after message eight.

It is likely that the third message was intentionally moved by the site operators to a more prominent place in the queue, because it was a nine page narrative about personal experiences with school bullying in the 1960s and 1970s, written by Thomas Brown, who continues to operate an anti-bullying program known as "The Broken Toy Project".<sup>7</sup> In the case of message 327, it is possible that the author started reading the first messages posted on the Web site, and did not realize that the message she was responding to had been written eighteen months earlier. Overall, however, the sequencing of messages followed a chronological order in the first set.

The chronological order was more of an issue with the second set of messages (476 through 950), where there appeared to be several site operators reading, screening and posting the messages, sometimes without paying too much attention to whether they had already been posted, or where they were inserting them in the queue. For example, messages 630 and 631 were exact re-posts of messages 514 and 515, while messages 516, 519, and 520 were re-

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Brown's message will be discussed at considerable length toward the end of Chapter 5.

posted as messages 643, 641, and 640 respectively, this time arranged in a slightly different order, surrounded by other messages that were first time postings.

Another example is that of Howard, a frequent visitor to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). Howard posted five messages in total (720, 912, 915, 918 and 921), all of them in response to other submissions. It was observed that Howard's message 720 was dated July 30, 2005, and that his message 915 was dated July 31, 2005, (only one day after message 720), despite the fact that there were 195 intervening messages, posted over a period of several months. It is likely that message 720 was written at the same time as the other four messages, as indicated by the date on the messages, and that it was mistakenly placed in a vacant earlier slot in the queue by one of the site operators.

It should be kept in mind that site participants were not required to date their messages, nor were they required to provide information about their gender or where they lived. Some participants did date their messages or make reference to events that occurred within a particular time framework, but many did not. Replies—but not the original submissions that they were being addressed to—were dated in the second set of messages; however, the replies were not always organized in chronological order. I corrected this as much as possible when postings were downloaded and assigned case identification numbers. Nevertheless, it was not clear whether the messages were being dated by the site operators or the authors themselves.

A review of the first 475 messages on the site indicates that they were generally posted in a predictable, chronological sequence, and that in most cases, the discourse flowed logically. For example, message 4 referred to a suicide that took place in June 1999, right around the time that [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) was established. Message 22 was dated September 1999, approximately two months later; message 35, posted by Ruth from British Columbia, said "it is now the year 2000"; message 53 was dated April 2000, while message 78, posted by Hulan from China, mentioned her recent attendance at a conference in Beijing in July 2000. Much the same can be said for the remainder of the first set: message 189 mentioned a newspaper article that was published in January 2001, message 246 a CBC news program that was aired in March 2001, and message 297 another newspaper article, this time published in June 2001.

Quite often, the approximate date had to be determined from a careful reading and re-reading of the texts. In message 356, 19 year-old Lisa-Marie from British Columbia included a poem that she had written in 1999, when she was in grade 10, and said that she had graduated from high school last year, putting the date of her submission somewhere around the Fall of 2002, shortly before the first 475 messages were harvested. In message 452, entitled "This Happened Ten Years Ago When I was in Grade 11", Brian from North Battleford, Saskatchewan talks about an incident that took place in the Spring of 1992, again putting the date of his submission somewhere around the Fall of 2002.

As noted above, the same cannot be said for the chronological sequence of the second set of 475 messages. Many of them followed a predictable order—

as would be expected, message 476 was posted in January 2005, message 493 was posted in February 2005, while messages 564, 649, 665, 703 and 899 were posted in April, June, August, September and October 2005 respectively. However, message 525 referred to a bullying incident in November 2005, and message 620 referred to a suicide in October 2005, suggesting that they were possibly submitted in early 2006, and should have appeared toward the end of the second set of messages, rather than closer to the beginning. What can be said with a high degree of confidence is that the replies, all of which were dated, possibly by the site operators, were harvested with chronological order in mind, and that they were all related to a specific original message. This was possible because in 2003, [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) began including the replies with the original posting, thus preserving intact all of the threads of conversation or discourse.

Most if not all of the last 475 messages were submitted to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) sometime between August 2004 and January 2006 (an 18 month time period). Many second set messages bore actual dates, and a close reading indicates that there was about a six month time lag between the date that a message was submitted and the date that it was actually posted on the site. This time lag was attributable to the fact that prior to posting, the messages were read and anonymized by the site operators.

### **Sampling strengths and limitations**

Gathering accurate information on bullying in the school environment has proved quite difficult, because some of these acts are committed at times and in places where there are few, if any adult witnesses (Frost, 2002; Haskell, 2008;

Rigby, 2008). While there has been an increasing number of observational studies, most researchers have relied upon self-reports, peer nominations, and teacher questionnaires (Byrne, 1994; Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Graham et al., 2007). Even if researchers could gain access to those locations where an appreciable amount of bullying is committed (e.g., washrooms and locker rooms), there is no reason to assume that the behaviour under investigation would be unaffected by the presence of an adult stranger. This is one of the key problem areas in observational research of any kind, and particularly with respect to sensitive issues such as drug use, criminal activity, or bullying and victimization, where the participants may be reluctant to have their behaviour witnessed.

Bullies may be keen to have their actions witnessed by peers whom they are attempting to impress (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Tattum, 1997), but are less likely to be comfortable in the presence of potential interveners or adult figures, who might report them or take steps to prevent what they are doing (Besag, 2006). Victims, on the other hand, are likely to be embarrassed by and ashamed of their victimization, and hence reluctant to be observed by anyone, with the possible exception of prospective interveners (Morrison, 2001). The attraction of Web sites devoted to the topic of bullying—and the wealth of information that they offer to cyber-researchers—ties in with the anonymity and protection from embarrassment that they provide to the participants. This in turn leads to more representative and highly articulated information on such events than might otherwise be available through alternative methods of sampling and data collection (Alasuutari, 1995; Thomas, 1996).

The benefits of cyber-research are further illustrated by the lack of diversity in samples obtained through more traditional methods. For example, Roland's (2002) sample, while quite large, consisted exclusively of 2088 Norwegian children, all in grade eight, while Shields and Cicchetti's (2001) sample was limited to 267 children, ranging in age from eight to twelve, who were attending the same summer camp for inner-city children. Olthof and Goossens' (2008) sample consisted of 184 girls and 194 boys attending six different elementary schools in the same town near Amsterdam. Jankauskiene et al.'s (2008) larger and somewhat more diverse sample, consisting of 1,214 students from three different grades in 17 secondary schools, was still taken exclusively from the city of Kaunas in Lithuania. In contrast, the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) represent a considerably more diverse population, with a wide range in ages, and with participants coming from all across Canada, not to mention from all around the world. As importantly, there are messages from parents, former schoolteachers, and adults who were victimized many years ago (including adult victims of workplace bullying)—groups whose voices are excluded when samples are drawn from school populations.

This is not to suggest that the sampling procedures are by any means "perfect" or without their unique, cyber-related limitations. With the type of Internet sample used in this study, there is always a chance of affording greater representation to the voices of a "privileged" group of people, who by definition need to have access to a computer with an Internet connection, along with the requisite computer literacy and familiarity with the English language (Nosek et al.,

2002). Since the early days of cyber-research, it has been recognized that factors such as age, gender, race and social class can all play a role in determining computer access and computer literacy (Kendall, 1999; Mann & Stewart, 2000). In the past, computer-mediated communication tended to be dominated by White males in their 20s or 30s, who possessed the necessary technological savvy, and who had greater access to computers (often in connection with their employment positions) than women (Burrows, Nettleton, & Pleace, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Fewer homes had computers or computer access due to issues of availability and affordability and at one point, close to 70% of all Internet users worldwide were in North America alone (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Things have changed considerably since the earlier days of the Internet and the development of cyber-research. Almost as many females as males are now using the Internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kitchin, 2002b; Valkenburg et al., 2005). Internet usage has become much more dispersed globally, with only 30% of all Internet users now residing in North America (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). These changes were reflected in the sample collected from the Web site—female participants outnumbered male participants, while the ages of the participants ranged from 7 to over 70. Almost half of the messages originated from Canada, which might be expected, given that [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is an Alberta-based, English language Web site. Even so, as many messages came from Western and Eastern Europe as from the United States, and an appreciable number came from "less developed" countries, such as Gambia,

Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Latvia, Bulgaria, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Mongolia and Thailand. Significantly, many of these authors attended English language schools or boarding schools, and could thus be regarded as "privileged", compared to other residents of their countries.

Perhaps of greater concern is the potential for "self-selection", or volunteerism (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira, 2002). What motivates people to post messages on a Web site like [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), rather than (or along with) complaining to parents or teachers, or involving the police? It could be argued that these messages represent "extreme" or "unusual" cases, where the person may have been more negatively affected by their bullying experiences than others, encountered greater difficulty in getting someone to listen to their story, or met with failure when seeking an alternative (and perhaps more orthodox) resolution to their problem.

That said, the majority of the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were describing less extreme forms of bullying, such as teasing and social exclusion, or relatively minor incidents of assault, theft and harassment. In many cases, these experiences were of an infrequent nature, or of a reasonably short duration. While it has been reported that emotional or relational bullying can be as harmful as physical bullying (Garbarino & DeLara, 2002; C. Phillips, 2003), the harm suffered by most of the victims who posted messages on this site was not usually serious, life-altering, or life-threatening. This is not to downplay the harmful consequences of bullying. Some of the messages described very serious incidents of bullying, that were unquestionably life-altering or life-

threatening. However, there was nothing overtly "extreme" or "unusual" about the overall characteristics of the bullying being described on this Web site. A more plausible explanation for why people elect to post messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is that they find it easier to disclose personal or sensitive information anonymously through a computer than through face-to-face contact with another person (Correll, 1995; Joinson, 2005; Kennedy, 2006; Lee, 2005).

An important factor to consider is the effect that the moderators, in this case the site operators of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), have in the shaping of the discourse (Powers, 2003). There is no question that [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) presents itself as an anti-bullying Web site—its home page says that the site is dedicated "to preventing, resolving and eliminating bullying", it invites participants to play an on-line anti-bullying game, and encourages visitors to take an anti-bullying pledge. The site operators also state that they "will NOT publish swearing or profanity"—in other words, they screen out or heavily edit messages that they consider to be offensive, which could serve to exclude a number of "foul-mouthed" bullies who might otherwise be represented in a sample drawn from a population of schoolchildren. Thus, the site can be said to be more "victim-friendly" than it is "bully-friendly", which may have the (possibly unintended) effect of encouraging messages from victims and their supporters, while discouraging messages from bullies and their supporters. The site also employs an asynchronous (as opposed to synchronous, or real-time) format, and has a policy of anonymizing the messages, which restricts conversational flow, and limits the prospects for the development of a cyber-community (Baym, 1995).

## **Convenience sampling, inscrutable methods, and the dark art of qualitative research**

Qualitative research has drawn criticism from various quarters, due to its reputed over-reliance on small "convenience" samples, and its use of seemingly "subjective" interpretive techniques that are often regarded—at least by some outside observers—as inscrutable (Bryman et al., 2009; Palys, 2003).

Qualitative research has also been criticized for "anecdotalism", dwelling on a handful of supportive cases, while ignoring contradictory cases (Silverman, 2000), and for confusing social research with social activism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As a consequence, it has sometimes been thought of as the dark art of qualitative research (cf. Wolcott, 1995).

With respect to the present study, the sample was neither small nor convenient. In the time that it took me to download the 950 messages, convert them from html, save them into individual files, number the files, clean up the formatting, insert them into NVivo, and then read them all several times, I could have designed, administered and evaluated several survey questionnaires, utilizing large samples and probabilistic sampling techniques. Moreover, there was nothing "inscrutable" about the interpretive techniques. All of the messages were retained in their original form, they were coded and categorized in accordance with a well-defined coding schematic and the coding and categorization were preserved intact in NVivo, thus permitting subsequent assessment of the reliability and validity of interpretation.

In addition, each message had its own individual icon in the NVivo Document Browser, the colour of which could be altered by going to Properties.

As the messages were referred to or quoted in my dissertation, the colour was changed from white to yellow, to show that they had been referred to or quoted once; from yellow to red, to show they had been used twice; and then, from red to black, to show they had been used three times and should not be used again. This was done to ensure that all of the messages—including those that were found to be repeat messages or ultimately deemed to be irrelevant or off-topic—would have an equal chance of being represented in this study, and that no one voice or small group of voices would dominate the discourse or the research results.

### **3.2 Parsing the texts**

The 950 text messages downloaded from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were by definition qualitative in nature. They ranged in size from a few words to over ten pages in length, with some being little more than brief commentary, and others rising almost to the level of life histories. None of them followed a pre-set format—the authors of messages could say as much or as little as they wanted. In many cases, information regarding age, gender, location, and the reasons for posting the message were provided by the author. In almost as many cases, this sort of information could only be inferred from a careful reading and re-reading of the messages, if it could be inferred at all.

I read all 950 of the messages at least four times: once when they were converted from html into RTF and formatted for insertion into NVivo; a second time when they were coded and categorized in NVivo; a third time when they were re-read and reviewed in NVivo to ensure completeness and consistency of

coding and categorization over the entire data set; and a fourth time to ensure consistency of coding and categorization between NVivo and the SPSS. Most messages—especially the more highly developed narratives or more thoughtful commentaries—were read eight, nine, ten, and even twenty or more times from beginning to end, often side-by-side, for purposes of comparison, identification of significant patterns or themes, verification of the identity of author, and determination of their suitability for inclusion in or exclusion from the study.

Many of these messages were analyzed manually in the preliminary stages, following the grounded theory approach set out by Strauss and Corbin (1998), whereby the categories, concepts, regularities, patterns and themes were allowed to emerge from the data through a process of open, axial and then selective coding (Flick, 1998; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In essence, then, there was no hypothesis at the outset (nor was one required from a grounded theory perspective), although several hypotheses were in fact developed and tested as the analysis progressed (Janesick, 1998; Popping, 2000; Silverman, 2000). This grounded theory approach has been followed by other cyber-researchers (e.g., Fernback, 1999), and seemed the most appropriate, given that none of the 950 messages adhered to a pre-set format, and that the information therefore had to be gleaned through a parsing of the texts (Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999).

I read the first 150 messages in the data set at least five times each, the extra time coming very early in the process, to obtain a general overview of the data set, and to develop a rudimentary coding and categorization schematic.

Another group of 80 messages, from three later segments of the first set of 475

messages, were read an average of 18 times each, with an average reading time of 45 minutes per message, in order to develop the final coding sheet for NVivo and the SPSS. These 80 messages were subsequently re-read a minimum of three more times—once when they were coded and categorized in NVivo, again when they were reviewed to ensure completeness and consistency of coding and categorization within NVivo, and then again to ensure consistency between NVivo and the SPSS.

In the process of assignation of numerical values for conversion into the SPSS, minor anomalies and inconsistencies in categorization were still picked up. These small anomalies or inconsistencies only became apparent when it was observed that a few numerical values were missing, or that some of the numbers did not align perfectly. This resulted in even further fine-tuning of the coding and assignation of attributes in NVivo, and in a many cases, a total re-reading of messages that had already been picked over with the proverbial fine-toothed comb. In this sense, the conversion of the NVivo data into the SPSS was very much a circular or "iterative" process (Flick, 1998; Palys, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It was similar to the initial manual reading and re-reading of 230 of the messages to develop the coding sheet, the reading of all 950 messages to code, categorize and assign attributes in NVivo, and then the third re-reading of all 950 messages in NVivo to ensure completeness and consistency of coding and categorization.

This reading and re-reading of the messages provided a wealth of information. Patterns and themes not readily apparent on the first or second

reading often revealed themselves on third, fourth or fifth readings. This was partly because messages could be read more quickly, and links or connections could more readily be made with other messages, because all of them had already been coded and categorized in NVivo at least once. As well, the messages became more familiar over time—by the second, third or fourth reading, the names of the authors, the titles of their messages, and the type of discourse they were engaging in were more readily recognized.

Through this process of parsing the texts, a number of regular visitors to the site were identified, along with a number of emerging stories, where authors gradually revealed more about themselves over a series of messages. Thus, it became possible to go back and add missing information, supplement existing information, and generally fill in details that were missing until such time as the other related messages were read and re-read and the necessary connections or linkages were made between the messages.

One example is provided by 11 year old Allison, from Calgary, Alberta, who posted message 109, entitled "I Am Small", and message 173, also entitled "I Am Small." It was the phrase "I am small" that drew my attention, because on the second reading, the two messages were read within a few days of each other. This was in distinct contrast to the first reading, where it was not feasible to get through seventy messages so quickly, due to the complexity and time-consuming nature of the initial coding and categorization process. In fact, on the first reading, the time elapsed between the reading of the two messages was more than two months, as opposed to just a few days the second time around.

Because the link between the two messages was discovered, it was then possible to fill in some of the information that was missing in message 173 (e.g., location) from information provided in message 109, and some of the information that was missing in message 109 (e.g., gender) from information provided in message 173.

A similar example is a grieving mother, whose 16 year old son was killed in a schoolyard fist fight. She was the author of messages 34, 217, 305, 429, 432, 435, 440, and 443. It was difficult to relate these messages to each other on the first and second readings, because they were posted at four very different times, with large intervals in between—message 34 was posted in early 2000, message 217 in early 2001, message 305 in the middle of 2001, and messages 429, 432, 435, 440, and 443 in the latter part of 2002. Also, they were initially read, coded and categorized in NVivo at quite different times—message 34 was read and coded in December 2006, message 217 in April 2007, message 305 in May 2007, and messages 429, 432, 435, 440, and 443 in June 2007—due to the large number of messages sandwiched in between them. The author of these eight messages first identified herself in message 34 as "a concerned parent in Canada", then in message 217 as "A Concerned Mom in Canada", in message 429 as "A Hurting Mother", and eventually, in message 435, as "A Concerned Mom in Alberta, Canada". The contents of message 435 helped to confirm that she actually lived in Alberta, finally permitting accurate assignment of "location" to all eight messages. Message 435 was the only one in which she did not mention the death of her 16 year old son, but it was possible to connect it with

the other messages, because she again used the expression "a concerned mom in Canada", and her language was identical to that of the earlier messages.

In a number of instances, it was necessary to distinguish carefully between authors who were posting messages using the same first name, because it was found on closer inspection that many of them were not the same person. For example, there were 16 messages posted by authors named Emily, but it was determined that they came from eight different people. The same Emily clearly posted messages 482, 858, 896 and 898, all of which offered helpful, sympathetic advice. In message 482, Emily talked about how "true friends" would not treat the victim in such a manner, and suggested that the victim should look for new friends. In message 858, she talked about the influence of bad friends; and in message 896, she described the victim as "a good friend". She did not mention the subject of friends in message 898. However, she ended message 896 by saying: "there is always someone who cares for you hun. Hang in there I'll always be there for you love Emily". She also ended message 898 by saying "hang in there Hun and always believe in yourself and not to pay attention to what other people say. Lots of love Emily", clearly demonstrating that these last two messages were written by the same person.

Through a process of comparison and contrast, the above four messages could be distinguished from other authors named Emily, for example:

- the Emily who posted messages 781, 804, 817 and 826, in which she acknowledged having been involved in teasing and taunting

herself, both as an instigator and as a recipient, and invariably invited victims to email her if they were still having problems

- the Emily who posted message 504, a 16 year old high school student who was talking about her own victimization
- the Emily who posted message 580, an 11 year old, writing in a child's voice, who most likely posted message 627 as well, because both ended by asking: "what should I do?"
- the Emily who posted message 595, who said she was 14 years old
- the Emily who posted message 713, a very long "story", that was excluded because it was not about bullying
- the two who posted messages 759 and 761, both called Emily, and both responding to message 753 at precisely the same time, yet with totally different advice
- the Emily who posted message 894, in which she described years of serious victimization and suicidality.

Bethany provides an excellent illustration of how a parsing of the texts could simultaneously help to identify regular visitors to the site, identify emerging stories, glean information (e.g., age and location) that was not made available in other messages posted by the same person, and help to distinguish different individuals using the same name. It was clear that the same Bethany posted messages 471, 665 and 935, because her writing style was unique, especially with respect to her use of exclamation marks—one exclamation mark at the end

of the preceding sentence, and three exclamation marks at the end of the subsequent sentence. For example, in message 665, she said: “It’s annoying! It’s like there telling me to not be different than anyone else!!!”; while in message 935, she said: “I hope this isnt true! It sounds very upsetting and you really have to stop it!!!”. In message 471, she said that she was nine years old, and from New Brunswick, thus permitting accurate attribution of age and location for all three messages. In message 665, she said she was victimized because she was “a grunger”, and “different” from everyone else, thereby explaining her motivation for posting the messages. The Bethany who posted these three messages could be distinguished from the Bethany who posted message 872, because the latter Bethany talked only about sticking up for a friend who was being victimized because of her hair colour and individuality, and said that she was from the United Kingdom.

### **3.3 Computer-assisted data analysis**

It became apparent early on in the process that the analysis of a qualitative data set of this magnitude would require a highly organized data storage and retrieval system. Traditionally, many qualitative researchers have carried out their data analysis by hand, making multiple copies of field notes or texts, marking them with coloured pens or pencils during the coding process, and keeping separate piles of information relating to each concept, category and theme (Popping, 2000; Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Weitzman, 2003). This sort of approach with the 950 text messages downloaded from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) would have required an area about the size of a football field. To illustrate, the contents

of one relatively small sub-node in NVivo (out of 546 main nodes and sub-nodes, sometimes referred to as parent and child nodes) were printed out after the coding was completed—there were 42 typewritten pages of coded material at that one sub-node alone.

As noted earlier, the initial process of developing the coding sheet was done manually, following a grounded theory approach. When that process was completed, the coding sheet had 69 main variables or concepts, with some 640 values, or sub-concepts. The variables and values from this coding sheet formed the basis for most of the nodes, sub-nodes, attributes and values in NVivo—i.e., they were entered directly into NVivo, prior to any further coding, categorization, or analysis of the 950 messages. Some nodes were eventually merged or deleted in NVivo, while other nodes, sub-nodes, attributes and values were added as the project progressed and new insights emerged. When finished, the NVivo project consisted of 1158 documents, of which 950 were messages and 208 were memos. There were 546 nodes, of which 64 were main (or parent) nodes, and 482 were sub (or child) nodes. Also, there were 28 attributes entered into a separate attribute spread sheet in NVivo, with 258 nominal or ordinal level values, not including interval level values, such as case numbers or word counts.

Essentially, NVivo is an advanced code and retrieve program that also facilitates the formulation and testing of hypotheses, and the building of theory (Bryman et al., 2009; Popping, 2000; Richards, 1999). It is particularly helpful for narrative and discourse analysis because apart from coding, categorization and coding storage, it facilitates advanced word searches, proximity searches,

organization of data into sets, and assaying of nodes and attributes, to mention a few of its many features. Equally important, NVivo makes it possible to link documents to each other, as was done in the case of repeat visitors to the site or to series of responses, and to write memos that can be linked to a specific document or to as many documents as they might actually be relevant to (Bryman et al., 2009; Weitzman, 2003).

The 208 memos written in connection with this project were all saved in NVivo, along with their links to the messages, and their links to other memos. These memos documented how ideas emerged as the data analysis progressed, and how significant coding and categorization decisions were made, e.g., with respect to age, gender, relevancy, and the possibility of identity play. The memos recorded why new categories were added, how major interpretations changed as messages were read and re-read, and why certain types of messages were deemed to be irrelevant and thus excluded from the study, while others that might appear to be almost identical were deemed to be relevant and thus included. Additionally the memos kept track of how frequent visitors to the site were identified, and how people using the same name were distinguished from each other.

These 208 memos, along with the well-defined coding schematic, the fully preserved 950 messages, and the fully preserved coding and categorization for each of those messages would certainly permit subsequent researchers to re-inspect the research process for the purpose of assessing the reliability of the research results. In other words, it is felt that the data analysis would most likely

meet the requirements of inter-rater reliability, or if not, then certainly meet the test of shared agreement with respect to major interpretations (Bryman et al., 2009; Palys, 2003; Silverman, 2000).

Where feasible, the data from NVivo were assigned numerical scores, and transferred into the SPSS for further analysis. This proved to be comparatively easy in many instances, because nodes, sub-nodes, attributes and values in NVivo were originally derived from the same coding schematic as the variables and values in SPSS. Moreover, the attributes and values in the NVivo spread sheet (not to be confused with the coding and categorization stored at the nodes and sub-nodes) were easily transferable to the SPSS (cf. Richards, 1999; Weitzman, 2003), once the qualitative values were converted into numerical values. However, transferring of the coding and categorization that was stored at the nodes and sub-nodes in NVivo had to be performed manually, by assigning each node and sub-node a numerical score that corresponded with a specific variable or value in the SPSS, and then entering the numbers into the SPSS, one at a time.

It is not always possible to assign numerical values to human experience, and in some instances, there were simply too many missing values in the messages—due to their qualitative, unstructured nature—to permit meaningful statistical analysis. All the messages were assigned attributes in NVivo in accordance with the precise location (if known) from which they originated, but there was little point in attempting to analyze this information statistically, or to present it in the form of a table (which would have gone on for several pages),

because of the scattered distribution and sparse numbers in some of the location categories. For instance, there were two messages from Northern Ireland, two messages from The Netherlands, one message from France, and one from Mongolia, and while there were messages from 22 US states, there were usually only one or two from each state. Thus, data with respect to these exact geographical locations, while retained as attributes and values in NVivo, were reduced to several much broader categories when they were transferred into the SPSS.

In connection with the topic of shame management, restorative justice and school bullying (cf. E. Ahmed, 2001; Morrison, 2006), nodes were established and maintained for expressions of shame by victims, bullies and other potential interveners (e.g., parents, teachers, friends, and classmates). However, while there were 370 messages from victims expressing feelings of shame, there were only 65 messages from bullies or bully-victims expressing shame, and even fewer (27) from potential interveners. Thus, while it was possible to create a variable in the SPSS for victim shame, it was not practical to do the same for the bullies or potential interveners, because a minimum of 200 values was used as the cut-off for transferring data into the SPSS. Another example of a node in NVivo that was not transferred into the SPSS was the one concerning waste imagery—discourse related to dirt, garbage, or the toilet. There were only 27 observed instances of waste imagery, which would have been insufficient for purposes of statistical evaluation.

This does not mean that attributes or nodes that were too scattered in terms of distribution or too sparse in terms of numbers were disregarded or excluded from the study. Expressions of shame from bullies, bully-victims and potential interveners were still coded and categorized in NVivo, and evaluated qualitatively. Instances of waste imagery were also evaluated qualitatively, especially as they related to labelling, stigma, and descriptions of victims as being "deviant".

### **3.4 Identity play, authenticity, and inclusion or exclusion**

The possibility of identity play has to be considered when conducting cyber-research (Nosek et al., 2002; Valkenburg et al., 2005). If the authenticity of the messages was in doubt, then this in turn would cast doubt on the credibility of the research findings. Indeed, much has been made of "identity play" on the Internet, particularly as it relates to the postmodernist notion of the fragmented, role-juggling, decentered self (Hine, 2000; Milovanovic, 1997). On the other hand, many cyber-researchers have found that the extent of such identity play tends to be vastly over-stated (Baym, 1995; Kennedy, 2006; Walsh & Wolak, 2005; Wynn & Katz, 1997). As noted earlier regarding the disclosure of personal information over the Internet (see Chapter 2), individuals who send messages to bulletin boards, news groups, discussion groups or self-help groups can be remarkably revealing when it comes to details such as age, gender, location, and even more intimate matters. Many go out of their way to persuade others that their self-presentation is authentic—i.e., that their on-line identity is the same as their off-line identity (Kendall, 1999; Kitchin, 2002b; Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006).

There is no question that a certain amount of identity play exists in game rooms, where participants are encouraged to take on new identities, and in adult chat rooms, where participants may deliberately disguise their true identities (Donath, 1999; Reid, 1996). However, such identity play is considerably less likely in self-help sites, and especially ones like [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), where the lag-time between sending a message, actually seeing it posted on site, and then receiving a reply (if any) could be longer than six months. There is no live chat to be had, and the Web site's policies with respect to removing identifying features from messages and not facilitating direct contact between participants makes the site unattractive to people who are just surfing the Internet.

Despite this, all of the 950 messages were assessed—at least two times each, and in some cases three or four times—for the possibility of identity play. Even when identity play was not really an issue, because the people were apparently who they were saying they were, the messages were assessed for the possibility of story telling, as opposed to them providing authentic accounts of real world experiences. In this regard, I scored each message for the likelihood of either identity play or story telling or both, as being highly unlikely-clearly authentic, possible-difficult to assess, or likely-even probable.

**Table 3.1 Likelihood of identity play or story-telling**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Highly unlikely-clearly authentic	802	84.4
Possible-difficult to assess	116	12.2
Likely-even probable	7	0.7
Not Applicable-repeated message	25	2.6
<b>Total</b>	950	100

The vast majority of messages (802 out of 950) were clearly authentic, with no apparent issues of identity play or story-telling. Many initially contained sufficient information, prior to sanitization by the site operators, to permit a determined person to trace the message back to the source. A good example of this would be Idella, a 62 year old former school teacher from British Columbia, who actually provided her full name and the name of the city in which she lived (not included here for reasons of participant anonymity):

I am a retired teacher and must admit that only slowly did I become aware of bullying over the 27 years of my career. It was never a topic of study during teacher training, and even in staff rooms among teachers it was never discussed as a "school" problem until my last year of active teaching and that was prompted by a death threat against a young man who "came out" as gay.

However, I am often haunted by memories of bullying that took place when I was a student in a small town in south-western Manitoba during the 40's and 50's. We were especially unkind to students who came to our town as refugees after the war, and I often think of and ask forgiveness for the cruelty we added to the cruelties they must have already experienced as they lost families and homes and countries due to war.

Other examples would be the two messages (84 and 131) posted by Zaiga, a student in Latvia, who in her second message not only gave her full name, but the exact name of the school that she was attending, and details about

what grade she was in. In message 196, Thomas from Nunavut gave his full name, and clearly indicated that he knew Bill Belsey, the founder of the Web site:

Hello Bill:

I'm sure you will remember me. Thomas \*\*\*\* of \*\*\*\* [details removed by researcher to protect the identity of the author]. When I went to school in \*\*\*\*, Nunavut and Churchill, Manitoba from when I was 12 to 16 years old I lived with bullies everyday it seemed. I forced myself to put on an aggressive nature and personality. I eventually started to drink and fight while under the influence. I could not trust anyone and became very lonely and homesick. I quit school as soon as I turned 16 when I really did not want to and continued to drink more and more. To this day I do not like myself for the way I acted because it was not the real ME. I am now 49 years old and own my own small business renting office space and managing a Seniors' Home.

Even those messages that did not contain identifying information were so detailed and persuasive that it was highly unlikely that anyone could—or would even bother to—make up such lengthy, personal accounts of that nature. A case in point would be the first message posted on the Web site, entitled "I Always Feared the Bell", by Rosie from Alberta:

"Sticks and stone[s] may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." A common cliché that many parents program into the minds of their progeny in an attempt to protect their children from the hurt and pain others may inflict upon them. The only ones these "savvy" caregivers are fooling are themselves. I too received that all-powerful "shield of wisdom". I was even naive enough to believe it for the first part of my experience. It was not the broken bones that took me years to recover from, it was a broken spirit.

To me the physical pain was not an issue. I could nurse my wounds at home and once they healed they would never bother me again. The thing that haunted me with nightmares and notions of suicide, were things that I would go to sleep with, wake up to, and think of for years to come. They would always be there. The condescending remarks about my humble exterior, the way they moved my desk up to the front of the classroom everyday, to remind me that I was a social outcast, and was too repulsive to look at. What clawed at me most, was their cold, hateful eyes. I could actually feel their stares burn through my chest, descending upon the little emotional control I had at that age. I felt like part of me was dying. I rarely spoke or ate. I

physically could not laugh. All that I had left of me was dark, hollow eyes. This was the poem that I wrote when I was at the depths of my grief: An icy, loveless classroom produces bleeding hearts. They pick and pull at imperfections and leave lifeless tender parts. When I hit rock-bottom, I will never know I've lost all connections, lost all friends But the garden I have reaped, was not the garden sewn.<sup>8</sup>

There was a smaller group of 116 messages where it was difficult to assess whether or not the individuals were engaging in identity play or story telling. The most common causes of the difficulty included the brevity of the messages, a lack of substance that would permit the proper evaluation of bonafides, or tangentially relevant commentary that mentioned no personal experience with bullying. Message 98 serves to illustrate this—it came close to being excluded, because the author was talking about a one-time, possibly made up incident of bullying, and he seemed to be more interested in chatting up the girl who posted message 96 than he was in talking about bullying:

Response to Why Do They Call Me Fat? by Steve

Bullies are a real bad thing. Whether you are fat, skinny, green, red, beige, black, whatever, you are beautiful in your own way. You are so special that people feel they have to run you down to build themselves up. Let me tell you a little story. This kid twice my size called me names yesterday. When I scored on him at basketball, he threw me to the ground and started choking me. I was so scared that I punched as hard as I could, and you know what? Then, he musta got scared at bit me in the ear, but the entire neighborhood laughed at him, for being such a huge baby.

I bet you are really pretty. I would go on a date with you anywhere, anytime, because I dig girls with heart.

However, message 98 was a good example of community building, or how people use the Internet as a vehicle to establish off-line relationships, and a good

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<sup>8</sup> Spelling and grammatical errors in the original messages have not been corrected.

example of a story (authentic or unauthentic) about how a bully was publicly shamed in front of the entire neighbourhood. Thus, a decision was made to include it in the study.

Messages 163 through 171 all came from the same primary school in Tucson, Arizona, as did message 218, and were clearly part of a school project on bullying. When it came to assessing their veracity (i.e., addressing the issue of identity play or story-telling), some were categorized as “possible-difficult to assess”. This was not because they were engaging in identity play—there was every reason to believe that the messages were indeed posted by a group of primary school students from Tucson, Arizona—but rather, because all of the messages came in the form of brief poems or short stories that contained anti-bullying slogans or sentiments. Several of the authors claimed to have been reformed bullies who had seen the error of their ways, but their stories could have been fabricated to satisfy the requirements of the school assignment. In virtually all cases, the messages contained very little relevant information, for example, about when the bullying took place, where it took place, what type of bullying was involved, or how long it went on for. Therefore, it was difficult in some cases to ascertain whether the authors had much in the way of personal experience with bullying and victimization. An example of this would be the following poem (message 166) submitted by Marcus:

You’re a Super Hero by Marcus, grade 5, Tuscon, Arizona, USA<sup>9</sup>

If you are a bully

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<sup>9</sup> All ten of the messages from this elementary school in Tucson, Arizona, had the name of the city misspelled.

you're a person up to no good  
like a villain  
if you try to help  
you're like a super hero  
and super heroes mostly help people talk about feelings  
Super villains usually hurt people  
And when you are hurt by a super villain,  
You end up taking your anger out on super heroes  
I once was a super villain  
And I thought about it and now  
I think it was wrong for me to do that so I became a super hero.

Other postings from the same group of school children in Tucson were much the same, in the sense that they were lacking in detail, and exclusively concerned with conveying anti-bullying messages:

I Was a Bully by Tyler, grade 3, Tuscon, Arizona, USA

I was a bully. I laughed and hit people. Then one day a person came and pushed me. I got mad and pushed him. He got up and punch me. Then I learned to not be a bully.

It Makes Me Mad by Martin, grade 4, Tuscon, Arizona, USA

It makes me mad when I see people bullying small kids. I feel like going and bullying them. But, it is not o.k. to do that because I would get in trouble and I would be teaching small kids how to be a bully.

The first time through, some of these messages were considered for exclusion, because they added little if anything to the discourse on bullying, they were so short on substantive detail as to be practically useless for purposes of analysis, and they could have all been made up simply to satisfy the requirements of a school project. However, all were ultimately included in the study, if for no other reason than that they were regarded as evidence of the

existence of a school project that perhaps was having some degree of effectiveness.

Messages that were brief and lacking in substance were more common in the second set of 475 messages, once it became possible for participants to type brief comments into a dialogue box and simply hit the submit button. Messages 512, 538 and 727, repeated in their entirety below, would be good examples of the effect that this had on the overall quality of the discourse:

I Wanna Say... - Submitted by tayz from Canada

Have the courage to be yourself and stand up for yourself. Don't let people that bully you bring you down. GOD made you special .....Remember people love you.

Get away from me - Submitted by Julia from Canada

The bully said "get away from me you loser" so I said, "f you!"

Mean bully - Submitted by Hayley from Canada

I was waking to school when a mean boy said I was a poopy head. But my head is not made out of poop and I was sad.

There was a small group of messages that were clearly intended to be stories instead of accounts of real life experiences, and they were categorized as such. This did not necessarily mean there was identity play involved, because some provided identifying information. Rather, the messages either started off with "once upon a time", or had a happy ending with some sort of moral attached, or were presented in the form of stories, as illustrated by the following message submitted by Jennah from Canada:

Once upon a time there was a bully and he was named Meanie because he was mean. People would tell adults about this but adults could not solve the problem. One day, a boy named Germana, came over and said: Why are you bullying him? The bully replied: Why do you CARE? and ignored him and, finally, Germana was tired and since he was the best in class the bully bullied him until he told the teacher. The teacher got him in trouble and then he started bullying even more. One day he was kicked out of school but all the bully wanted was a friend.

The message even concluded by saying "the end", and then added a moral: "I hope you have learned a lesson: sometimes bullies want friends". The main reason it was included in the study, apart from how well it illustrated story-telling, was that the commentator made the observation (repeated in other messages) that bullies may bully because they lack friendship.

Message 591, entitled "Goodbye Tilly", was written by Gemma from the United Kingdom, and was almost two full pages in length. It started off like many novels, with a prologue that foreshadowed the conclusion:

The ambulance arrived. She was motionless in the road. You could hear sirens. You could see blood. You could smell bullies. But why would they do such a thing to beautiful Tilly? Because she was pretty. Envy was the cause of Tilly in the road.

Gemma's story about Tilly then went on to lay out the scenario and provide lines for the various actors, much as in a screen play:

Tilly was walking home on her own after saying goodbye to her friends at the gate. If Tily's mates lived up her way she would've been fine. But they didn't and the drama soon began.

"Hey you freak!" someone shouted from across the road.  
Tilly turned around.

"So that is your name then!" laughed one of the four girls. They walked faster to catch up with Tilly who just turned and walked on.

"Will you stop!?" exclaimed a short girl.

Tilly stopped. She felt under control of someone she didn't even know.

Gemma mentioned no direct personal experience with bullying and victimization, although it is conceivable that at least some elements in the message came from her own life experiences or observations. As was the case with message 743, this story was included in the study because it identified some of the common themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of these 950 messages. Those themes or patterns included jealousy and envy on the part of the bullies, feelings of worthlessness on the part of the victim, and the scenario of the victim committing a horrific and bloody suicide in front of the bullies, thus achieving a measure of revenge, wherein the bullies got their comeuppance, and were publicly ashamed.

In message 462, Jennifer, a 12 year old from London, England, even acknowledged that parts of her story were made up:

*I would just like to say that this story is true, but the names have been changed. The person called Jenna bullied not only George during those two months but me and many of my friends. It was in the start of secondary school, so I don't blame her. Every one was nervous. They were all off there feet enough to skip to conclusions. But she made me really scared and stupid becuae of what she called me. I wish everyone who bullied me appoligised in the end. (The stories been changed a little actually.)*<sup>10</sup>

Generally speaking, relevance was more of an issue than identity play or story telling. As was the case with issues of identity play and story telling, I assessed all 950 of the messages for relevance—at least two times each, if not

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<sup>10</sup> I have added italics to demonstrate that the author of the message, Jennifer, is acknowledging that parts of her story are made up.

three of four times—and scored them as being highly relevant, moderately relevant, mildly relevant, or irrelevant (see Table 3.2). Most of the messages were deemed to be at least mildly or moderately relevant, with close to half (471) being highly relevant.

**Table 3.2 Degree of relevance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Highly relevant	471	49.5
Moderately relevant	205	21.6
Mildly relevant	200	21.1
Irrelevant	74	7.8
<b>Total</b>	950	100.0

Again, in keeping with the standpoint or own voices approach, only 74 of the messages were deemed to be irrelevant, and therefore excluded from the study. Of those 74 messages, 25 were excluded because they were extremely brief, short on substance, and added nothing to the discourse. Twenty-five were excluded because they were repeated messages and counting them more than once would have skewed the results. The remainder were excluded because they were related to criminal offences other than bullying, or to an abuse of authority or power that did not meet any recognized definition of bullying.

To illustrate, message 510, written by Ben in reply to “Mi LiFe SuXs” by Cassie, says nothing more than: “It’s ok; you’ll get through it Peace Ben”. It would be extremely difficult to derive any meaningful information from a message of this nature. Another message (688), written by Caitlynn in reply to “I Need

Advice" by Julia from United States (who had broken up with her boyfriend), says only: "That is so weird. I had a friend that was a guy he goes to my school. I upset to think he was so hot but then I found out that he said I was fat". While Caitlynn may have felt genuine disappointment about being unattractive to a boy whom she liked, it would be a stretch to categorize this as bullying. An anonymous reply (submitted under the title "LIFE IS NOT FAIR"), to "Screwed up" from United Kingdom, remarks: "Wow!! I can totally relate to this post!! You are not alone here. Take care. PS: sorry I have no advice I can give. I can just relate to a screwed up life". Other examples of brief comments that were lacking in substance would include Joe from the United States saying nothing more than "right on" in message 807, or Shawna saying only "I know what you are feeling" in message 880.

Not all excluded messages were as brief or inconsequential as those mentioned above. There were seven lengthy messages from a German Language High School in Bulgaria (messages 2, 24, 25, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52 and 53), some of which included the school name, the school address, and the teacher's email address, thus attesting to their authenticity. However, all but two of the messages were on topics such as soccer hooliganism, street gangs, and property crimes, and these were excluded. It is possible that the authors of these five messages were confusing soccer hooliganism and street gangs with the expression "mobbing", which was commonly used by earlier Scandinavian researchers to describe bullying activities carried out by groups (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995; Olweus, 1978; Pearce, 2002; Roberts, 2006). The two

messages (45 and 52) from the language school that were more or less on the topic of bullying were included in the study, but were categorized respectively as being only moderately and mildly relevant.

Another illustration of the type of messages were that were neither brief nor lacking in substance, but that were still excluded, is the four page message from "A Fed-Up Parent in Canada". In this message, a mother was complaining about a hockey coach who was teaching kids on the team how to swear and act like hockey players, and the futility of complaining about it to the Ontario Hockey Association. In fact, her son was kicked off the team as a result of her complaints. This generated a reply from another mother, Linda M. in Nova Scotia, saying that the minor league hockey associations were "corrupt", and suggesting ways to resolve the problem. While they made for interesting reading, neither of these two messages was on the topic of bullying.

With the exception of the 25 repeated messages, the other excluded messages were still coded to a certain extent and assigned attributes in NVivo, with some of the data also being assigned numerical values and transferred into the SPSS. For example, basic information that was retained from the excluded messages included age, gender and location, to assist in describing the demographic profile of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). The excluded messages were also assessed for evidence of the authors wanting to see their stories in the public domain, and evidence of community building, such as expressions of sympathy, offers of support, or providing advice. Although such information might not be relevant to bullying per se, it is pertinent to the following chapter on the

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) community, and to the discussion about cyber-communities in general.

A final consideration when assessing the authenticity and relevance of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) centred around the accuracy or inaccuracy of memories and accounts of past events. It could be argued that memories (and thus accounts) of bullying that took place, ten, twenty, or even fifty years ago are subject to a degree of revision, reconstruction, and contamination (Besag, 2006; Rivers, 2001). However, a number of recent studies have indicated that events associated clearly with specific times, places, or significant events—milestones, landmarks, or reference points—are likely to be recalled with a high degree of accuracy, despite the passage of time (Chapell et al., 2006; Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006). In particular, it has been demonstrated that people remember where and when they were first bullied, especially when it involved being hit, kicked, having something stolen from them, or being ridiculed in front of others (Rivers, 2001).

It was evident that many of the individuals who posted messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) had vivid recollections of their bullying experiences, and were able to link them to specific times, places, or events. In message 135, 17 year-old Siobhan recalls that "It all started when I moved from Calgary to BC in grade 2". The anonymous author of message 785, "18 vs. 5", says that: "I'm now 17 and I've got a story for you! When I was in elementary school, from kindergarden to grade 6, everyone but my 4 other friends seemed to be against us all". In "Finding my LD Pride", Liz, a college student from British Columbia, talks about

the learning difficulties that she had, especially with the compulsory subjects of math and French back in grade nine. She links these difficulties to how she "would spend one period a day in the school Learning Centre, often called the Romper Room". In message 375, Kara, who had since completed high school and gone on the college, relates that: "the first few years of elementary school were fine. It wasn't till I hit the fourth grade that things really got tough. I went to a Catholic Elementary school". Whether it was Louise from United Kingdom (who was at that time writing her graduating exams in high school) in message 601, describing an upsurge in bullying "At christmas in year 7", when "a new girl started" in her class, or 21 year-old Jonathon from New Jersey, talking in message 463 about how he "moved to Rochester Michigan", and was "a scared little boy in a new place", it was clear that temporal landmarks, spatial landmarks and significant occurrences served as anchors, thereby grounding their recollections in such a way that revision, reconstruction and contamination were not really major issues.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE WWW.BULLYING.ORG “COMMUNITY”**

This chapter provides a general overview of the [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) community. This includes information about the age, gender and location of the Web site participants, the number of replies to original postings, and the number of frequent visitors to the site. Information is also provided about the distribution of the participants by category (e.g., commentator, respondent, bully, victim, bully-victim, bystander, parent, or school teacher), where the bullying took place (e.g., at school, in the neighbourhood, at work, or a combination of venues), and the main types of bullying discussed on the Web site.

### **4.1 Is [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) a community?**

Much has been written about the emergence of cyber-communities, and about their candidacy for a relatively new form of ethnographic research known as "cyber-ethnography" (Jankowski, 2006; Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006; Watson, 1997). Some observers have argued that these "virtual" communities are similar to communities that we see in the "real" world, in that they create shared realities through the language or symbolization of computer-mediated communication (S. G. Jones, 1997). To follow this argument, cyber-communities, like "real" world communities, have shared norms and values, ongoing (sustained) communication, a sense of commonality and belonging, and an agreed-upon "netiquette" (Hine, 2000). They also establish community boundaries (or borders), enforce community norms, and exclude outsiders or others who fail to

conform (Correll, 1995; Fernback, 1999; Jones, 1995). Thus, it is said that these cyber-communities can be studied using traditional ethnographic methods—for example, observing the setting and the social actors, recording and interpreting the narratives and histories of the actors, and analyzing how norms, values and community boundaries are established and understood.

The concept of cybercommunity may seem elusive, due to the nebulous nature of cyberspace itself. The term “community” is perhaps more routinely associated with a group that not only shares certain values or characteristics—religion, ethnicity or lifestyle, for example—but also occupies a specific physical location with defined boundaries (Jankowski, 2006). The location and boundaries may not be as apparent in cyber-space, but a number of these “virtual” communities appear comparable in many respects to communities in the so-called “real world” (Fernback, 1999).

It is generally agreed that these cyber-communities and the cultures that emerge from them are grounded in communication, and more specifically, in computer-mediated communication. In a sense, location and physical contact have been largely replaced by this new technological phenomenon (Baym, 1995; Watson, 1997). Computer-mediated communication is a site of social creativity, enabling participants to form new relationships and to construct new social meanings and group identities (Baym, 1995). These shared realities are created primarily through the use of language or symbolization, generating messages or textual narratives that act as bridges and that represent shared values, norms and a sense of commonality or community (Jones, 1997; Riessman, 1993). It is

of course these textual messages or narratives—and the manner in which they are used to convey and construct meaning and social reality—that are of the greatest interest to cyberethnographers and discourse analysts alike.

The existence of “shared identity”, “commonality”, or “community” is crucial to the very notion of cyberethnography. If these are not distinct communities or groups, united by some semblance of shared meaning or reality, then how can they legitimately be the subject of an ethnographic study? It appears from Correll’s (1995) cyberethnographic study of an electronic bar known as the Lesbian Café that this particular group would meet the definition of a “community”, in that the participants had a shared sense of identity, a well-established (and agreed-upon) set of social norms for behaviour, and an ongoing (sustained) communicative process. Regular members would come into the café, order drinks, socialize on line, have on-line parties, and arrange off-line meetings. Much the same could be said for the Phish.Net Web site studied by Watson (1997). This was a “community” consisting of some 50,000 fans of the band Phish, who met frequently in cyberspace to share the band’s music, talk about upcoming events, and to arrange off-line meetings to attend live performances by the band or to exchange tapes that were made at previous performances.

The manner in which social norms are maintained, boundaries are established and non-members are excluded are important features of these cybercommunities. Regular community members will sometimes react quite dramatically to outsiders who do not share their values or their sense of propriety

such as their established netiquette. Such outsiders can quickly find themselves being ignored by the group, or in some cases, becoming the target of an organized email campaign aimed at driving them out (Donath, 1999; Lee, 2005; McLaughlin et al., 1995; Powers, 2003).

In her study of the Lesbian Café, Correll (1995) observed that when a heterosexual enquired into the possibility of arranging a threesome involving himself, his girlfriend and any of the Web site regulars who might be interested in participating, he was told in no uncertain terms that “Lesbians DO NOT SLEEP WITH MEN!!!!!!....you are in the wrong place!” Watson (1997:111) noted a similar occurrence on Phish.Net, where a fan posted a message acknowledging the use of fake tickets to obtain entry to a performance. The fan was told by one regular member that his behaviour was “childish” and “selfish”, and by another that what he had done was unimpressive, disappointing, and had harmed everyone in the community.

Another element of admonishing involved a person who in 2003 posted a message on [www.stopsexualabuse.com](http://www.stopsexualabuse.com), a domain name since taken over by a law firm specializing in family law. This person said: “I was raped when I was sixteen by my fifty year old science teacher and it remains the best sexual experience I ever had”. One of the regulars replied almost instantly, saying: “You are a very sick individual!!! This Website is for those persons who have been abused to release their pain. Not for people to revel in their sadistic, morally-lacking fantasies....You are crazy and perverted!!!!....Stay off this site”.

Not all cyber-groups are “communities” and some might be described more accurately as “pseudo-communities” (Fernback, 1999; Jones, 1995; McLaughlin et al., 1995). It is questionable whether some of the bulletin board styles of “support” groups—such as those found at [www.escapinghades.com](http://www.escapinghades.com) (for survivors of sexual abuse) or [alt.support.depression](http://alt.support.depression)—even rise to the level of pseudo-communities, given that they have largely been hijacked by tracking (spyware) organizations and individuals or groups attempting to market a product or re-direct people to other Web sites. Also, they lack the degree of sustained communication and relationship-building seen in groups that more clearly meet the definition of “cyber-community” (Hine, 2005a; Mann & Stewart, 2000).

It would be difficult to describe [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as a fully-fledged community, or even as a cyber-community or pseudo-community, for that matter. Of the 925 messages (25 of the 950 were excluded because they were repeat messages), 796 (or 86 percent) were posted by one-time visitors to the site, who were not heard from again. Some of the one-time participants may have been peripheral members who were “lurking” in the background, reading replies to their own postings, and perhaps reading messages from others, but neither actively participating nor making their presence known (cf. Hine, 2000; McLaughlin et al., 1995). There were 46 users who posted two messages each, but only 15 regular users who posted three or more messages.

Of the 15 regular users of the Web site, 11 were found in the second set of messages—messages 475 through 950, harvested in August, 2006—after it became possible to type a message into a dialogue box and simply hit the submit

or reply button. It could be argued that the increased number of regular users between the first and second set of messages was indicative of a growing sense of community, but of these 11 regular users in the second set, only three, Britt, Muni and CJ, posted eight or more messages (most posted three or four messages).

There is no question that a handful of visitors regularly used the site to seek help or comfort, or to provide help or comfort to others. This group includes:

- the previously mentioned grieving mother in Alberta who posted eight messages, seven about having lost her son in a schoolyard fight
- Muni, a young adult female and former victim of bullying from the US, who posted 15 messages—the largest number, and over the widest time span, including messages 490, 502, 545, 652, 766, 701, 709, 745, 755, 768, 772, 779, 797, 913 and 943
- CJ, a young adult female and former victim of bullying from the UK, who posted 12 messages—the second largest number, again over a fairly wide time span, including messages 590, 671, 836, 839, 840, 841, 846, 910, 911, 914, 917 and 920
- Brittney, the grade 7 student from Canada who posted the anti-bullying speech that she had presented at her school, and who gradually revealed over a series of eight messages that she was a bully as well as a victim

- Maureen, a 48 year-old female and former victim of bullying, who posted six messages.

As was seen in Chapter 2, 201 of the messages were replies to earlier messages, with some of them generating a series of replies, similar to a forum or discussion group. While most of the series consisted of only two or three replies, some were quite lengthy. "SO THIS IS MY LIFE - I Got Up For This?" by Alexandra generated a series of 9 responses; "Stop Bullying Me Please" by Karly, 7 responses; "Picking On" by Caitlin, 12 responses; "Tied to a Car" by speakerforthesilent, 5 responses; "Being Chased" by Lisa, 6 responses; "Why Do They Do It?" by tessa3244, 5 responses; and "Will It Ever Stop?" by Cassidy, 8 responses. In all, there were 40 such threads or series of responses in the data set, with only nine occurring in the first set of 475 messages, and 31 in the second set. Again, it could be argued that the increase in the number of "conversations" or series of responses between the first and second set of messages was indicative of a nascent sense of community or at least an attempt at community building. For the most part, however, these were not really like conversations, because of the time lag between the submission and posting of the original message, and the submission and posting of the reply, often being six months or longer.

**Table 4.1 Crosstabulation of message sets by relevance**

	<b>Messages 1-475</b>	<b>Messages 476-950</b>	<b>Total</b>
Highly relevant	278 58.5%	193 40.6%	471 49.6%
Moderately relevant	99 20.8%	106 22.3%	205 21.6%
Mildly relevant	71 14.9%	129 27.2%	200 21.1%
Irrelevant	27 5.7%	47 9.9%	74 7.8%
<b>Total</b>	475 100.0%	475 100.0%	950 100.0%

It became clear that the overall length of the messages decreased significantly between the first set of messages and the second set. The two sets of messages were subjected to an independent-samples *t* test. This confirmed that the average (mean) length of the messages in the first set (messages 1-475, collected up to December 31, 2002) was around 373 words per message (*SD* = 417.81). The average length of the messages in the second set (messages 476-950, collected up to August 30, 2006) was around 170 words (*SD* = 214.80), for a mean difference of 203 words between the two sets ( $t(699.23) = 9.30, p < .01$ ). Put another way, the average length of messages in the second set was approximately 46% of the length of the first set. The relevance or overall "quality" of the messages also deteriorated between the first set of messages and the second set (see Table 4.1), with a greater number in the second set being categorized as "irrelevant" or "mildly relevant", and fewer being categorized as "highly relevant" ( $\chi^2(3, N = 950) = 37.80, p < .01$ ).

The change in the overall length and quality of the messages in the second set (messages 476-950, collected up to August 30, 2006) is illustrated by the following—small and by no means exhaustive—sample of messages, repeated in their entirety:

disgusting!! - Submitted by jessica from Canada (message 521): "this boy grabbed my eraser without asking then when i looked he sneezed on my erazer and licked my eraser!!!!on purpose!!"

Sad - Submitted by Sara from Canada (message 571): "I have no friends because of some rumour".

Bully! - Submitted by Rupica from Canada (message 582): "I sneezed and she started making rumors about me! I feel really bad".

:-(- Submitted by WENDY from Canada (message 612): "I HATE MY LIFE :(("

Anyone? - Submitted by someone from United Kingdom (message 662): "Has anyone been bullied by people who just don't like you?"

Being picked on - Submitted by Liz from Canada (message 752): "It sucks to be pick on I know that. The one thing I have to see is it hurts if you are being picked on. Tell someone"

Reply submitted by Ryan on June 15, 2005 to been bulled since before p-k - Submitted by ambi bambi from United States (message 793): "Don't show that being fat annoys you and people won't pick on you for it"

In some instances, the titles of the messages were longer than the messages themselves. While the individuals who posted such messages may have been affected in one way or another by bullying, it might be said that the Web site appeared to be "devolving", rather than evolving into a cyber-community.

Perhaps the Web site's seeming inability to evolve into a cyber-community could be attributed to the policies of the site operators themselves. They

screened all of the messages for content, because the site was primarily dedicated to children and teens. Thus, no posting of pornography was permitted, and all swearing was eliminated. They removed identifying features and contact details for authors under the age of 18 for the first 475 messages, and removed identifying features and contact details for virtually all of the authors of the last 475 messages. They also declined to facilitate contact between site participants, and especially, communication with participants under the age of 18, making it impossible to form the sort of on-line and off-line relationships associated with cyber-communities (cf. Correll, 1995; Watson, 1997). Moreover, the decision to change the Web site from a bulletin board to a chat room format with a dialogue box and submit or reply buttons evidently contributed to an overall decline in the number of lengthy, thoughtful messages.

It could be suggested from a Durkheimian perspective that the decision by the site operators to characterize [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as an anti-bullying site, and to exclude—or if not exclude, then discourage or heavily edit—"non-conforming" messages served at the same time to circumvent the within-group establishment of community boundaries. Such decisions could also have circumvented the establishment of agreed-upon social norms that are so vital to the development of a sense of "cohesion" or "community". For Durkheim, a certain amount of deviance is actually "normal" or "functional", in that it contributes to social solidarity or collective conscience, by encouraging the members of a given society to demarcate for themselves which behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not (Durkheim, 1964b; Erikson, 2005; 1966; Messner & Rosenfeld,

2006). By pre-defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and establishing the community boundaries, the site operators may have wittingly or unwittingly discouraged the emergence of a cyber-community by depriving participants of this opportunity (Fernback, 1999; Jones, 1995; McLaughlin et al., 1995).

## **4.2 Age, gender, location and social class**

Individuals posting messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were not required to provide details regarding their age, gender or location. Many provided these details voluntarily, but there were a number of instances where some or all of the information was missing. Even after reading all 950 of the messages three times (usually several more times if this information was missing), it was impossible to determine age in 34 of the messages, gender in 45 of the messages, and location in 178 of the messages. This is of course the nature of this type of qualitative analysis of unstructured text messages in the absence of direct personal communication with the authors.

There was a potential concern regarding the 129 messages posted by frequent visitors to the site. These frequent visitors posted messages on a variety of different topics—at times original (initial) postings of their own, and at other times in response to messages posted by other participants. In many instances, there were noticeable intervals in between. Their messages varied in length and substance—some were quite short and thin on detail, while others were extended and full of important information. The issue arose because counting all of the messages that they posted when categorizing for age and

gender would skew the distribution, due to the fact that most of the frequent visitors to the site were young adult females. On the other hand, counting only one of their messages—when some of them posted as many as 8, 12, and even 15—would have involved a qualitative decision with respect to which one was the most relevant, and would have severely distorted the picture of the Web site itself.

After examining the overall effect on the distribution, these messages were counted as though they were from different individuals, while still recognizing that they were posted by frequent visitors, and keeping track of them as such. While this measure increased the number of young adults in the sample by 25 (19 percent), and the number of females by 24 (four percent), this was not felt to be problematic, as long as it was identified, and kept in mind when drawing inferences regarding age and gender. As it happens, young adults were seemingly underrepresented in the sample, while females were already overrepresented (an extra four percent would not make a particularly big difference, one way or the other). The multiple messages from frequent visitors had a minimal effect on distribution by location, because all of them came from Canada, the United States or the United Kingdom (the three largest sources, accounting for 68.3 percent of all messages where the location was known).

It should be noted that messages that I ultimately excluded from the study because they were deemed to be irrelevant were still included when calculating the distribution of the site participants in accordance with their age, gender, location and social class. This presented a more accurate portrayal of the

demographics of the Web site. The 25 repeated messages were excluded when calculating the distribution by age, gender and location, because this clearly would have amounted to counting the same thing twice. The 25 messages do however appear under the category of "not applicable" in the following frequency distribution tables.

### **Age of site participants**

I treated the age of the site participants as an ordinal variable, ranked from 1-child (12 years of age or younger), 2-teenager (13 to 19 years of age), 3-young adult (20 to 25 years of age), to 4-adult (26 years of age or older). Although the age brackets were not divided into equal age ranges, each progressively encompassed an older age group (Bachman & Paternoster, 2009; Bryman et al., 2009), and all made sense within the context of a bullying study. Children were generally talking about recent or ongoing bullying experiences in kindergarten or elementary school, while teenagers were talking about recent or ongoing bullying experiences in junior or senior high school, or past bullying experiences in elementary school or kindergarten. Young adults had finished high school, and were typically working or going to college. In the case of young adults, they were describing kindergarten, elementary school or high school bullying experiences that took place several (in some cases many) years ago. Adults were mostly talking about personal experiences with bullying that took place many years ago, or about the bullying and victimization experiences of their own children, or both.

There were 16 individuals over the age of 55 who recounted long past personal experiences with bullying, past experiences as parents of bullies or

victims, or even recent experiences as grandparents with grandchildren who were involved in bullying or victimization. However, the numbers in this older group were of insufficient size and strength to warrant a separate category or rank, so a decision was made to include them in the adult category (over the age of 26).

In the first 475 messages, many site participants specifically mentioned their age, as evidenced by the following (small, and by no means exhaustive) sample of the titles of some of these messages:

How Do We Stop It? by Virginia \*\*\*\*,<sup>11</sup> age 56, Salmo, British Columbia, Canada (message 32)

Anger, Pain and Tears, By Gladys, 15 years old, Marondera, Zimbabwe ( message 73)

Eight Years of Bullying, and Then More at Work! by Derek, age 29, Coquitlam, Canada (message 83)

What Did I Ever Do to Make Them Hate Me? by Kristel, 16 years old, Bangkok, Thailand (message 85)

I Am Ashamed to Say by Patrick, age 32, a Police Officer, Newfoundland, Canada (message 111)

As a Concerned and Loving Parent by Kathleen, age 47 in Ontario Canada (message 115)  
A Response to: Will You Be My Friend? by Terri, age 18, Yukon Territory, Canada (message 137)

Suicide is NOT An Option by Travis, age 12 in Brandon Manitoba, Canada ( message 224)

The Difference That Twenty-Five Years Has Made by Martha, age 38 in \*\*\*\*,  
Newfoundland (message 285)<sup>12</sup>

Response To I Don't See How I Can Live Any Longer by Linda, age 52, in the United States (message 326)

They Infuriate Me by Sarah, age 16, Perth, Western Australia, Australia (message 411)

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<sup>11</sup> I removed the surname from message 32 myself, for reasons of participant confidentiality.

<sup>12</sup> I removed the town name from message 285 myself, for reasons of participant confidentiality.

Although age was rarely mentioned directly in the titles of the second set of messages, this information was often provided in the body of the messages. Message 517, "Will it ever end?", submitted by Julia from United States, said that: "When I was nine a girl who I hated chased me....Now at eleven a boy I liked and now hate has threatened to kill me...". Message 531, "The recess wreckers!" by Michael from Canada, started with: "In my school, there are really old boys and girls. I am about 2 years younger than them". Michael ended this message by saying that the older boys and girls who had been bullying him were "in grade 7 and 8", thereby confirming that he was under the age of twelve. Lauren from Canada started message 605, "The Eye That Heard It All", by saying that: "My name is L. I'm 13 and I have lazy eye". Message 716, "They wont stop", by Ononymous [sic] from the United Kingdom, began with the statement: "I'm 15 and for the last 4 months I have been victimized and intimidated by two girls in my year at school". Message 945, "Don't let them bring you down - a lesson in self-esteem", by Elizabeth from the United Kingdom, described bullying that took place during junior high school, and ended by saying: "It's ten years later. I'm 21 now".

Even when age was not specifically mentioned in the title or the body of the messages, enough information was sometimes available through means outside of the messages themselves to infer age with a high degree of precision. For example, messages 329 through 342 all came in a cluster, from Prince Edward Island. While nine of the messages did not mention age at all, the authors of messages 333, 334, 339, 342 and 343 all stated their age as 11 in

their titles, the author of message 335 stated his age as 12 in his title, and the author of message 333 mentioned the name of the school in the body of the message. Therefore, it was possible to determine that these 15 messages were part of a primary school project involving 11 and 12 year old children.

The same can be said for assigning age to some of the frequent visitors to the site. Merriska, who posted messages 654, 740, 741 and 837, was talking in message 654 about her victimization experiences in grade four, and went on to describe her former elementary school friends and her childhood experiences, contrasting them with her present dreams and crushes. It was initially felt that Merriska was writing at a high school level, but this was not confirmed until one of her later messages (741), where she talked about having bullied other kids herself six years earlier, when she was in grade two, thereby putting her age for all four messages at 13 or 14.

**Table 4.2 Age of site participants**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Child (12 or under)	284	29.9
Teenager (13-19)	273	28.7
Adult (26 or over)	202	21.3
Young adult (20-25)	132	13.9
Not mentioned-not clear	34	3.6
Not applicable	25	2.6
<b>Total</b>	950	100.0

As can be seen in Table 4.2, 284 of the messages came from children under the age of twelve, 273 came from teenagers, 202 from adults, and 132

from young adults. A total of 34 messages contained insufficient information to determine age, while 25 were categorized as "not applicable" because they were repeated messages. There were more messages (58.6%) from children and teenagers who were attending school at the time of their submissions and hence more likely to be directly involved in or affected by bullying. There were also slightly more children than teenagers since many from both age groups clustered around the age 12-13 borderline, the cut-off point used in this present study for distinguishing between children and teenagers. This figure is consistent with the notion that bullying peaks during the transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high school, and then tails off toward the end of high school (cf. Craig et al., 2007; Pepler et al., 2008; Rigby, 2008).

There were comparatively fewer messages (34.9%) from young adults and adults, with young adults perhaps being somewhat underrepresented, in the sense that they are thought to be the most frequent users of the Internet (Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). This was not entirely surprising, given that the young adults were evidently past their school years, and hence less likely to be directly involved in bullying. Moreover, the parameters used in this study for the young adult category were quite narrow (from 20 to 25 years of age), in order to secure perspectives of those who had recently finished school, but who had probably not yet started to raise school-age children of their own.

There were considerably more adults (26 years of age or older) than young adults, with the number of adults tailing off dramatically from the age of 50

onwards, as would be predicted by known patterns of Internet usage by individuals in that particular age group (McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Thayer & Ray, 2006). The comparatively high number of adults again should not be too surprising, in view of the wider age parameters for that age group, and given that many of them had children or grandchildren who were involved in bullying or victimization. If they did not have children or grandchildren of their own who were involved in bullying, they were trying in an "adult-like" manner to share their wisdom and experience with the numerous children and teenagers who were posting messages on the site. (It should be kept in mind that those who posted the first 475 messages are now eight years older than they were at the time, and that those who posted the last 475 messages are now four years older).

The age of the site users changed dramatically between the first and second sets of messages (see Table 4.3). The number of children, teenagers and young adults using the site increased from 64.1 percent to 85.2 percent of all users, with the largest increase coming from children. The number of adults using the site decreased from 35.5 percent of all users to only 7.9 percent ( $\chi^2(4, N = 925) = 130.12, p < .01$ ). This shift was most likely caused by the change from a bulletin board to a chat room format, a transition that apparently appealed to younger participants, but not to older ones. It is also possible that adults found the newer mode of truncated, chat-style messages less inspiring than the previous mode of lengthy, well thought out messages. Despite this change between the first and second message sets, there was still a fairly large contingent of young adults (132) and adults (202) in the 950 messages, adding a

dimension to this study that is invariably absent from bullying studies that draw their entire sample from school populations.

**Table 4.3 Crosstabulation of message sets by age<sup>13</sup>**

	<b>Messages 1-475</b>	<b>Messages 475-950</b>	<b>Total</b>
Child (12 or under)	105 22.5%	179 39.1%	284 30.7%
Teenager (13-19)	132 28.3%	141 30.8%	273 29.5%
Young adult (20-25)	62 13.3%	70 15.3%	132 14.3%
Adult (26 or over)	166 35.5%	36 7.9%	202 21.8%
Not mentioned-not clear	2 0.4%	32 7.0%	34 3.7%
<b>Total</b>	467 100.0%	458 100.0%	925 100.0%

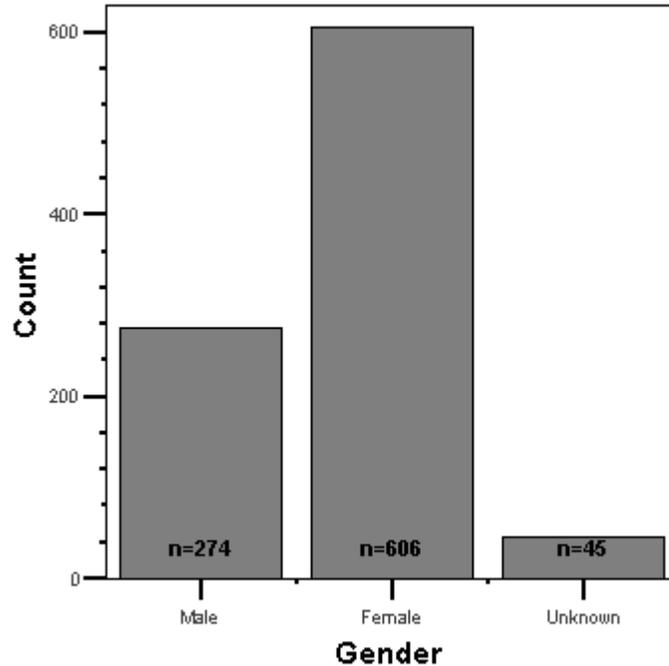
### **Gender of site participants**

As mentioned several times in my thesis, females posting messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) outnumbered males by a margin of more than two to one (606 females, and 274 males) (see Figure 4.1). This pattern runs contrary to the long-held notion that men are more likely to be users of the Internet than women, and more likely to dominate computer-mediated communication groups (Hlebec, Manfreda, & Vehovar, 2006; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

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<sup>13</sup> The 25 messages that were excluded because they were repeat messages were not included in this cross-tabulation.

**Figure 2: Bar chart of distribution of Web site participants according to gender**



Recent research indicates that Internet usage may now be split evenly between males and females. Males tend to use the Internet more for sports and games, and females tend to use it more for communication purposes, especially when it comes to personal content of the sort found on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) (Kitchin, 2002b; T. Sanders, 2005; Thayer & Ray, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 2005). Moreover, females accounted for 82 percent of all respondents to Hinduja and Patchin's (2008) on-line survey on cyber-bullying, and 63 percent of all respondents to Craig et al's (2007) on-line survey on strategies for dealing with bullying (posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)). This suggests that the gender distribution in this present study is a reasonably accurate reflection of what is happening on the Web site itself, not to mention what is happening in cyberspace, at least

when it comes to the issue of females using the Internet to communicate about (or respond to surveys on) personal issues such as bullying and victimization.

Although it was not possible to determine gender in 45 of the messages, it was in large part a fairly straightforward task. Often, this information was included in the title of the messages, as illustrated by the following:

The Sting of Teasing by Marian Gilo Fonnio, National School Of Nursing Freetown. Sierra Leone (message 17, female)

Don't Let Them Get You Down! by Bev C from Northern Ireland (message 30, female)

Bullying and Teasing from : Peter, Armed Forces Sec. Tech. Uddara Barracks Kumasi-Ghana, West Africa. (message 59, male)

Carrying My Campus Cross by: Master Ivan (Student), Ghana (message 63, male)

Response to Why Do They Call Me Fat? by Heather in Canada (message 99, female)

Self-help for Adults and Victims of Bullying by Tim in Canada (message 142, male)

Competitive Sports and Isolation of Students by David, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada (message 220, male)

My Son Was Arrested Last Friday for Assault by Catherine, an adult in Canada (message 232, female)

Emotional and Physical Bullying by Molly, a Teacher-in-Training in Lexington, Kentucky, USA (message 401, female)

The Person who Bullied me - Submitted by Crystal from Canada (message 532, female)

School Meanies - Submitted by kenny from Canada (message 624, male)

Sometimes 2 Wrongs DO Make a Right - Submitted by Sally from United States (message 731, female)

Does stalking count as bullying? - Submitted by Kaitlin from Canada (message 831, female)

The bully that never lets go - Submitted by Pete from United Kingdom (message 842, male)

Hated For Something I Can't Change - Submitted by Elizabeth from United States (message 881, female)

Even when no name appeared in the title of the message, other information pertaining to gender was often provided. "Schools Don't Seem Safe! by A Frustrated, Anonymous Mother" (message 369), "I Was Bullied in High School By a 39-year-old man from Ontario, Canada" (message 453), "Stop calling me names" submitted by "confused girl from United Kingdom" (message 723) and "It never ends..." submitted by "SadGuy from Canada" (message 770) are just a few examples of how gender was quickly determined in the absence of a male or female name.

In other instances, names were included in the titles of the messages, but they were not instantly recognizable as being masculine or feminine, because they were of non-English origin. Several examples would include names such as Lyubomir (message 24), Miku (message 61), Abu (message 81), Zaiga (messages 84 and 131), Osei message (214), Sanjita (message 717) and Makayla (message 849). In cases like these, the origins, meanings and regular usages of the names were researched on the Internet, using a wide variety of Web sites, including personal Web sites where the site owners were using these names themselves. This established that Lyubomir, Abu and Osei were all male names, whereas Miku, Zaiga, Sanjita and Makayla were all female names.

There were also messages posted by individuals whose first names could be either masculine or feminine, such as Mackenzie (message 192), Kim (message 308), Morgan (332), Lindsay (message 414), Jessie (message 659) and Cassidy (message 819), to mention a few. In all such cases, the messages

had to be read carefully for gendered content, often several times. In message 192, Mackenzie said that:

When I get in the lineup a kid named \*\*\*\* would say don't you brush your hair? It does not bother me I have hair that sticks out of my head sideways. The time the bell rings for lunch the race is on. I don't stand out a lot, but for some reason people call me a fat, ugly, cow...<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Mackenzie was talking about her appearance, and that she was being referred to as a "cow", suggested that she was a girl.

In message 332, Morgan said that:

I am scared to do things because I'm bad at asports . I can do so much on the computer, programming, even being my own computer technician. Being around the computer lets me forget about what has happened. And lets me into my own world. I play games, or I program or fool around with the computer.

The fact that Morgan was concerned about his lack of athletic ability, and mentioned his skills as a computer technician and his interest in computer games, suggested that he was a boy.

While message 659 from Jessie did not provide much information with respect to gender, her second of three messages (message 681), written in reply to "Stop Bullying Me Please!!!" by Karly from United Kingdom, helped to fill in the blanks:

Aww hunny, it's ok. You know glasses really are not that big of a deal, I don't know why people make fun of it. Almost everyone in my family wear glasses, my boyfriend wears glasses, 2 of my best friends wear glasses, and it's not that uncommon....I'm just getting over a 6 week hospital admission because I was bullied so much that the stress got to me and I developed an eating disorder.

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<sup>14</sup> This is a reminder that identifying details (e.g., names, locations, etc) were removed by the site operators prior to posting the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org).

Jessie's use of the expression "aww hunny", her comment about having a boyfriend, and the revelation that she had been admitted to hospital for an eating disorder suggested that she was quite likely a female.

Additionally, there were 60 messages posted by individuals who did not mention their first name or give any indication at all regarding their gender in the titles of their messages, as exemplified below:

Legal and Therapeutic Help-P.G. an adult (message 123)

It Could Happen to Anybody by Anonymous (message 144)

Fearing the School Days by Anonymous Age 11 (message 213)

What It Boils Down To by Anonymous (message 265)

Learned Helplessness by An Anonymous Adult (message 374)

Terrified by an anonymous 5th grader in private school (message 439)

like u really know - Submitted by unknowin from Canada (message 546)

I do not know what to do ? - Submitted by xXx needin help xXx from United Kingdom (message 560)

I got swated- Submitted by Fly from Canada (message 635)

All Sorts of People Bully - Submitted by Anonymous from United States (message 737)

18 vs. 5 - Submitted by blank from Canada (message 785)

Like Me For Me - Submitted by \*anonymous\* from Brazil (message 809)

VERBAL - Submitted by ? from United Kingdom (message 875)

I would like to say sorry - Submitted by (un-known) from Gambia (message 946)

With many of these messages, where the authors were deliberately trying to remain anonymous, it was virtually impossible to determine gender. However, there were occasions where enough clues were supplied within the text (or the context) of the messages to make an informed guess. For example, "Response to The Bullying Never Stops by J.W." was written in reply to message 69 from Lyanne, a 15 year-old female victim of bullying. Although J.W. did not specifically mention anything about his gender, he did say in his reply that "I am almost fifteen", "I bet you are smart, pretty". J.W. also went on to offer his friendship to Lyanne, and to ask what kind of music she liked and whether or not she wanted him to burn her a CD. This sounded very much like a teenage male trying to "chat up" a teenage female over the Internet.

In message 213, "Fearing the School Days by Anonymous Age 11", the author says that:

It all started when some two girls started trying to set me up with a boy. I didn't know what to do and it sounded like a good way to fit in so I went along with it. It wasn't until they started making us hug and kiss me that I realised that it wasn't a good choice. I finally dumped him and it broke his heart.

There was little doubt that this particular message was written by an 11 year-old female.

**Table 4.4 Crosstabulation of message sets by gender**

	<b>Messages 1-475</b>	<b>Messages 476-950</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	188 40.3%	86 18.8%	274 29.6%
Female	266 57.0%	340 74.2%	606 65.5%
Unknown	13 2.8%	32 7.0%	45 4.9%
<b>Total</b>	467 100.0%	458 100.0%	925 100.0%

It is noteworthy that the percentage of females posting messages on the Web site increased from 57 percent to 74.2 percent between the first set of messages and the second set. The percentage of males posting messages decreased from 40.3 percent to 18.8 percent ( $\chi^2(2, N = 925) = 54.95, p < .01$ ) (see Table 4.4).

This change could be interpreted in a variety of ways. It is possible that females simply found the new "chat room" format of the Web site more appealing than did males. It is also possible that the increasing number of females who were using the Web site accurately reflected the aforementioned increase in the overall number of females who have been turning to the Internet as a means of communication (Craig et al., 2007; P. K. Smith et al., 2008; Thayer & Ray, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 2005). Another viable explanation is that there has been considerably less focus on female bullying than on male bullying, despite indications that bullying is at least as prevalent amongst females as it is amongst males (Besag, 2006; Brown et al., 2007; C. Phillips, 2003). This lack of attention

to female victimization could leave girls and women with fewer solutions to bullying than males, and in turn, encourage them to pursue alternative outlets such as anti-bullying Web sites.

### **Location of site participants**

The location from which participants were submitting their messages proved to be somewhat more difficult to determine than their age or gender. Generally, participants either provided information about their location, or they did not. As can be seen from Table 4.5, there were 178 instances where location simply could not be determined. This was more of an issue with the second set of messages (476 to 950), where location was categorized as unknown in 108 of the cases, as opposed to only 70 of the cases in the first set of messages (1 to 475).

The majority of the messages of unknown origin probably came from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, because [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is an English-language Web site, and most of the messages where location was known with certainty did in fact come from Canada (46 percent), the United States (13.3 percent), and the United Kingdom (9.2 percent). It is plausible that somewhere close to half of the messages of unknown origin came from Canada, because [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is a Canadian-based Web site, and has been the recipient of a great deal of publicity in the Canadian media. There was, however, an observable trend toward more messages from the United Kingdom in the second set of messages (65 messages in the second set, as opposed to 22 in the first set), and a trend away from messages from Western and Eastern

Europe, Africa and Australia, New Zealand and Asia. Thus, an increased percentage of messages of unknown origin might have come from the United Kingdom, rather than from Canada or other countries (the United States stayed about the same, with 61 messages in the first set, and 65 in the second).

Despite some uncertainties, location was known with a high degree of precision in the majority of the cases. For example, it was possible to determine exactly where many of the messages came from within Canada, including British Columbia (26), Alberta (40), Saskatchewan (12), Manitoba (8), Ontario (50), Quebec (9), New Brunswick (4), Nova Scotia (5), Prince Edward Island (17), Newfoundland and Labrador (6), Nunavut (5), the Northwest Territories (2) and The Yukon (2). The same applies to being able to determine the exact location of a number of the messages that came from within the United States, including California (4), Colorado (1), Wyoming (1), Ohio (1), Iowa (1), Illinois (5), Pennsylvania (5), Massachusetts (2), Kentucky (2), and Florida (10), to mention a few of the 22 States in the US that were known to be represented in the sample.

**Table 4.5 Distribution by country and continent**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Canada	436	45.9
United States	126	13.3
United Kingdom	87	9.2
Western & Eastern Europe (excluding UK)	35	3.7
Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia	30	3.2
Africa	26	2.7
Other	7	.7
Not Known	178	18.7
Not Applicable-repeated message	25	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In some instances, the Web site participants provided enough detail to make it possible to determine precisely what city they lived in, and possibly even what school they were attending (if someone wanted to put the effort into finding them). This is exemplified by 10 messages that all came from grade five students attending an elementary school in Tucson, Arizona (messages 163 through 171, and message 218, which arrived a bit later), nine messages from the German Language High School in Sofia, Bulgaria (messages 2, 24, 25, 45, and 48 through 53), seven messages from 12-14 year olds that all came in a cluster from Port Nolloth, South Africa (messages 344 through 350), and five messages that all came in at roughly the same time from the International School in Bangkok, Thailand (messages 77, 79, 85, 90 and 91).

While the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) came from all corners of the globe, and appeared to reflect trans-national and cross-cultural views on bullying, there is always a question about whether an Internet sample of this

nature is generalizable to populations other than the one from which it was drawn (Nosek et al., 2002). As discussed previously, it would be difficult to describe it as a true random sample of bullies, victims and other affected parties around the world, due to the voluntary (self-selecting) nature of the participants, and the social class requirements that go hand-in-hand with Internet access (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kitchin, 2002b). There is also the matter of the high number of "lurkers"—individuals who may visit the Web site regularly and read the messages, but not post messages of their own—who are believed to inhabit cyber-space (McLaughlin et al., 1995), and the difficulties in defining the sampling frame (Kraut et al., 2004).

Despite these considerations, this sample of 950 messages from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is larger than Kennedy's (2006) sample of 14 mature, working class, ethnic minority women in the United Kingdom who were provided with free computers and Internet access in connection with research on identity play in cyber-space. My sample is also larger than Kitchin's (2002b) discourse analysis of 34 threads of messages posted on an Alcoholics Anonymous newsgroup over an eleven month period, and almost as large as Hlebec et al.'s (2006) survey of 1009 self-selected (voluntary) participants who were Internet users in Slovenia. Indeed, the size and scope of this study of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is comparable to that of the Web-generated, on-line surveys employed in Ybarra et al.'s (2007) examination of the overlap between school bullying and Internet harassment, Hinduja and Patchin's (2008) analysis of the risk factors for cyber-bullying, and

Craig et al.'s (2007) survey (posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)) with respect to victim strategies for dealing with bullying.

My sample may be no less representative or generalizable than the numerous location-specific, age-specific studies conducted in various locales around the world. These include, for example:

- Goodwin's (2002) analysis of power asymmetries in the conversations of 30 schoolgirls attending an elementary school in Southern California
- Phoenix et al.'s (2003) qualitative analysis of the masculinity and bullying narratives produced by 78 boys (aged 11 to 14) in London
- Terasahjo and Salmivalli's (2003) analysis of the interpretive repertoires of bullying produced by 74 elementary school students in Finland
- Phillips' (2007) study involving semi-structured interviews with 31 female college students in London regarding their punking and bullying experiences in middle and high school
- Landry's (2008) study of the "mean girl motives" advanced by 24 girls aged 8 to 11, all of whom belonged to the same non-profit after-school organization in Nova Scotia.

Even larger scale quantitative (survey-based) studies are very location-specific and age-specific, for instance:

- Prinstein and Cillessen's (2003) study of peer status and aggression in 235 grade ten students attending a suburban high school in New England
- Smith et al.'s (2007) survey regarding anti-bullying programs in Ontario schools (which only produced a return rate of 28 percent, or 395 usable questionnaires)
- Klomek et al.'s (2007) study of bullying and suicidality amongst adolescents in six high schools in the State of New York
- Bond, Wolfe, Tollit, Butler and Patton's (2007) comparison of the Peer Relations Questionnaire and the Gatehouse Bullying Scale, employing a sample of 2,463 grade eight students from 25 secondary schools in Victoria, Australia.

This is not to suggest that the above-mentioned studies are methodologically flawed, or that there is anything intrinsically wrong with the manner in which their samples were obtained. Many such studies are innovative and insightful, and the researchers have made significant contributions to the study of bullying. However, it should be recognized that studies that employ location-specific and age-specific samples are not necessarily more representative or generalizable to other populations than the trans-national, cross-cultural sample obtained from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). Indeed, one of the primary attractions of Internet samples such as the one employed herein is that, rather than being restricted to one small age group of students attending schools

in one location, they include the voices of people of many different nationalities and age groups.

### **Social class**

As noted in the earlier discussion about the limitations of drawing a sample of only those individuals who have computer access and the skills required to post messages on an English-language Web site (see Chapter 3), most participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) did not come from disadvantaged backgrounds (cf. Burrows et al., 2000; Hlebec et al., 2006). Even those from less developed countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Latvia, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Thailand were usually attending English language schools, boarding schools, or colleges, thus attesting to their relatively high socioeconomic status. A handful of messages specifically mentioned a connection between socioeconomic deprivation and victimization. In "My Childhood Full of Despair", Tracy, a young adult and former bullying victim from Vancouver, Canada recounted:

I remember a time, (not that long ago) when my sister and myself were one of the many children in a school to be bullied. The school I was attending was a very "rich" community school. We all called it SNOB HILL. My mom was my only parent and she didn't make much money so we didn't get to wear the trendy clothes or buy the trendy toys. It made it very difficult to make friends. The friends that I did have also were raised in a one parent home. So I was a poor kid (money wise) with poor friends, livin on the edge of Snob Hill. If I wasn't fending for my younger sister I was fending for myself.

This explanation for victimization was echoed In "Keep Telling Adults Until One Listens!" submitted by Linda, a mother (and former victim) from Ontario, Canada:

my daughter became the victim of bullies. She was absolutely miserable through eight years of public school. She was smart, pretty, and friendly, but she was the only kid in her class who came from a single-parent household.

We didn't have much money, so she didn't wear designer clothes, or have all the latest and greatest toys. We didn't go on expensive vacations. In short, she was the poor kid in her class.

Other examples include "There is Hope: My Story", by 16 year-old Nancy, who related that: "my mother raised me on her own, so we weren't rich. I didn't have the greatest clothes or shoes, therefore I was made fun of"; "They Don't Know", by 12 year-old Clareese, who said: "we can't afford our house;(we're about to live in a motel!) how they tease me because all I wear are different tee-shirts and the same pants"; and 43 year-old Dianne, who talked about her family being Scandinavian immigrants and her being teased because she had "almost nothing other than hand-me-downs to wear".

One particularly compelling report about bullying, victimization and social class, entitled "The Dangers of Teasing in Our Schools", was submitted by Oku-Afari from Ghana. He described what happened to the children of economically and culturally disadvantaged rural village farmers when they were sent to the city for schooling:

In fact, some students have become so influenced and adaptive to 'western cultures and lifestyle' that they do not even have much interest in our own culture and its good values. These students often tease or make mockery of others who have come directly to school (boarding school) from their villages where cocoa farming is the main occupation. They often refer to these village based students with all kinds of names including "Agyaba", meaning; 'poormen sons', or 'villagers' or 'bushmen'. This is because our farmers are hen used to tease them. Why! why is this so!! Is it their fault that they were given birth to in the village and to poor parents for that matter?

Oku-Afri described the devastating impact of bullying on the future lives of victimized students:

some of these intelligent students could no longer bear these teasings and acts of intimidation. They packed their things and left the school for their respective villages without the knowledge of the school authorities. When the authorities noticed what had happened, the harm had already been done. Two of these boys had completely lost interest in their education and no amount of counselling would bring them back to school. The third boy also nearly got drowned when in his confused state of mind he decided to take a dive though he had no knowledge of swimming. He was only saved by some fishermen who happened to do fishing at that time.

There were a few messages suggesting that bullies also came from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the one from Rachel, the Inuk woman who posted the three messages about her various life experiences, including the time that she and her sister spent in an English language boarding school in Nunavut:

There was a lot of violence at boarding school, most of it hidden. Some classes were let out early, racing home to Stringer Hall, taking short cuts to avoid the bullies. Most bullies were "town" kids, envious of what they thought was our "uppity" institutional life.

Similarly, "I Used to Be a Bully, I Also Used to Be Bullied", by Adrian from Alberta, Canada, points to economic hardship as a contributing factor in bullying:

I was raised only by my mother. We were poor... very poor because she had me when she was young so she could not get a high paying job. When she would communicate with me it was almost always yelling. I don't think a week went by where I did not get a spanking with the wooden spoon. I don't blame her for it, I suppose I was a victim of the high stress in her life. I would take this mental and physical abuse to school and lash out, most of the time it was against people who would not fight back.

Most participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), however, did not characterize bullies as being economically deprived or socially disadvantaged. John from Ontario, Canada wrote to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) to say that he has just watched a

CBC show about bullying, and that he disagreed with statements made by the guest from McMaster University regarding bullies being underprivileged children:

I heard the guest from McMaster University say that bullies come from several categories of under privileged children but she did not include the children of well to do families who are similarly not taught to respect others. It is true however, that the child of any parent who is not taught to respect others will quickly learn to exploit the power and position he/she obtains by picking on, or worse, bullying he/her peers.

Elizabeth S. from, Alberta, Canada, wrote in about the same television program, saying that:

I am a single mom. I was once was bullied by 3 boys. I did not appreciate what that lady said from the University on the CBC TV show. The people who bullied me all have 2 parents who lived together. It is not the case of single parents. It is the result of people not having any life skills.

In any event, it was abundantly clear that the majority of the Web site participants did not lead economically deprived lives. A number specifically mentioned attending the sort of private schools and colleges that would not normally be accessible to people without financial means, including St. Augustine's College in Ghana (messages 18 and 19), the German Language High School in Bulgaria (e.g., messages 25, 49, 51 and 52), the International School in Bangkok (messages 77, 78, 79, 89, 90 and 91), and King's College in Uganda (message 474). In "My Story", 17 year-old Daniel said: "I'm now in yr 12 and I'm 17 at a tall poppy syndromed school in Sydney Australia".<sup>15</sup> In "My Bullying Experience", 23 year-old Mikey (also from Australia) said that he "went to a private school...up until year 8", started university following high school, and

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<sup>15</sup> I assume that Daniel is talking here about schools in Australia that focus on high achievers and the future "leaders" of society, similar to the "Ivy League" schools in the U.S.A.

that he was completing a "degree in law at the end of the year". Whether it was Mary from the United States saying in "My Own College Friends May Never Understand" that she was attending college and living in a college dormitory, or Linda saying in "Reflections On Having Been a Bully" that she "was in an experimental program during grades 7, 8, and 9, comprised of students who were deemed to be somewhat 'gifted', or at least capable of working at an accelerated rate", and that she took sides with the "cute cheerleaders and rich, self-confident, infinitely poised girls", it would be difficult to conclude that they lacked the necessary wherewithal to pursue a quality education.

Indeed, any number of the former bullies and victims who wrote into the site had not only gone to college or university, but had gone on to become teachers, social workers, nurses, lawyers, computer programmers, network administrators, and business owners. For example, R. M., a teacher-counsellor from Northern Alberta who was using [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) as a teaching tool, said that he had "returned to university as a mature student", and had "graduated with 2 degrees". Carolyn, whose message was entitled "24 going on 17", said that she had a B.Sc. in Psychology, and was working as a Crisis Services Coordinator at a mental health clinic. Bert, a 38 year-old from the Netherlands, said that he was "working as a psychiatric nurse [and] studying psychology". Even Tracey—whose story was used above as an example of how bullying might in some circumstances be related to social class (because she said that she lived on Snob Hill and that her mother was a poor single parent)—had gone on to

become a computer technician and network administrator, and was studying computer programming.

Those in the study who bullied or were bullied directly as a result of their socioeconomic circumstances would be the exception, rather than the rule (cf. Pepler et al., 2008). In message 749, Maureen, a former victim and frequent visitor to the site, wrote that when she was in her teens, she "couldn't wait to leave the South Suburban area of Chicago. It was pretentious, intolerant, prejudice, clannish. These people were affluent snobs whose idea of fun was a shopping mall". In message 842, Pete from the United Kingdom talked about a lifetime of being bullied by his brother, but indicated that his family "lived in a large house with 20 acres of land", that his "parents were well off and...spent a month or two skiing every winter in Switzerland", and that his parents also "bought a series of yachts". Even Erma, a "Black Student Who Was Seen As White Trash", said that he "lived in a basically white neighbourhood", that he "hung around with white people and played a basically white sport, hockey", and that when the blacks started bullying him as a consequence, he "dealt with this oppression by seeing a therapist". Evidently, Erma's parents had the financial means to live in a white neighbourhood, to pay for him to play ice hockey (an expensive sport, requiring rink fees, travel to and from the rink, and expensive equipment), and to pay for him to see a therapist when he was being bullied.

It is difficult to conclude that the bullying or victimization behaviours described by the participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were related in any significant manner to the type of blocked opportunities—caused by a disjunction between

economically valued cultural goals and the institutionalized means to achieve them—as described by anomie-strain theorists such as Robert Merton (1938; 1964). Similarly, it would be difficult to conclude that they were related to a sense of “status frustration” or “status deprivation” that was said by Albert Cohen (1964) to stem from the inability of lower class individuals (particularly males) to meet the standards of the “middle class measuring rod”.

To the extent that anomie-strain theories have applicability here they would be more along the lines of Robert Agnew’s (1992; 2006) “general strain theory”. This explains the strains experienced by middle-class adolescents in terms of poor peer relations, their inability to attain popularity with peers, and their lack of power—due to dependence on parents and other adult authority figures—to escape from or avoid aversive or negative events such as poor school experiences, verbal insults and physical assaults. An equally viable explanation might be that set out by Passas (2003), wherein a sense of anomie develops in relative (rather than objective) terms, in comparison to reference groups. In essence, even middle- or upper-class individuals can experience feelings of relative deprivation when they compare themselves to other individuals in their social milieu who appear to be enjoying higher status or greater levels of achievement.

### **4.3 Bullies, victims, bully-victims, parents, respondents and commentators**

So far, I have assessed whether [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is really a “community” in the truest sense of the word (it is not), and have examined the participants in

terms of their demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, location and social class. What follows is a breakdown of the Web site participants in accordance with how they were categorized in terms of their relationship to or experience with the bullying and victimization process—in other words, how they described themselves, and what their motivation was for sending their messages into the Web site. The majority of participants categorized themselves in one way or another. In fact, both the earlier and later versions of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) invited the participants to indicate whether they were victims, bullies, former bullies or were affected in some other manner by bullying. Even where the participants did not self-categorize when posting their messages, their motivation for writing to the site usually became apparent upon reading the messages.<sup>16</sup>

Even so, it was not always easy to categorize (or “pigeonhole”) the Web site participants. While there were 116 messages from respondents who mentioned no firsthand experience whatsoever with bullying, 25 of them were from individuals known to be actual victims, bullies, or bully-victims, because they had posted other messages on the site in which they talked about their own experiences with bullying. There were 36 respondents who indicated in their messages that they had been victims of bullying at some time in the past (former victims), 24 who were still being victimized at the time that they submitted their responses (victims), two who indicated in their responses that they were involved in both bullying and victimization (bully-victims), one who said she had been

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<sup>16</sup> This does not include those whom I categorized as commentators, because they offered unsolicited comments or opinions and said nothing to indicate that they had any personal experience with bullying. It also does not include those whom I categorized as respondents, because they were responding to other messages and again not mentioning any firsthand experience with bullying,

involved in bullying and victimization in the past (a former bully-victim), 13 who cited firsthand experience as a parent, grandparent, relative or other caregiver of someone who had been affected by bullying and victimization, and seven respondents who said that they had themselves been bystanders at or observers of incidents of bullying (bystander-observers). While it was possible to keep track of all these many different types of respondents, any and all who were not “pure respondents”—i.e., respondents who mentioned nothing in their messages about firsthand experience—were ultimately categorized in accordance with their personal experiences with bullying, for example, as victims, bullies, bully-victims, parents, teachers, or bystanders.

Most messages from African nations spoke about bullying behaviour that would readily be recognized as such anywhere in the world, but six messages (19, 63, 73, 74, 81 and 428) described incidents that were more akin to the sort of “ritual hazing” associated with induction into private schools or athletic fraternities than they were specifically to bullying (cf. Klein, 2006a; Rigby, 2008; Roberts, 2006). This is captured in the message by Edward from Ghana, entitled “Campus Terrorism”:

My impressions about boarding schools were full of high hopes and great expectations. So many times had I wished to be enrolled.

The day of fulfilment came to pass. I was filled with great zeal and jim- jams. But I was sorry to leave home where mom and dad had played Prince with me. I thought every sleeping place was a home.

But the boarding house was never a home. My seniors played page with me. Running errands was my new profession. As for bullying and teasings, they are better untold. The treatments were just against common sense. Even prayers could no more give consolation.

'Torture chambers' were created for us greenhorns. 'Chisel boys' became our new names. The reason.....? We would not dish out our limited moneys or provisions. We would kneel for no just cause till the cock crew to announce a new day. Hell would break loose if you dared complain or reported any form of extortion or physical abuse.

But a new dawn of academic year began to unfold. The seniors and the wicked ones would be no more. Smiles would soon reappear on our faces again. But we still felt sorry. A vicious circle could be seen nearby. There were still potentially wicked and aspiring seniors waiting for their turn. But we wished these fresh and poor ones are spared this time.

A similar story was submitted by Ivan, entitled “Carrying my Campus Cross”. He was also from Ghana, but unlike Edward, whose message was related above in its entirety, Ivan was sent to a day school rather than to a boarding school:

I was enrolled into a day school in my vicinity just because my parents wanted me to be closer to them. I personally liked the idea because I thought I could run away from bullying. The day I entered the School compound, I was given a cold welcome by some seniors. Since I was not putting on the prescribed uniform, I was asked by these seniors to fold my trousers to the knee-level so that it would look like shorts. I protested and wanted to defend my stand but they all shouted the slogan 'obey before complain'.

As freshers, we were made to do all the donkey jobs on campus. We realised the seniors got work for those juniors who idled about and we tried to rather busy ourselves with something else. We hid ourselves anytime we were free. The canteen became our worst enemy since instead of eating during break, we were made to run unnecessary errands using our own resources. Humiliation was the reward for accepting a kind gesture offered by a 'bully in an angel's outfit'. Scrubbing of "atonko" (a place of convenience) became one's work for coming to school late and for moving with a girl a senior had set eyes on. We were made to clean the tables and shoes of seniors with our neatly dressed uniforms if we did not have any handkerchief on us. We were punished by our house prefects for letting the house down in a tournament or house inspection.

As was the case with Edward’s message about “Campus Terrorism”, Ivan concludes his message by saying that:

As the academic calendar progressed, we got accustomed to the system, though initially it produced a setback on our academic output. We usually received a great relief anytime we entered examination era. But the cycle of bullying would continue since the spirit of vengeance had been already imparted into us to administer the same thing to the next generation.

These six stories basically described bullying that started on the first day in a new school, and usually ended following a one year period of initiation. At first glance, it was felt that they deserved their own category of “ritualized hazing”. This was because of the predictable onset and desistance of their victimization, and because of the seemingly trivial and nonutilitarian initiation ordeals that they were put through by the older students (e.g., folding their trousers up to knee length, running unnecessary errands, kneeling all night long). However, there were six of them in total, which would make it a very small category, accounting for only 0.5 percent of all messages posted. In addition, most of what they were describing—e.g., teasing, public humiliation, theft of or damage to personal property, and an imbalance of power—were characteristics associated with more traditional forms of bullying. Thus, a decision was made to place these six cases in the victim category.

In 15 instances, it was next to impossible to place individuals into a single category (e.g., bully, victim, bystander, parent, or teacher) without doing injustice to the complexity of their personal experiences and how they were affected by them. These 15 messages were submitted by teachers, parents, or other caregivers, who at one time were bullies, victims, bully-victims or bystander-observers themselves, and who were in many cases writing to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) about problems that their own children or wards were currently experiencing with

bullying. For example, in “I Want to Help”, 32 year old Leah, the mother of two young boys wrote: “When I was in elementary school I was teased about how ‘skinny’ I was. I’ve hated my body almost my entire life”. Leah goes on to talk about the bullying that persists in schools today, and expresses concern that her boys may end up being victimized as well. In “Take a Stand”, Valerie G. says that she is “an adult who was bullied as a teen in high school”. She then talks about her daughter who was being bullied in grade 8. Valerie describes how this was only resolved when she complained to the school principal and threatened to keep her daughter out of school until remedial action was taken. In message 852, Anna from the United Kingdom recounts that “I was bullied as a child made worse by the fact I was taken away from my family but I survive. My son is a victim of bullying because he is very intelligent but he survives”.

In “Another Mother's Story” (message 416), Ginger from La Marque, Texas relates that:

I was always heavy, always overweight, a big girl. I was 5'6" by the time I was 12 and was large-boned. I didn't actually get 'fat' until my late teens. All through school there would be a certain faction that would tease me with little 'nicknames:' the typical names that chubby kids are called and then Ginger Huge (a play on my maiden name), the one that really hurt.

My last year in school was the worst. It had never been good, I really hated going to school, but that last year I frequently left this one classroom in tears. Journalism with Mrs. \*\*\*\*\* and it would have been my favorite class otherwise. She'd just sit there or shake her head while the entire class (10-12 other students) took turns saying nasty things to me: 'Here's a picture of our good friend Ginger Huge' and it was a picture of a cow. Or "Hey Ginger, we need a tent. Let us borrow your jacket.'

Ginger goes on to say that she is now 38 years of age, and still lacks self-esteem and feels frightened when she sees a group of teenagers. She adds:

I now have a chubby 9 year old son and a chubby 13 year old daughter who I worry about everyday. I know they get called names in school, too, but I don't know what to do about it. I've had words with their teachers over it and it seems to get better for awhile. Next year they'll be going to new schools in the school district that I went to and I am dreading it. I'm afraid I'll feel more and more like old 'Ginger Huger' and won't be able to help them.

These 15 messages offered a rare glimpse into how bullying has manifested itself over time, and persisted across generations. As such, I decided to create an entirely new category (parent, teacher, former BVO), in which the authors had to be a parent, caregiver or teacher, with children under their care who were involved in or were potential candidates for involvement in bullying, as well as themselves being a former victim, bully or bystander-observer.

**Table 4.6 Categorization of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) participants**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Victim	526	55.4
Respondent	116	12.2
Commentator	80	8.4
Parent or other relative	64	6.7
Bully-victim	63	6.6
Bystander-observer	30	3.2
Bully	25	2.6
Parent, teacher, former BVO	15	1.6
Teacher-principal	6	.6
Not applicable-repeated message	25	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As indicated in Table 4.6, self-identified victims accounted for 55.4 percent of all the messages posted on the site. Again, this is not unexpected, given that

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) describes itself as an anti-bullying Web site, saying that it is dedicated "to preventing, resolving and eliminating bullying", inviting participants to play an on-line anti-bullying game, and encouraging visitors to take an anti-bullying pledge. As noted in Chapter 3, the site is more "victim-friendly" than it is "bully-friendly", which may encourage messages from victims and their supporters, while simultaneously discouraging messages from bullies and their supporters.

An alternative explanation for the preponderance of victims in the sample harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is that there are simply fewer bullies than there are victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; P. K. Smith et al., 2008). This may be particularly applicable when it comes to the type of bullying reportedly carried out against weaker and less popular students by popular, athletically-inclined "jocks", who constitute only 20 percent of the student body in most schools (Klein, 2006a). Yet another possibility is that people are less likely to self-identify as being bullies, either due to the social stigma attached (Hazler et al., 2006; Ireland, 2000), or to the fact that their behaviour may actually be regarded as socially acceptable and normative by themselves and their peers (Haber & Glatzer, 2007; Morrison, 2006).

While the "own voices" or "standpoint" approach—wherein the research subjects are permitted to tell their own stories from their own perspective—was adhered to as much as possible in this study, 30 of the Web site participants who self-identified as victims ended up being categorized as bully-victims. This was because of their personal accounts of involvement in what could only be

described as bullying behaviour. Some may have felt that their own behaviour was justified for reasons of self-defence or maintaining self-respect, but they nevertheless had engaged in the same type of teasing, social exclusion, rumour-mongering, and physical aggression that is described in most standard definitions of bullying. In fact, 166 of the self-identified victims had engaged at one time or another in some form of retaliatory behavior, and even though they portrayed (or perhaps perceived) themselves differently, many actually provoked or initiated the circumstances that led to their own victimization. This suggests that the proportion of individuals who are involved in both bullying and victimization is most likely under-estimated and under-reported, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, "Causes of Bullying". Next, however, I will turn my attention to the longstanding, commonplace nature of bullying, and to the question of whether bullying has really changed all that much over the years.

## **CHAPTER 5: FROM THE NORMAL TO THE PATHOLOGICAL, AND BACK AGAIN**

It is well established that bullying is widespread and commonplace. In fact, bullying has been observed and studied in many countries around the world.

A few major country-specific studies include:

- Canada (Craig et al., 2000; Hymel, 2002; Pepler, Craig, O'Connell, Atlas, & Charach, 2004; J. D. Smith et al., 2007)
- The United States (Goodwin, 2002; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Phillips, 2007; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001)
- The United Kingdom (Phillips, 2003; Smith, Sharp, Eslea, & Thompson, 2004; Sutton et al., 1999)
- Ireland (Minton, Dahl, O'Moore, & Tuck, 2008; O'Moore, 2000)
- Norway (Olweus, 1978; Olweus, 2004; Roland, 2002)
- Finland (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003)
- Belgium (Stevens et al., 2000; Stevens et al., 2002)
- The Netherlands Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006; Limper, 2000; Olthof & Goossens, 2008)
- Germany (Hanewinkel, 2004; Schafer & Korn, 2003)

- Portugal (Pereira, Mendonca, Neto, Valente, & Smith, 2004)
- Spain (Ortega et al., 2004)
- Italy (Gini, 2008; Smorti & Ciucci, 2000)
- Greece ( Andreou, 2004; Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2007)
- Israel (Tartakovsky & Mirsky, 2001; Wolke & Samara, 2004)
- South Africa (Mlisa, Ward, Flisher, & Lombard, 2008; Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008)
- India (Munni & Malhi, 2006)
- Bangladesh (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006)
- Australia (Cross et al., 2004; Morrison, 2006; Rigby, 2002)
- New Zealand (Adair, Dixon, & Sutherland, 2000)
- Japan (Kanetsuna, Smith, & Morita, 2006; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003)
- Korea (Schwartz, Farver, Chang, & Lee-Shin, 2002; Yang, Kim, Kim, Shin, & Yoon, 2006).

Outside of school settings, bullying has also been observed and studied in colleges (Chapell et al., 2006), prisons (Blaauw, 2005; Ireland, 2000; South & Wood, 2006), the workplace (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Cowie et al., 2002), and cyberspace (Cassidy et al., 2009; Dehue et al., 2008; P. K. Smith et al., 2008).

Estimates of the prevalence of bullying vary considerably, depending upon where the data were collected, what types of observations were made, which questions were asked, and the definition of bullying that was employed. Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority of school students in most countries have either bullied someone else or been bullied themselves at one time or another (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004; Pepler et al., 2008). Some studies in the United Kingdom and the United States reported that 75 percent of school students in those countries had been bullied within the past few weeks or months (Chodzinski, 2004; Griffin & Gross, 2004; C. Phillips, 2003). Canada itself is considered to be one of the “hot spots” for bullying with 54 percent of boys and 32 percent of girls reportedly having bullied someone in the preceding six weeks (Smith et al., 2007).

It is now recognized that bullying is not a “new” behaviour (Morrison, 2007; Phillips, 2007; Rigby, 2008; Roberts, 2006). However, the overall approach has been to treat bullying as though it is essentially a recently transformed or more virulent strain of an older and previously less threatening social malady (cf. Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, bullying studies and anti-bullying programs have proliferated since the late 1990s, with many describing bullying and victimization in terms of psychopathology or medical illness (e.g., Ball et al., 2008; Brousse et al., 2008; Campbell & Morrison, 2007; Dehue et al., 2008; Jankauskiene et al., 2008; Marini, Dane, & Bosacki, 2006). Even if bullying is not described as a “serious health problem” (Dehue et al., 2008), a “public health problem” (Srabstein et al., 2008), or “a pervasive and

serious issue for school mental health” (Zins et al., 2007, p. 3), it is characterized as “a serious social problem” (Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003) or as “a symptom of a dysfunctional social system” (Field, 2007, p. 16).

In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Emile Durkheim (1964b) devoted an entire chapter to what he described as “The Normal and the Pathological” in society. It is interesting to speculate as to how Durkheim, in his own endeavours to distinguish between normal and pathological social phenomena, might have viewed this characterization of bullying as a disease or serious social problem. Certainly there would have been bullying in schools in Durkheim’s time (Midlarsky & Klain, 2005; Rigby et al., 2004) and he would most likely have been aware (at least on some level) of its existence. Durkheim might have asked how a form of behaviour that has persisted for millennia in many different societies and cultures around the world could go from being tolerable and even normal to intolerable and abnormal (at least in some circles) in a period of thirty years or less. He might even have wondered whether it would be accurate to describe something that is so widespread and commonplace as “pathological”. As was the case with his contention that a certain amount of deviance was normal and even functional, Durkheim might well have argued that a certain amount of bullying could be regarded as normal and functional (cf. Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Lines, 2008; Thompson et al., 2002).

## 5.1 The “commonality” of bullying

In Chapter 4, it was demonstrated that [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) was not a true “cyber-community”, in the sense that the term is understood by cyber-ethnographers. It does not meet the criteria of a cyber-community because:

- 86 percent of the messages were posted by one-time visitors to the site
- there were only 15 regular users (i.e., participants who posted three or more messages on the site)
- there were only 40 conversational threads or series of responses
- there was little (if any) development of the sort of on-line and off-line relationships associated with cyber-communities.

It was suggested that the site's inability to evolve into a cyber-community could be ascribed in part to the policies of the site operators, who screened messages for content, removed identifying features and contact details from messages, and declined to facilitate contact between site participants. It could also be that the site participants had relatively little in common in terms of age, location and general interests, except for their overarching interest in bullying. The fact that people from all over the world and from all walks of life would write in to a Web site such as [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in itself attests to the ubiquitousness of bullying.

As Winnie, a high school student from Uganda says in message 474, “our world is full of bullies”. This sentiment is echoed in message 180 by Michelina

from British Columbia, Canada, who says that “bullies are all over the place”, in message 414 by Lindsay from Prince Edward Island, Canada, who says “I’ve seen lots of bullying in my life”, and in message 90 by Natsuko, a Japanese student who reports that there is lots of bullying in the foreign language high school that she is attending in Bangkok, Thailand. Natsuko adds that “in Japan, school bullying is the most common problem in each school”.

There is also a general recognition by the site participants that the majority of people have been bullied at one time or another. Shawnda, an adult from Saskatchewan, Canada, who in message 195 describes being victimized throughout her school years, acknowledges that her “story is not unique”. Ryan, a Canadian teenager now attending school in Michigan, says in message 243 that “I know it happens to everyone”. Jonny, a 24 year-old from Northern Ireland, begins message 283 by announcing: “Like all you guys I was bullied in High School”. Whether it is Kristel from Bangkok saying in message 85 that “everyone has been teased at one point or another”, or Amy from Canada saying in message 933 that “In all of our childhood lives, we’ve been bullied”, it is evident that the site participants do not regard their own victimization experiences as particularly unique. Even those who indicate that they were “not extremely bullied” (like the anonymous author of message 265) acknowledge that they have “witnessed many acts of it”.

In many instances, the bullying reported by the participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) started in kindergarten or elementary school. The bullying continued through junior high and high school, indicating that it was not

necessarily limited to a particular age, grade or peer group. Of the 557 messages posted by bullies, victims, bystanders, and others with firsthand experience who specifically mentioned the duration of the bullying, 172 of them described episodes of bullying that lasted five years or longer, and 182 described bullying that lasted for longer than a year but less than five years.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 5.1 Duration of bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than one year	203	27.8
One year or more, less than five	182	30.0
Five years or more	172	23.6
Not mentioned-not clear	172	23.6
<b>Total</b>	729	100.0

In “I Hope Bullying Stops” (message 211), Crynieka comments that: “I have been bullied since preschool. Now I’m in the 5th grade and I still get bullied”. In “Life After School” (message 320), Michelle from the United Kingdom says: “I was bullied from age 5 to 15 and it never really stopped until I left school”. Similar comments were made by Lisa from Canada in message 787, who says that “I was bullied from grades 4-9”, and Ryan from Canada, who states in message 905 that “I have always been the bullied and this all started in grade 1 and now I’m in grade 8”. This theme is epitomized by message 58, posted by 22 year-old Jeff from Canada:

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<sup>17</sup> The 74 excluded messages and the 196 commentators and respondents who claimed no personal experience with bullying were not included in this analysis.

I experienced bullying from the beginning of it all, Kindergarten. I wasn't mean, rude, or nasty to anyone. I was always so frustrated because I knew I had done nothing at all to deserve coming home from school crying. And yet they still made fun of me. When I was young they called me a girl. As I got older and entered Junior High and High School, the insults turned into faggot, fairy, and every other synonym you could possibly imagine for being gay.

It was evident that bullying often followed victims from school to school. In “Shadows of Light” (message 316), 15 year-old J.D. from California talks about how he overcame bullying at one school by learning Tae Kwon Do and fighting back, but then had to move to live with his grandmother and attend school in another district, where the bullying started all over again. J.D. describes how he resolved the problem at the school in his grandmother’s area by simply ignoring the bully and eventually making friends with him, but then adds that “I’m going into yet another school district”, and asks the other Web site participants to “Wish me luck!”. In message 247, Sue and Eric, the parents of a bullied child, relate that they “have been living in toronto [sic] in the same place for 10 years”, and that their adopted son Stanley had “been to 9 schools” during that decade. In message 708, Natasha from Canada says that she “moved to a new school” to get away from bullying, but that she was bullied at the new school “because [she] was new”.

Message 771, entitled “What should I do? What would you do?”, submitted anonymously “by unknown from Canada”, relates that:

I am a grade 7 student and I have been bullied by people who I thought were my friends. At my old school there was no stopping the bullying especially if people were trying to hurt me. In fact the bullying got so bad that I moved from school to school for at least 5 years before I found a good school that I felt safe in. The bullying was so bad that it was all types of bullying: verbal and emotional and physical.

Again, the above evidence reinforces the finding that bullying is not an isolated phenomenon and that it is not confined to specific schools, where teachers might be less vigilant and more tolerant of bullying, the school administration might be more lax, or the students might share certain attitudes that are supportive of bullying.

**Table 5.2 Location of bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
School	440	60.4
Combination (school, streets, home)	124	17.0
Neighbourhood	22	3.0
School Bus	8	1.1
Parks, playgrounds, recreational	7	1.0
Cyberspace	5	.7
Workplace	5	.7
Family home	4	.5
Other	2	.3
Not mentioned/Not clear	112	15.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In fact, of the 619 Web site participants who claimed personal experience with bullying and provided specific information regarding the location of the bullying, 124 described bullying that occurred across a variety of venues, rather than exclusively in the school environment (see Table 5.2).

In message 83, “Eight Years of Bullying, and Then More at Work!”, 29 year-old Derek from Coquitlam, Canada, reports that he “was bullied non-stop from Grade 3 to Grade 12”. Derek adds that “after leaving high school, I started

a career with a bully boss who nearly destroyed my career and my life. His behavior was so close to that of bullying classmates and teachers that I thought I was right back in elementary school again". In message 250, KL from Ontario, Canada says that she "experienced bullying as child", that she "also experienced bullying" in high school, and that as an adult, she has seen and experienced bullying "in the daily lives of professionals". Clockwork Orange, the anonymous author of message 499, describes how he was "bullied in school...when the kids would kick and tease [him] in the playground", and how he is now "the latest gossip in the particular fandom on livejournal", a Web site where he is experiencing cyber-bullying. In a similar vein, Myriam from Canada (message 536) talks about how her daughter "has been pushed, called names, surrounded in the school yard", "been harassed on the Internet", and has been "receiving prank calls". An excellent example of how bullying can cross a variety of venues is provided in "Inside and Out" (message 593) by nine year-old Destinee from Canada, who says that "they pick on me at school, outside of school, on the bus and when I'm doing my daily activities".

Apart from following victims from school to school, and from school to the neighbourhood or workplace, it was apparent that bullying followed some of the Web site participants from one side of a country to another, and even from country to country. In message 356, Lisa-Marie, an 18 year-old from British Columbia, Canada, says that:

I never really experienced bullying or teasing until I reached 4th grade. That was when I moved to Newfoundland, so I was in a new school. Right from day one, I was not accepted. The other classmates teased me day after day, about the way I spoke and the way I looked.

Lisa-Marie goes on to say that “after two years of living in Newfoundland, I finally moved away, back to my old homeplace in Ontario. I experience some form of teasing there, but not as intense”. Then, she says she “moved once again, to British Columbia”, where she was teased for the “first three years of high school” because of a number of physical disabilities.

In “Too Many Schools, Too Many Fools” (message 354), 23 year-old Jeremy from Australia describes how bullying has followed him across the face of the globe:

When I was two, my parents moved to America. At elementary school I never fitted in. I was teased and often called a foreigner, labeled an Australian. When I was told I was moving to Australia, I was really excited because I felt I would fit in better, but what I didn't realise at the tender age of 5 was that I had picked up a American accent.... The ribbings I got were horendous, "dirty, horrible, stinking yank". It was horrific. I could never understand why they were being mean to me.... When I heard that my family was moving to Papua New Guinea, I was really excited, I just wanted to flee from the people I was being victimised by. My first attempts at socialising fell to bits and this time I hid, shelterd myself in the school library, made friends out of books. Eventually I made friends, but then my family moved back to Australia, a new school , same story.

Jeremy's message is almost identical to message 931, submitted by

Maria:

Well I have had a lot of trouble because of my parents work and I've been bullied since I was 5 year old. In the beginning it was in \*\*\* (my country) because I was talking like a latinamerican person and then I didn't have friends and everyone ran away from me.... then because I had bad results in my class so my classmates used to say that I was stupid ....then here in Nicaragua it has been like that (even worse) I had to change my school because of that. Now I'm in a new school. At the beginning it was cool but then everybody start telling me that I was a b\*\*\* and I felt so bad. Now I've had to change my groups of friends but they still making jokes about me.

In all, 354 of the messages posted on the Web site described bullying as a relatively mundane or commonplace occurrence, 75 characterized bullies as being high status (the “cool”, popular students, or the “in-crowd”), and 27 described bullying as a “normal” childhood activity (see Table 5.3). In this particular instance, all of the messages, except the 74 that were repeated messages or were unrelated to the subject of bullying, were subjected to detailed analysis. The rationale was that even those commentators or respondents who claimed no personal experience with bullying or victimization should have their opinions heard with respect to the normality or abnormality of bullying. More will be said about bullies enjoying higher status or greater popularity than victims immediately below, and also in Chapter 7, entitled “Causes of Bullying”.

**Table 5.3 Bullying as commonplace or normal**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Not mentioned/not clear	420	44.2
Bullying as commonplace (lots of bullying)	354	37.3
Bullies as high status (“cool”, the “in-crowd”)	75	7.9
Bullying as normal childhood activity	27	2.8
Not applicable-repeat messages, excluded	74	7.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **5.2 Bullying as “abnormal” or deviant**

That a high number of the messages described bullying as commonplace or normal, or characterized bullies as being high status, does not mean that the Web site participants—many of whom were victims—were coming out

enthusiastically in support of bullying. While they generally recognized that bullying was widespread and that most people had been bullied at one time or another, they were as apt to describe bullies as being abnormal or deviant as they were to describe them as being normal and conforming. Indeed, close to half of the Web site participants viewed bullying as being deviant to some degree, in many cases describing bullies as lacking in self-esteem or life skills, as losers later in life, or as future criminals (see Table 5.4).

**Table 5.4 Bullying as abnormal or deviant**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Not mentioned/not clear	460	48.4
Bullies as deviant	209	22.0
Low self-esteem, no life skills	95	10.0
Bullies as future criminals	51	5.4
Bullies as losers later in life	35	3.7
Bullies as “sick”, mentally ill	26	2.7
Not applicable	74	7.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>100.0</b>

That said, there were 207 messages where the authors declared that bullying was commonplace or relatively normal, yet on the other hand, that it was deviant or abnormal. Again, this underscores the difficulty involved in taking complex, multi-faceted human discourse and assigning to it a specific (either-or) value or subsuming it under a single category. Thus, these 207 messages involving conflicting or multi-faceted discourse appear in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 (above), counted both as examples of bullying as commonplace or normal, and

of bullying as abnormal or deviant. To do otherwise would have been to distort the views expressed by the social actors.

An excellent example of this sort of multi-faceted discourse comes from message 400, “The Never Ending Story”, submitted by Buck from the United States. Buck demonstrates awareness of the commonality and longstanding nature of bullying: “[it] is something that will be evident in the high schools across the United States as long as there are students who feel they are better than others”. He is aware that bullies may enjoy higher social status than their victims: “in most cases the bully is someone that excels in sports or is a head cheerleader or someone who is very bright”. However, Buck believes that “a bully is someone who does not have the sense to understand that they are really troubled somewhere within their own life”.

The following are just a few examples where recognition of the commonality of bullying and/or that bullies may enjoy higher status was counterbalanced by observations about bullies themselves being troubled or insecure. In message 92, Maria (a grade 10 student from Russia) comments that bullying “exists as long as society exists” and that “bullies are usually the strongest or highest boys or girls in the school”. She adds that “they are people, who suffer from the less of self confidence”. In “What Do I Think About Bullying?”, Veronika from Sweden (message 360) remarks that bullying “happens all over the world, in all ages and its hard to prevent”, but adds that “the bully himself often has problems and take those out on others”. In message 447, 18 year-old Mario from Mexico reports that he “witnessed a lot of bullying from the

cool kids”, some of whom he describes as “rich, popular, good looking bullies”. Mario also notes that bullies “need to hurt others so they can feel good about themselves”. In message 488, written in reply to message 487 from Sarah, entitled “Mean kids are!!”, 13 year-old Christine tells Sarah: “I still get picked on no matter what I do. I just ignore it. Don't worry what other people think”, thereby depicting bullying as something that happens quite routinely and that can usually be ignored. Christine then suggests to Sarah that bullies are “only doing it because they want attention or they want to feel in control”.

Although bullying was often associated with higher status individuals or groups, some messages portrayed bullies as losers later in life. Message 203, “A Happy Ending” was submitted anonymously by someone who had graduated from high school in a small town in Manitoba ten years earlier. This person completed university and started a successful career, and had recently attended his “10 year graduation reunion”. The author of the message recounts how he “was bullied and teased throughout junior and high school....by the ‘in crowd’ and their minions”. He remarks that at his class reunion:

It turns out, most of my tormentors are minimum wage earning manual labourers with screwed-up personal lives. Now, I don't mean to criticize ones occupation, but these people, were, I think capable of much more in life. In a way, I do feel for them. Hockey dreams and jock-like pretensions have been replaced with beer bellies, cigarettes and VLT machines. The nerd did succeed in the end. Seeing the look on their faces when I showed up at the reunion in my Mercedes almost made up for the ten years of hell.

A similar chord is struck in “My Story & Advice for Today's Victims” (message 258) by 24 year-old Sam, who attended “a Catholic high school in London, Ontario”. He recalls that every school day “was filled with people

pushing me, slamming me into lockers, making fun of me, making fun of my clothes, the music I listened to, the job I had, the family I came from, you name it". He asks: "Does any of this sound familiar?" According to Sam, "times may have changed a bit since 1995 but the causes...for bullying haven't....if you dress different, listen to music that's not popular with most of your peers, you're going to be made fun of". Sam says in his message that he graduated from college, owns his own home, and has "a very good career now". He offers the following advice for victims of bullying:

Bullies don't last five minutes in college and university....Oh yeah, and lastly, when you do get to where I am now, just think, while you've stayed the course, done your schooling, get a real job, get a car, house, spouse, etc., chances are, 99.9% of the losers you went to school with will be either dead, unemployed, on welfare, single mothers, in jail, hooked on drugs, or pumping your gas!

"An apology" , submitted by Laura from Canada (message 892), provides a former bully's perspective on how bullying may be carried out to gain popularity, but how bullies have self-esteem issues, and may go on to experience life problems. Laura explains that "it was mostly because the group of girls I hung out with....we were the cool, tough girls of our area". As a consequence, she "got kicked out high school" and was "arrested numerous times". Laura adds that "a lot of my anger and hostility came from being extremely self-conscious.... Putting other people down made me feel that much better about myself". Like others above, she foresees future problems for bullies, including herself:

I just hope all these kids realize that their always is a brighter day, and it's funny because in 10 years from now when you have a good job and are starting a family, have a good life, they'll still be the same old idiots they always were, thinking they're so big and so cool when really, they're nothing

but a joke. Look at me, I was supposed to graduate 2 years ago. I'm now 19 and am still in Grade 11.

At times, recognition of the long-standing, widespread nature of bullying came hand-in-hand with the characterization of bullies as criminals, or as future criminals. In “The Rubbish of Rights” (message 239), David Murphy describes how he handled bullying during his 25 years as a school teacher, claiming that “the courts are so soft on youth crime in Canada that the kids in schools think they are untouchable”. He argues that: “bullying is an assault and assault is a crime....except, it seems, where youths are concerned”. Murphy proposes that “human rights legislation....must be revisited because in [his] view both parents and their bullying children use this legislation against the victims and the teachers who complain”. This is similar to message 295, “It's a Learned Reaction”, submitted by Lindsay, an adult commentator from British Columbia, Canada. Lindsay comments that the bullying problem “is just coming to light” now, adding that “it is an age old situation”. She concludes that: “we as humans seek the weak in many forms of our society. That is why we have Jails, and they are jam packed. Guess what , they are full of bullies”.

In Message 942, Paige from the United Kingdom says that “I am always bullied”, and talks about how bullying crosses various social domains, including “at school”, during lunch breaks, “on my way home from my friend’s house”, and “away from everyone else” (cf. Byrne, 1994; Frost, 2002; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Rigby, 2008). She describes how bullies had at various times engaged in criminal behaviour that actually resulted in their involvement with the criminal justice system—they had “beat [her] senseless”, “slammed [her] head into a

wall”, and at one point had left her with such visible “cuts and bruises” that her mother had “immediately called the police”.

There were many messages where the authors talked exclusively about bullying in terms of abnormality or deviance, mentioning nothing at all about bullying being long-standing, commonplace, or primarily being perpetrated by higher status individuals. In message 645, Hope, a teenage victim from the United States, recounts that she “started to have thoughts of suicide”, and ended up being “committed to a hospital/adolescent training place”. She went to the school principal and “now the 4 girls who harassed [her] are going to court”. In message 711, Jessie—who posted three responses on the Web site, and was herself a victim of bullying—responded to message 708 from Natasha, saying that if the bully “hits you than that’s assault and no one should have to live with it, you really should go to the police about it”. In “They Don’t Understand” (message 845), Tanya from the United Kingdom describes how a group of bullies are vandalizing her house and terrorizing her family, and how her “family now have got to go to court” to deal with the “threatening behavior”. In “ABH victim” (message 850), Gabi from the United Kingdom says that a “girl kicked me in my back half way down some stairs and I received whiplash and was hospitalized”. She reports that “at the moment I have the police sorting out the girl and hopefully do something that will make her stop”.

Apart from this characterization of bullies as criminals, there were messages that described them as being sick, mentally ill, and/or in need of medical or psychological treatment. The anonymous author of message 141, “a

30-year-old woman who was bullied throughout elementary school”, recalls that authorities can blame the victim, not the victimizers:

The teachers noticed a problem because I became shy and withdrawn. They thought I was the one with the problem, and recommended that I see a psychiatrist. I was pulled out of class one morning a week against my will and forced to sit in a psychiatrist's office from grades one through three....I never understood why the treatment for a victim of bullying was to be forced to see a psychiatrist against her will!!! It is the BULLY that needs professional help, not the victim!!!!

In “Someone Help Me”, David, a teenage bully-victim from Alberta, Canada says that “I need help with my anger”:

Some one please help me to control my anger sometimes I just want to beat everybody. If I don't get some help soon I'll be likely to murder someone. Then I won't have friends everyone will try to kill me as of today I have injured about twelve people none of them seriously. But sooner or later someone's going to end up in the hospital and they probably won't get out for a good 6 months.

While only five of the 950 messages were concerned exclusively with workplace bullying, two of those furnished excellent portrayals of bullies as mentally ill. Frosty from Canada begins message 613, entitled “Workplace bullying”, by coming right out and saying: “My co-worker has mental illness. My co-worker was a supervisor when she became obviously ill”. In “I Was Bullied by a Colleague in the Workplace” (message 280), Gina, a teacher from Alberta Canada, relates that:

For seven long years I was bullied by a colleague - someone I worked with very closely. In time I grew to fear her. This made me feel ashamed inside - how could someone as educated and skilled as myself be so afraid? It was hard to understand at the time. What made the abuse so complicated was that at times she was very nice to me and she complimented me and my work. It was because of this that I tolerated everything else. Furthermore, she used the excuse of PMS as being the reason why she was so mean and angry. I believed her and felt sorry for her. But now I know the truth. She was a

bully a workplace bully. She bullied other teachers and she even bullied the principal.

Gina describes controlling behaviours that her colleague engaged in, such as suddenly and unexpectedly getting angry “for the silliest reasons”, leaving meetings in tears and slamming the door behind her “when she could not get her own way”, and standing very close to others and using her body or body language to intimidate others “when she was upset with something”. Gina reports that she finally realized that her colleague “was dangerous”, and says that “I now truly believe that she has a mental illness”.

There were also messages that described bullies as simultaneously being criminals and sick or mentally ill. “It wasn't me on MSN”<sup>18</sup> (message 585), submitted by Tiny from Canada, describes how an incident of cyber-bullying in which he claims he was not personally involved caused one of his “girlfriend's friends” to “go psycho” on him, and to post a message on MSN saying that “she wanted to kill [him]”. Tiny talked about this with the Vice-Principal of the school, who then involved the school psychologist and “brought in the police” in an effort to resolve the problem. In message 895, submitted anonymously in response to message 894—in which a teenage girl from the United Kingdom relates how she and her friend were attacked by a group of bullies, resulting in her friend dying and her being hospitalized—the author asks: “Were those people charged? They certainly should've been - with murder, as well as assault causing grievous bodily

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<sup>18</sup> MSN is an acronym for Microsoft Network that amongst other services, provides access to Internet chat rooms.

harm". She then adds that "those people were positively unhealthy - mentally. Don't let their disease affect you!"

While there were only four messages that dealt exclusively with bullying in the family home, one of them serves as a prime example of bullies being simultaneously portrayed as criminals and as mentally ill. "I Have a Bully in My Own Home" (message 155), submitted by Alice, a "forty-five year old woman" who is the "divorced head of the household" in Canada, outlines in great detail the suffering that has been inflicted upon her and her family by her 15 year-old daughter, Krystal. The mother, Alice, describes how Krystal had threatened to hit "her younger sister Miranda...with a steel framed dining room chair", had torn "an entire wall in her room apart with a two-by-four, and smashed her window", and had bitten her mother's "finger right down to the bone". Alice reports that Krystal had "been incarcerated twice, treated and assessed by entire rooms full of professionals", and that she "could have phoned the police last night" because Krystal "was breaching her probation by not keeping the peace".

On balance, discourse about bullying being commonplace, widespread, longstanding, or (to some degree) normative was more prevalent than discourse about bullying being abnormal, deviant or criminal. As noted earlier, however, many of the Web site participants were victims themselves, and were clearly against bullying. If anything, there was an overall tone of resignation. In message 47, Caleb, a teenager from Florida, reflected: "I know there will always be someone who wants to be a bully, but we need to at least have [school] staff who will stand up and say no you can't be doing that". In message 257, Jill, a

grade 9 student and former bully recounts: "I know it's happening. I see it everyday. It's bullying.... when I think back to my earlier years I realize how I damaged my former best friends life forever". Cheryl, an adult from Delaware (message 312) remarks that: "with regards to bullies, with friends like them, who needs enemies? I've had it happen to me at work and at school". Danielle, a Canadian teenager, says in message 569 that: "I'll always know that there's always going to be bullies. we just need to stand up to them".

### **5.3 Bullying throughout the years**

Olweus, in his 1993 book *Bullying at School*, cautions that there are "indirect signs" that bullying "takes more serious forms and is more prevalent nowadays than 10-15 years ago" (p. 17). This perception that bullying is on the increase or becoming more serious is exemplified by Marsh, Parada, Craven and Finger's (2004, p. 64) statement that "bullying is a growing and significant problem", and by Haber and Glatzer's (2007, p. 9) observation that "the bullying problem seems to be getting worse". Sanders (2004, p. 2) claims that bullying "is more volatile and occurs more often than it did in the past", while the subtitle of Chodzinski's (2004) book about bullying refers to it as "a crisis in our schools and in our communities". As Rigby (2008) points out, however, there is really no evidence to suggest that bullying is any more prevalent or more serious today than it was in previous times (cf. Duncan, 2006; Morrison, 2007).

There were 716 messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) where the authors claimed firsthand experience with bullying and/or victimization, and where it was possible to estimate with reasonable precision when the bullying first occurred.

Of these 716 messages, 400 concerned bullying that had taken place within the past ten years (see Table 5.5). This is consistent with the fact that the Internet has (at least until quite recently) been used more heavily by children, teenagers and young adults (Burrows et al., 2000; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Thus, many site participants could not realistically be expected to describe bullying incidents that took place in the distant past. The prevalence of messages describing recent bullying incidents is further explained by the known demographics of [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) itself (Craig et al., 2007). It could also be explained in part by the Web site's transformation from a bulletin board format to something akin to a chat room format (albeit with asynchronous chat), which seemed to appeal more to younger participants.<sup>19</sup>

That said, the other 316 messages where it was possible to estimate the time framework described bullying that had taken place over ten years ago. This was before interest in school bullying started to gain such popular and scholarly momentum. Sixty-seven of these messages described experiences from over twenty years ago, when there were few bullying researchers, even fewer anti-bullying programs, and little (if any) public interest in the topic. Fifty-eight of the messages concerned bullying that had occurred over thirty years ago, with 35 of them describing incidents that took place well before the time that Olweus (1978) published his ground-breaking work on bullying in Norwegian schools.

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<sup>19</sup> The effects of the transformation of the Web site were covered at some length in Chapter 4, and in Table 4.3.

**Table 5.5 Period of bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 10 years ago	400	54.9
10 or more years, less than 20	191	26.2
20 or more years, less than 30	67	9.2
30 or more years ago	58	8.0
Not known/not clear	13	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100.0</b>

These 316 messages—especially the 67 messages describing experiences from over twenty years ago, and the 58 messages describing experiences from over thirty years ago—offer insight into how little the quality or quantity of bullying has actually changed throughout the years.

### **Severity and intensity of the bullying**

When the severity or intensity of the bullying being described in the messages was analyzed qualitatively in NVivo, many different categories or types of bullying emerged. These ranged from seemingly innocuous (noncriminal) behaviours such as teasing and taunting, social exclusion, and a combination of teasing, taunting and exclusion, to more serious (criminal) behaviours involving at least one offence that could potentially be prosecuted under most criminal codes. The latter includes theft, criminal harassment, common assault, assault with a weapon or assault causing bodily harm, sexual assault, and homicide. To facilitate quantitative analysis of the changes (or absence thereof) in bullying over time, however, the intensity/severity of the bullying was broken down into two categories: noncriminal or criminal behaviour.

Noncriminal behaviour included teasing, taunting, and social exclusion, or some combination of the three, while criminal behaviour included recognizable criminal offences such as theft, harassment, assault, sexual assault and homicide. Although this assignment to one of two mutually exclusive categories might seem arbitrary, it came close to mirroring the actual distribution of the severity/intensity of the bullying being described in the messages. One hundred and sixty-eight mentioned teasing and taunting only, another 163 mentioned a combination of teasing, taunting and exclusion, and 228 mentioned a combination of teasing, taunting or exclusion, accompanied by the commission of one or more recognizable criminal offences. In all, there were only 13 messages that mentioned social exclusion exclusively, without any reference to teasing and taunting, and only 61 that mentioned criminal offences exclusively, without any reference to teasing, taunting or exclusion.

There were the 638 cases where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, and where the values were known both for the period during which the bullying first started and for the severity/intensity of the bullying. As can be seen from Table 5.6, messages concerning incidents that took place over 10, 20 or 30 years ago were somewhat more likely than messages about more recent incidents to report bullying that involved some type of criminal offence. The statistical relationship between the type of bullying (criminal or noncriminal) and the time period in which the bullying took place was weak ( $\chi^2(3, N = 638) = 8.20, p < .05$ ). There were 151 messages about incidents from 10, 20 or 30 years ago that involved some type of criminal offence, as opposed to 137 messages that

were exclusively about teasing and exclusion. This can be compared with the messages concerning incidents that took place less than 10 years previously, where 205 were exclusively about teasing and exclusion, and only 145 mentioned anything about criminal offences. At the very least, this weak statistical relationship lends tentative support to the conclusion that the severity/intensity of bullying has not increased much if at all throughout the years.

**Table 5.6 Crosstabulation of severity of bullying with period of bullying**

	<b>Less than 10 yrs ago</b>	<b>10 or more yrs, less than 20</b>	<b>20 or more yrs, less than 30</b>	<b>30 or more yrs ago</b>	<b>Total</b>
Noncriminal	205 58.6%	87 49.2%	26 44.1%	24 46.2%	342 53.6%
Criminal	145 41.4%	90 50.8%	33 55.9%	28 53.8%	296 46.4%
<b>Total</b>	350 100.0%	177 100.0%	59 100.0%	52 100.0%	638 100.0%

### **Frequency of the bullying**

There were 624 cases where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, and where the values were known both for the period during which the bullying first started and for the frequency of the bullying. To generate an ordinal (rank-ordered) measurement of frequency, the messages were categorized in NVivo as “infrequently bullied” (between one and three times in all) and assigned a score of 1 in the SPSS, categorized in NVivo as “regularly bullied” (three or more times a month, or four or more times a year) and assigned a score of 2 in the SPSS, or categorized in NVivo as “frequently bullied” (every day, every week

or every month, on an ongoing basis) and assigned a score of 3 in the SPSS (cf. Bachman & Paternoster, 2009; Bryman et al., 2009).

**Table 5.7 Crosstabulation of frequency of bullying with period of bullying**

	<b>Less than 10 yrs ago</b>	<b>10 or more yrs, less than 20</b>	<b>20 or more yrs, less than 30</b>	<b>30 or more yrs ago</b>	<b>Total</b>
Infrequently bullied	80 23.9%	13 7.4%	4 6.5%	2 3.9%	99 15.9%
Regularly bullied	57 17.0%	32 18.2%	7 11.3%	13 25.5%	109 17.5%
Frequently bullied	198 59.1%	131 74.4%	51 82.2%	36 70.6%	416 66.7%
<b>Total</b>	335 100.0%	176 100.0%	62 100.0%	51 100.0%	624 100.0%

As was the case with the relationship between the period during which the bullying took place and the severity/intensity of the bullying (see Table 5.6), messages concerning incidents that took place over 10 or 20 years ago were again more likely than messages about more recent incidents to report frequent bullying (see Table 5.7). The relationship between the frequency of the bullying and the time period in which the bullying took place would appear to be slightly stronger than the relationship between the time period and the severity/intensity of the bullying, ( $\chi^2(6, N = 624) = 39.76, p < .01$ ). However, there were insufficient counts in two of the cells, and the effect size for the period of over 30 years ago was difficult to quantify with confidence. Despite that, there were 218 messages about incidents from 10 or 20 years ago that described frequent bullying, as

compared to only 71 that talked about regular or infrequent bullying (a ratio of over 3 to 1). This is in distinct contrast to the messages concerning incidents that took place less than 10 years ago, where 198 described frequent bullying, as compared to 137 that talked about regular or infrequent bullying (a ratio of less than 1.5 to 1).

### **Duration of bullying**

There were 556 cases where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying and where the values were known both for the period during which the bullying took place and for the duration of the bullying (see Table 5.8). Again, to generate an ordinal (rank-ordered) measurement of duration, the messages were categorized in NVivo as “less than one year” and assigned a score of 1 in the SPSS, categorized in NVivo as “one year or more, less than five” and assigned a score of 2 in the SPSS, or categorized in NVivo as “five years or more” and assigned a score of 3 in the SPSS.

The relationship between the time period and the duration of the bullying (how long the bullying went on for) proved to be considerably stronger ( $\chi^2(6, N = 566) = 245.49, p < .01$ ) than the relationships between the time period and the severity/intensity and the time period and frequency of the bullying. To place this in proper perspective, it should be kept in mind that those who were describing bullying that took place in the distant past would be in a considerably better position to look back and reflect upon the duration of the bullying than those whose bullying experiences were of a more recent nature. To illustrate, 95 of the messages that fixed the onset of the bullying at less than five years prior to the

posting of the message also described the bullying as lasting for less than a year. Only eight of those 95 messages described the bullying as lasting for more than a year but less than five years. Clearly, it would have been next to impossible for the authors of those 95 messages to describe bullying that had lasted for more than five years if the onset of the bullying had occurred less than five years ago.

**Table 5.8 Crosstabulation of duration of bullying with period of bullying**

	<b>Less than 10 yrs ago</b>	<b>10 or more yrs, less than 20</b>	<b>20 or more yrs, less than 30</b>	<b>30 or more yrs ago</b>	<b>Total</b>
Bullied less than 1 year	174 66.2%	25 14.1%	2 3.1%	2 3.8%	203 36.5%
Bullied 1 year or more, less than 5	78 29.7%	67 37.9%	21 32.8%	16 30.8%	182 32.7%
Bullied 5 years or more	11 4.2%	85 48.0%	41 64.1%	34 65.4%	171 30.8%
<b>Total</b>	263 100.0%	177 100.0%	64 100.0%	52 100.0%	556 100.0%

For that matter, these three measures of the relationship between the time period and the severity/intensity of the bullying, the frequency of the bullying and the duration of the bullying should all be interpreted carefully. There is no question that each serves in one sense or another to demonstrate that bullying has not really changed all that much over the years. If anything, the measurements of the severity/intensity, frequency and duration of the bullying suggest that things may have been worse 10, 20 or 30 years ago. It must be remembered that the older individuals who related accounts about bullying that

took place in the distant past possibly experienced more severe or life-altering forms of bullying. They were perhaps more likely to remember these experiences and feel compelled to post a message on an anti-bullying Web site such as [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) (cf. Besag, 2006; Chapell et al., 2006; Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006; Rivers, 2001).

The statistical measurements of the severity, frequency and duration of bullying (set out above), viewed in conjunction with a careful qualitative analysis of the messages from individuals who were talking about bullying that took place over 10, 20 or 30 (and even 40, 50 or 60) years ago, suggest that there have been no dramatic changes in the quality or quantity of bullying over the years. The personal accounts that follow represent a minuscule proportion of the 316 messages that could have been presented here; however, to include them all would have taken up well over a hundred typewritten pages. Most of the accounts used below were selected, partly because they had not yet been referred to or quoted in earlier sections of the paper, and partly because they parsimoniously yet accurately portrayed how little bullying has changed throughout the years.

### **Bullying over 10 years ago**

The following messages were categorized in the SPSS as being from over 10 years ago but less than 20 years ago (for reasons of establishing categories bracketing 10 year intervals), but most were actually closer to being from 20 years ago. The anonymous 14 year-old author of message 234, entitled “My Experiences as a Victim Of Bullying”, says that: “I have been bullied all my life. It

all started in grade 1". Although he was only 14 at the time when the message was posted (in 2001), he would now be about 23 years of age, thus placing the onset of his bullying experiences at around 17 years ago, in 1992. At the time he posted the message, the bullying had continued from grade one into "the ninth grade going into ten", and apart from "making fun of [him] for what [he] looked like and what [he] wore", it had progressed to the point where they had started "threatening and throwing things" at him. In "We Are Not Like Them, We Are Better", Gerhard, a then 23 year-old (now 31 year-old), self-described "male computer geek", recalls how he "was tormented for not fitting in" starting in grade 7, putting the onset of his bullying experiences at around 18 years ago, in 1991. Apart from being teased, harassed, and having his class projects dismantled behind his back, he mentions one incident where he had a run-in with a gang leader who grabbed him from behind, and another where he had his head slammed against a locker while he was sitting and reading (he did not see his attacker approaching).

Message 66, entitled "The Hardest Time of My Life", submitted by then 17 year-old Elizabeth from Alberta, Canada, who would be around 26 years of age now, reports that she has "been bullied all [her] life pretty much since...grade 2", putting her earliest bullying experiences at about 19 years ago, in 1990. However, Elizabeth says that it was "at the beginning of grade nine [where] my life hit a major downfall. On September 10, 1997 I was going through a tough time and one of the boys who stole some stuff [from] my house was harassing me a lot!" She recounts an incident where two male friends, with the assistance

of one of her girlfriends, sexually assaulted her in a school washroom. After she reported the incident, Elizabeth says that one of the male's sisters "started harassing me everyday and all her friends too whenever they saw me I would get threatened or pushed and shoved. This went on for months on end".

In "Have Faith" (message 464), R.D., an adult from Canada, talks about how his first real experience with "bullying took place at the age of 14, a time when an adolescent is trying to develop their own sense of identity". Because he "had long hair", he was subjected to homophobic bullying, and "was often grabbed by the hair, thrown into lockers or slammed into doors by groups of four or more". In a series of circumstances that sound remarkably similar to those leading up to any number of the school shootings throughout the late 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, R.D. "began taking weapons to school...first a 10 inch dagger", and then on a later occasion, "went home for...lunch and returned with a .22 pistol". RD describes what happened after he returned to the school with the gun:

I followed one of the worst perpetrators to a secluded area behind the school and aimed at his kneecap. Before I had a chance to pull the trigger, the principal of the school walked up behind me and told me to put the gun down. I did, went to his office, and told him that I was not going to take anymore abuse. The vice-principal said that I should get my haircut because he considered me "an embarrassment to the school". It was only the length of hair.....MY HAIR.

R.D. dropped out of high school but had "attained a degree in Educational Psychology...[and] was able to complete a post graduate degree at one of the best (if not the best) universities in the world". This conservatively places this almost Columbine-like series of incidents at close to 18 or 19 years ago, well

before the rash of school shootings in the 1990s that gave rise to much of the bullying research and to many anti-bullying programs.

Many other messages about bullying that took place during this time period were similar in terms of the seriousness, frequency and duration of the bullying. In message 373, entitled “Is This Bullying?”, Jenny describes bullying that took place “from about age 8 till 15”, estimated to have begun 14 years ago. It involved people who hit her and made fun of her, and who left her “covered in cuts from running from them and bruises from being hit”. In message 666, entitled “I didn’t Understand”, Celestine from the United States says that: “When I was in grade school all the way until high school, I got bullied” (estimated to have begun over 15 years ago, and perhaps earlier than that). She says that she “felt as if no one liked [her]”, and that she “was teased so bad” that she finally punched one of the bullies, resulting in her (Celestine) getting into trouble with the school administration. “Bullying is Not Just in Schools”, by Nancy from Canada, provides an interesting perspective on bullying that took place when she “was working at a hospital in southern Alberta”, where she “was picked on mercilessly until [she] had a ‘nervous break down’”. Nancy says that she “stuck it out for 4 years....and was diagnosed with post traumatic shock disorder 2 years later”. According to Nancy, it had “taken many years of counselling, and a really good husband to help” her recover. Given that her message was posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in 2001, this would conservatively place the onset of her bullying experiences at around 1993 or 1994, well before the appearance of any substantive research or literature on the subject of workplace bullying.

## **Bullying over 20 years ago**

When it comes to the severity, frequency and duration of the bullying, there is no noticeable difference between the messages describing bullying that occurred 10 or more (but less than 20) years ago, and those describing bullying that occurred 20 or more (but less than 30) years ago. In “A Little Bit of Hope From A 26 Year Old” (message 148, posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in 2000), Anne from Canada says that she “was bullied a lot as a child”, and “would be chased or hurt” when she “walked to and from school”. She recalls that her “most painful memory was of being lured into the woods and having four kids jump on me”. This is very similar to message 438, from Tami in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who “graduated from High School in 2000 and was teased in [sic] bullied since first grade”, putting the onset of her bullying experiences at around 21 years ago. Tami reports that “I was called all kinds of names, and got beat up almost everyday in grade school. In Jr. High, I was threatened with violence, and had to leave my classes early to avoid being jumped”.

Message 281, posted in 2001 by then 30 year-old Kelli from British Columbia, Canada, sounds virtually identical to message 66 submitted by Elizabeth from Alberta, which was reviewed at length in the preceding section concerning bullying that took place over 10 years ago. Kelli says that she “was the target of jokes and pranks” by friends, and that “most of these ‘friends’ were males”. Like Elizabeth, she describes how the bullying of her male friends escalated over time:

My pants were pulled down in front of others. I had a bottle of pop poured over my head and they laughed at me because I didn't feel it right away with

my "big" hair. When I was pushed into a large mirror in the basement hang out, there was little concern for me, and more concern about the broken mirror. There was a terrible time when a group of 5 of them had blocked me in a public washroom and had me on the ground in what I was sure was going to end in rape.

The same can be said about message 473, "The Memories Of Junior High School Still Haunt Me", from then 30 year-old MaryBeth (she would now be 37):

How it came about and why I was a target still to this day bewilders me. I think perhaps because I befriended a couple of boys in the neighborhood I just do not know. All of a sudden by a group of 6 girls I was labeled a slut and I hadn't even kissed a boy at this time. I would receive harrasing phone calls, my parents house toilet papered, egged, every weekend. This group of girls would ride by on bikes shouting MaryBeth is a slut! I couldn't ride the bus because they would chant names at me. I was followed and pushed and shoved in hallways at school and after school. I was beat up. BUT the one of the worst outcomes of the bullying is the label that was left on me and boys seemed to think I was easy. One day I went with a girlfriend to babysit. She invited a boy over and he brough several of his friends by as well. I am not sure how it got to this point but all of a sudden 4-5 boys had me pinned down pouring peppermint schnops down my throat and the next thing I remember is waking up in the bathtup naked and all the boys standing above me laughing.

Descriptions of bullying of this nature were not restricted to female-on-female or male-on-female bullying. In message 359, entitled "Getting Away From the Bullies", Bill from Canada reports that he "too was bullied in grade school. This included hitting, kicking, teasing, insults, and sexual assault". Bill, who became a nurse after graduating from high school, goes on to say that "the two worst bullies both died, both while running from the police" and that "of the girls who taunted [him], all are divorced", indicating that this bullying first began well over 20 years ago, and quite possibly closer to 30 years ago.

In "my story" (message 633), Mike from Canada says that his first experiences with bullying "started in grade 4" when he "was 11 going on 12".

According to Mike, “the kids that were [his] friends, were not friends at all. They wanted to beat [him] up before, during and after school”. It is possible to date these earlier bullying experiences at almost 30 years ago, because Mike reports that “during the years of 96 to 98, [he] was working at a small business in the city”. Mike also describes how he was bullied at work:

My boss and the assistant manager would pick on me through the entire work day. During the time they would punch me, make me touch other co-workers body parts and put my head in the toilet. Other times they would make fun of my sexuality in front of customers. I was later dismissed from my duties.

Evidently, Mike’s first bullying experiences at school occurred at a time (around 1979 or 1980) when Olweus’ landmark work on school bullying was published, and Mike’s bullying experiences at work (between 1996 and 1998) occurred at a time when there had been little research or literature produced on workplace bullying.

### **Bullying over 30 years ago**

Although this section is entitled “Bullying over 30 years ago”, for the sake of brevity, it also encompasses bullying experiences that happened well over 30 years ago, in some cases, going back over 40, 50, and 60 years. For example, “My Loss” by Kurt, an adult from Canada, describes bullying that started when Kurt was in grade 2, estimated to be around 1972 or 1973. He suffered “punching, kicking, taunting”, and received “a black eye and a bloody nose” for beating one of the bullies (in this case, his brother) in a game of chess. In “Too Little, Too Late”, an anonymous adult from Saskatchewan, Canada describes bullying that started when he was age 15, estimated to be around 1976 or 1977.

He says he "went through it all. Name calling, getting beaten up in the locker room, have [his] things damaged or destroyed, getting beat up after school in a non-consensual fight". In "Still Hurts a Quarter Century On", posted in 2002, placing the bullying at 32 years ago, Robert from British Columbia, Canada recalls that:

For 5 years, I was constantly the target of verbal and physical harassment. Boys and girls would both call me the worst names, beat me up, try to remove my pants, wheel me around in a garbage can, hang me out of second-story classroom windows, and do whatever they could to make me feel like nothing.

While more has been said recently about homophobic bullying, and its relationship to school shootings and suicidality (e.g., Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006b; Webber, 2003), any number of messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) demonstrate that this is neither a novel form of bullying, nor one that has emerged in the past 10 or 20 years. In message 159, then 72 year-old George (he would be 80 now) recalls how he went to school in Winnipeg, where he "was outed as a gay kid when [he] was in grade 7", conservatively dating the onset of his bullying experiences at some time during the 1940s. George says that "the bullying was pretty persistent most of the time"—he was "picked on a lot and ended up in a lot of fights". In "We Will Survive", Ed from Gander, Newfoundland, describes how his "hell began in grade 8", which according to the information he provided would be about 33 years ago:

In grade 8 I was very aware that I was "different...some people now call it sensitive"...I was more comfortable talking with the girls in my class than the boys....Then it started....Queer, Fag, Homo, Sissy, fagget...there are other names but they are too vulgar to list here...

I thought grade 8 was bad but grade 9 was worse than Hell...One episode that really sticks in my mind is going into class one day and having 2 large magnets on the legs of my set...I was told by my "classmates" they were "fag-magnets" and that I was a strong one!!!!

Retaliatory violence is not a recent development, either. In message 540, Thomas from the United States relates that:

I was born in the late 60's. My family and I moved a lot. I went to 12 or so schools by the time I graduated High School. Nobody took the time to make me their friend and I didn't know how to make friends until I was well out of High School. I don't believe I had a single friend until I was over 30 years of age. Going to school was always like going to a war zone willingly from around 8 AM until 3:30 PM....In JR. High School I stabbed someone. Why? The entire school was out to get me. I had to try and kill or be killed.

In "A School Massacre Averted", Francois from Ontario, Canada (who attended school in Quebec) says that "beginning in Grade 1, teasing, pushing and shoving became a constant worry", and that "the severity of the bullying attacks got worse", to the point where he "began to experience thoughts of suicide":

In secondary 4 in 1977, I snapped. A boy behind me in french class was taking pleasure stabbing me in the neck with his pencil. I jumped up, tried to overturn his desk and attempted to grab his throat to strangle him. Several other students restrained me and the teacher was having a fit. I insulted her and I was pushed out of the classroom. The teacher locked the door, and I continued my fit of rage in the hallway, yelling imprecations and banging on the door. I felt a hand on my shoulder, clenched my fist, swung around and punched. It was the school principal. I then fled.

I walked the couple of kilometers home, wild thoughts of revenge were dancing in my rageful mind. When I arrived home, I ran up to my parent's bedroom and grabbed my father's hunting rifle and ammunition from the closet. I then went to the basement, thinking that I would saw off the stock and barrel in order to better hide the weapon. At that moment, I had the clear intention to go back to the high school and start shooting.

Francois explains that he changed his mind at the last moment, and contemplated suicide instead, “with the rifle between [his] knees and the cartridge in [his] hand”.

There were also messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that pertained to incidents of bullying from back in the 1930s, or earlier. In “My Experience with Bullying”, Ed from Ontario says that:

I can remember a bully at our school His favourite trick was to catch you at the water fountain, you know the type they look like a mushroom but smaller. He would sneak up on you while drinking and jam your head/face down on this chrome fountain forcing your teeth through your upper lip. I was always small for my age and he found great delight to harass me all through primary school.

Ed places these bullying experiences in the 1930s, or possibly even the latter part of the 1920's, through his statement that “years later I met him while serving in the RCNVR WWII same ship”. In a similar vein, message 255 by Jan describes how he “was an outcast during the thirties; i.e., 1935 - 1939, moving about constantly and being attack by each new bully”. Jan adds that he “quickly learned to fight”, and that he “would make sure that the bully suffered even more”.

### **Thomas Brown's Nightmare**

In Chapter 2, it was noted that the third message on the Web site, entitled “School.... the Nightmare by Thomas Brown”, was dated November 2001 (if everything had been in perfect chronological order, it should have been posted somewhere between messages 350 and 400). It is likely that this message was moved by the site operators to a more prominent place in the queue, because it

was a nine-page narrative about personal experiences with school bullying in the 1960s and 1970s, written by an individual who operated (and continues to operate) an anti-bullying program known as "The Broken Toy Project". Thomas starts his message by saying that like most others, he "reacted with shock and disgust" at the highly publicized school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, where two students shot and killed 12 students and one teacher, and wounded 23 others. But then, "as soon as [he] heard that these boys were outcasts targeting certain factions of the school", he says that he "began to understand".

Thomas goes back to the period between 1968 and 1971, when he was bullied incessantly about being overweight. He recalls an incident on the school bus when the "ear flick and slap count [was] at 23" by the time he arrived at school. In P.E. class, he was "the first one to get 'hit' with the dodge-ball", while at the same time dodging "endless remarks about breasts and bras". He moves on to the shower room, where on one occasion someone urinated on him, and on another, someone "with an audience looking on, took his two fingernails, one underneath and one on top of a nipple, squeezing it until it almost popped off". He was left "standing there naked with little rivulets of blood dripping down [his] belly and onto the floor".

Thomas recalls that he "began to do a lot of praying". It seemed that his prayers had been answered when the P.E. coach unexpectedly announced in class that all of those who no longer wished to participate in P.E. could instead work out in the weight room housed in the basement of the adjacent elementary

school. Thomas describes this weight room as “The Dungeon”. There were four students (including Thomas) who took advantage of this offer, but then ended up being tormented by an older student—assigned to “supervise” their activities in The Dungeon—who “would systematically kick, punch and slap” them. On one occasion, their “supervisor” was joined by “three other high-school students” who “had been expelled months ago”. Thomas says that he had “never been hit so many times in so many places in [his] life”.

In 1972, Thomas transferred to a vocational school, partly to learn about printing and film, but mostly to get away from the bullying. At the vocational school, Thomas found “seniors regularly assaulting juniors...hitting [them] with industrial broom handles...smoking pot in the darkroom...urinating in developing fluid:

We were told to never tell about anything...or they would kill us. You know what...I believed them. It got a lot worse as the days and weeks went on. These guys made your average school bully look about as terrifying as Bambi. The torment got costly too. Every developing fluid would get pissed or spit in...ruining a commercial job...I would have to pay for it. And I did. A lot of us juniors did. Whenever Mr. \*\*\*\*\* had to leave the room...it was literally 'open season' on the juniors...except one. \*\*\*\*\* had figured out a long time ago the wisdom of 'if you can't beat em...join em.' And he did... joining right in with the torture.

Thomas fast-forwards to 1996, to a time when he had just finished speaking about his anti-bullying program to a middle-school audience in New Jersey. As he was about to leave, he was “asked to speak to a seventh grader who was waiting for [him] in the library”. Thomas describes the meeting:

With tears running down his face and his voice cracking from time to time, the youngster told me about some boys in his class who were always tormenting him, especially in the locker room before and after

gym....Fighting sobs he told me about being constantly teased...having his underwear pulled down in the locker room...being stuffed into a locker...having his books and papers thrown into the shower...being slapped... pinched...punched.

As Thomas Brown's nightmare comes to an end, he observes that: "life certainly does go on".

#### **5.4 The normal and the pathological re-visited**

The scales employed in this study to measure the severity, frequency and duration of the bullying were developed using a grounded theory approach; that is, these measures were allowed to emerge "naturally" from the data themselves. However, they are not dissimilar to measurement scales employed by other bullying researchers (e.g., Bond et al., 2007; Craig et al., 2000; Gini, 2008; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). All three scales point to a weak to modest relationship between bullying and the periods in time that the messages are referring to. They generally indicate that incidents of bullying reported as happening over 10, 20 or 30 years ago were more likely to be of a severe, frequent, ongoing nature than those reported as happening within the past 10 years. The small but representative sample of messages presented above further supports this observation, with first-hand descriptions of homophobic bullying, serious assaults, and students carrying weapons to school, all happening well before the subject of bullying garnered such widespread attention. Thus, it can be said that my research elicits no evidence that there had been an appreciable change in the severity or prevalence of bullying over time.

Despite the fact that bullying is often treated as though it is abnormal, deviant, or pathological, it was clear that the majority of the Web site participants recognized bullying as being widespread, commonplace, and reasonably typical (if not normative) behaviour. As was seen above, for example, Jill said that: “I see it everyday. It's bullying”, while Danielle acknowledged “there's always going to be bullies”, and Veronika observed that it “happens all over the world, in all ages”. There was a general awareness on the part of the site participants that bullies might actually enjoy higher social status and/or possess more social capital than their victims (Klein, 2006b; Klein, 2006a; Lamertz & Aquino, 2004; Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004; Phillips, 2007). This was highlighted by Buck's observation that “the bully is someone that excels in sports or is a head cheerleader”, by Maria's statement that “bullies are usually the strongest or highest boys or girls in the school”, and by Mario's characterization of bullies as “the cool kids...rich, popular, good looking bullies”.

At the same time, bullies were indeed characterized by some of the Web site participants as criminals or as being on their way to a life of crime, consistent with much of the conventional wisdom on the subject (Ireland, 2000; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998a; Morrison, 2001; Randall, 1997). This is evident in Sam's description of bullies as “in jail, hooked on drugs”, or Lindsay's statement that jails “are jam packed...they are full of bullies”. However, it has been amply demonstrated above, and to a certain degree through the extant research, that bullying has long been (and continues to be) common in schools throughout the world (Bond et al., 2007; Griffin & Gross, 2004; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Phillips,

2007; Sveinsson & Morris, 2007). Therefore, it should not be surprising to find that a sizeable percentage of incarcerated adults have been involved in school bullying at one time or another.

## CHAPTER 6: FEMALE AND INTER-GENDER BULLYING

Much of the available literature rests on the premise that boys engage in more bullying than girls, and that boys also engage in more “direct”, “overt”, or physical aggression, while girls engage in more “indirect”, “covert”, or relational aggression (e.g., Besag, 2006; Gini, 2007; Landry, 2008; Pepler et al., 2008; Sanders, 2004; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). In the wake of the Columbine incident and other school shootings that were said to be linked to homophobic bullying and the construction of “normative” masculinity, there was even a noticeable trend toward masculinity studies. A few examples of such studies include Kimmel and Mahler’s (2003) “Masculinity, Homophobia and Violence”, Phoenix et al’s (2003) “Producing Contradictory Masculine Subject Positions: Narratives of Threat, Homophobia and Bullying in 11-14 Year Old Boys”, Jessie Klein’s (2006) “Sexuality and School Shootings”, and Debby Phillips’ (2007) “Punking and Bullying”.

There have been various explanations advanced for this apparent gender difference in types of bullying. One is that males are naturally more aggressive than females, due to biological differences and other evolutionary influences such as the traditional male role of predatory hunter or protector of hearth and home. In other words, some might say that males are simply “hardwired” differently than females (Field, 2007; Lines, 2008; Thompson et al., 2002; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). However, most—including those suggesting that

biological or evolutionary factors could be related to differences between male and female bullying— would agree that the relationship is considerably more complex. Clearly, there are other situational and social factors to keep in mind, such as gender differences when it comes to what is considered to be normative or socially attractive (Garbarino & DeLara, 2002; Marsh et al., 2004; Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004; Thompson et al., 2002). It has been said that boys place a higher social value on competition, physical strength and dominance, while girls place a higher value on cooperation, socialization and friendship (Besag, 2006; Gini, 2008; Vaillancourt et al., 2008).

In *See Jane Hit*, Garbarino (2006) takes the position that girls are becoming increasingly competitive and aggressive, and are now more inclined to engage in physically violent bullying. Others, however, emphasize that female bullying is neither new, nor is it becoming more prevalent in recent times (Duncan, 2006). In some quarters, it has been suggested that female bullying is as commonplace and longstanding as male bullying, and that there has always been a component of physical violence in female bullying (Besag, 2006; Brown et al., 2007; Odgers & Moretti, 2002; Phillips, 2003; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003).

## **6.1 Is it “female” bullying?**

This chapter addresses two key questions: (a) whether females do indeed engage in a significant amount of overt, physically aggressive bullying, and (b) whether the quantity and quality of female bullying has changed markedly over the years. This investigation is somewhat restricted in scope, because only 368 of the messages provided sufficient information to say definitively whether the

authors were describing female bullying, male bullying, or inter-gender bullying. There were almost as many cases (361, or 49.5%) where the information was insufficient to make a determination in this regard (see Table 6.1). The 74 excluded messages and the 196 messages from pure respondents or pure commentators were not factored into this analysis, because they were either off-topic, repeats of earlier messages, or provided nothing to suggest that the authors had firsthand experience with bullying of any type.

**Table 6.1 Female, male and inter-gender bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Not known-not clear	361	49.5
Female bullying	142	19.5
Inter-gender bullying	132	18.1
Male bullying	94	12.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>100.0</b>

For inclusion in the female bullying category, the bullying had to expressly involve a female bully and a female victim. Only 142 of the messages could confidently be categorized as involving “female bullying”. Of these, two were posted by males. Message 267, “My Daughter is Being Bullied”, submitted by Brad from Manitoba, Canada described how his 12 year old daughter was being “intimidated, bullied, harassed, kicked, shoved” and stalked on MSN by a 14 year old female student. The other, message 196 (previously cited), was posted by 49 year-old Thomas from Nunavut. Although Thomas briefly mentioned having been bullied himself over 45 years ago, he provided considerably more information with respect to his daughter’s bullying experiences:

One of my children (Cynthia) is in a mental hospital suffering from mental disorder brought on directly by young ladies who were bullies in her school. She became very aggressive herself and got into trouble with the law due to drugs and alcohol she would not otherwise be using if she was not bullied in school.

A third message (794), posted by Frankie from Canada, was briefly considered for inclusion under the female bullying category, because it described how the author was being tormented and called names by a group of girls who were “getting violent”. However, this was excluded from the female bullying category, because Frankie—judging by the name and the tenor of his other comments—was most likely a male victim.

Of the 142 messages that described female bullying, 139 were submitted by females (the gender of the author was not known in one case). Messages from males did, however, provide additional insight into female bullying and inter-gender bullying. Seventy of the messages posted by males were concerned exclusively with male bullying, involving a male bully and a male victim. That said, males posted 10 messages about female-on-male bullying and 19 messages about bullying that involved various gender combinations—e.g., males and females bullying females, males and females bullying males, males bullying females and males, or females bullying females and males.

There were also 23 messages from females that were concerned exclusively with male-on-male bullying. Of these, 16 were posted by mothers talking about their sons being bullied by other boys, two were from grandparents talking about their grandsons being bullied, and two were from cousins of bullying victims. Of the 16 messages posted by mothers, seven were posted by the

previously discussed “concerned mother in Alberta, Canada”. She sums up her experience in message 429:

My son was killed in a fist fight. This was not simply about a fist fight over a girl as some people have mentioned. It was my son's precious life. He died from one punch to his face. I wish that kids would realize that fighting does not solve anything. My son was not a fighter, he went because he was afraid and did not want to be called a chicken. My son had many friends, but he was also bullied when we lived in the city because he was smaller than most boys his age and had an undiagnosed learning disability at that time.

The two messages from female cousins were also both about young males who had died as a consequence of bullying. “RIP”, submitted by Princess from Canada (message 885), describes a scenario that is remarkably similar to the one experienced by the above-mentioned mother from Alberta:

[T]he boy who would have now been a man, died in a fight because people think violence is the answer. Well it's not and it never will be. He did not want to fight; he started walking away when this other low life boy gave him a sucker punch right in his temple which killed him instantly. That's all it takes is one hit and you ruin his life, his family's life, and also yours because then you are known as a murderer. The boy who did it had to move schools and everything because everyone knew about what he did.

Message 606, “A's Story”, submitted by Katie from the United States, reports on the suicide of a cousin who had been the victim of homophobic bullying:

My cousin A was a bright young little boy and he was so full of life. He had dreams of going to college to study robotics and things of that nature. During the first four days of his freshman year of highschool he began experiencing bullying by seniors. He was harassed terribly, shoved in his locker, and forced to say he was gay. After four days he emailed a friend and say I can't take it anymore this is goodbye. He then proceeded to his basement where he took a hunting good and took his life. This happened in 1999 when we were both 14 years of age. I miss him terribly and I just want people to know that bullying can cause kids to do some seriously crazy things so think twice before you bully someone!

With only 94 cases known with certainty to involve male-on-male bullying, these seven messages from the concerned mother and the two from female cousins had to be dealt with carefully. They accounted for close to 10 percent of all clear-cut male bullying cases in the study. Taken out of context, they could create the impression that male-on-male bullying often ends in homicide or suicide.

Females posted 39 messages concerning male-on-female bullying, describing themselves as the victim in all but one of those cases. Females also posted 57 messages about bullying that involved various gender combinations—e.g., males and females bullying females, males and females bullying males, males bullying females and males, or females bullying females and males. In 41 of those messages, the females portrayed themselves as victims. The remaining 16 messages from females regarding bullying that involved various gender combinations came from bystanders, bully-victims, mothers, grandmothers, and mothers who had themselves been involved in bullying and victimization when they were younger.

In addition, there were three messages posted by females that recounted incidents of female-on-male bullying. Message 194, entitled “I Am Ashamed to Say That I Was a Bully”, was submitted by Kathy, the parent of a son with autism. Kathy was concerned that her son might eventually become a victim of the same type of bullying that she had engaged in herself when she was younger:

[W]hen I was about 11 or 12 years old I was a bully. I regret the teasing I did to a boy named Danny, he was a new kid at school in my class. I don't know why I teased him, except to say I was not a happy child. I came from an alcoholic home without a lot of support. I don't know what ever became of this boy as he did not come to school on the last day of grade 6. He didn't come back because of the bullying he got at school by me and some of the other kids. I have never forgotten my part in verbally tormenting this boy.

The second message from a female regarding female-on-male bullying (message 584) was submitted by Charlene from Canada. Like message 606 from Katie (cited at length above), Charlene was talking about a cousin who had committed suicide because of homophobic bullying. Unlike Katie's cousin, however, Charlene's male cousin had been bullied by a female:

I can't go on living knowing that the people who tormented my cousin into killing himself. That was blunt but people need to know that what they are doing is wrong and it should have major consequences. Like this girl who tormented my cousin, one of the people who made him choose his decision to take his life, not the only one but one of the main ones, she is on my bus and bullies other kids and I wound up freaking out on her and being extremely blunt when she call this little kid a "faggot" one of the things that bugged my cousin soo.

In "I Wanna Say Sorry" (message (827), Heather from Canada acknowledges her own involvement in a violent case of female-on-male bullying:

I used to be a really big bully without realizing it. But when I realized it I guess it was too late. When someone made me mad or I didn't get my way I would beat up people. Those people were my friends... I realized it was too late when I didnt get my way and I took a stick off the ground and I stabbed one of my best friends in the head. He was bleeding everywhere.

Heather says that she "got off the hook...[no] detentions or suspensions", and that "a couple of years later [she] went and beat up another kid".

In summary, while 606 of the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were posted by females, there were 361 messages on the site where it was not possible to

determine whether they were talking about male bullying, female bullying, or inter-gender bullying. Only 142 of the messages were clearly about “female bullying”. Moreover, there were cases of females describing male-on-male and female-on-male bullying, males describing female-on-male bullying, and both genders describing bullying that entailed various gender combinations, with females being bullies, victims, or both. The numbers in the male-on-female and female-on-male bullying categories were quite small on their own (39 and 13 respectively), so for the purposes of statistical analysis, it was necessary to fold these two smaller categories into the general category of inter-gender bullying. Otherwise, there would have been occasions where the expected cell count in cross-tabulations would be less than five, thereby obviating the use of measurements such as the chi-square (Palys, 2003, p. 354). While quantitative analysis was still employed whenever possible, female bullying was one of the areas of investigation where qualitative analysis proved to be particularly helpful.

## **6.2 Severity, frequency and duration of female bullying**

In earlier chapters of this dissertation, there were numerous messages cited from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that underscored the widespread nature of female bullying. Idella, a 62 year-old retired school teacher, spoke in message 28 about how she and her school mates were especially cruel to refugee children who came to Manitoba back in the 1940s and 1950s. Alice, the 45 year-old mother who authored “I Have a Bully in My Own Home”, outlined how her 15 year-old daughter had threatened to hit her younger sister, had torn apart her own room, smashed a window in the family home, and had bitten her mother’s finger “down

to the bone”. Gina, a teacher from Alberta, related in message 280 how she had been bullied by a female colleague in the workplace over a period of seven years. In message 645, Hope from the United States described how she had been harassed by four girls who were on their way to court as a result, while in message 942, Paige from the United Kingdom talked about how she was “always bullied” by other girls—at school, during lunch breaks, and on her way home. Apparently, female bullying is commonplace and widespread, and does at times involve physical violence. The questions to be addressed here are whether females engage in a significant amount of overt, physically aggressive bullying, and how the quantity and quality of female bullying compares to that of male bullying.

### **Severity/intensity of female bullying**

It appears from the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that male bullying is more likely to be overt and physically aggressive than female bullying ( $\chi^2(2, N = 359) = 43.41, p < .01$ ). Eighty of the 139 messages about female bullying where the severity or intensity of the bullying was known described “non-criminal” behaviour such as teasing, social exclusion, or both, while only 59 of the messages mentioned “criminal” activities like theft, harassment, common assault, and serious levels of assault (see Table 6.2). On the other hand, 79 of the messages about male bullying—again where severity/intensity was known—mentioned criminal activities, whereas only 13 were about non-criminal behaviour. It is noteworthy that messages concerning inter-gender bullying also revealed a greater number of criminal (as opposed to noncriminal) behaviours.

This topic will be explored in greater depth in a later section of this chapter, as a significant portion of female bullying is thought to involve inter-gender bullying, often linked to romantic relationships and issues of sexuality (Duncan, 2006; Garbarino, 2006; Leach, 2006; Underwood, 2004).

**Table 6.2 Crosstabulation of severity/intensity of bullying with female, male and inter-gender bullying**

	<b>Female bullying</b>	<b>Male bullying</b>	<b>Inter-gender bullying</b>	<b>Total</b>
Non-criminal	80 57.6%	13 14.1%	56 43.8%	149 41.5%
Criminal	59 42.4%	79 85.9%	72 56.3%	210 58.5%
<b>Total</b>	139 100.0%	92 100.0%	128 100.0%	359 100.0%

The distribution in Table 6.2 and the chi-square of 43.41 are both indicative of a moderately strong association between gender and the severity of the bullying. The lambda ( $\lambda = .14$ ,  $p = .07$ )—used to measure the proportional reduction of error in predicting one nominal variable based on knowledge of the other nominal variable—suggests a weaker association (Bachman & Paternoster, 2009, pp. 378-379; Levin & Fox, 2000, pp. 380-381; Palys, 2003, p. 352-354). In this particular instance, knowing whether the bullying involves males, females, or a combination of males and females would appear to be of limited value in predicting whether males are more likely than females to engage in overt, physical bullying. However, the effect size of the inter-gender bullying

category—with more criminal than non-criminal bullying—must be kept in mind when drawing inferences from these results.

It was noted earlier in this chapter that the seven messages by the mother from Alberta concerning the death of her son in a schoolyard fist fight made it appear as though male-on-male bullying often involved physical aggression and was apt to lead to serious injury or death. There were also multiple messages posted by females—who outnumbered males by 109 to 15 when it came to such multiple postings—that made it appear as though female bullying typically consisted of teasing, social exclusion, and spreading rumours.

Muni, a 21 year-old female from the United States, was the most frequent visitor to the site. All but one of Muni's 15 messages were written in response to other messages. In eight cases, she was categorized as a respondent only, because she mentioned nothing whatsoever about personal experience with bullying. In the seven messages where Muni did describe herself as a victim, she was almost always talking about teasing and social exclusion. For example, in message 502, written in response to message 501 from Steffanie from the United States, Muni says that "when I was in public school, I was called names such as stinky, stinkbomb, dirty, etc". Another message (745) from Muni was written in response to message 744, in which an anonymous author from the United Kingdom asks: "Why is it people bully more in a village?". Muni replies: "I am sorry you have been bullied so much. I have been bullied too, and it is hurtful and infuriating, I know". In the only message that was not written in response to other messages (message 545), Muni announces that: "I was ganged up on by

two girls at my job....They taunted me and said horrible things like 'you have no friends' and 'are u a virgin?'".

Merriska from Canada, who posted messages 654, 740, 741 and 837, also focussed exclusively on female bullying consisting of teasing, exclusion and rumour-mongering. In message 654, she mentioned how her "friends were picking on [her] and leaving [her] out of all their conversations", and how she could feel the whispers behind [her] back". In message 740, she talked about how she "would ditch [her] friends if they kept picking on the younger children". In message 741, entitled "Evil New Kid", Merriska described her new classmate:

[S]he was kinda wierd. Her ears were big and her nose was crooked like a witch. She had large buck-teeth and she was rathar ugly. But, that doesn't make you a bad person. I tried to be her friend. Her name was Amanda. "Hi Amanda, my name is Merriska and welcome to our school" I said. "Go away" she simply replied. I couldn't believe what had just happened. She was supposed to be the new kid and she wasn't making a effort to be nice.

Zaiga from Latvia—cited previously to illustrate the absence of identity play on the web site—posted two messages (84 and 131). Both messages commented about how it is "very unpleasant if your friend laughs at you", and talked about "one girl who even didn't want to go to school because no one loved her". Zaiga's second message was virtually a word-for word replica of the first one, and would have been excluded as a repeat message, except that the second time around she changed the paragraph structure slightly, and provided her full name, the exact name of the school, and details regarding which grade she was in.

Messages 724 and 725, submitted by Katie from the United Kingdom, were both entitled “The email bully”. In the first message, she announced:

On the 6th of May 2005 the email bully struck!

The girl was called Girl1 and she was also a bully at school, she got...well should I say agitated!

So at lunch-time she went on to the class computer and she knew my email because we used to mates and she sent me an email saying:

Katie was either interrupted while sending her first message to the Web site, or realized that she had left it unfinished, because she supplied the missing information in her second message:

that is what the email read and the title of the email was: TO THE S\*\*\* OF THE WORLD!!!

if you have any more things to help me with please email me

thanks a bunch

In view of the virtually identical discourse found in a number of these multiple messages posted by frequent visitors to the site, a second statistical analysis was conducted. This involved removing the most extreme cases, specifically, six of the seven messages (all about the same son who died in a schoolyard fight), and eight messages posted by frequent visitors that were highly repetitive of their other messages and were all on the identical subject of relatively minor female bullying. This second analysis was done to examine the degree to which a handful of frequent visitors could dominate the discourse and distort the picture of the type of bullying being discussed on the Web site. Once these 14 extreme cases were removed, the degree of association between

gender and severity of bullying decreased slightly. The chi-square went from 43.41 to 36.51. The lambda also fell from .14 ( $p = .07$ ) to .11 ( $p = .17$ ), suggesting that knowing whether it was female, male or inter-gender bullying was of somewhat reduced value when it came to predicting the severity or intensity of the bullying.

These observations are further borne out by numerous messages about overt physical female bullying that were submitted to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). In "My Story That Makes Me Cry" (message 306), Robin, a high school student in Australia, describes how "it started in year seven....all of my friends turned against me. They called me all sorts of names. They made prank phone calls and threats". She goes on to talk about how the bullying turned from teasing, exclusion and threatening to physical violence:

This year I am in year nine and my two friends who I thought were very good friends turned their backs on me. They hit and punched me, embarrassed me, and called me horrible names. But the thing that hurt me the most is that they are now best friends with the girl that bullied me in years 7 and 8. Now they try to push me and they start rumours that are not true.

Another story recounted female bullying that took place in grade nine.

Message 576, by Laura from Canada, says:

When I was in 9th grade a lot of the older guys liked me. Eventually, I began to date one. We were together for a month and the 10th grade girls hated me for that. Before I knew it, I was a victim of bullying....For 6 straight months I experienced a lot. I was shoved into lockers, kicked, hit, pushed, yelled at, and even accused of being a "whore" or "slut" just because guys liked me. I was walking to the caf one day for lunch and behind me 2...of the girls started throwing objects at my head.

In “Being chased” (message 700), Lisa from the United Kingdom relates an incident of female bullying that involved various behaviours of a serious and criminal nature. Lisa was sleeping over for the night at the home of a female friend (whose mother was away for the evening) when this transpired. As Lisa tells it, her friend suggested a game of “blind man’s bluff”, with Lisa wearing the blindfold:

I remember someone pushing me and then I heard a bang as something fell. I took the blindfold off and everything was dark they must have put the lights out. I looked down and saw a picture broken on the floor, Girl1s sister popped out from under a table, gave me a sly smile and then looked down at the picture and started shouting, swearing and threatening me, I was so scared. She even took out a lighter and threatened to light my hair. I ran out their house really scared; I even forgot my stuff. I kept running till I heard Girl1 shouting to me so I thought she would be stopping to apologize about her sister but no, she came up to me shoved me while her sister and cousin came up and her cousin punched me several times, I was at this point in tears and then I saw her sister burning something I only just realised it was my new clothes.

Not all messages about female bullying involved such extreme behaviour, although elements of physical violence or threats of violence were present in many of them. In “Angel to Bully” (message 524), Joanne from Canada describes how her former best friend from grade four suddenly started in grade five to ignore her, to give her “the silent treatment” and talk about her behind her back. Moving forward to grade six, Joanne reports that:

She came back this year and continued where we left off. She hit me with a basketball and laughed. She tripped me and "V" and it was horrifying. She swore at us and everything escalated. I finally realized she was bullying me and "V" and everyone else. I'm trying to stand up to her but she seems so okay with hurting people.

In message 608, Kelly from Canada relates how she had “been a victim of bullying since a young age”. She says that “it wasn’t serious” until she moved to a new school at the age of 14:

[P]eople started to pick on me; they first name called then they threw items at me in the classroom. I remember on Valentine’s Day everyone got a rose from this girl in my class except me. she told me that the other people who were the biggest geeks didn’t get any either. I was this sad loner. I had no friends and everyone was against me.

Kelly adds that:

three girls from one of the gangs tried to get me to come out they were always taking the piss out of me at school. Then one of the five girls hit me in my face; luckily I didn’t bleed.

In “I just took it” (message 876), Megan from United Kingdom says that:

I just used to take it. I never said anything back or when they pushed or legged me up I just carried on walking but one day she decided that she wanted to kick my head in. I walked away. The next day she was making rumours up about me.

There is no question that messages posted by females were more likely than messages posted by males to describe “indirect”, “covert”, or relational aggression. However, it is evident from the above that females do indeed engage in a significant amount of overt, physically aggressive bullying. There were 59 messages about female bullying that involved one or more criminal offences, usually in combination with teasing, exclusion and rumour-mongering. Moreover, there were 219 messages from females where it was not clear if they involved overt, aggressive bullying. It is estimated that there were at least 38 of those 219 messages where the bullying could have been categorized as overt and physically aggressive if a bit more information had been provided. Also, a

number of messages concerning serious incidents of female bullying were subsumed under the inter-gender bullying category, because they involved female-on-male bullying, or various combinations of bullying by females and males.

### **Frequency and duration of female bullying**

There were 348 cases where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, and where the values were known for the gender of the bullies and victims and for the frequency of the bullying. Again, frequency was treated as an ordinal (rank-ordered) measurement. Infrequent bullying meant that the person mentioned having bullied others or having been bullied themselves only once, twice, or three times in all. Regular bullying referred to three or more times a month, or four or more times a year, while frequent bullying referred to every day, every week or every month, usually on an ongoing basis (see Table 6.3). On the basis of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), there appears to be no statistically significant difference when it comes to the frequency of bullying experienced by females, males and various combinations of females and males ( $\chi^2(4, N = 348) = 3.08, p = .54$ ).

**Table 6.3 Frequency of female, male and inter-gender bullying**

	<b>Female bullying</b>	<b>Male bullying</b>	<b>Inter-gender bullying</b>	<b>Total</b>
Infrequently bullied (a few times)	31 23.1%	22 24.2%	23 18.7%	76 21.8%
Regularly bullied (several times a month/year)	26 19.4%	19 20.9%	19 15.4%	64 18.4%
Frequently bullied (ongoing, almost daily, weekly)	77 57.5%	50 54.9%	81 65.9%	208 59.8%
<b>Total</b>	134 100.0%	91 100.0%	123 100.0%	348 100.0%

Almost the same can be said for the duration of bullying. There were 325 cases where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, and where the values were known for both the gender of the bullies and victims and for the duration of the bullying. Again, duration was treated as an ordinal (rank-ordered) measurement. If the bullying lasted for less than a year, it was deemed to be of short duration. If it lasted for more than a year, but less than five years, it was considered to be of moderate duration. Bullying that lasted for five years or more was considered to be of long (extreme) duration (see Table 6.4). In this instance, there was a weak but significant relationship between gender and the duration of bullying ( $\chi^2(4, N = 325) = 13.53, p < .01$ ), with females slightly more likely than males or those involved in inter-gender bullying to report bullying of a short duration.

**Table 6.4 Duration of female, male and inter-gender bullying**

	<b>Female bullying</b>	<b>Male bullying</b>	<b>Inter-gender bullying</b>	<b>Total</b>
Short duration (less than 1 year)	76 59.4%	38 44.7%	42 37.5%	156 48.0%
Moderate duration (more than 1 year, less than 5)	30 23.4%	26 30.6%	33 29.5%	89 27.4%
Extreme duration (5 years or longer)	22 17.2%	21 24.7%	37 33.0%	80 24.6%
<b>Total</b>	128 100.0%	85 100.0%	112 100.0%	325 100.0%

As seen earlier, 208 out of 348 messages (59.8 percent) where the values were known for both gender and frequency described bullying of a very frequent nature—i.e., on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Also, 169 out of 325 messages (52 percent) where the values were known for both gender and duration described bullying that had lasted for over a year, and in many cases, for over five years. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, it is possible that some of these messages from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) represent "extreme" or "unusual" cases, where the bullying was of a frequent and longstanding nature, and the individuals perhaps felt compelled to post a message about their experiences on an anti-bullying Web site.

### 6.3 Female bullying throughout the years

Of the 366 messages where the values were known both for the gender of the bully and the victim and for the time period in which the bullying occurred, 305 described bullying that took place within the past 20 years. This result is not surprising, given that 284 of the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) came from children, 273 from teenagers and 132 from young adults, while only 202 came from adults (34 messages contained insufficient information to determine age, and 25 were repeat messages). Nevertheless, there were 79 messages about female or inter-gender bullying that occurred 10 or more years ago (in some cases close to 20 years ago), 14 about female or inter-gender bullying from 20 or more years ago, and 20 messages about episodes from 30 or more years ago. As was the case with the duration of the bullying, there was a weak but significant relationship between gender and the time period of the bullying ( $\chi^2(6, N = 366) = 23.63, p < .01$ ). Males were slightly more likely than females or those involved in inter-gender bullying to report bullying that occurred a long time ago (see Table 6.5).

**Table 6.5 Crosstabulation of time period with female, male and inter-gender bullying**

	<b>Female bullying</b>	<b>Male bullying</b>	<b>Inter-gender bullying</b>	<b>Total</b>
Less than 10 yrs ago	96 67.6%	44 46.8%	63 48.5%	203 55.5%
10 or more yrs, less than 20	32 22.6%	23 24.4%	47 36.1%	102 27.9%
20 or more yrs, less than 30	6 4.2%	12 12.8%	8 6.2%	26 7.1%
30 or more yrs Ago	8 5.6%	15 16.0%	12 9.2%	35 9.5%
<b>Total</b>	142 100.0%	94 100.0%	130 100.0%	366 100.0%

The Web site is replete with messages concerning serious and/or physically violent female-on-female bullying going back over many years. In “I See It Happening: Observations From A Former Bully” (message 257), Jill accepts responsibility for how she bullied a former friend over ten years ago:

We were best friends for 3 years but as time went on she became over possessive and I felt I needed to break free. It began with harmless avoidance. Well, I thought it was harmless at the time. I never quite gave her an explanation to why I was avoiding her. Later it became worse. A lot worse. Everyday brought a new torture to play on her. One day we would run away from her at all time and the next day I ws making her cry and blaming our friendship problems on her. Everything was her fault. Always. I began to pull her out of classes on a daily basis just to make her cry. It made me feel powerful. Soon, we began to get involved in physical fights where we would both end up slapping one another or punching or pulling eachothers hair. We began swearing at eachother and getting into trouble at school. One day I even made a schedule for her about when she could come visit me at my desk or be my partner at school. I know that is quite sad, but I did and she followed it. We drifted even farther aprt in the next years along the road.

Now we never talk to each other and avoid each other as much as possible. The year after our fighting year, her grades began to drop and was beginning to fail subjects at school. She got into drugs and was doing poorly.

In message 390, 16 year-old Rebekah from Dublin, Ireland describes threatening and harassment that took place over ten years ago that sounds remarkably similar to the type of bullying that caused Dawn Wesley to commit suicide in Mission, B.C. in November 2000 (cf. Coloroso, 2002; Morrison, 2006):

[A]ll of a sudden, half of the girls in school stopped talking to me and complained about me to everyone I knew. There were times when during the weekend I couldn't go outside my house in fear of getting stared at and put down. Girls stopped and looked at me as if I was dirt. I knew I wasn't.. they knew I wasn't, but they never stopped. They got hold of my mobile phone number and every night I would get horrible phone calls and text messages ...calling me fat and ugly. I even got death threats several times. One of them said "Why don't you just kill yourself? or even better, let me do it for you". I never found out exactly who made all these calls. The group of girls that harassed me just kept getting bigger and bigger.

Like Dawn Wesley, Rebekah says she “decided that the best thing to do was to end [her] life”, but “didn't succeed” and eventually “realised it was the worst way to solve any problem”. If Rebekah had succeeded in taking her life, however, it is conceivable that the girls who were criminally harassing her and encouraging her to kill herself could have been charged and convicted, as was the case with one of the female bullies who was found guilty in criminal court of harassing Dawn Wesley.

Another message consistent with this theme, “High School Hell” (message 405), was submitted by Caz from the United Kingdom:

Year nine seemed to get really tough and I was always in the firing line to get picked on because I didn't follow the crowd. The cool crowd decided who they didn't want to speak to over pathetic reasons.... The girls in the year above me were so nasty to me, they phoned my mom up and told her I

wasn't going to be home that night because i would be dead. Two days later, my death was in the local paper. They were sick individuals.

Caz graduated from high school and went on to college, but reports that she was threatened and harassed there as well, by one of the same females who had been bullying her in grade nine:

A girl from my high school got in touch with me the other day using her brother's mobile phone. It wasn't a nice message that was sent either. It went along the lines that I'm a fat slag and I'm going to die and I'll wish I was never born.

On this occasion, however, Caz recognized the behaviour as being criminal, and involved the police:

I grew up and realised that if I keep it to myself, it won't go away, so I phoned the police. They got in contact with the girl and I got my mobile number changed. If she gets in touch with me again, she'll be arrested, so I suppose I have gotten somewhere really. If anything ever happens to me again, I won't be hesitating to go to the police or anyone. Why should I put up with the horrible things that they throw at me?

In message 375, Kara talks about female bullying that took place when she was in grades four and five, which would be well over 15 years ago, because she had since gone “onto high school and college”. As was the case with the bullying described by Jill in message 257 (cited earlier), the severity of the bullying escalated over time. Unlike Jill, who admits to having been the bully, Kara was the victim:

it all started when this girl started calling me a "retard." I think this was because I was in special ed for math. And soon everybody else in the class started following her lead. Soon I was "contaminated." When I walked by their desks, they'd blow on the floor. But that girl was the worst. She stepped up her reign of terror by saying 'You're dead at recess or after school.' She'd walk up behind me in the hallways and kick or punch me. She'd also plan my demise to every sick little detail....She also uttered death threats, saying that her and older sister were going to kill me. I was lucky to avoid her for the

summer. But the next year was filled with a barrage of her terrorism. She even told some other kids that she really wanted to kill me.

**“I No Longer Care by An Anonymous Adult in Ontario, Canada” (message 319) recounts six years of physical bullying at the hands of a group of girls:**

As a child I was taught to 'turn the other cheek' in the face of a fight. My mother explained that this meant I was to walk away in all situations. So I did, and therefore, got beat up on the way to school, at recess, on the way home from lunch, back again, recess and once again on the way home. I was beat up almost every day from kindergarten to Grade 5 by the same group of girls, 'just for fun'. I had no friends and was completely rejected for all those years. My mother knew the beatings were going on because she could see the bruising, cuts, and fear, but she still forbid me from physically defending myself, using the bible as an excuse. 'It is not our way', she explained.

The onset of this physically aggressive female bullying is estimated to be well over 25 years ago, because the message was posted around the middle of 2002, the author reports that the bullying started in kindergarten, and says later in her message that she had been married for some time to a police officer.

In message 870, 43 year-old Dianne from United States describes how she was bullied over 30 years ago, from age eight until eighteen. It started when she and her family “moved to a town where the pecking order amongst the kids was based on physical fighting abilities (girls’ included)”:

There were physical threats, and one afternoon, a group of girls even showed up at my house to beat me up (this was because of false gossip, falsely attributed to me). The only reason the bullies didn't finish the job was because a neighbor saw me on the ground, and she yelled out of her door at us that she was calling the cops--and everyone scattered. (Later on that evening, the ring-leader--and, I think, two other girls--came to my front door, wanting to finish the job. I don't remember what happened to prevent it that time, but it didn't ever get finished.)

I told my principal at school. What he did was, sometimes, when the threats got really bad (i.e. I was going to get jumped on the way home from school), was allow me to wait in his office until all the other kids had gone home. (I

don't remember any of the bullies getting punished for their behavior, but I can't honestly say that they didn't.)

Even when overt physical violence was not specifically mentioned in the messages, many of the reported activities of female bullies included damaging personal property, theft, threatening and criminal harassment. In "There is Light at the End of the Tunnel" (Message 39), written in response to Jessica's message "It's Not Even My Fault!" (message 38), Sara says:

Just like Jessica, my problems started in Grade Four. I also had three 'best friends', who for some reason I don't think I'll ever know just decided not to be my friends anymore. The way Jessica said it, "they dumped me like a piece of dirt" was a perfect description; that's exactly how it felt. I've always been both blessed and cursed with the strongest sense of loyalty, and I spent the next four and a half years trying to regain acceptance from the girls who turned me away. Every time I tried, they would pretend to accept me back into their group - mainly because I was good in school and so eager to please that I would let them copy my homework. Then they would stab me in the back by destroying or stealing my property, verbally abusing me, or trying to get me into trouble. One time they stole a book from me that I'd taken out of the public library.

This message was posted in 1999, which in conjunction with Sara's announcement that she is in "high school now", places the onset of this episode of female bullying at around 15 years ago.

It is evident from this brief review that females do indeed engage in a significant amount of overt, physically aggressive female-on-female bullying, and that the quantity and quality of this type of female bullying has not changed all that much over the years. As will be seen below, females also engage in a significant amount of overt, physically aggressive, inter-gender bullying.

## 6.4 Inter-gender bullying

As noted earlier, of the 368 messages where the values were known for both gender and the type of bullying, there were 39 messages concerning male-on-female bullying, 13 messages about female-on-male bullying, and 80 about bullying involving a variety of gender combinations. Of the 80 cases involving various gender combinations, there were 47 where females were clearly acting as bullies, either alone or in conjunction with male bullies. Because of the relatively small numbers in the male-on-female and female-on-male categories, and to facilitate statistical analysis, all 132 of these messages were subsumed under the larger category of inter-gender bullying.

Not all incidents of inter-gender bullying in which females played a bullying role were of a violent or criminal nature. In “Life Ruined” (message 441), 31 year-old Dave from Australia recounts how he was verbally abused by females at school:

When I was at high school the girls told me I was ugly, stinky and stupid and that I'd never have a girlfriend in my entire life. I hung around with a group of girls and they were always telling me that I was ugly and made me feel worthless. Most of the other girls in the school did similar things to me. It started when I was very young but most of the bad treatment started when I was 10 and it continued until I was 16.

Dave explains that while he managed to get through university and finish a Ph.D, he never felt confident enough to establish a stable romantic relationship as a consequence of bullying he was subjected to at school.

In message 542, Dylan from Canada describes being the victim of homophobic bullying perpetrated by a female:

One day there was a girl named Girl1 she was once my best friend until she thought I was gay because she found out that I called a gay cute. Then I started to say that she a cute girl but then you know That she found a new best friend and then we never hanged out again!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! That's a real bully HAHAHAHA

Dylan, who posted three other messages on the Web site (all of them in reply to other messages), reconfirms this experience with homophobic bullying in his reply to message 548 from Nicole, entitled "A Bossy Bully". Nicole's message talked about how one of her female friends managed to exercise control over Nicole and ten other girls by keeping them frightened of her. In his reply (message 550), Dylan remarks: "I know how you feel in the 4, 5, 6, grad there was this girl named I\_\_\_\_\_ she always thought I was gay but I showed her".

There were also reports of females engaging in threatening behaviour. For example, in "Bullying Must End" (message 82), 13 year-old Rudi from Canada talks about how he has been bullied for four years, and that how "in grade six, it got really bad. They started to get really verbally abusive, until...one girl told me that her mother was going to kill me". Rudi says that he "became worried, and frightened", but there is no indication in his message that he actually suffered any physical harm. This is comparable to the bullying incident described in message 900 from Corey, in which he says that he and a female classmate used to "chat almost all the time" on MSN. One day, however, she got angry and threatened that she was going to beat Corey to death with the help of a few high school students. Corey reports that he "was sort of frightened" and that he had blocked her messages. However, there was nothing in Corey's message to

suggest that his female classmate had either the intent or means to carry through with her threat.

In “I Am a Worried Mom” (message 251), on the other hand, Ingrid from Canada describes how her son was physically attacked by three or four other children. Amongst the participants was an older female relative of one of the attackers:

Hello my name is Ingrid and my son Yousseff was bitten yesterday by 3 or 4 kids between the ages of 5 and 10. They came out from school at lunch time and one of the kids in the group said something very bad about the kid of 8 years and they laughed and my son made a very big mistake to repeat what the other kid said. His classmate of 8 years old got really mad and start to beat my son up. He was with his older sister, a cousin. His brother of 5 years and other cousin they participated and followed my son to our building where we live. My son fell on the snow and he threw snow at them because he didn't know what to do. They kicked him and he managed to stand and run until he got to the door of our building. A person who lives here in the 7 floor told them to stop, and other kid who lives in the 5 floor opened the door to my son and still they didn't want to stop. The big sister was so upset and she hurt my son's hand.

There were also messages about females fighting back against the females or males who were bullying them. In “Will it ever end?” (message 517), 11 year-old Julia from the United States talks about having been bullied by boys and girls since she was five years of age. Julia says: “When I was nine a girl who I hated chased me. I asked her to stop but she didn’t. I ended up kicking her side to get her to stop. That was a happy day”. Julia then goes on to say: “at eleven a boy I liked and now hate has threatened to kill me with a bb gun, a 64 km, and a sniper and a brick”. In “The Hardships of my Life” (message 926), 13 year-old Jennifer from Canada describes one of her earlier bullying experiences: “as first grade came, I encountered a bully, whose name I won’t tell you. He was

very mean and tried to beat me up every day. But I always fought back and once when I was feeling very angry I made his lip bleed". Jennifer ends her message with a comment about her most recent experience with female-on-female bullying: "the girl who hurt me got ditched by all of her friends. She got what she deserved".

While the messages cited above all describe relatively recent episodes of inter-gender bullying, other messages posted on the site indicated that this sort of bullying was not a recent or surprising development. "It Could Happen to Anybody" (message 144), posted anonymously by a teenage female in 2001, talked about how "boys were trying to beat [her] up, and the girls were verbally harrasing [her]" five years earlier, when she was in grade four. She also mentions an incident in grade six when "one kid tried to hit my younger sister so I threw him over the desk".

In "The Locker Room" (message 298), again posted in 2001, 17 year-old Scott from Illinois explains how he was bullied by both males and females when he first entered high school:<sup>20</sup>

Every time I went into the locker room someone did something to me. I was kicked in the groin, shoved in the waterheater, spat on, and snapped with rubber bands to name the creative things. I was also hit, kicked, pushed, and beaten almost every day in that locker room. I also had my pants thrown in the toilet twice (one of those times I got into a fight because of, and I was suspended, unjustly) and my shoe was flushed in the urinal once! My gym clothes were not left in my locker and the other guys played keep-away with my lock every time I turned around. My glasses were taken from me as well as my wallet. I also heard a few sexually inappropriate comments in that locker room....The locker room was not the only place that violence occurred my freshman year. In that gym class, there was a girl who liked to

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<sup>20</sup> Haskell's (2008) study of homophobic and transphobic bullying reported that P.E. classes and change rooms were settings in which this sort of bullying commonly occurred.

claw me with her fingers. She would often claw rather deeply. Before my seventh hour Health and Theology classes (those classes were on a trimester schedule), I was hit, pushed, slapped, pinched, and I had my stuff tampered with almost every day.

“Standing Up For What Is Right” (message 206) recounts an incident when Steve from Canada found himself in the middle of a female-on-female bullying scenario:

one time I stood up for a girl who was being picked on and then I was told to watch my back. And then after school I was confronted by this girl who wanted a fight, so I told her if that's the only thing that would get her to get over it I'd fight her. And I did, luckily for me I only came out with a swollen cheek, and she hobbled home with her nose bleeding.

“Bullied As a Child”, submitted by Sally, a young adult from Ontario, Canada, describes how she “was beaten up verbally and physically everyday after school from Kindergarten to Grade 4 in one public school then Grade 5-Grade 10 in a completely different school system”. Sally recalls that:

While the girls were off playing at recess I was by myself and unhappy because they were teasing me. The part I regretted the most was walking home from school everyday. There wasn't a single day that went by that someone (male or female) wouldn't punch, push me down, hit, scratch, pull my hair....High school was not much better I was pushed around and beaten up by 6 girls while 2 held me down.

Sally mentions in her message—which was posted in the year 2000—that she had completed grade 13 and was attending university, indicating that some of her earlier bullying experiences took place well over 20 years ago, long before the subject of female bullying began to garner attention from educators and social researchers (cf. Underwood, 2004).

In message 158, Anne, an adult from New Brunswick, Canada provides a lengthy account of an inter-gender bullying incident that also took place well over 20 years ago:

When I was eight, after school one day, this was in the winter, a couple girls in my neighborhood, came to my door and they asked me if I wanted to go out and play with them. And I hadn't really talked to these girls a lot because they really weren't that nice to me all the time but I was young and of course I wanted to be their friend....

So we went for a walk and they just kind of, talked and they led me up into the woods. I didn't think anything of it. And as we were walking through, I came upon a string across the road- across the path that I was walking on. And the kids, there was four kids, three girls and one boy. The one girl had blonde hair and she was like about 11. And the boy was 11 as well and then the two other girls were my age. And there was two other kids in the bushes on either side holding the string because they were trying to trip me. And at that point I recognized who they were and I got really scared.

But we were heading back out of the woods so I thought: OK, I can get out of here, you know we're going to get out. And then a couple minutes later, they just started yelling like: get her. And they jumped on me and they were like ripping off my hat and my mittens and hitting me and I don't remember how I got away but somehow I was able to push them off...I managed to get away and I ran home and I was very traumatized.

Message 195, submitted by Shawnda from Saskatchewan, Canada, covers many years of inter-gender bullying:

I am from a rural community in Saskatchewan where the students are with the same class from Kindergarten to Grade 12. For me there wasn't the option of transferring to another school to escape the personal hell I went through. I was always a fairly outspoken girl and I did fight back against the advice to just ignore the taunts. I realized instinctively that wasn't going to be effective in stopping the abuse. I was bullied by the other boys and girls, even to the point where I was hurt physically by one of the boys. There is still muscle and nerve damage from that attack even though I am now 28 years old.

In view of Shawnda's age (28) when she posted this message in 2000, and the fact that she is talking about inter-gender bullying that started in

kindergarten or elementary school, it is likely that the onset of bullying was over 30 years ago, at or around the time of Olweus' (1978) male-specific study of "bullies and whipping boys" in Norway.

### **6.5 Is female bullying "different"?**

A number of researchers have concluded that a significant amount of female bullying is quite overt and physically aggressive. In a study of 31 women aged 16 to 22 who were attending college in London, England, Phillips (2003) found that three-quarters of them had seen other girls fighting, while slightly less than one-half had been personally involved in a physical fight at high school. In a survey of 671 teenage girls in Scotland, 30 percent of them admitted to having hit, punched or kicked someone (Batchelor, Burman, & Brown, 2001). In another study conducted in a high school in New England, Prinstein and Cillessen (2003) found no statistically significant difference between boys and girls when it came to involvement in overt aggression. While girls experience more relational, covert (or indirect) aggression than boys, it has been demonstrated that for girls, this relational aggression is often a precursor to their becoming involved in overt physical aggression (Batchelor et al., 2001; Odgers & Moretti, 2002; Phillips, 2003).

The findings of my doctoral research on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) are consistent with the studies outlined above. There were 82 messages where females were evidently involved in overt physical aggression against female or male victims. There were 42 additional messages where it appeared likely that females were physical aggressors. In many of those cases, it could not be stated with absolute

certainty that females were the aggressors, due to missing information about gender, or to the complex combinations of males and females and the commingling of a wide range of bullying activities, including teasing, exclusion, theft, threatening, and assault. To complicate matters further, many females who participated in female-on-female or inter-gender bullying portrayed themselves as victims rather than as aggressors (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Graham et al., 2007). As will be seen in Chapter 7, some of these self-proclaimed victims were themselves engaging in overt physical aggression toward others.

### **Relational aggression as a precursor to physical aggression**

As noted earlier in this chapter, relational aggression is thought to be a precursor to females becoming involved in overt physical aggression. In message 306, Robin a high school student from Australia remarked that “it started in year seven....all of my friends turned against me. They called me all sorts of names”. Robin then described how in year nine it had escalated to the point where her female friends “hit and punched” her. In another message cited earlier in this chapter, Kara (message 375) reported that the bullying commenced “when this girl started calling me a ‘retard’”. Kara explained how “everybody else in the class started following her lead”, and how this girl then began to “walk up behind me in the hallways and kick or punch me”. Another example cited briefly was “Angel to Bully” (message 524), submitted by Joanne from Canada. A more detailed examination of Joanne’s message shows clearly how relational aggression can transform over time into overt physical aggression:

4th grade: "T" and I were good friends. So were "L" and "R" and I. "T" was a perfect Angel, she was sweet and caring.

5th grade: "T" was still awesome. She was a great friend. One day, "T" just started commanding me and my friend "V" around. Over time, "L", "R" and I dissolved. I was too busy trying to meet "T"'s needs. She'd ignore me, and give me the silent treatment and it was too hard to deal with. I broke down and cried one day and embarrassed myself in front of everyone. Everyone always took "T"'s side. She was the perfect devil. She'd go around bragging and talking behind my back. I heard her call me "fat" and "know-it-all". Thank goodness it finally ended.

6th grade: But not for long. She came back this year and continued where we left off. She hit me with a basketball and laughed. She tripped me and "V" and it was horrifying. She swore at us and everything escalated.

The above messages, cited previously in this chapter, were just the tip of the iceberg. Message 537, submitted by Nyakouth from Australia, reads as follows:

Well there was this day that one of my best friend was away and so I had no one to play with. And one of my friends that my best friend and I had a fight with was hanging around some other people that I hate. It started when they were calling me names like loner, loser, b\*\*\*\* and all of this other stuff that I didn't like and they were saying all of this while I was walking around the whole school. It was soooo annoying that it had to come until I lost it. I got really angry with them and I just turned to them and asked "what is your problem with me" they answered back saying this "nothing it's just fun". and I left there and 30 secs later they started it again and this time I got way angrier than before and I just went crazy and I slapped 2 of the girls and the other two I pulled their hair and then after that they stopped following me....

In "There's No Simple Solution" (message 436), then 20 year-old Lynn from Christchurch, New Zealand describes ongoing relational and then overt physical bullying with an estimated onset of over 20 years ago:

I don't think I knew I was a social outcast until I was about 6, when it was clear that in order to get along in the world, you had to be part of a group of friends. That's when the bullying started. On and off for as long as I can remember, I was taunted, physically beaten, threatened and teased....When I was 16, I was tormented by not only one group of bullies, but two. When

one stopped, the other started, and on it went. I resorted to the only solution I knew- I hit one of the ringleaders.

Message 828, submitted by Olivia from the United States, describes how relational bullying escalated into overt physical bullying in a college setting:

Though most bullying may take place in junior high/high school, I was bullied when I was in college. Two female classmates of mine had acted on their hatred towards me. First, it was the typical petty stuff, spreading vicious rumors about me to my friends/classmates and trying to pick fights with me....My classmates/friends didn't pay attention to what these girls said about me because they had better things to do, like concentrating on their school. These girls became enraged at their failed attempts to bring me down, so they resorted to physical violence. They threw me against the coke machine (where I struck my head, resulting in a gash across my forehead and a black eye), burned me on the side of my face with a car cigarette lighter, and cut me on my left arm with a razor blade.

### **Female bullying, compulsory heterosexuality, and the construction of normative femininity**

Much has been said about the connection between male bullying, compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative masculinity (e.g., Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006b; Phoenix et al., 2003). On the other hand, perhaps not enough has been said about female bullying, compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative femininity (Brown et al., 2007; Duncan, 2006; Landry, 2008). As is the case with compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative masculinity for males, compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative femininity require females to demonstrate interest in romantic and sexual relations with males. Females are also expected to be concerned with their appearance or attractiveness to the opposite sex, dress in accordance with current fashion trends, and act in a gender-appropriate, feminine manner.

There were 29 messages about female or inter-gender bullying where physical appearance, grooming or style of dress were cited as the primary reason (or reasons) for being bullied. There were also 27 messages where appearance, grooming and dress were mentioned in combination with a myriad of reasons, including shyness, being the new girl in town, being unpopular, or having no friends, to mention a few. This does not necessarily mean that appearance, grooming and dress were not factors in other occurrences of female or inter-gender bullying—just that they were not specified in the messages. As it happens, of the 729 messages where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, either as a victim, bully-victim, bully, parent, teacher or bystander, 245 mentioned nothing whatsoever about the reasons for victimization.

That said, many messages specifically revolved around the importance of appearance, grooming and dress—in other words, doing femininity properly. In “Changes” (message 117), JP from Alberta says that “it all started when I was just a little girl. I was short, freckles, red hair, completely outta the norm”. She describes what it was like by the time she was 14 years old:

No one would talk to me, rumors were going around. If I so much as did anything that would put the spotlight on me, new rumors would spring up. Then, over the summer, I had decided to change my ways, I bought a completely new wardrobe, I started to smoke, I started to fit in with the people who for so long had treated me like an alien.

She adds that “I cut my hair so it was short, a weak attempt at changing how people perceived me”.

The anonymous author of “How Can I Get Over the Hurt That I Still Feel?” (message 289), writing from British Columbia, Canada, remarks that:

They teased me about the kind of car I drove, what I wore to school, or even how I looked. they always told me that I was fat and ugly, I was always told that it would be impossible to get my license because I was too short.... They would say that I should not be caught wearing a dress because my legs where fat...

**“Life After Bullies” (message 317), submitted by another anonymous author, this time from The Maritimes in Canada, reads as follows:**

I remember when I was in grade 9 . I wasn't the cool kid or the one with the best clothes. I was shy and liked to keep to myself. I had glasses, acne and hand me downs. Some of the girls use to pick on me and say that I was loose, ugly and was no good. One girl even went so far as to sticking a letter on my desk saying no one like me because of the way I looked, walked and talked. She told me that I should get some Noxzema and get rid of my zit head. She said I would never have a boyfriend or any other friends.

**In “The Effects Will Go On” (message 787), Lisa from Canada recalls:**

I was bullied from grades 4-9, and I still feel the effects, even though I am now in grade 12. The main part of it happened in gr 9. All the girls were starting to wear more grown up clothes, and I didn't really care. They all wore thongs, and so one day when they noticed that I still wore regular stuff, I got the nickname "granny panties," and they often would tease me, calling them pull-ups, and saying that "goodnights make goodmornings".<sup>21</sup>

**Lisa’s message also serves as a good example of how relational bullying can escalate into overt physical bullying:**

I was sitting with one of my friends at lunch when some of the girls came up and started to say that she had been dissing them up over msn and stuff like that. They also brought along this really tall girl with them (who at the time we thought was a grade 12). I just told my friend that if they needed to bring this girl (who neither of us knew) that they must be scared of her. The tall girl then told me to shut up and stay out of it becuae it was none of my buisness. I told her that she should stay out of it too then, cause it was none of her business. She told me that because they were her friends, it made it her business, to which I said that [my friend] was my friend, and it was therefore my buisness too. She then threated to kick my \*\*\* and they left. I didn’t really worry about it, it wasn't anything they hadn't threatened before. We

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<sup>21</sup> According to [www.goodnites.com](http://www.goodnites.com), Goodnites is the registered trademark for sleep pants or underwear for older children who wet their beds.

decided to go out for a walk, and then sat on the curb. The group of girls came up to us, and told us to move. We said no, and the tall girl said "OK, I'm gonna box ur face in." I didn't actually want to fight, so I stayed sitting, knowing that she wouldn't hit me if I was sitting. I told her I'd fight her, once she hit me first (hey, then I could claim self defence). So she kept on telling me to stand up, and I said no. Finally she started to walk off, and she dumped a bottle of coke down the back of my shirt. That made me stand up. A circle then formed around us. At this point I really did want to hit her, but I was gonna wait until she hit me first. Finally a big crowd was forming, and one of the girls who teased me a lot (we'll call her L) pushed me into the tall girl (did I mention that until today I had never seen her before??) and she pushed me away. Then L pushed me again, which is when I decided that I wasn't going to do this, and I grabbed my bag and went in a halfwalk-half run to the office.

The onset of the bullying in all four of the messages cited above was estimated to have been at least 10 and most likely over 15 years ago. The only message on the Web site from France (message 859), posted by Coralie, was also thought to be describing bullying that took place at least 15 years ago, although it is possible that it could have happened 20 or 30 years ago:

My name is Coralie and from age 11 to 14 I was bullied by girls in my class. I was a little blonde and chubby girl, and they give me this nickname: "Grosse pouponne" (Chubby Babe-in-arms in English)

The girls liked to make me cry. One day, one of them take some scissors and begin to cut my hair! Another day, I was surrounded by a group and one girl said, "Hey, I've a good idea, let's take off her shoes!" They did it. "Gee ! Beautiful white socks!!! Hey, girls, who want to see chubby babe-in-arms bare feet?" They took my socks. After, I had to walk barefoot in the corridor (and the floor was very cold!), they tickled my feet and forced me to kiss my own feet!

There were a number of messages describing events of this nature that clearly took place over 30 years ago. In "I Want to Help" (message 88), Leah, a "32 year old mother with 2 young boys" who posted her message on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in the year 2000, says: "I remember the kids that were picked

on. They had the wrong clothes, the wrong look, the wrong car, took the wrong classes". She adds:

When I was in elementary school I was teased about how "skinny" I was. I've hated my body almost my entire life. Now I'm happy that after 2 children I am still "thin". But I will always remember how different I felt. I was also the only 1/2 asian girl among my girlfriends. I was never liked by the boys, and I always wished I was white.

"Effects of bullying are life long" (message 577), by 39 year-old Barbara from the United Kingdom, offers further evidence that this type of bullying has not changed much over the years:

I was just a plain old geek. I didn't have the right clothes. I didn't look right. I didn't act right. I had little confidence left. I was a prime target for bullies. They honed in on me like a pack of vultures. Mainly the girls, but also a few boys taunted me merciless.

It didn't help when one of the most popular girls in school, one year higher than me, moved into a house just two houses away from ours. She would hang around outside after school with her pack of friends and they would laugh behind my back as I walked home. Or she'd shout things at me as I walked to school out of her window, things like "oh barb you are realllllyyyy prettyyyyyy" with fanatical laughter following, laughter that echoes in my head to this day.

### **Femininity, sexual harassment, and homophobic harassment**

Messages concerning physical attractiveness and the construction of normative femininity occasionally mentioned incidents of what could only be described as sexual harassment, sexual assault, or both (Brown et al., 2007; Meyer, 2006). In Chapter 5 of my thesis, "The Hardest Time of My Life" (message 66) by Elizabeth was used as an example of bullying that commenced 19 years ago, in 1990. In her message, Linda recounted an incident in grade 9

where two male friends, with the assistance of one of her girlfriends, sexually assaulted her in a school washroom:

Outside of her room were two guys that me and another girl were friends with, not good friends, but friends....So all 4 of us went walking back to class when we passed the teachers washroom, it's just one of the single stall. The 2 boys pulled us in to the bathroom. Then they turned off the lights and shoved the other girl in the corner. They counted to 3 and dropped me on the ground. The bigger guy held me on my back and put my arms behind me. The other guy kneeled on my feet and he removed my top. The other girl was still in the corner and was told to keep flushing the toilets so no one could hear and to stay there and do not turn on the lights. In the mean time I was trying to fight to get my arms and leave. They started touching me and I kept telling them NO! But they would not stop. They would change places every now and then and when they did I tried to get up but they would push me down and then I started talking hoping someone walking by would hear over the toilette begin flushed and they put there hand in my mouth. To shut me up I bite his hand so hard it left bruises and then they put my sweater in my mouth and took my hands back I was kicking and I got my hands free again and I scratched the other guy all down his arms. And then they held me down even harder so I could not get lose. They removed my pants and they touched me for a bit and then the bell rang. School was over. They both got up and told me if I tell anyone about this I was going to die. They told me to get up and put my clothes back on and we would leave the bathroom one by one so it did not look like anything was going on.

Two other messages cited in Chapter 5 as examples of bullying episodes that had taken place over 20 and 25 years ago respectively were message 281 from Kelli and message 473 from MaryBeth. In her message, Kelli talked about how five of her male friends sexually harassed her and at one time sexually assaulted her:

My pants were pulled down in front of others....There was a terrible time when a group of 5 of them had blocked me in a public washroom and had me on the ground in what I was sure was going to end in rape. I fought my way out, kicking and screaming, even though I was told "If you scream, I will punch you in the head." Still, I hung around the same crowd for a short while longer, because I found some strange sort of acceptance in it.

In her message, MaryBeth described how a "group of girls would ride by [her house] on bikes shouting MaryBeth is a slut!" She said that one of the worst outcomes was that the label of "slut" made boys think she was "easy". When MaryBeth went out to babysit with a girlfriend, her girlfriend invited a boy who brought several of his male friends along. MaryBeth said:

I am not sure how it got to this point but all of a sudden 4-5 boys had me pinned down pouring peppermint schnops down my throat and the next thing I remember is waking up in the bathtub naked and all the boys standing above me laughing.

"I Am A Former Victim of Bullying -Please Help" (message 425) by Kimberly, an adult from Florida, was mentioned briefly in Chapter 2 to illustrate how participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were requesting and receiving replies to their messages. Part of Kimberly's two page message is cited below:

I am a 33 yr old female. I started being bullied in grammar school. I was the shortest and skinniest girl in my grade. No one would want me on their teams in gym, and I was always the last to be picked when we were required to have "buddies". No big deal, it hurt, but I could deal with it....

8th thru 11th grade got worse....I was told daily, for 5 years straight how I was UGLY. I never wore make up, or could afford fancy clothes, but I thought I was cute, clean, and well groomed, but extremely naive. "UGLY,UGLY, UGLY! WHY ARE YOU SO UGLY EMBRYO?????" That's what they used to say to me. I would answer "I don't know". I am not talking about 1 or 2 kids, I am talking about a class of about 100. Their words taunt me to this day.

I never went to a prom, or a dance. I never had a date. I never was invited to any parties. I did not want to go anywhere on weekends, for fear I would see classmates.

In 11th grade, while walking home one night, a boy a few years older had followed me and exposed himself to me. I was innocent, and scared, and called the police. The rest of the year I was called "slut".

“Height + Maturity = Pain” (message 422), by then 20 year-old Annie from California, recounted various incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault that took place over 15 years ago, committed against her by both boys and girls:

I have been bullied since second grade. I had always stood out among my peers, being 5ft 8 inches tall by the time I was 9 years old. I hit puberty that same year. I started my period, I developed breasts, my face broke out in acne, I grew hair under my arms (among other places). Growing pains and cramps practically crippled me frequently and I grew two shoe sizes and two inches taller within 12 months....I was so tall, and my breasts were so developed (I wore a full B cup by the time I turned 10) that it was virtually impossible to buy clothes that looked even relatively CLOSE to the styles that my peers wore. I was often embarrassed by the "adult" style clothes I was forced to attend school in....

For years I literally feared boys (and later men) after going through years of elementary school in which boys would grab my breasts during tag, or intentionally press themselves against my chest when they had to squeeze by me in a doorway (usually a doorway wide enough to accommodate four full-grown adults). The girls would snap my bra straps and steal feminine pads out of my backpack, so they could throw them at me or stick them all over my desk. Girls and boys would frequently try to grab between my legs to do what they called a "pad check."

In an unusual turn of events, Heather a parent from Ontario, Canada, describes how her son is being sexually harassed by a girl whose breast he “accidentally” touched on the playground:

My 11 year old son came home from school just before Thanksgiving informing me that while playing tag on the playground at school he accidentally touched a young girl on the breast. He had apologized over and over again to this young lady but ever since that day it's been a constant battle for him. We didn't find this out until my son came to his father and I with stories of what was transpiring and of the talk he had with the principal of the school and his teacher informing him to stay away from the kids at recess.

Since this incident this young girl been harassing my son on a daily basis with accusations in the playground of him touching her "private parts", while laughing and joking about it with her friends....However, it hasn't been defined to just teasing about the incident it has transformed into teasing

about my son "humping boys", about his weight, his looks, telling both of my children to go back from where they came from and the list goes on.

Some postings mentioned accusations—founded or unfounded—of lesbianism. In “Don't Let Them Get You Down!” (message 30), Bev C from Northern Ireland remarks that:

I am a 15 year old lesbian and at school I am bullied by teachers, not my peers! I was outed to my parents by a teacher and since that I have never felt the same at school. I constantly receive "dirty" looks from teachers and I am usually isolated in class.

Message 645 by Hope has been cited twice before—the first time in Chapter 5, as an example of bullies being characterized as abnormal or deviant, and earlier in this present chapter, to demonstrate the widespread and commonplace nature of female bullying. In her message, Hope described how she was being accused by a female friend of simultaneously being a lesbian and sleeping with her female friend's boyfriend:

This year when school started things were different; people looked at me funny, whispered about me, and gave me dirty looks. one time I even had my best friend come up to me and tell me never to talk to her again because someone had told her I was a lez and I had had sex with her boyfriend which was not true. She and her friend would push me down at track practice and yell names at me.

In “I HATE BULLIES” (message 853), Alex from Canada says that:

I get bullied ALL the time....People always push me into lockers and steal my lunch money.. It's so immature, and it makes me feel bad about myself....And people call me rude names and I've never even done anything to them.. This girl keeps calling me a "flaming lesbian".. She's such a bully! I only have three more years of school left.. I think I can manage. I'm so hungry though because she stole my lunch money!

In all, there were seven messages about females being described as lesbian or gay. As well, there were 16 messages where females were called sluts, whores, “skanks”, “slappas”, or simply “loose”, and 22 others where they were called “cows”, all targeting their supposed failure to conform to the standards of normative femininity (Meyer, 2006). Interestingly, there was one message by Elizabeth from the United States, entitled “Hated For Something I Can’t Change”, where the author’s bisexuality was being described in terms that would more typically be directed toward male victims of homophobia:

There are several people at my school who harass me about being bisexual. Calling me things like "homo", "queer", "sicko", etc. One of them, Boy1, is the worst and he somehow found my AIM screen name and IMed me saying only "queer". I've talked to a teacher that I trust (after he called me a "homo" in class)....

### **Differences and similarities between female and male bullying**

Of the 729 messages where the authors had firsthand experience with bullying, there were 29 messages about males being described as gays, homos, faggots, fags, wusses, or pussies. Similar to the above-mentioned messages concerning females, the attacks were all targeting the supposed failure of the victims to conform to the standards of normative sexuality—in this case, masculinity. The type of bullying detailed in these 29 messages was not substantively different than that aimed at female victims. Message 58 by Jeff, used in Chapter 5 to illustrate the widespread and commonplace nature of bullying, talked about how Jeff was called a “faggot, fairy, and every other synonym you could possibly imagine for being gay”. Message 60 by Ed, cited in Chapter 5 as an example of homophobic bullying that took place over 30 years

ago, described how he “was more comfortable talking with the girls in [his] class than the boys....Then it started....Queer, Fag, Homo, Sissy”. In Message 159, also cited in Chapter 5 as an example of homophobic bullying from well over 30 years ago (most likely 40 years ago), then 72 year-old George said: “I was outed as a gay kid when I was in grade 7.... I became known as what in those day was sort of - the only term I can remember was homo”.

Messages about homophobia directed toward male victims usually contained descriptions of males as being weak, non-athletic, or lacking in courage...in other words, as being less than “manly”. In “Why Me?” (message 160), Stephen from Canada says:

I am the oldest in the school and a very weak person. I didn't even matter to some people, except for my great friend who likes me. I had a friend who threatened me. He told me that I had to bring a condom to school, so I brought it and I'm being hurt. People say that I'm a gay lord and they hurt me. Now I can't trust anybody. I'm more scared and I have scratches all over my legs. I hate to go outside and play soccer with the other kids.

In a similar vein, 12 year-old Levi from British Columbia, Canada asks “Why Does it Happen To Me?” (message 357):

My problem is at hockey practise. There is a really big kid who....calls me fag and other names that I dare not say. He steals my water bottle and shoots the pucks at me -- at my back where I am not protected and punches me in the face. It still hurts, even though I have a helmet on. If I tell...the coaches will think that I'm a baby. And you can't even ask him nicely, he just says no and if I skate away, he'll take his stick and hit the bottom of my skates so I fall down.

There were also 22 messages about male-on-male bullying or inter-gender bullying where relational aggression—i.e. teasing or social exclusion—was clearly a precursor to males becoming involved in overt physical aggression.

“I'm Bullied Because I'm Small” (message 193), by Robert from Ontario, Canada, is one such example:

A couple of weeks ago, my best friend's friend decided to 'take me on' after school. We have been fighting for months. It recently got worse. He teased me and I teased him which was wrong. The news got around. Everyone was on his side. I am made fun of because I'm small. I'm in grade seven and I'm 12 years old and 150cm (4'7”).

On Friday after school, 15 people were on his side waiting to beat me up. I continued to say I don't want to fight but I had no choice. Most of the people pushed me in the deep snow. I had to climb a fence to get to my back yard.

Message 574, another example of how relational bullying between males can escalate into physical bullying, was posted by Karen, a mother from the United States:

My son is in 4th grade and is rather tall for his age. There has been one boy who has bullied him since 1st grade. One year, he (being rather athletic and smart) told my son he could play football. Being excited, my son stood on the lines waiting to be chosen. After the teams were decided and my son stood there the only one not chosen, he asked, "What about me?" The bully said, "Sorry" in a sarcastic manner. This year, this same boy has been calling my son names and began the year with giving him a "bee sting" (painful twist of the skin). At a recent Halloween party, this same boy was there and kicked and body slammed my son and pushed him to the ground.

Karen says that she called the other boy's mother about the most recent incident, but his mother claimed that Karen's son was the bully, not hers. Karen's older son then “stuck up for his brother and kicked the bully”, after which the bully's mother became upset with Karen and her older son.

Several messages that described the transition from relational to physical aggression also mentioned issues of sexuality, or failing to conform to the

standards of normative masculinity. In message 445, Randy asks “I'm Home From School... Why?”:

My name is Randy and I am an 8th grader from Wisconsin. Everyday when I come to school, somebody always makes fun of me. They make fun of me in all sorts of ways. They call me names, make smart aleck remarks about me and they say all sorts of nasty stuff that I never have and would never do. (They said that I f\*\*\*\*\* my 7 year old sister. That is NOT true.) This morning, those bullies have crossed the line. When I was looking at a sign, the two went up to me and started to call me names. I told them to shut up and also told them that this whole monkey business isn't funny anymore.... They didn't listen to me and they called me more names. I got angry so I explained to them that I've been made fun of for 3 years. Yes, 3 years! They ignored me and talked about me. To get their attention, I kicked a few tiny woodchips at them. Both were angry, so they grabbed a rock and threw it at my head. My glasses were sent flying. Angry, I chased after the jerks threatening to kill them.

“I Am Still Bullied” (message 470), submitted by Ryan, a grade nine student from Newfoundland, Canada, is a good example of how relational bullying with homophobic overtones can escalate into something more physical:

The recess bell rang, I ran out of the class room excitedly to go talk to my friends. As I was running I heard this awful screaming noise behind me yelling something that I had never heard before. The word was "Fag" I stopped and turned around to see if they were yelling at me, the answer was yes they were screaming at me! I turned a bright red and the next thing I knew it seemed as if everyone was calling me this word I had never heard of.

So, I finally found out what the word was and I got really offended and upset but instead of telling anyone about this all I did was bottle it up inside me. For the next three years I still was being called that word and every I would pass someone who would call me it I would cringe because I was afraid I would get beat up.

Then one day at the end of grade eight me and my friend were walking out of the school and the next thing I knew I was on the floor with a sharp pain running up and down my back and along my neck. I got up to see what had happened but I couldn't tell because they had ran away.

As noted in Chapter 4, there were 45 messages posted on the Web site where the gender of the author was not mentioned, and there were no tangible clues from which gender could reasonably be inferred. Ten of those messages were concerned exclusively with teasing, taunting, and social exclusion, while another five mentioned both relational and physical bullying. It was thought that around half of those messages were written by males who may have been reluctant to identify themselves or admit to being adversely affected by relational bullying. Moreover, there were 361 messages on the site where it was not possible to determine whether they involved female bullying, male bullying, or inter-gender bullying. Of those, there were 195 that dealt strictly with relational bullying, 43 of which were written by males. Clearly, males do engage in an appreciable amount of relational bullying.

### **Summary**

Judging from the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), both genders engage in covert, indirect or relational bullying, although females appear more likely to engage in this type of bullying than males. Both males and females engage in relational bullying that escalates into physical bullying, and both seem willing to escalate the level of violence if they feel sufficiently threatened or tormented. While males are somewhat more likely than females to engage in overt, physical bullying, there was more than enough evidence of females engaging in physical bullying to dispel any notion that this is strictly or even primarily a male domain. Although the relationship between male bullying, compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative masculinity has

drawn more attention, female bullying also appears to be linked to compulsory heterosexuality and to the construction of normative femininity.

Messages from females were more likely than messages from males to describe relatively recent incidents of relational bullying. However, the dramatic change in the age and gender of the site users between the first and second set of messages had a strong influence in this regard. In the second set (messages 476-950), the number of children, teenagers and young adults increased, while the number of adults decreased. Also, the number of females increased, while the number of males decreased. Where the participants had firsthand experience with bullying and provided sufficient information to make a determination, almost three-quarters of the messages in the first set (messages 1-475) were about male or inter-gender bullying, with well over half of them mentioning some sort of criminal offence. This was in distinct contrast to the second set, where over 60 percent of the messages were about female bullying, and over 60 percent were about recent relational (or non-criminal) bullying.

Messages on the site described female-on-female bullying—including overt physical bullying—going back 30 or 40 years ago. With respect to inter-gender bullying, there were many cases where females were seen to be acting as bullies, either alone or in conjunction with male bullies. Messages on the site described inter-gender bullying—also involving overt physical bullying—going back 20 or 30 years. Thus, the recent upswing in attention being paid to female bullying cannot be explained solely in terms of girls gaining more freedom,

becoming more violent, or engaging in more bullying than they did in the past (cf. Brown et al., 2007; Phillips, 2003).

## CHAPTER 7: CAUSES OF BULLYING

A number of factors have been identified as potential causes of bullying. These run the gamut from serious psychological problems—with school bullies being characterized as conduct-disordered, as future criminals, as junior psychopaths in training—to economic disadvantage, poor parenting, low self-esteem, impulsivity and anger management issues (cf. Field, 2007; Lines, 2008; Rigby, 2008). Victims, on the other hand, are said to have introverted personalities, or to suffer from neuroticism, depression, social cognitive deficits, emotional dysregulation, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (cf. Ball et al., 2008; Brousse et al., 2008).

There is a growing recognition that bullying and victimization may have less to do with psychological or child-rearing factors, and more to do with the working out of age-old issues of social status, popularity, and conformity. It has been reported that bullies tend to be more popular than their victims. In many instances, bullies may be regarded by their peers as normal and conforming, and victims as abnormal or nonconforming (cf. Klein, 2006a; Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004; Phillips, 2003).

At the same time, there has been an increasing awareness that is not always easy to distinguish between bullies and victims. Bullies are sometimes victims of bullying themselves, while victims are also known to engage in bullying. The line between bullies and victims is often blurred, with these roles

being fluid, rather than static (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Marsh et al., 2004). Thus, it is difficult to ascribe one set of causal factors to bullies, and an entirely different one to bully-victims and victims.

## **7.1 In search of the elusive bully-victim**

In his 1993 book *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, Olweus distinguished between what he termed “provocative victims” and “passive or submissive” victims. According to Olweus, passive or submissive victims attracted bullying because they appeared weak and were unlikely to retaliate if bullied. By definition, provocative victims brought on their own victimization through their aggressive or reactive behaviour. Provocative victims also attempted to retaliate if bullied, and would even try to “to bully weaker students” (Olweus, 1993, pp. 57-58). More recently, these provocative victims have come to be known as “aggressive victims”, “victim-aggressors”, or more simply, as “bully-victims” (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000).

There have been varying estimates regarding the prevalence of bully-victims in school populations (Marini et al., 2006; Solberg et al., 2007). In their study of proactive and reactive aggression amongst 1,220 elementary school children in Finland, Salmivalli and Nieminen (2002) found that bully-victims constituted only 1.9 percent of their sample population, as compared to bullies and victims, at 10.6 and 6.2 percent respectively. In a more recent study of 784 middle and high school students in the Midwestern United States, on the other hand, Holt and Espelage (2007) found that bully-victims constituted 11.5 percent of their sample—similar to the percentage of bullies at 14.3 percent and victims

at 12.5 percent. In a meta-evaluation of bullying surveys from England, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, China, and Japan, Eslea et al (2004) reported that bully-victims ranged from a low of 0.8 percent in a survey from England to 19.6 percent in a survey from Spain. This wide variation in findings can be explained in large part by the interpretation of the term “bully-victim” (Solberg et al., 2007; Unnever, 2005).

For my doctoral research, I applied the term bully-victim to Web site participants who openly acknowledged having been both bullies and victims, as well as to those who were evidently involved in both bullying and victimization, even if they portrayed themselves as victims. Of the 729 site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying, only 33 acknowledged that they were bully-victims. Despite my overall adherence to the “own voices” perspective, I re-categorized an additional 30 self-described victims as bully-victims, because it was evident that they were engaged in bullying themselves.

A further 27 of the self-described victims could have been categorized as bully-victims as well—they were undoubtedly victims, but they had also engaged in various types of provocation and/or retaliation. Another 109 victims reported that they had retaliated against the individuals who were bullying them, but only on a one-time basis. Some had acted in self-defense, or had taken what appeared to be a sensible course of action by attempting to avoid the individuals who were bullying them, or exclude them from their social circles.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Avoidance and exclusion behaviours appear frequently in definitions of bullying. Thus, if a victim was deliberately avoiding or excluding someone, then it could be argued that they were themselves engaging in bullying behaviour.

Nevertheless, 166 (29.8 percent) of the 556 Web site participants who described themselves as victims had engaged in some form of retaliatory activity at one time or another.

### **“I’ve Been Bullied...Become the Bully... and Have Reformed”**

As noted above, only 33 of the 729 Web site participants who claimed firsthand experience with bullying openly admitted that they were both bullies and victims. In “I’ve Been Bullied...Become the Bully...and Have Reformed” (message 279), 17 year old Will Z. says:

over the past eleven years I've been bullied (though it continues to some extent at this peak of my life) and later I became a bully myself. Throughout my life I was a victim of bullying, by various groups of boys and girls, from name-calling to physical confrontations- which continuously took it's toll on my health. I was continuously depressed and at few points I've been isolated and I also have isolated myself from the outside world. Ironically, by grade 9, I had enough, and I became the bully. I don't know why I had bullied those weaker than me. It was like I reflected the pain to get the sensation of power, but really, all it was that I was burying my own pain by inflicting on others.

This is similar to the content of message 420, entitled “I Was Once a Bully”, posted by 16 year-old Nicholas from Massachusetts:

For 4 years I tormented people. I brought people to tears just because they tried to be them selves. Why? Why did I do this to people? What makes someone a Bully? Fear. The same fear that stops you from speaking your mind, the same fear that stops you every day from being you. The fear of being made fun of. Every bully has something that they don't want to be made fun of for, so they make fun of you so no one will find out. I was picked on for being dumb....

I left that school and went to middle school. I was happy. People were ok at first, but then I started to gain weight. People started bugging me about it. I wasn't going to go back to hating my self again. So I was with some kids I thought I wanted to be friends with and they started to pick on this kid. He was minding his own business, wasn't even looking around and they just pounced on him. To fit in I started to insult him and believe me I'm not

complementing myself, but I was good. So day after day I picked on this kid so people wouldn't pick on me. I messed with his mind. I made him question everything he did....I left middle school and went to high school. I started to bully kids there to but in a school of four thousand kids I was no match. I was picked on and hated it. I didn't like a taste of my own medicine.

In “Feared by All (Victim and Former Bully)”, Tiffers, a teenage female from Canada, describes how she used to be a bully until a couple of days prior to posting her message, when she stopped bullying and became a victim herself:

I used to be a bully....I was feared by alot of people....well not exactly feared but i did bully alot of people. I like it better this way, not being a bullying. I stopped a couple days ago.I'm not very proud of my bullying but now it's over and in the past, this is now, I am not a bully but a victim. Quite alot of people bully me but I don't care so much, they don't do it very often but they still do.

Whether it is Jody from Canada, saying in message 742 that “I’m not really a bully, or a victim, I’m kind of both”, or the anonymous author of message 847, entitled “Two Ways to Go”, announcing that “I was a bully at the same time I was being bullied”, it is apparent that there is indeed a bully-victim nexus, where individuals may find themselves in different places at different times.

One particularly instructive example of someone who gradually came to recognize that she was a bully-victim appeared in a series of eight messages posted by Brittany, a grade seven student from Canada. The first six messages were all written in response to postings from other Web site participants who had been bullied, with most of her contributions recommending some form of retaliation:

In some cases, I think the bully deserves a taste of his/her own medicine. If he/she is going to be so mean to an innocent individual who has not provoked the conflict in anyway, then he/she needs to be taught a lesson. (message 692)

That's when you have to stick up for yourself they yell at you, yell at them back making sure they get it through their thick skulls (cheesy I know) that what could happen to them. (message 788)

Tell her that you don't want to be mean and all, but that she's bugging you....ask her if she has a problem, and maybe you can help. And if she doesn't have one then tell her to stop making fun of you because it's really bugging you and it's annoying. (message 803)

Tell her this like seriously this. "Leave me alone k just stop! This is getting annoying and I don't know what your problem is? And quit trying to seek attention, and it's not working! Also you're not better than me or anybody else. And so what I live on your street and that's not going to change so give it up! (message 823)

It is not until message 886 that Brittany finally acknowledges that she is in fact both a bully and a victim herself:

I just wanted to say that I really like this website, took me a while to figure out some things though. I put my category as Other because well I was both a bully and a victim of bullying. Actually I was being bullied by the same person that was bullying me.

Brittany indicates that she was planning to apologize to her victim, but before she had a chance, Brittany got in trouble with the police and was suspended from school:

I was going to say sorry....But, before I could I was suspended. So I also wanted to say to people that "thinking about the worse things that can happen, can sometimes be good because it just might change your mind about things." That was March break though since then I've never wanted to make fun of anybody again. I could have been charged by the police, but instead they gave me a warning.

### **“Sometimes 2 Wrongs DO Make a Right”**

While some individuals were prepared to acknowledge that they were both bullies and victims, the majority chose to portray themselves as victims. In

“Sometimes 2 Wrongs DO Make a Right” (message 731), Sally from the United States announces that:

One time a girl came up to me and made a very nasty comment towards me - she claimed I was dirty and smelly and I did not wash. This is a horrible thing to say to an innocent person. This is not a very nice thing to say to someone. Do you want to know what I did? I wrote her a nasty note criticizing her hairstyle. I could tell the note got to her and, boy, did the revenge feel good! Bullies DESERVE a taste of their own medicine. They started it - they were the ones who chose to pick on an innocent human being.

Interestingly, this message from Sally generated one critical reply (message 732) from an anonymous author who remarked that: “You have sunk as low as they have :):) good job you are no better than a bully”. In one of the few cases where there was actually some back-and-forth flow in the conversation, Sally wrote back to the anonymous respondent, asserting her right to retaliate:

In some cases, I think the bully deserves a taste of his/her own medicine. If he/she is going to be so mean to an innocent individual who has not provoked the conflict in anyway, then he/she needs to be taught a lesson. The death penalty kills the killers - and I applaud that. Some crimes I have read about are so heinous and evil that I think the perpetrator deserves to be put to death.

Many of the participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) simply did not recognize—or refused to recognize—that they were as culpable as the individuals about whom they were complaining. In “Why Does It Happen to Me” (message 370), 10 year-old Jazmin from Manitoba, Canada asks:

Why is it that whenever I try to get them back, they just bug me more? There is this group of kids in my school who just HATE me for no reason. They

torment me at recess.. Once one of them wrote '\*\*\*\*\* you Jazmin \*\*\*\*\*' in the girls bathroom. They even tease me about who I hang-out with!<sup>23</sup>

Jazmin describes how she fought back against the individuals whom she perceived to be bullies, and even offers advice to others about how to react in the face of bullying:

I love those few rare moments when I can outwit those girls. My advice to you people out there being bullied; Use your minds to out smart them. Bullies aren't smart. They use their strength and big groups to scare you. In some of those stories I read people were teased about being fat. If that happens to you, just smile and say, 'Like you aren't!'

In "I Was Bullied a Long time Ago" (message 447), 18 year-old Mario from Mexico recalls that:

I was bullied in grade school by two or three older kids who got into my grade, they called me names and I got into one year of bullying until I stood up for myself and fought one of them, I won the fight and they started respecting me from then on....

In this particular instance, Mario may have perceived himself as being the victim, but he evidently engaged in and won a physical fight with one of the bullies. He then recalls his experiences in high school, where he was a part of what he refers to as "the popular crowd", and "witnessed at lot of bullying from the cool kids". Here, Mario was apparently a bystander who might have encouraged the bullying by virtue of his membership in this group. As Mario says, "We as the popular kids were able to get away almost with anything". Later, Mario mentions a time when he personally intervened when someone was

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<sup>23</sup> The asterisks were inserted into this message (and into many other messages) by the site operators, in order to remove swear words and/or to remove features that might allow the reader to identify the author of the message or to identify other individuals who were being discussed in the message.

bullying one of his relatives, again indicating that he was on the giving end as often as he was on the receiving end:

Or take a leaf out of my book, my younger cousin was bullied at school and he was too small to defend himself physically so I went over there, scared the little creep who bugged him and he wont get into problems anymore.

### **“This is Ridiculous”**

Along with fighting back, an equally common approach taken by individuals who were both bullies and victims was to deny that they were bullies, even though they had been identified as such by their teachers and/or their parents. In “This is Ridiculous” (message 941), Nicole from the United States complains that her teachers “say that [she’s] the one that is bullying others”. Nicole’s parents apparently are no more sympathetic than the teachers:

My parents know. But they just think I can get over it. You know what--I cant get over it if all they do is ignore my problems. My parents verbally and physically abuse me....But they think what they are doing is right.

Nicole’s message centres on an incident where someone put chewing gum on her chair at school. She wants to report what happened to the school principal, but is concerned that her version of the events might be discounted:

I want to report the "gum incident" to the principal--but without proof I'm basically screwed. When I hit the girl after insulting me--who did they believe?....The girl. The girl said I cussed her out and then hid [hit] her. I may have hit her--BUT NOT ONCE DID I CUSS HER OUT.

Message 597, “I Can’t Take it Anymore” by Stefania from Canada, offers a comparable example of someone who portrays herself as a victim but is evidently not seen in that light by the teachers, the school principal, or her parents:

Every single day I go to school these two boys in my class make fun of what I am wearing or the way I put my hair up. I just about had it with them so I started to yell at them to please leave me alone. Then the teacher came into the classroom and the two boys lied that I pushed them down and swore at them when I didn't so he sent me to the principal's office and I lost two recesses. Plus my parents don't believe me when I said the truth so I am grounded....GRRRRRR

In “I Get Bullied” (message 102), 15 year-old Lacy from Canada claims that she has been bullied all her life. However, she describes an earlier bullying episode that she had seemingly instigated through her own behaviour toward the alleged bully:

I was in grade eight and this girl who was in my science class and my teacher was never in the class room and I laughed at something that she thought wasn't funny and she exploded!! She got up out of her desk and come over to mine and pushed my desk over including my open binder and it all landed on the floor, then she went for my chair and knocked me and the chair over!! Bullying has happened to me all of my life, it's like I'm prone to it. Anyways, like I was saying, the school called my mom and told her to come to the school because the girl and I were going to be expelled because of what happened. Then my mom gets to the school and I'm called out of class to the principal's office. It turns out that I'm the only one who was on the "last threads" at the school...<sup>24</sup>

### **“Victim gets punished as well”**

According to the postings, parents in the above cases seemed to support—or at least not quarrel with—the school administration’s characterization of their children as bully-victims. However, a handful of parents were as likely as their children to deny culpability. In message 520, “Victim gets punished as well”, R from Canada relates the following:

My son, a grade 7 student was on his way home when he was attacked from behind. He was thrown to the ground and kicked repeatedly. He managed to get up but was again pushed to the ground and kicked repeatedly. A friend of his saw what was happening and ran up and pushed the aggressor to the

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<sup>24</sup> I interpret this as meaning that she is “hanging on by the last thread” at school.

ground. My son was afraid he would again be taken to the ground so he knee dropped the other boy. He did not strike the boy again. When the principal talked to the boys both were given detentions. I have met with the principal to strongly express my disagreement with her decision. She has maintained her position and refuses to let my son off the detentions.

In “A Hurt Mother’s Cry” (message 461), Karen from Pennsylvania reports that her oldest boy (who was then in grade six) had been bullied and harassed since the third grade. She recounts that “he had a few fights in 4th grade protecting himself and standing up for himself”, but adds that “of course it was all his fault according to the other mother”. Karen transferred her son to another school, but acknowledges that there was another “incident”. Karen goes on to blame the mother of one of the other children involved in this subsequent incident:

...a substitute teacher, filling in when needed. She is also president of the PTO at this school and has many relatives in high places in this school district. I was wrong to think she could be an adult about this. She got with the other mothers of the kids...and they called his karate instructor....They asked the guy what kind of operation is he running. Of course my son got jumped on from this instructor.

In Message 232, Catherine from Canada announces that her son has just been arrested for assaulting another student at school:

I was told that he punched a fellow student in the stomach, hard enough to make him cry. My son told me he did not do this, he asked the boy to get his ball (the boy said no), my son said ok, and (to me, it sounded like he tapped him with the back of his hand) in much the same way that you would if you wanted someone's attention. My son is 12, he was handcuffed, read his rights, and taken to a locked room at the local police station.

It became clear that this was not the first time that Catherine’s son had been in trouble for fighting at school:

At the beginning of the year, another boy who my son had become friends with, who also has very strong leadership capabilities, started picking on my son. Not in typical bully fashion, more like jealousy. Always picking fights, they were both sent to the office many times for fighting, etc.

In fact, her son's involvement in fighting appeared to be part of a repetitive pattern:

A few months ago my son and a buddy were walking along the road, when they met two boys that they knew. They (all four) decided to have a play fight. A passerby saw them and thought they were too rough and told them to break it up. He was told that they were only playing, but he said that he would call the police. A principal from another school happened by, (near 5:00p.m.) and confirmed that they could indeed call the police. The next day my son was suspended for three days.

### **Retaliation as a cause and consequence of bullying**

Retaliation can be regarded as both a cause and a consequence of bullying. As noted earlier in this chapter, 166 of the self-categorized victims mentioned engaging in retaliatory activity. Indeed, of the 729 Web site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying, 248 (34 percent) had retaliated at some point or another against those whom they perceived to be the oppressors or tormenters. While the most common response to bullying was avoidance or exclusion at 33.1 percent, physical retaliation came in a close second at 26.6 percent (see Table 7.1). In fact, of the 44 messages that described multiple forms of retaliation—for example, a combination of exclusion, teasing or rumour-mongering—20 included elements of physical attacks as well. If these additional 20 messages had been categorized under physical retaliation alone, rather than under multiple retaliation, then the physical retaliation category would have been the largest.

**Table 7.1 Type of retaliation**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Avoiding/excluding bullies	82	33.1
Physical	66	26.6
Verbal	51	20.6
Multiple	44	17.7
Other	5	2.0
<b>Total</b>	248	100.0

It is not difficult to see how instigation can lead to retaliation, which can in turn lead to escalation. In message 20, 12 year-old Chase from Canada says that he feels like he's going to "lose it":

I often get teased a ton. Not like big bad old bullies trying to steal me lunch money or anything like that. I'm not vary good at anything that is "cool".... I get picked on by being put down or people spreading rumours or cracking jokes about me....Once I pretty much lost it and grabbed a kid (a lot bigger than me) and in pure anger I threw him across the room and on top of a desk (which later fell on him. That just made it worse. That was about 3 months ago and it is just as bad as ever.

In message 103, Barb, a grandmother from Canada, asks for help with her grandson:

My grandson is in grade 9. He is 16 and for the past 2 months a bunch of kids have been bullying him. He hit one last month when the boy tried to punch him down a flight of stairs. The bully went nuts and the teachers had to lock my grandson in a room so the kid could not get him. The bully was kicked out of school now. The other kids have said they are going to stab my grandson and he is scared to go to school. I have tried to get him in a school where I live, but they will not take him because their numbers are to high. What can I do for him? I cannot get help. He needs to go to school please help us.

Violent retaliation has been characterized as a relatively recent and alarming development, especially when mentioned in connection with fatal school shootings such as Columbine or Red Lake High in Minnesota, where the

perpetrators were said to be victims of bullying (cf. Beran, 2008; McCabe & Martin, 2005; Morrison, 2007). However, as Ray from British Columbia sets out in “Bullying in Canada in the 1960’s” (message 365), violent responses to bullying are by no means new:

I was also teased for many years from grade 4 to grade 9 and later a bit in highschool. Children would call me names because my name was long and I was smart. Classmates don't like if anyone is too smart. One day in grade nine I jabbed the bully in front of me with a pen. I went out for recess and then some people who saw me do this decided to have an ink fight just for fun. Although I didn't take part, all the people who bullied me and I were hauled into the teacher's office to get punished.

In “How I Have Dealt With Bullying Throughout My Life” (message 264), Francois, who immigrated from South Africa to Canada in the 1960s as a child, describes how he took on a bully in grade eight:

In grade eight, when a gym teacher didn't stop the bully from a very dangerous act, I took matters into my own hands. Hanging more than twenty feet above the gym floor on a rope while the bully swung it vigorously in an attempt to make me fall made it a matter of life or death for me. The teacher, who witnessed the act, did nothing to stop the bully. I slid down the rope, and when my feet hit the floor, despite the pain of rope burns, I promptly struck the perpetrator and broke his jaw. This resulted in my being sent to the principal's office and probable expulsion proceedings against me.

Educators and the designers of anti-bullying programs strongly discourage physical retaliation, because it arguably leads to escalation. Moreover, the victim frequently loses the battle, and as often as not, the victim comes to be viewed as a troublesome student, or perhaps even as a bully (cf. Field, 2007; Rigby, 2008). Certainly this was the case with Ray and Francois (above), who were both singled out for punishment, although they claimed they did not initiate the aggression themselves.

That said, 29 out of the 66 messages (44 percent) that mentioned physical—rather than verbal or emotional—retaliation also described bullying outcomes in positive (rather than negative) terms. In addition, nine out of the 20 messages (45 percent) that mentioned multiple retaliation (including physical retaliation) also described bullying outcomes in positive terms. While educators and designers of anti-bullying programs might not approve, a high percentage of victims and bully-victims apparently found physical retaliation to be a satisfactory solution to their problems. Even if it does not end the bullying, in some cases there is a sense of standing up for oneself, of not simply “taking it” endlessly.

“I Just Got Picked On Mum” (message 210), posted anonymously by a female teenager from the United Kingdom, illustrates this well. She says that “in class people used to throw stuff at me and my friends and say we were \*\*\*\*\*, boffs, nerds, geeks, freaks”:

One day when a girl in my class called \*\*\*\*\* kept on hitting the back of my chair, it was the last straw. At the end of school, waiting for the bus, she approached me and said some nasty things to me and my friends. So after a short argument with myself, I walked up to her and slapped her round the face. She tried to hit me back, but as I knew self-defence she had no chance. She ended up on the floor.

The author concludes the message by announcing: “Nobody picks on me or my friend anymore....I don't really think you should start a fight with a bully but, it worked for me”.

In “The Lunch Table Bully” (message 718), Tracey from the United States reports a similar outcome:

When I was in sixth grade, there was this girl that would bully everyone at the lunch table. I started taking a self defense class. One day, I used my skills.

She had been treating everyone like a dog, me the most. One day at lunch, she was commanding me like a dog and I "disobeyed" her. We had a nail digging "contest" and then her hand was on top of mine. I pulled my strength together and used her own hand to punch herself on the bridge of her nose. I was very happy that I conquered the lunch table bully.

**Message 174, posted anonymously, talks about bullying in the 1960s and 1970s:**

as an adult I remember how I felt when I was constantly being bullied. I went through these problems back in the sixties and seventies, so as you can guess this problem is not new. I never really knew why I was being bullied other than the fact my surname was considered different, and I did not believe in fighting. Now that I am an adult I think much it was done to test me, to see how much I will take before I snap. It was not until I got in to high school that I discovered that when I fought back the bullies began to respect me.

**Message 377, from Jim in Florida, about bullying that I estimated to have occurred over 20 years ago, describes a similarly successful outcome:**

I had many bad experiences from 6th to 9th grade, and at the beginning of 10th grade I stopped going to school and ran away from home. I dropped out of high school but went to a community college and then a university....Realistically, attacking the bully is not usually an option. I don't say this because "violence doesn't solve anything" because it does. I fought guys my size, and they left me alone after that.

**M.B. from Canada says in message 444 that he was "bullied mercilessly...from the age of 7 to 12". He indicates that he is "now 29, married and doing [his] second degree at university". His message was posted in 2002, suggesting that the last incident of bullying took place almost 25 years ago. M. B. offers the following categorical advice:**

get your parents to enroll you in a good martial arts school and then train like a demon. One day when I was being beaten up by 3 other kids I snapped, and 5 years of torment just flowed out. I started beating up the biggest kid and only stopped when 4 people dragged me off him. After that not a single problem with bullying. Train hard, go after the leader and make an example of him or her. The bullying will then stop.

Although all nine of the above messages concerned violent physical retaliation, I placed only one of them (message 377) in the bully-victim category. While I briefly considered two more of these nine messages for re-categorization, eight of them essentially described one-time incidents, or seemingly justifiable acts of self-defense.

The same cannot be said for message 475, “Bullying is Everybody’s Responsibility”. This message was written by Rod from Nova Scotia, who—judging by comments he made throughout—was a parent and a school teacher at the time of posting (the year 2002). Rod’s message describes school bullying that took place over 20 years ago, and possibly over 30 years ago. While Rod portrays himself as a concerned parent and educator, there is little doubt that the activities he engaged in as a youth would quickly result in him being earmarked as a bully in the contemporary school system:

When I was growing up, I was an armed forces brat, and we moved quite frequently due to postings so we were always entering new schools in different areas. I soon learned that the easiest way to make the transition to a new school was to seek out the "bully" and challenge him. You didn't have to win the fight you just had to put up a good fight to let him know you weren't going to be a pushover and that usually solved the problem before it arose. That also usually proved to be the only fight you had to have while at that school.

As was true with the messages examined above, most of the Web site participants portrayed themselves as victims, even though they may have contributed in some measure to their own victimization. A case in point would be the tragic story of the concerned mother in Alberta who lost her 16 year-old son in a schoolyard fist fight. In message 217, the mother says that “the boys did

what most people refer to as normal for teenagers, name calling and swearing at each other”, but also acknowledges that the fight was “agreed upon by both boys”. She adds that: “In this case I would not call it bullying”. However, in message 34, she says that at the trial, her son “was made out to look like a bully and the accused the victim”, and in message 305, that “the media had a hayday and turned him [her son] into a bully”. Judging by these statements, it is apparent that her son did indeed play a role in the bullying. In her son’s case, the escalating level of back-and-forth retaliation can be viewed as both a cause and a consequence of bullying.

Thus, based on the available research and the postings discussed above, it can be said that bullies are sometimes victims, and victims are sometimes bullies. These roles are often in flux, depending upon exigent circumstances and fluctuations in social status. Thus, it seems illogical on the one hand to characterize an individual as being conduct-disordered or as a junior psychopath when he or she is engaged in bullying, and on the other to characterize the same individual as having an introverted personality or as suffering from neuroticism, depression or social cognitive deficits when he or she is being victimized. Evidently, the causes of bullying and victimization must be sought elsewhere.

## **7.2 Status and stigma**

In Chapters 5 and 6, it was observed that bullies were often thought of as being of higher status than their victims. A growing number of researchers have come to frame this status asymmetry in terms of the bullies enjoying greater social capital than their victims—i.e., their relative standing in the social

hierarchy, their friendship networks, the social power that they are able to wield, and the social support that they receive from parents, teachers, coaches and peers (Holt & Espelage, 2007; Klein, 2006a; Lamertz & Aquino, 2004). From a Durkheimian perspective, it could be suggested that bullies have stronger social bonds than do their victims, in the sense that bullies are more attached to their school and their support groups, and are more likely to be involved in what some might regard as “socially acceptable” or “normative” behaviour (cf. Unnever, 2005). Indeed, it could be suggested that bullying—and the concomitant stigmatization of victims as deviants or social outcasts—serves to some extent to define community boundaries and to sustain social cohesion (Durkheim, 1964b; Durkheim, 1965; Erikson, 2005; 1966).

At the same time, it could be argued with justification that bullying has more to do with social conflict and power relations than with social consensus or social cohesion. In fact, most researchers have defined bullying largely in terms of the power imbalance between the bullies and their victims (e.g., Beran, Hughes, & Lupart, 2008; Morrison, 2006). As will be seen shortly, the stigmatization of victims is actually more consistent with the tenets of labelling theory—a theory premised upon social conflict, status and power differentials, and the ability of the powerful to impose labels on the powerless (Akers & Sellers, 2009; Becker, 1963)—than it is with consensus theory.

### **Reasons for bullying**

The most common explanation offered by site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying was that people bullied to become popular or

to get attention from their peer group (see Table 7.2). Other reasons commonly put forward by the site participants were that bullies simply liked to hurt or frighten other people, or were insensitive to the pain or fear they were causing. The type of explanations regularly advanced by bullying researchers, educators and designers of anti-bullying programs—e.g., that bullies are insecure, have a poor upbringing, lack social skills, have or are seeking power, are gang members, or have anger management problems—were less prevalent.

**Table 7.2 Reasons for bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Popularity/peer attention	107	26.8
Bullies enjoy hurting others-causing fear	79	19.8
Bullies are insensitive	56	14.0
Insecure/lack of self-esteem	45	11.2
Poor upbringing/lack of affection or social skills	40	10.0
Bullies are also bullied	34	8.5
Other (anger management, gang membership, etc)	21	5.2
Bullies seeking/have power	18	4.5
<b>Total</b>	400	100.0

This is not to suggest that issues such as power, poor upbringing or low self-esteem were missing from the discourse. These issues tended to be articulated more clearly by adults, particularly those with years of personal experience. In “The Home of the Bully” (message 252), for example, Carol speaks from the perspective of a former school teacher in Canada:

In my experience the cause of bullying must be addressed in the home of the bully. Some are bullied by their caregivers, controlled to an extent that to gain a feeling of power they must do what they hate when it is done to them and that is to take someone else's power away from them. This gives the bully the

feeling of power they are lacking in their main personal lives. Often, in my experience as a teacher, I found that children who were physically aggressive towards others experienced physical discipline in their homes as a regular part of their lives. They then went out and passed on this violence to some unsuspecting, undeserving peer. It also gained them a power position, albeit a negative one given out of fear, with their peers.

Carol raises issues of power, in tandem with issues of poor parenting.

She also raises the issue of low self-esteem:

The other major commonality I noticed was that most bullies while appearing fearless and strong were, in fact, unsure of themselves and very lacking in self-esteem. This lack of self-esteem could often be traced back to their treatment in their own homes.

In message 776, Wendi, an adult from the United States, realizes in retrospect why she allowed herself to be victimized for many years by a female acquaintance:

Why did I always strive to include A in whatever I was doing? I've realized today; even though I was a victim of her moods, her two-faced behavior, her destruction, her jealousy; I kept her on my side and in my thoughts because I felt sorry for her.

My mother told me just recently that whenever I was in junior high, and going through all of the typical pre-teen changes of starting my period, dealing with a developing body, attending a new school, meeting new people, making new friends, dealing with new teachers and harder school work; I kept A as my friend because no one else would. She asked me one day why I wanted to be A's friend and she said that my reply was that I felt sorry for her because no one else was nice to her.

Throughout her message, Wendi gives the impression that her friend "A" was insecure and lacking in self-esteem. As a consequence of her insecurity, "A"

went out or her way to impede friendships that Wendi might otherwise have formed.<sup>25</sup>

In general, site participants were more inclined to explain bullying in terms of popularity and friends or the lack thereof. Even Wendi's message, described in detail above, was concerned in large part with failed friendships:

There would be more rumors spread about me, more friendships ruined because of A, more girls against me than for me....Why didn't I stand up to her? Why did I let the other girls friendships fizzle because of her? Why didn't I play with other girls on the playground?

Far and away, the predominant explanations of bullying involved friends, popularity, and being cool. When messages from respondents and commentators are counted along with those from Web site participants who claimed firsthand experience with bullying, the words "friend", "friends", "friendship" or "friendships" appeared in 2,227 passages, while words such as "popular", "unpopular", "popularity", and "cool" or "coolest" appeared in 222 passages. In contrast, words such as "status", "self-esteem", and "insecure" or "insecurity" appeared in 190 passages, while words such as "power", "powerful", and "powerless" appeared in only 106 passages. This does not necessarily mean that the Web site participants were oblivious to factors like social status, social support and power imbalances—it is possible that they were contextualizing their experiences or opinions in terminology that was more familiar to them.

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<sup>25</sup> The letter "A" was inserted into this message by the site operators, to prevent identification of the female acquaintance Wendi was describing.

In message 36, Karen, an adult and former victim from Canada, describes the bullies as “the ‘cool’ kids in my class”. In message 697, kitkat, an elementary school student from the United States, says that the individuals who are bullying her “are the most popular kids in my grade”. This recurrent description of bullies can be seen in message 609, “My horrid school life”, submitted by Zaara, a teenager from the United Kingdom:

She is really popular and hangs around with popular people. A lot of people are scared of her but they all turn out to be her friends. Sometimes her friends say things to me as well but normally it is just her and people laugh. She has made up soo much untrue stuff about me. I can't say anything because I am not popular at all.

Another good illustration comes for message, 408, submitted by then 11 year-old Jessie from Ontario, Canada:

There are a group of kids at my school who address themselves as the cool kids. they bully me and my cousin wherever we go on the playground.... Whatever they do, lots of other kids think they are cool so they make fun too.... They think that they are better than us and everyone else.

### **Reasons for victimization**

The two most common explanations for victimization involved a combination of factors (such as physical appearance, intelligence or size combined), or physical appearance alone (see Table 7.3). Having no friends or being unable to keep friends, and inability to achieve social status, were the third and fourth most common explanations respectively, followed by being younger or smaller, being insecure or having low self-esteem, and being new to the school or neighbourhood. However, issues of friendship or popularity were mentioned in 54 of the 114 messages that described victimization as involving a combination

of factors, in 31 of the 52 messages about victims being unable to achieve status, and 9 of the 33 messages about victims being new to the school or neighbourhood. Thus, it can be said that issues of friendship and popularity dominated the explanations for both bullying and victimization.

**Table 7.3 Reasons for victimization**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Combination (appearance, intelligence, size)	114	20.7
Physical appearance	77	14.0
No friends, or unable to keep friends	68	12.3
Unable to achieve status	52	9.4
Younger-smaller	39	7.1
Insecure, low self-esteem	37	6.7
Other (smell, physical ailment, racism)	34	6.2
New kid in school or neighbourhood	33	6.0
Don't know (ask why)	33	6.0
Intelligence (high IQ, low IQ, learning problem)	32	5.8
Shyness, gentleness (possible homophobia)	32	5.8
<b>Total</b>	551	100.0

This focus on multiple reasons for victimization is evident in message 54, submitted by Farren, a 13 year-old female victim from Canada. She offers several reasons for her victimization:

When my mom was pregnant with me she was on an acne drug called Acutane. That defected my birth. They always were telling me that I couldn't hear. I have a lazy eye that they teased me about that.

Farren's account of her victimization was categorized under "combination of reasons", partly because of her hearing problem and her "lazy eye", and also because of her difficulty in finding and keeping friends:

My "friends" would talk behind my back, and when some of the people in my class asked them if they were my friends they would go I'm not answering that question.<sup>26</sup>

In "You Can get through it ALL: Read My Story" (message 449), then 21 year-old Victoria from Ontario, Canada lists a host of reasons for her victimization:

Beginning in 5th grade I found myself almost fully mature; I got my period at age 10 and was publicly embarrassed by my classmates (and even their parents!!!) about being physically older than my peers. I had bad acne and was abused constantly about it: people would call me pizza face or use slogans from acne medication ads when addressing me, such as "oxycute 'em"....I was also abused about various things ranging from my hair to my weight to my lust for knowledge.... I was (and still am) an exceptional student and was often overheard by my bullies when I asked the teacher for extra work or something else to do when I finished assignments early. Consequently, of course, I was bullied for that, too!

Victoria says: "sometimes the 'cool' people pretended to be my friends and would do things to hurt me". Eventually, she went to a new school, where she again encountered problems with friendships:

I left after a year and went to a new high school, only to fall in with a group of friends who were very abusive and inconsiderate. I had a lot of problems with my self-esteem. I fell into a deep suicidal depression and was bullied for that, even! My "friends" would write nasty poetry about me and read it in coffee-houses when I was there.

In "My life as a bully-victim" (message 552), Phylcia from the United States remarks:

I was always the quiet and nice girl. In 5th grade, a boy started calling me bad names like monkey on the stick, ugly and other demeaning names. Then like most of the boys started talking about me and saying mean, hurtful things to me. Girls didn't want to be my friend because I wasn't cool or cute or I just didn't fit in....

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<sup>26</sup> I interpret this as meaning that when Farren's "friends" were asked, they refused to acknowledge their friendship with her.

7th grade got worse. I had to wear a wig because my hair started falling out in 6th grade of Jan.2001. I remember either on the first or second day of 7th grade, peers started talking about me worst, some talked about snatching the wig off my head. Then on my way home from the bus this boy tried to snatch the wig off my head.

While Phylcia was victimized for a combination of reasons, she signs off on a poignant note, saying: "I have no friends. Even now to this day I have no real friends".

As noted above, 31 of the 52 messages (almost 60 percent) concerning victims being unable to achieve status also mentioned issues of friendship or popularity. In message 206, Steve from Canada describes various cliques in his high school, and how he has belonged to several of them over the years:

I've never really been bullied although I can say I've hung out with people who have been and I've also hung out with the people who have been the ones harrasing others. Throughout highschool I have gone from group to group trying to find people with the same morals as me and now I have, but only after hanging out with the "losers", the "brains", the "druggies", the "athletes", the "fighters" and the "in crowd". The last real clique that I belonged to was the "in crowd" and usually the ones who were bullying others.

Steve identifies the importance of friendship and popularity in determining membership—or inability to achieve membership—in the higher status clique, or “the in crowd”:

I noticed that the ones who were bullying were the ones who were trying to make a name for themselves or trying to look big in front of their friends.... I dont understand why these people were considered "cool" and why they became so popular.

In message 406, Jim, an adult from Kansas City, talks about victimization experiences estimated to have occurred over 20 years ago. Jim says that from

grade 3 to grade 8, he “was a social outcast called every derogatory name under the sun”. Jim apparently had few (if any) friends:

It wasn't just a person or even a specific group of tormentors that tortured my day but nearly everyone I knew. There were a few who were sympathetic, but they could only speak to me when no one else was around. Being seen with the class pariah would have been social suicide.

Jim and his family moved to a new state when he was 13. This made a large difference, because following the move, Jim “actually started to make friends”.

In “I Always Think Why Me?” (message 610), Sarah from Canada remarks that:

The kids in the class always have their own groups, like the popular kids, the geeks, and then there are the normal kids like me. I've never been a bully at all. I'm not overweight, or have a disorder or anything like that. I am constantly getting picked on by the popular kids in my class...They always say, "You're such a retard," or "You think you're popular, better guess again," "Why would anyone want to go out with you?"

Sarah mentions that her inability to become one of “the popular kids” is because she has “no friends”. She recounts an incident where she was abandoned by her “friends” when “the popular kids” started picking on her:

While I was outside the popular kids came up to me and my friends and they were picking on me, but my so-called friends just joined in. Then I walked away and went inside. While I was walking inside, they all called me a cry baby [ I wasn't even crying].... Now everybody is accusing me of crying, and being a chicken and stuff.

Only 13 out of the 33 messages (39 percent) where the reasons for victimization were placed under the rubric of “new kid in school or the neighbourhood” specifically mentioned issues of friendship or popularity.

However, issues of friendship and popularity likely contributed to the many problems associated with being new to the school or neighbourhood, as seen in “No Matter Where We Go” (message 75), submitted by Michelle, a mother from the United States:

I am a 31 yr old mother of 3. My family and I move alot. 3 times in the past 3 years. This has taken its toll on my 10 yr old. He is always the new kid. He gets picked on no matter where we go.

It is clear from her message that her son has difficulty in making or keeping friends:

When new kids move in the neighborhood my son becomes friends with them until they hook up with the bullies and then they join the group that picks on my son.

In “A Simple Smile Goes a Long Way” (message 381), Sandra from Ontario, Canada describes the problems her nephew has been experiencing since entering a new school:

I just gained custody of my 11 year old nephew who has had enough problems in his life then to have to deal with other kids who are mean to him. He just started a new school and is being made fun of a lot. Being that he is coming into a school half way through the year it is hard to make new friends and "break into the cliques".

Sandra reports that she has “attempted to speak with the school”, but adds that “they seem to have the attitude that he is new and must be the one causing the problems”. Her nephew tells her that he is “tired of feeling left out” and that “no one accepts [him]”.

Another message—also classified under “combination of reasons” for victimization—mentioned learning disabilities, moving to a new school and to a

new neighbourhood, plus inability to make friends. In “Both MY Sons Are Being Bullied” (message 262), Terry, a mother from Saskatchewan, Canada, announces that her family has just “moved to another city and its a nightmare”. She says that one of her sons “has a learning disability and other problems such as speech, eating, disorders”, and that her older son often steps in to protect him from the victimization that he is experiencing at the new school they are attending. Terry concludes by saying that her “boys are friendless and they do not understand why”.

### **Shifting friendships, shifting status**

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the bully-victim continuum, where individuals might find themselves in different places at different times, depending upon fluctuations in their friendship networks and popularity (or social status). The effects of losing friends and losing popularity surface in “All Alone” (message 104), submitted by 12 year-old Amanda from Ontario, Canada:

I was best friends with a girl . We were always together until one of my old friends from another school came to my new one!. I didn't get along with her all that much at the other school but I thought I might again. When she came into my class, I was so excited BUT then my two friends started doing everything together, Not that I really cared or anything but whenever I asked to come along they would say No we want to do stuff by themself. So, knowing me, I was just like okay thats fine, but really I felt totally left out!..... After a while my best friend would never call me anymore she would always be busy with my other friend when I called her. I let it all go hoping everything would be okay but when summer came It was horrible I sat all alone getting made fun of for being small and just because I wasn't all that in style.

“Katelyn’s Story”, submitted by an 11 or 12 year old from Ontario, illustrates the effects of losing and then gaining friends and popularity over a two year period in school, starting from the beginning of Grade 4:

I hung out with my usual gang, but I could see that something was wrong. Two of my best friends were in an argument. They were always best friends before, they never fought before....Then my friends turned on me. I was alone when the really bad stuff happened. The twins along with their friends, decided to be mean that day. They punched me and threw me on the ground. They also embarrassed me by telling others my personal secrets. When I came home, I was punished for something I didn't do. Days went past, I was still alone and the teacher was very mean. By april I had given up all hope of ever getting a friend again.

**Katelyn’s story then takes a turn for the better:**

One day, soon after, I met someone. Her name was Sylvie. She brought me into her life. The best thing about her was that she was a true friend. She was a 3rd grader. By the end of the year I was feeling better about myself.... I am in grade 6 now. Even though I still get teased, I always have sylvie and my other friends, by my side to help me through tough times.

While researchers have often focussed on the significance of friendships and popularity when it comes to female bullying and victimization (cf. Besag, 2006; Duncan, 2006), shifts in friendships and popularity can be influential factors in male bullying as well. An example of this can be found in “I want to play too” (message 526), submitted by Emmanuel from Canada:

When I was eight I had a really good friend, and every day we played together, and then there was the school bully who just really didn’t like me for no reason at all. My best friend joined the bullies’ gang, so instead of it being 4 on 2 it was 5 on 1, I felt really angry.

“Reaching to the Light” (message 775), posted by Bryan, recounts a similar experience, except this time in a high school setting:

When I started out high school, I was in a new school full of new faces. I felt out of place but took comfort in the fact that I had people from my previous school in the same classes. After a few weeks of hanging out with them, they began to use me to gain more "popularity" with complete strangers....This is when it really hit me hard. They didn't care at all about anything, not me, not themselves, not anything. Part way through the conversation, I got up, walked away, and never looked back.... I spent the next few days walking the halls by myself just trying to avoid my so called "friends". After a while, I bumped into some people who I used to hang out with before being bullied. They welcomed me with open arms and I think they saved my life.

In "Stand Up for Yourself" (message 307), then 21 year-old Eric also talks about transitions he experienced in high school:

When I was in middle school, I was the scapegoat and made fun of by everyone. I had no friends, was an outcast. I was afraid to even go to school. After middle school was high school which was a blast. I began getting respected, people left me alone, except upperclassmen. I was hazed but not as badly as some. After my freshman year, it was all good. I began carrying myself differently which I still do today.

Eric's description of himself as a "scapegoat" and "an outcast", and the previously discussed message from Jim in Kansas City (message 406), wherein Jim also portrays himself as "a social outcast" and "the class pariah", underscore the significance of social status in determining whether or not an individual is likely to become a victim of bullying.

### **Victims as social outcasts**

Generating persuasive empirical validation for labelling theory has proven to be an elusive task (cf. Akers & Sellers, 2009; Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007; Winfree & Abadinsky, 2010). Nonetheless, the contributors to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were evidently aware of the labels attached to victims, as well as the status of victims as outsiders or social outcasts (cf. Roberts, 2006). In fact, the discourse

on the web site provided considerable support for the tenets of labelling theory, as set out in Howard Becker's landmark (1963) book, *Outsiders*.

The term "outcast" appeared in 23 of the messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), while the term "loser"—also used to signify that the individual was an outcast—appeared as frequently. Other signifying terms, such as "loner" and "outsider", appeared in 16 other messages. A few brief examples are listed below:

Natives by Roger in Canada (message 154): "I am native I grew up going to 2 white schools with a handful of other natives. I got picked on. I was an *outcast*, very shy, and very quiet".<sup>27</sup>

My Life by Anonymous (message 222): "I am *a loner* because I can't seem to fit in".

I Was An *Outcast* During the Thirties by Jan Albitz (message 255): "I was an *outcast* during the thirties; i.e., 1935 - 1939, moving about constantly and being attack by each new bully".

A Story of Life by Kim Fissel, a survivor of school bullying (message 351): "I finally reunited with my friend Jodie in the middle of my grade ten year and found she had found other friends that were *outcasts* just as I was and for the first time since grade five, we were all together we were all untouchable to society. We were ostracized and humiliated daily..."

Emotional and Physical Bullying by Molly, a Teacher-in-Training in Lexington, Kentucky, USA (message 401): "I had one student that came to the school in the middle of the year which immediately made her an *outsider* amongst her new peers".

There's No Simple Solution by Lynn in Christchurch, New Zealand (message 436): "I don't think I knew I was a *social outcast* until I was about 6, when it

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<sup>27</sup> For purposes of emphasis and clarity, I have added italicization to terms such as loner, outcast and outsider in these excerpts from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org).

was clear that in order to get along in the world, you had to be part of a group of friends”.

Bullying should stop - Submitted by Nyakouth from Australia (message 537): “It started when they were calling me names like *loner*, *loser*...”

Screwed up - Submitted by Screwed up from United Kingdom (message 719): “I feel like a loser and an *OUTCAST* in society”.

The sense of being an outcast or outsider was typically linked to one or more other characteristics that made the victim seem unusual or abnormal to their peers. “But I’m a Teacher Now?” (message 147), posted by a then 25 year-old middle school teacher from Canada, relates how she was bullied “for just anything they could think of”. Eventually, her weight became the target:

as their bullying increased, and I neared puberty, so did my weight. My weight became the major focus of their jibes and name calling. I moved from elementary to high school but, since I lived in a small town, nothing really changed... I was still the easy target no matter what I did.

All through high school I remained the *outsider*. The few friends I thought I had eventually turned on me and joined in my continual public humiliation.

Tammi, a mother from British Columbia, Canada, writes:

“I was a popular girl in the popular crowd at my old school I was attending. When I moved to a new school in Grade 4, I was the new person, an *outcast*...I lost what friends I had made from those early years on entering high school”.

Tammi adds that she “was labelled a ‘SLOW LEARNER’” by her teachers and her parents. Any efforts that she might have made to form new friendships were impeded, because she was not permitted to have friends over. As Tammi explains it, her parents told her that socialization was dependent on “hard work and good marks”.

While the anonymous author of message 178 did not specifically mention being called an outcast or outsider, it was clear from her comments that she was treated as such:

People started calling me "Cat Lady" to be mean. That name followed me into high school, and in grade 9 people would say "meow" when I walked into the classroom.<sup>28</sup>

Like Kim Fissel, the author of message 351—used above as an example of victims characterizing themselves as outcasts—the author of message 178 describes how she was regarded as “untouchable”:

Getting on the bus was one of the things I hated the most. No one wanted to sit with me. They treated me like I had a disease or something....People also threw garbage at me on the bus, and one guy told his friend if he touched me he'd get my disease.

In “I Do Not Know When They Will Stop” (message 423), Murray from the United Kingdom talks about how he has been labelled, how he is friendless, and how he too has been treated like garbage:

I am called "fatty no mates" and people make a mockery out of my ginger dreadlocks. I cannot find help anywhere and I feel that I am on my own....I once went running and the people who are bashing me saw me [and] squeezed me into a bin and threw me in a lake.

“Beaver” (message 834), posted by Jessie from Canada, brings together a number of the themes or patterns identified in this chapter, including being the new kid in school, being friendless, being labelled, and being treated like garbage:

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<sup>28</sup> This may be a reference to the “crazy cat lady” who appeared from time to time as a mentally ill character on the TV show “The Simpsons”. It could also be a reference to Jocelyn Wildenstein, sometimes described in the media as “the cat lady” because of the multiple plastic surgeries that she underwent.

When I was in grade 4 I lived with my grandparents, until my mom found a new job in City. She wanted me to move there with her but I didn't want to I hated the idea of moving, having to switch schools and everything. I moved over the summer and started a \*\*\* Elementary school in grade 5. I was made fun of because my teeth were sort of big, I was called a beaver and had apples and garbage thrown at me on the bus...

## Labelling theory revisited

In all, 179 of the messages from individuals who had firsthand experience with bullying mentioned the presence of some sort of derogatory name or label.

The labels ran the gamut, targeting everything from physical appearance to ethnicity to learning difficulties to simply being different:

“What I Hate About People Bullying Me by Yvonne” (message 87): People call me patchy-watchy and I don't like that because it's true. I have have a bald spot.

“Greedy, Oily and Chink by Mark in British Columbia, Canada” (message 207): Recently I have been called names such as ‘greedy’ and ‘oily’ and ‘chink’ because my face is shiny and I am a 170 pound Chinese person.

“My Name is Ali !!!” (message 212): “I'm am always called geek at school!... They say I stink and I am like a snotball!

“Is Verbal Assault Bullying? by Colleen in Ontario” (message 216): “My son is mildly retarded and we made the mistake of putting him in a Special Ed Class with integration. The problem is that even though he has been fully integrated for three years, the kids still attach the stigma/aka name-calling etc. of special needs or ‘Special nerds’...”

“The Early History of Me by Sara in Canada” (message 379): “I'm Sara, and I am autistic....names like freak, retard, walking dictionary, Jerry's kid, and cootie became the only names the other students knew for me”.

“what happened to me - Submitted by C from United Kingdom” (message 639): “I was the odd one out and I looked odd to everybody so I got called names like ‘cat the dog’ and ‘Sheep’ and ‘Nitty Nora’...you see I had heads lice in year 5 and they still thought that I would have it now so nobody went an inch near me”.

Another criticism of labelling theory has been its seeming inability to demonstrate empirically that being labelled actually leads individuals to adopt their new “deviant” identity, or to engage in further (secondary) deviance as a consequence of being labelled (Akers & Sellers, 2009; Winfree & Abadinsky, 2010). Of the 179 messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that mentioned awareness of a label, 42 described how the individual concerned had adopted, adapted to, or otherwise been affected by the label. While these numbers are not particularly high, it should be kept in mind that individuals who were posting messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were allowed to say as little or as much as they wanted, without being required to follow a specific format or to address certain issues. Thus, it is plausible (even likely) that more of the Web site participants had been the recipients of some sort of label and had been affected by that label to one degree or another.

Consistent with labelling and/or stigma theory (Becker, 1963; Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Goffman, 2005), of the 42 messages that mentioned how the individual had responded to the label, 17 talked about out how they had adopted, embraced or accepted their new, deviant identity. In her response to “SO THIS IS MY LIFE - I Got Up For This? by Alexandra” (message 8), Lindsay, a teenager from Ontario, Canada, says in message 15: “I fear that someone is going to come back and tell me I'm a loser, that I stink, that my pants don't fit right”. Lindsay then describes how she has accepted her identity as a loser or an outsider:

I still look in the mirror sometimes and say "you're ugly." "You're stupid."  
"How could anyone like you?" But I get past it. I continue living my ugly,

stupid existence in which no one likes me, and I enjoy the \*\*\*\* out of it. I revel in my existence, because I don't care if they don't like me. I know that I can live without them...

In her response to "Why Do They Call Me Fat?" by Natasha (message 96), Lauren tells Natasha: "I am 18 years old now and I was always big for my age". Lauren was harassed constantly about her weight. She not only came to see herself as overweight but began to act the part:

I believed them. I knew it wasn't as bad as they told me it was, but when I got depressed about it, I ate food. This is called emotional eating. I wasn't that big, but I made myself big. I let their hateful, dishonest lies hurt me. When I got really fat, they won.

In message 417, Jen from Nova Scotia announces: "I don't write into sites but this was one time I had to....I am a violinist and pianist and a quarter of my day is spent on music practices":

I get names such as "Beethoven" and "Mozart" at school. Those aren't that bad but what I really hate is I live in a small town and there are two groups of people at my school: drugies and snobs. I fit into neither. All their parents know each other and none know my parents, well, they know who they are, but they don't really know them. So I know don't them. I walk alone when we change classes and I spend my recess and lunch at the bandroom, bathroom or pinned against my locker. Occassionly, people talk to me and one of their main questions is always "I didn't see you at the dance, where were you?" My answer is always 'Orchestra'...

Jen then offers advice on how to handle being a misfit or an outsider:

If I could give you one piece of advice, it would be if you have no friends, that's okay! There was never any law saying that you have to have people to hang out with. I'd much rather sit and finish my homework in the hall then hang out in the cafeteria and fill myself with junk food and gossip.

"My Experience" (message 878) recounts how Laura from the United States became anorexic, only after being labelled as anorexic by her peers:

I'm Laura and I am now 14 years old. I was bullied when I was 12-13. I had been really sick and lost about 20 pounds. So guess what everybody said? Of course! They said I was anorexic. I wasn't at first. But as they made fun of me and spread rumors, I thought...well maybe they'll stop if I AM anorexic. So I stopped eating. Friends that had been my friends since preschool and kindergarten would call me names and one of my "friends" put on her MSN instant messenger name "Laura is ANOREXIC" and of course all of my friends believed her... it hurt so bad. I even started to cut myself. It was the worse year of my life.

Of the 42 messages that mentioned how the individual had responded to the label, 25 described reactions other than simply adopting or embracing the new, deviant identity. Again, consistent with labelling theory and stigma theory, eight of those messages described attempts to conform to social norms, or in the alternative, to at least disguise the deviant identity (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 2005). In "My Story & Advice for Today's Victims" (message 258), 24 year-old Sam talks about how he was labelled as a "gay" in high school:

For some reason, they THOUGHT they knew me so well that they needed no proof to back up their constant claims of my supposedly being gay. Well, I'm not gay but no matter what you are, I think you'll agree, nobody deserves to be insulted for that reason or any other, ever, by anyone at school, of all places.

Later in his message, Sam describes efforts that he made since then to conform to social norms:

Today I'm 24. I don't dress the same as I did back then, nor do I look as "goofy" as I did, either. Actually, I like to think I've "conformed" to the standard of most people enough so that I don't stand out, thus attracting negative attention.... In fact, if you knew me back then you'd swear I'm not at all like I once was.

Message 770, posted by SadGuy from Canada, offers a similar example concerning someone who was teased "for the way [he] looked (the big one!),

walked, talked, or behaved". Like Sam, SadGuy from Canada describes the efforts he made to conform:

I tried to change my hair, diet, workout and even take reading classes but nothing worked. People still perceive me as the same physically "lacking" person I have been perceived as since grade 5. I try to be a nicer person thinking I'd learn to forgive their sayings.

In fact, like others who were classified as attempting to conform with social norms to disguise their deviant identity, SadGuy came close to adopting—or at least accepting—his deviant identity:

I guess I am cursed with my appearance that'll never change and probably should accept being excluded and bullied by everyone, probably for the rest of my life. And I don't think getting medicinal help would cure me, but just help my sense of disillusionment towards my problems....I try to ignore these people and not let them get to me, but how can I do that when everyone I've met has bullied me on several occasions, even my current closest friend.

The same observation could be made with respect to the nine who responded to their label by retreating into a shell and/or shutting themselves off from contact with others. In many cases, they came close to accepting their identity as social outcasts or outsiders. To illustrate, Sally, an adult from Ontario, Canada, describes how six girls in high school ostracized her and attacked her physically:

They not only beat me up but they wouldn't talk to me either and others were afraid to do or say anything and treated me like an outcast. The day my mom and dad told me we were moving I thought I'd never would have packed that quickly in my life. I wanted a fresh start and couldn't wait to get it.

Sally goes on to relate how even after moving with her family to a new area and new school, she voluntarily withdrew from school-related activities, imposing social isolation upon herself:

Grade 11 I was at another high in a completely different district....I went through the rest of high school with some bullying problems but not to the extent before. Grade 13 grad I was the happiest kid on earth but not because of Prom or anything else but because I got to share it with people I trusted and loved my parents and sister. I didn't go to Prom because of past memories and due to some girls which I felt I was just setting myself up to be bait for. I stayed home and celebrated with my family.

Another example is provided by 39 year-old Barbara from the United Kingdom, whose message 577 was used in Chapter 6 to demonstrate that compulsory heterosexuality and the construction of normative femininity have been integral parts of female bullying throughout the years. In message 577, Barbara recalls: "I was just a plain old geek. I didn't have the right clothes. I didn't look right. I didn't act right. I had little confidence left. I was a prime target for bullies". She reacted to bullying through what she refers to as self-inflicted isolation:

No one sat by me on the bus. I was the freak. I started riding my bike instead to get away from them....Any time something happened, I would change my habits or change my course to avoid those tormentors. I ended up making sure whatever I did had no contact with anyone else. I ended up basically in self inflicted isolation. I became afraid to look at people in the eye, afraid they would laugh at me or bully me or say something nasty about my appearance. It was less painful to just be alone.

Other reactions to the label varied considerably from individual to individual. Three who were told that they were "special nerds", "slow learners" or "retards" reacted by losing interest in school, missing school or quitting school (cf. Haskell, 2008). Two who suffered psychological distress sought therapy for

their problems. MaryBeth, who was labelled a “slut” (message 473), became the victim of a sexual assault because her male and female peers interpreted the label quite literally. The three most common reactions, however, were

1. embracing or accepting the label
2. attempting to demonstrate conformity with social norms (or at least, attempting to disguise the deviant identity), and
3. self-imposed isolation.

In a certain sense, the way I have applied labelling theory here runs counter to how labelling theory is typically understood and applied. As a general rule, labelling theory has focussed more on “offenders”, and how being officially labelled as a deviant or criminal can cause them to come to see themselves as such, and thus, to embark upon a life course of deviance or criminality (cf. Lilly et al., 2007; Winfree & Abadinsky, 2010). Much of the extant literature on bullying does indeed invoke a crime analogy, portraying the bullies as “offenders”, and the “victims” as “victims” (cf. Blake, 2001; Casella, 2003; Englander, 2007). If this analogy was followed through to its logical conclusion, bullies would be more likely to see themselves as bullies and/or deviants once they were labelled as such, and would therefore continue to engage in—or even escalate—their deviant/bullying behaviours. Moreover, as a consequence of being suspended or expelled from school, and possibly even being charged with and convicted of a criminal offence, bullies would go on to fulfil their prophesized roles as future criminals. In the present case, I have instead applied labelling theory to victims, to demonstrate how being labelled can contribute to the development of a

deviant/victim self-image, and can contribute to ongoing and more serious victimization.

In addition, labelling theory traditionally emphasizes the involvement of moral entrepreneurs or claims-makers—social agents who have the power and ability to make and enforce social norms, and to determine who will be labelled as a deviant or an outsider (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1987; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). These moral entrepreneurs or claim-makers, including the media, government officials and bullying “experts”, have unquestionably had a strong influence on drawing attention to the issue of bullying, and on the implementation of a myriad of anti-bullying programs and legislative initiatives. In the above analysis, however, I have set aside the influence of these powerful interest groups for the moment, concentrating instead on the labels that are imposed upon unpopular, lower status students by popular, higher status students. There are marked power differentials between school students in terms of their age, size, social skills, social networks and popularity (Rigby, 2008), and thus, marked differences in their ability to stigmatize and bully other students. The remainder of this chapter and a substantial part of the following chapter will pay greater attention to the role of social agents—e.g., parents, teachers, school administrators, and anti-bullying advocates—who would presumably wield greater power and influence than students when it comes to the issue of school bullying.

### **7.3 Social capital and social support**

Over the past decade, theoretical constructs such as social capital and social support have emerged as potential explanations for bullying and victimization (e.g., Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Klein, 2006a). My analysis of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) provides empirical support for both these constructs, especially when employed together.

The concept of social capital has been used in conjunction with Hirschi's (Hirschi, 2002) social bond theory, which in turn drew its inspiration from Durkheimian notions of community, social cohesion, and social solidarity (Durkheim, 1964a; Durkheim, 1965; Erikson, 2005; 1966). This connection between social capital, social bond theory and Durkheimian thinking is captured well in Putnam's (2007) Johan Skytte prize lecture on social capital and social diversity, delivered at Uppsala University in Sweden, where he talks simultaneously about "community", "social cohesion", "social solidarity", and the importance of both "bridging social capital" and "bonding social capital". It is further illustrated by Sampson and Groves' (1990) study of "changes in crime and deviance over the life course", where they integrate Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital with Durkheimian thinking and two key elements of Hirschi's social bond theory—attachment and commitment.

Social capital may be defined as the social resources that individuals have available to them—their social relationships, neighbourhood networks, and the degree of social support which they receive from family, friends, and (in the case of students) school teachers and other school personnel (Aquino & Lamertz,

2004; Coleman, 1988). While social support theory has more commonly been used in psychological or medical health explanations of stress and depression, it is similar in many respects to the concept of social capital, in that it too studies the effects of social networks on “social integration” and “status support” (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 312).

Overall, bullies enjoy more social capital and receive greater social support than victims, while bully-victims may find their reserves of social capital and social support increasing or decreasing as their roles shift along the bully-victim continuum. As was seen earlier in this chapter, and in chapters five and six, explanations involving friendship, popularity, status and stigmatization dominated the Web site discourse about bullying and victimization. Many victims and bully-victims also complained about the lack of social support that they received from friends, siblings, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

### **Social support from friends or peers**

Consistent with the notion that social support from friends or peers has the largest effect on buffering a school-aged individual from victimization, those who received such support tended to report more favourable outcomes. As can be seen in Table 7.4, of the 156 victims and bully-victims who mentioned receiving intervention or support from friends or peers, 97 said that it helped a lot, or at least a little bit.

**Table 7.4 Effects of intervention from friends or peer group**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Helps a lot	57	36.6
Helps a bit	40	25.6
Doesn't help	30	19.2
Makes things worse	29	18.6
<b>Total</b>	156	100.0

The most common form of support, provided by 77 of the 156 friends or peers, involved friendship or advice. Another 34 attempted to prevent the bullying by showing their disapproval, warning the bullies, or fighting the bullies. Five of the friends or peers tried to help by reporting the bullying to a teacher or to their own parents.

**“I thought we were friends”**

“I thought we were friends” is the title of message 562, submitted by Lauryn from the United States. This sentiment is echoed in the title of message 145, “An Inconsiderate Friend”, by Courtney, and in message 503, “She said she was my friend!!!”, by Alexis. Of the 59 Web site participants who said that the involvement of friends or peers did not help, or made things worse, 46 mentioned that their friends or peers ignored the bullying, blamed the victim for their own victimization, and in 36 instances, actually joined in the bullying themselves.

In message 278, for example, a mother replicates a letter about her son that she posted on bulletin boards throughout their town in Southern Alberta. In her letter, she tells others in the town about how her son has been the victim of

“degradation; taunting, harassing, goading, ‘flashing’, ‘mooning’, scapegoating and ostracism”. She adds in her letter that:

One of the saddest aspects of this situation is that most kids, when they are alone with this child, seem to like and respect him. They tell him their troubles. They talk about their feelings, and they have fun. And it is heartbreaking when these same precious "friends" turn on him when they are in a group. He feels betrayed.

### **Betrayal by friends**

Phylcia from the United States also talks about betrayal by friends in “My life as a bully victim” (message 552):

Girls didn't want to be my friend because I wasn't cool or cute or I just didn't fit in. My friends didn't really like me; they treat me like I am slow or like I suppose to let them hurt me. Then 6th grade the problems escalated at the bus stop. They started calling me retarded. In six grade the girl that I thought was my friend started calling me retard. One accused me of stealing her candy and another one was when my "suppose" to be friend accused me of talking about her behind her back.

Indeed, “betrayal by friends”, mentioned in 87 messages, was one of the more common forms of discourse on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). In “Trying To Trust People” (message 314), 17 year-old Bastian from Australia says:

I know from experience that when you are being bullied it is very hard to trust people, especially after they have betrayed you and sometimes you get to the point where you feel that you will never be able to trust anyone, because of what they might say or do to you. I was in this situation and I found that the people who I thought were my friends suddenly found that it was more fun to play tricks, try to pressure me and push me around, than actually be friends.

In Message 904, Emma from Canada recounts an elaborate saga of betrayal and counter-betrayal, in which she and her group of “friends” weave their way through an ever-changing landscape of bullying and victimization:

I came to this school with nothing. No idea. Well, I did have something. My best friend Girl1 came with me. We were close, you know? She was the highlight of my life....She was smart and funny and popular. So ready to try something new. I worked so hard in sixth grade to gain her friendship.

I didn't see her for over a month. When I did, she was not herself anymore....We went to school, and she started being a little bit mean to me. She would make up games and give me the dumbest role, or exclude me completely. It made me so sad. I took my mum's advice and ignored her for a while. Eventually, she came around and we were best friends again.

Emma then goes on to reveal how she and two of her other friends also engage in rumour-mongering about the same girl that Emma is complaining about:

I confided in my two closest friends, telling them that Girl1 was starting to scare me. They agreed. They always did... Anyways...Girl1 had a party. I went and had a great time. I thought, ok. I'll give Girl1 a clean slate. It's over. I forgive her. I was FINALLY at peace. But, a few days later, I hear that all of my friends have told Girl1 all of the secret things that I told them. She is bloody pissed at me, now.

Evidently, friendship networks and the degree of social support provided (or not provided) by those networks can have a direct bearing on where an individual might find themselves at any given time on the bullying-victimization spectrum.

### **Social support from parents**

Of the 206 Web site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying, and who mentioned complaining to parents, only 44 (21.3 percent) said that it helped them a lot. By contrast, 57 (27.7 percent) said that complaining to parents helped only a little bit, 81 (39.3 percent) said that it did not help at all, while 24 (11.7 percent) said that it actually made things worse.

**Table 7.5 Reaction of parents to complaints about victimization**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Ignore, say no problem/nothing they can do	50	24.3
Combination (e.g., counselling, involving school, moving)	41	19.9
Speak to/involve school	36	17.5
Provide advice, counselling	28	13.6
Blame victim	25	12.1
Confront bully or bully's parents	17	8.2
Move, change schools/drop out of school	9	4.4
<b>Total</b>	206	100.0

This feeling that complaining to parents was of limited (if any) value can be explained in large part by the reaction of the parents (see Table 7.5). In 98 of the 131 cases where the parents took a proactive stance and supported their children, 54 of the site participants reported that it helped a bit, and 44 reported that it helped a lot. Proactive parental support that appeared to be most successful—at least in the minds of the victims—included allowing the victim to change schools or drop out of school, confronting the bully or the bully's parents, or a combination of tactics, such as providing emotional support, complaining to the school, moving to a new neighbourhood and/or obtaining professional counselling.

**“I told my mom and she didn't do anything about it”**

Of the 105 Web site participants who reported that parental involvement did not help, or actually made things worse, 47 said that their parents ignored them or made no effort to help them resolve their problem. The above subtitle, “I told my mom and she didn't do anything about it”, was excerpted from message

728, submitted by Sarah from Canada. This is similar to the comment made by the author of message 179, a 12 year-old female from Alberta, Canada, whose mother relied on the cliché that "sticks and stones may hurt your bones but words will never hurt you" when she complained about being teased and tormented at school. Another example is message 657, "Bullied by Everyone", submitted by Nikki from Canada. In her message, Nikki says: "I told my mom that I was getting bullied by everyone at school and she didn't care. She just ignored me".

In six of these cases, the parents grudgingly acknowledged the bullying, but offered platitudinous religious advice that proved to be of no more help to the victims than dismissing the complaints or ignoring them outright. In message 283, then 24 year-old Jonny from Northern Ireland complains that "my Parents, being religious relied upon the classic cop out - "Pray to God and it will be O.K." - but it wasn't". In message 319, an anonymous adult from Ontario, Canada recalls that "As a child I was taught to 'turn the other cheek' in the face of a fight".

She adds:

My mother knew the beatings were going on because she could see the bruising, cuts, and fear, but she still forbid me from physically defending myself, using the bible as an excuse. 'It is not our way', she explained.

In five other instances, the parents offered chestnuts that were of no more help than the religious platitudes discussed above. In the face of what he describes as "a relentless assault", Chase says in message 20 that his parents advised him to "not let them see you sweat". In "Carrying My Campus Cross" (message 63), Master Student Ivan from Ghana reports that many local parents regard bullying as "a normal act among students intended to toughen them".

Jenny, an adult from New Brunswick, Canada, refers in message 241 to the “kids will be kids attitude’ or ‘just ignore them and they (bullies) will leave you alone’ attitude” that she encountered when inquiring about her six year old nephew being bullied. Another (15 year-old) Jenny describes in message 373 how she is “covered in cuts from running from [a group of boys] and bruises from being hit”, and complains that her parents tell her that “they are boys and will grow out of it”. Natasha from Canada says in message 708 that “I tell my mother but she tells me don't worry you'll get over it”.

**“My mom told me I should be nicer to people!”**

The above subtitle—“My mom told me I should be nicer to people!”—was excerpted from message 377, submitted by Jim, an adult from Florida. Of the site participants who reported that parental involvement did not help, or actually made things worse, 25 said that their parents blamed them for their own victimization. In “I Hate All Bullies” (message 397), a 16 year old- female from Canada reports how she is constantly being harassed on the school bus, but goes on to complain that “when I told my mom, and begged for a ride home, she laughed at me, and told me that I was a liar”. In message 426, Tom, an adult from Illinois says that he “got beat up three or four days a week from second grade all the way up to [his] last year in junior high”. Tom adds that “my parents were no help, telling me that none of the bullying would happen if I would just get along with people”. Nine year-old Bethany from New Brunswick, Canada says in message 471 that people call her “fat or stupid cow and stuff like that”, but that her parents’ response is that she is “just paranoid”.

This tendency of some parents to blame their children for being “different”, “deviant” or “abnormal” is illustrated well by message 464, “Have Faith”, submitted by R.D., an adult from Canada. This particular message was also cited in Chapter 5, as an example of homophobic bullying that occurred 18 or 19 years ago, well before the school shootings in the 1990s that gave rise to much of the bullying research and to many of the anti-bullying programs. Because he “had long hair”, R.D. was subjected to homophobic bullying by “a group of [his] more conservative ‘peers’”. The reaction of R.D.’s parents was unhelpful and unsupportive:

At 14 years of age it is hard to question authority, especially when the only suggestion that you receive from your parents is to get your hair cut because of the consensus of your assumed "peers".

In message 555, Chelsey from Canada says that her family seem unconcerned about her problems, and are actually ashamed of her:

Nobody knows I exist (like literally). I “like totally” have no friends. The only people that no I exist is my family but they don't seem to act like I do....One day I overdosed at school and nobody noticed except the principals my guardian didn't even visit me, when I was in the hospital. My family's ashamed of me.

These examples of ineffective responses by parents does not mean that all parents and caregivers who failed to respond to the bullying were apt to blame the victim or quick to brush the problem off with unhelpful, hackneyed advice. In 16 cases, the parents seemed to be more overwhelmed or helpless than unconcerned. In message 204, for example, Gary from Quebec says that “my parents don't know what to do”. In message 359, Bill from Canada describes being bullied over 25 years ago, and recalls that his parents “were concerned,

but frankly, totally helpless". In three cases, the parents apparently failed to recognize that their child was being bullied. A case in point is Melissa M. from Ontario, who says:

I pleaded with my mother on a daily basis for her to keep me at home. She'd always aske me why I hated school so much and I always lied pretending I hated the curriculum rather than the children who made my school years a living hell. I even faked sick, claiming to have stomach pains in order to stay away from the children who tormented me so. The school even claimed I had a learning disability and that was the reason why I didnt want to attend school. If they had only paid attention....

### **Social support from school personnel**

Despite the oft-repeated advice to tell a teacher if you are being bullied, this proved to be an exercise in futility in the majority of cases. Of the 207 site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying, and who mentioned complaining to teachers, only 52 (25.1 percent) said that it helped. On the other hand, 104 (50.2 percent) said that complaining to teachers did not help, and 51 (24.6 percent) said that it made things worse. To express this differently, three-quarters of the participants found complaining to teachers to be unhelpful (cf. Elliott, 2002b; Rigby, 2008; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008).

**Table 7.6 Reaction of teachers to complaints about victimization**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Ignore, no response, say no problem	70	33.8
Blame victim	61	29.5
Caution/educate bully and/or victim	48	23.2
Punish bully or involve police	18	8.7
Multiple responses (parents, police, counselling)	7	3.4
Other	3	1.4
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0

Of the 206 messages (discussed earlier) that mentioned complaining to parents, 131 indicated that the parents at least tried to offer some form of support. Of the 207 messages that mentioned complaining to teachers, a virtually identical number—131 of 207—indicated that teachers either downplayed the problem, ignored the problem or blamed the victim (see Table 7.6). “Don’t Let Your Kids Slip Through!” (message 121), submitted by “a loving mum in Western Australia”, provides an excellent example of how the problem is often ignored, despite victims being specifically advised by their parents to seek assistance from their teachers:

I told my kids to go and tell the teacher when bullying happened but they were told to stop being silly. Then I told them to go and stand by the teacher on playground duty if they were bullied. The teachers told them to go away.

In “I Love School, But I Hate The Kids Who Bully Me” (message 380), 12 year-old Miranda from Florida describes how her teachers ignore bullying, even when it is unfolding right before their eyes:

I am getting teased and called disgusting names. When these incidents happen my teachers see the bully saying these things and I tell my teacher about it, they say, "ignore it" or "I didn't see that happen". But they were standing right there at the time.

Whether it is 12 year-old Mike, saying in message 386 that “I know people say go to the teacher.....whenever I go to the teacher I get told to ignore it” or Maria, an adult from Canada, reporting in message 887 that “teachers stared, watching students insulted me and hit me, and did not do anything”, it appears that many teachers are disinclined to come to the aid of the victims.

### **“When Teachers Don't Help”**

“When Teachers Don't Help” is the title of message 135, submitted by Siobhan from British Columbia, Canada. As can be seen in Table 7.6 (above), 61 of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) indicated that school teachers often responded to reports or observations of bullying by blaming the victims. In fairness to the teachers, it should be noted that of these 61 messages, one came from a self-acknowledged bully-victim, and 12 came from individuals whom I re-categorized as bully-victims or possible bully-victims (despite the fact that they portrayed themselves as victims). An additional 11 of these 61 messages came from individuals who were not bully-victims, but who had engaged in a form of retaliation—e.g., rumour mongering or fighting back physically—that might attract negative attention from teachers.

Nevertheless, there was a strong perception that teachers were more apt to blame the victims and the bully-victims than they were to blame the bullies. In message 76, for example, 12 year-old Clifford from Winnipeg, Canada relates how he was unfairly blamed by the teacher, the school administration and the school counsellor for his inability to cope with the bullying:

They were making fun of me, punching and kicking me and taking part in some other things. The bullying didn't stop, it kept going and going and going. All through grade one the kids picked on me and again and again I kept getting sent to the office and sent to the guidance councillor for crying and yelling in class. She wanted me put on Ritalin. I didn't have A.D.D, I was just depressed!

In “My Story” (message 157), Gord from Gastown, British Columbia Canada recalls how he was bullied during the 1980s. Gord ended up being blamed—first by his peers, and then by the school coaches—for a physical disability that limited his athleticism and was evidently beyond his control:

They called me retard, cripple, girl, banana because of how I walked. Before I got my operation done, I used to walk on my toe....Every sporting activity I would get some junior high kids that would do something and blame it on me. And so the coaches would come at me and start blaming me for what happened.

“A Mother's Story of Emotional Bullying” (message 398), submitted by an anonymous “Mother in Canada”, describes a scenario in which both the mother and her son are blamed for being overly sensitive:

In first grade my son....stopped talking at school, said little at home, no longer played with kids in the neighbourhood....I went to the school asked what's up? nothing they could see. I persisted something was going on but what? I eventually called school social worker who told me nothing was wrong, it was my son reacting to an over protective "FIRST GRADE PARENT" who as we all know find first grade more stressful themselves than the child.

The mother subsequently learned that her son was being victimized by an older boy, who was also bullying several other students. She continues:

it wasn't until September that everything was revealed including the other kids who were victimized by this kid. The highlight of this is several of these kids asked for help both in the classroom and in the schoolyard and were told they needed to handle their own problems.

**“No-one would listen, not my teachers, classmates, friends or parents”**

The above subtitle is drawn from message 101, submitted by Donna, an adult from Canada. Donna says that when she was bullied over 30 years ago:

No-one would listen, not my teachers, classmates, friends or parents. They all considered what ever happened I was partially responsible in some way of starting the verbal and physical fights.

This message from Donna serves to illustrate the degree to which the social relationships and family relationships—the “social bonds”—of many victims and bully-victims have been severed, or become “dysfunctional”. Thus, an appreciable number of victims and bully-victims find themselves unable to draw upon the reserves of social capital and social support that other individuals could turn to in time of need.

This propensity for friends, peers, teachers and parents to deny social support to the victims, or even to blame the victims themselves, can be attributed to the victims being perceived by others as “different”, “deviant” or “abnormal”—as social “outcasts”. Judging by the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), those who are actually involved in and affected by this process understand it well. In “Why Things Don't Change” (806), Joe, an adult from the United States, makes the following series of observations:

when teachers have to rescue the same kid over and over, they assign a pattern to him, and reason that the he/she must be an "odd ball" who can't conform. Then the teachers and administrators begin singling the victim out for abuse of their own....The victim not only has to deal with bullying from his peers, in the form of name-calling, vandalism, and physical abuse, but now also has to contend with teachers who unfairly score him low in achievement, put him on detention, and enlist his parents in berating him for poor performance.

In message 808, written in reply to message 806 from Joe (above), Mary endorses Joe's explanation of how the process unfolds:

you're singled out easily if you don't follow along with everyone else in the class and bullying comes along very quickly and is quickly ignored by the teachers. I had a teacher demean me in front of my dad during a parent/teacher conference....

## **7.4 Summary**

In this chapter, we have seen that the line between bullying and victimization is not easily drawn. There is a bully-victim spectrum, along which individuals may find themselves in the role of bully, victim, or bully-victim, depending upon their circumstances at the time. Therefore, research endeavours that focus solely on the unique motivations, personalities or psychobiological attributes of individual actors or small groups of actors—the pure victims, the reactive victims, the aggressive victims, the bully-victims, the bully-assistants, the pure bullies, the active bystanders and the pure bystanders (cf. Sanders, 2004)—are likely to have limited explanatory power. Instead, bullying should be seen for what it is—a longstanding, widespread practice, in which social actors work out issues of conformity, deviance, status, stigma, and access to social capital and/or social support.

In the concluding chapter, I will examine the consequences of bullying, the institutional responses to bullying, and the role that society and education play in sustaining—or at least tolerating—bullying. Finally, I will discuss the policy implications of my research, and identify a number of theoretical implications that warrant further exploration and development.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a tremendous increase in the amount of attention being paid to the issue of bullying. As noted in the Introduction to my dissertation (see Figure 1.1), 1,306 academic articles were published on this subject between 2000 and 2009. These figures for the past ten years, taken from the Web of Science database, represent 82 percent of academic articles on bullying published to date.<sup>29</sup> [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) currently lists 2,385 books on school bullying, 599 on workplace bullying, and 228 on cyber-bullying. The following is a very small sample of the many recent books that offer advice on how to deal with bullying:

- *Children and Bullying: How Parents and Educators Can Reduce Bullying at School* (Rigby, 2008)
- *How To Stop Bullying: Positive Steps to Protect Children in Your Care* (Csóti, 2008)
- *Safe School Ambassadors: Harnessing Student Power to Stop Bullying and Violence* (Phillips, Linney, & Pack, 2008)
- *Managing Violence in Schools* (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007)

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<sup>29</sup> The Web of Science does not include books at all, nor does it include the vast number of "self-help" or "expert opinion" articles originating from sources outside of mainstream academic circles.

- *Bully Blocking: Six Secrets to Help Children Deal with Teasing and Bullying* (Field, 2007)
- *Restoring Safe School Communities: A Whole School Response to Bullying, Violence and Alienation* (Morrison, 2007)
- *Bullying, Victimization and Peer Harassment: A Handbook of Prevention and Intervention* (Zins et al., 2007)
- *Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights and Feuds: A Practical Approach to Girls' Bullying* (Besag, 2006)
- *Bullied Teacher, Bullied Student: How to Recognize the Bullying Culture in Your School and What to do About It* (Parsons, 2005)
- *Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice* (Hopkins, 2004)
- *Bullying: A Practical Guide to Coping for Schools* (M. Elliott & Kidscape, 2002)
- *Bullying: Effective Strategies for Long-Term Management* (D. Thompson et al., 2002)

With so many recent articles and books on the subject of bullying, one might reasonably conclude that bullying is reaching epidemic proportions, or is more virulent today than it was in the past. However, as demonstrated earlier in my dissertation, bullying is not new, and other than the prominence of cyberbullying, recent manifestations of bullying are not substantively different

from earlier ones (cf. Rigby, 2008). How then do we explain this newfound interest?

It could be suggested that the sudden upsurge in bullying research, the emergence of grassroots anti-bullying movements, the imposition of school anti-bullying programs, and the worldwide trend toward legally-mandated anti-bullying programs bear some of the earmarks of a moral panic (cf. Burns & Crawford, 1999; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). However, I do not argue that the extreme interest in school bullying truly rises to the level of a “moral panic” or a socially constructed “problem”. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) point out, a main feature of a moral panic is volatility—such panics appear suddenly, disappear as suddenly, and then are quickly forgotten. Moreover, most of the issues or behaviours that come to be defined as problematic or harmful during a moral panic turn out in retrospect to be relatively trivial or innocuous.

The same cannot be said in the case of bullying and victimization. Some claims about the seriousness of the bullying problem are exaggerated, and the proliferation of unproven anti-bullying programs is difficult to explain. That said, interest in bullying has not waned, or at least, not so far. Furthermore, bullying-related school shootings and victim suicides did not suddenly cease after capturing such widespread attention in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The 2003 shooting of two students at Rocori High School in Cold Spring, the 2005 shooting of a security guard and five students at Red Lake High School in Minnesota, the 2006 shooting of the school principal at Weston High in Cazenovia, and the 2007 shooting of the school principal and seven students in

Tuusula, Finland were all reportedly committed by victims of bullying. The 2009 suicide by drug overdose of 15 year-old Megan Gillan in the United Kingdom and the 2010 suicide by hanging of Ashkan Sultani on Vancouver Island, Canada were also said to be related to bullying (Cooper, 2010b; Narain, 2009).

## **8.1 Consequences of bullying**

The negative outcomes of bullying are often accentuated by bullying researchers and anti-bullying advocates. As noted at different points in my dissertation, bullies, and victims are said to be at higher risk than non-bullies and non-victims for suicidality, criminality, and a host of other life course problems (e.g., Chodzinski, 2004; Elliott, 2002b). Comparatively few researchers acknowledge that the majority of bullies and victims overcome or age out of these behaviours and go on to lead perfectly normal lives (cf., Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Phillips, 2003). With this in mind, I have elected to give equal consideration to both positive and negative discourses about bullying.

### **Negative discourses about bullying**

There were 561 messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) where the authors had personal experience with bullying and also mentioned how the bullying had negatively affected themselves or someone that they knew. Of these 561 messages, 238 (42.4 percent) reported what could best be described as relatively minor emotional harm to the victim (see Table 8.1). I do not mean to trivialize the emotional impact that bullying can have. However, in the 238 cases

that mentioned emotional harm as the only negative outcome, the bullying tended to be of a less serious nature, and of relatively short duration.

**Table 8.1 Negative discourses about bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Harm to emotional health	238	42.4
Harm to emotional, mental and/or physical health	86	15.3
Thoughts of suicide/self-harm	48	8.6
Missing school, failing school, dropping out	39	7.0
Attempts at suicide	30	5.3
Failure at life/afraid	30	5.3
Physical harm/Injury	27	4.8
Scarred for life (emotionally “wounded”)	25	4.5
Death/homicide	12	2.1
Suicide	9	1.6
Life-long hatred (thoughts of revenge)	8	1.4
Serious self harm	7	1.3
Seriously injured	2	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In 219 of the 238 messages where the result was emotional harm, the authors also provided information regarding the type of bullying. Of these 219 messages, 168 (76.7 percent) described noncriminal behaviour, such as teasing, taunting, social exclusion, or a combination of these behaviours. In 174 of these messages—where the authors included details about the duration of the bullying—72 (41.4 percent) talked about bullying that had lasted for less than a year, while another 61 (35.1 percent) described bullying that had lasted for more than one year, but less than five years.

### **“My The Day My Feelings Were Hurt”**

“My The Day My feelings Were Hurt” is the title of message 492, submitted by Kelsey from Canada. In her message, Kelsey describes an incident that caused the break up of a friendship:

Today was an ordinary day: boring and dull. Of course that can all change when you have such great friends like I have. It was time for gym and Girl1 in my class was playing...wizard ball and after gym she was making fun of me by calling me a flake and making fun of me. I told my mom and she said that she was getting tired of Girl1 and I was too. My best friend Girl2 said she didn't even want to be Girl1's friend....now I can't stand Girl1 and if she thinks she can act like that in high school she will have no friends.

In message 493, Krystyna replies to Kelsey, saying: “Like poor you!!! My advice is to ignore her!!! I mean, She's the flake here”. The following is a small sample of other messages that describe bullying of relatively short duration and of a seemingly less serious nature, where the negative outcome is some form of emotional harm:

“Why Can't Kids See Past My Weight?” by Michelle, age 10 Canada (message 140):

I get teased at school because of my weight. I know how it feels to be called chubby, fat and stupid.... It hurts to be teased and I wish it would stop.

“Please Give Advice” by Phillip from the United Kingdom (message 363):

I was going to school trip with my friend and we shared the same room.... the friend turned out to be a bully calling me fat, gay and other horrible words. So now I fear going to high school because he's there.

“They're After Me!” by James in Virginia, U.S.A. (message 393):

I have a lot of bullies in my school in my small town in Virginia, USA and I am one of their main targets. I am not bragging or anything, but I am pretty popular. These bullies only pick on me because I am short. That makes me want to cry a lot.

"You Will Never Make the Basketball Team!" by an anonymous student (message 442):

My friend \*\*\*\*\* was playing basketball with me. She won! She said, "You stink" and "You will never make the basketball team". She still is teasing me. She is hurting my feelings.

"Why can't they leave me alone and get on with their life?", submitted by "Sad and confused person from Canada" (message 566):

I'm in grade 7 and there is a girl in my class who calls me a fat ass (because I am fat) and I always cry when she calls me that but when I cry she just says to her friends (also known as bystanders), "Oh look she crying again!"

"A bully at \* Intermediate", by Isabelle from New Zealand (message 572):

I go to school at \*\*\* Intermediate where there are lots of bullies but one bully really stands out in a bad way she almost go expelled earlier in the year but i am sorry to say but she still goes to school at \*\*\* and worst of all she's in my class!!!....Her name is Girl1. She mocks me almost every day!!!....I absolutely hate it!!!

"so hurt", by Mike from Canada (message 622):

People who you thought were your friends turned around and back stabbed you. You have done everything for these people only to get in return them hating on you. Life sucks, can it get any worse?

"I am being bullied", by Samantha from the United States (message 869):

When I walk down the halls they bother me and say mean things to me. I have told my mother.... She has told me to ignore them, never say anything mean and hold my head up high. I tell my mom that it does not bother me, but deep down, it is embarrassing.

"VERBAL", by "?" from the United Kingdom (message 875):

At school I used to get called names....But one day I said why are you calling me names? I've done nothing bad to you so why do you keep calling me names? They said nothing and walked away.

"I would like to share a story with you", by Rebecca from Canada (message 939):

I was in grade six and bullied a girl. My friends and I made fun of her because she had head lice. (We were not making this up we saw it crawling in her hair.) We gave her dirty looks and gossiped about her. I finally realized that this was wrong when I moved schools.

As discussed earlier, messages where the negative outcome was some form of emotional harm tended to describe bullying of a less serious (noncriminal) nature, lasting for a relatively short period of time. However, in 137 (67.8 percent) of the 202 cases where the values were known for both the negative consequences of bullying and the frequency of bullying, individuals who reported suffering emotional harm also reported bullying that occurred on an ongoing, daily or weekly basis. Thus, the degree of emotional harm appears to be more highly associated with frequency of bullying than with the type of bullying and/or how long it goes on for.

#### **“Mental Bullying is the Most Painful Thing Anyone Can Experience”**

As noted above, many messages about teasing, taunting and exclusion—also referred to as emotional or relational bullying (cf. Csóti, 2008; Elliott, 2002a)—mentioned seemingly minor emotional harm. That said, there were 17 messages claiming that emotional bullying was more harmful than physical bullying (cf. C. Phillips, 2003). In message 395, “Mental Bullying is the Most Painful Thing Anyone Can Experience”, 14 year-old Matt from the United Kingdom remarks:

Every day people were saying how ugly I am and that I have big lips. I know it sounds stupid, but it hurts so much. Every morning I see them staring at me in the mirror and I wish they weren't there.

Matt then describes the profound effects that emotional bullying or “mental bullying” has had on him:

I have put a knives to myself before, but for some reson I just couldn't do it, but I'm scared that I will soon. I hear their voices in my head everyday and it is slowly driving me insane....I'm doomed and it is way too late for me.

This particular theme is repeated in a number of messages. “I Am Not Dumb, I Can Talk!” (message 101) was submitted by Donna, an adult from Canada. Donna’s message was used in Chapter 7 to illustrate how victims were lacking in social capital and social support. Donna, whose victimization experiences took place over 30 years ago, says that “words can be, and generally are more damaging then a slap or punch. Those marks heal, but words bounce around in your head for years, and years, and years to the point you really begin to believe what was said”. “This Is a Story That Might Shock You” (message 179) was submitted anonymously by a 12 year-old female from Alberta, Canada. This anonymous message, also used in Chapter 7 as an example of lack of social support from parents, claims that: “when you break a bone it will mend and when you get a black eye it will eventually go away, but words stick with you forever” (cf. Garbarino & DeLara, 2002). Similarly, 16 year-old Emily from Canada says in message 504 that that people “don’t seem to understand...how deep and hurtful just words alone can be”.

In “Don't Doubt How You Feel” (message 412), 14 year-old Miriam from Chicago explains that emotional bullying is especially harmful because the victim can never be sure whether it is real or imaginary:

I know what it's like to be bullied, but in the worst way. They didn't shove, and yell and steal my stuff. I often doubted that it was even happening. I couldn't really tell someone what she said to make me upset, it was just how she said it. It is dangerous to doubt how you feel. I still remember a few times you could see it, hear it but most of the times I went home crying, it was unexplained. Because bullying is portrayed as loud and visible, the most desperate victims go unheard.

Emotional bullying can also be very difficult for parents or school personnel to detect. This is evidenced by the following observation from Carol, the former schoolteacher whose message “The Home of the Bully”, was previously cited in Chapter 6:

When we speak of bullying we often are referring to physical aggression but emotional aggression can be even more harmful. Physical attacks are very visible and more easily dealt with for there is concrete proof that the aggression occurs. The family is easily involved in the necessity to deal with the problem. What is more insidious and far more difficult to prove is emotional bullying - whispered, gossiped, words said and justified as just teasing. The emotionally bullied child has a much more difficult time making his case for much is hearsay and done behind the backs and out of earshot of those in charge.

Thirteen of the 17 messages about emotional bullying being more harmful than physical bullying mentioned extreme negative outcomes. Those extreme outcomes included missing or failing school (two messages), being “scarred for life” (three messages), having thoughts of suicide or self-harm (five messages), sustaining serious physical harm (one message), and death (one message). Evidently, the impact that emotional bullying has on certain individuals cannot be discounted. As Elizabeth from the United Kingdom remarks in message 945:

Sometimes I wish the bullying had been physical, at least then I would have known that my existence was being acknowledged. Instead, any verbal abuse was strictly behind my back, or in the form of a nasty note in my bag. I wasn't paranoid, they really were laughing at me. For three years straight, I

spent every break and lunchtime alone. Even the teachers did not notice me....

It's ten years later. I'm 21 now, I should have made so much of my life by now. Truth is, I haven't. I suffer from depression, I've self-harmed. I've just started therapy and anti-depressants. Why? Because for the past ten years, I have lived believing I was as worthless as my fellow students made me feel. I lived by the script they had written.

Apart from their characterization of emotional bullying as being more harmful than physical bullying, there was nothing about these 17 cases that clearly distinguished them from the hundreds of other individuals who posted messages about emotional bullying on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). Twelve of the 17 had experienced bullying of a non-criminal nature—teasing, taunting and exclusion—while the remainder described a combination of bullying that included teasing, exclusion and some form of criminal activity, such as theft or assault. In cases where the duration of the bullying was made clear in their messages, five had been bullied for a period exceeding five years. However, five had been bullied for between two and five years, while three had been bullied for less than one year. Eleven said that they had been bullied on an ongoing, daily or weekly basis, but another four indicated that they had only been bullied several times in one month, or several times during a year. It is conceivable that the individuals who say that emotional bullying is more harmful than physical bullying may be more “sensitive” or feel more “vulnerable” than those whose reactions to emotional bullying are seemingly less extreme.

**“They pushed, chased, kicked, punched, and made fun of me”**

Only 27 of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) talked exclusively about physical harm that was neither permanent nor life-threatening. In these instances, the individuals indicated that they had been tripped, pushed, punched and/or kicked, as suggested by the above subtitle, taken from message 518 by 11 year-old Lauren from Canada. The messages described relatively minor physical harm from which the victims usually recovered quickly. An example of this would be “I Hate Bullies, Don't You?” (message 410), posted by Derek in Pennsylvania, USA:

There is a bully in my school this year. He acts like he's the best. He bothers me for no reasons. He just walks up and kicks me in the nuts. It hurts me....The last day of school he was caught. In the beginning of the next school year he had detention. I was laughing at him. He yelled at me but I didn't mind. After that day since, we've never talked to each other. Now, I can live a normal, everyday life!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Another example would be message 460, submitted by Tanner, a self-acknowledged bully from Alberta, Canada:

When you think stuff that you do like trip someone and hit them on the shoulder really light and you think its funny, it may be hurting the person you do it to. I used to do it, but I started to hurt people when I thought it was funny and they did not think it was funny when I did it. I did get into trouble and the kids that think you're cool, you should not do what I did to my friends. Do you think this is bullying?

Two other messages in the data set reported serious physical harm or injury. One (message 16), posted by a grandmother from Saskatchewan, Canada, outlined at considerable length how her granddaughter had sustained brain damage that required ongoing medical treatment. According to the grandmother, this injury was caused by the stress of emotional—not physical—

bullying. The other (message 828), posted by a female victim from the United States, reported on a series of very serious physical injuries that she had sustained in college, at the hands of individuals whom she described as female and male “gang members”. Those injuries included being burned with a cigarette lighter, cut with a razor, hit with brass knuckles, and being stabbed. However, it was not clear how much of this could actually be likened to school bullying, as opposed to gang activity. Two of the females (both young adults) who attacked her were sent to jail as a consequence. She then became the victim of a retaliatory attack committed by “two male gang members”, who according to her were still being sought by the police at the time of her message.

#### **“A Lost Son by E.M. in Canada”**

There were 12 messages that reported that the victim had died as a result of bullying. Clearly, this is the ultimate form of serious physical injury. However, seven of those messages were submitted by the same grieving mother in Alberta whose son had been tragically killed in a schoolyard fistfight; thus, they were all related to a single incident. “A Lost Son” was the title of message 304, posted by another mother from Canada, whose 16 year-old son was found dead after a night of binge drinking. While bullying was seemingly a contributory factor in his death, her son did not die from a physical injury inflicted by bullies, or by deliberately taking his own life. Rather, he died as a result of voluntarily participating in a teenage drinking party, in an effort to impress his peers and gain their acceptance:

Our son would do anything to gain acceptance, and on June 9, 2001 my son and two of his "friends" went drinking. To prove he was just a "big" as they were he drank twice the amount of liquor as they. He fell into trees and sidewalks, begging for them to help him up. I don't know what happened except that sometime after midnight, they left him on a path where a small creek flowed nearby . His body was found the sometime after six by a poor woman walking her dog.

In message 885, "Princess" from Canada describes how her cousin was killed in a schoolyard fistfight:

The boy who would have now been a man, died in a fight because people think violence is the answer....He did not want to fight; he started walking away when this other low life boy gave him a sucker punch right in his temple which killed him instantly.

In this instance, however, there was insufficient information to accurately determine whether the fight was part of a repetitive pattern of bullying and victimization, or just an unfortunate one-time incident that had a lethal outcome. Message 648, posted by "speakerforthesilent" from Canada, also described a homicide, but it was again unclear whether it truly had anything to do with bullying. Instead, it described a wild house party gone wrong, where the author (a teenage female) ended up in a coma after being "tied to a car" and driven around by her brother's friends, and her brother ended up being killed by his so-called "friends" after he intervened on his sister's behalf and called an ambulance.

Message 329, "What Bullying Can Do", was submitted by Jenna, along with 14 other messages from the same elementary school in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Although seven of the students claimed to have firsthand experience with bullying, all—including Jenna—appeared to be posting their

messages in order to comply with the requirements of an anti-bullying assignment. Jenna says: "I have seen a lot of bullying and it wasn't a good thing to see. People find it funny to pick on the less popular kids in the class". She adds: "I have seen people talk about being bullied and they didn't end up a happy story people died or badly injured". Jenna's comments were vague, so there was no way of ascertaining whether she personally knew of students who died or had been badly injured, or if she was merely repeating what she had been told in class. In many respects, Jenna's message sounds almost identical to message 332, "My Thoughts On Bullying", posted by her classmate Megan: "A lot of times they just want to be part of the popular group, but if you ask me, if you have to hurt other people to be 'popular' then why would you want to be popular?"

On the other hand, message 894, submitted by 14 year-old Emily from the United Kingdom, provides a firsthand account of a death that was clearly a direct result of bullying. Emily says that she has been bullied since elementary school, but that things have gotten much worse since she started attending secondary school:

People started picking on me and my friend. They picked on her because she was my friend. One day they followed us after school we started running but they were fast. There were over 12 people there. They were on their bikes and had things with them. They were carrying chains and knives....They hit me with the chain and I felt a rush of pain up my arm. Then they kicked me and chucked rocks again and again. They beat me till I was bloody. Blood was pouring out of my mouth and I was crouched down on the floor. I couldn't get up but what about my friend I quickly went towards her as they left and she wasn't breathing. I called 999 and an ambulance came I was put in hospital with 3 broken ribs broken nose and internal damage. But my friend suffered worse I went to see her but she still didn't move. I held her hand and cried. Then something went wrong. All the nurses came in and pushed me out. 1 hour later they told me she had died.

To put things in perspective, once six out of the seven messages from the grieving mother in Alberta were factored out, there were in reality only six reports of homicide amongst the 950 messages harvested from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). Of those six remaining messages, one involved a son who died from binge drinking, and another concerned a brother and sister who became victims when they threw a raucous house party while their parents were away. There was also a message from an elementary school student, where it was doubtful that the author had firsthand knowledge of anyone who had actually died as a result of bullying, and another where it was difficult to determine whether the youth's death from "a sucker punch" resulted from a one-time fight, or from repetitive bullying. In all, then, there were only two cases where there was a clear cut cause-effect relationship between bullying and the victim's death.

**"They physically, emotionally, and mentally abuse me"**

The above quotation comes from message 393, posted by 10 year-old Geoffrey from Ontario, Canada. Negative consequences, including some combination of emotional, mental and/or physical harm, were mentioned in 86 of the messages, making this the second most common type of negative discourse.

There was a marked qualitative and quantitative difference between reports of bullying that in 76.7 percent of cases led to emotional harm only, and reports of bullying that included teasing, exclusion and some form of criminal activity that in 88.5 percent of cases led to a combination of emotional, mental and/or physical harm. Thus, it can be said that most types of bullying and bullying outcomes described on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) fall into one of two major

categories—exclusively emotional bullying that usually results in emotional harm, or a combination of emotional and physical bullying that usually results in a combination of emotional, mental and/or physical harm.

“My Story of Living Hell” (message 231), posted by a 12 year-old female from Manitoba, Canada, illustrates how emotional and physical bullying can lead to emotional, mental and physical harm:

I get picked on every single day. Something has to be done or else I am going to go really insane. Today I got a lot of stuff thrown at me and I was getting called names....I go home crying. I go home with bruises from grade 10 girls always beating the \*\*\*\* out of me.

Message 231 (above) is similar in content to message 293, “Help! I'm Trapped in Hell!”, posted by Hope from Western Canada:

I'm constantly being beat-up by my two older sisters and basically all of the kids at school. They call me looser, cry-baby, ugly, shorty, ooh you're gross, and get out of this school, you do not belong here!! One time, while I was waiting for the bus, they threw a rock of concrete at the back of my head, causing a slight concussion. They also take my things and throw them into the garbage can and calling me a garbage-picker when I go to retrieve them. They're constantly hitting me across the back of my head, pulling my hair, kicking my legs and leaving me out of group projects. To me this feels like Hell on earth.

The negative effects of this combination of emotional and physical bullying can evidently be serious, and potentially health- or life-threatening. Message 431 was posted anonymously by a White teenage male, living “in a mainly coloured area of Birmingham”. This individual describes himself as a victim of reverse racism:

They have tried setting me on fire twice without succeeding...because it was wet and I had also been swimming.... I also play lacrosse and they do not welcome me at the club. They have broken 5 sticks of mine and now I have

to use a cheap plastic one because of money problems which gives them another excuse to bully me. Once they put me in the net and fired lacrosse balls at me, until I told them that the white race was inadequate.

He concludes his message, saying:

They threaten to knife me daily and I cannot take it..... I think my life is no longer worth living if they don't end it sooner.....Please help. I can not go on much longer like this, somebody just talk to me.

Message 618, submitted by Denise, a female teen from Canada, ends with a similar plea for help:

I didn't mind them calling me names but now it is like kicking, punching and even pushing! I really am afraid something bad will happen to me....I am scared, what if I have to get put in the hospital or worse ..die. PLEASE HELP ME

“How Being Bullied Changed My Life!” (message 588), posted by Jodi from Canada, demonstrates how this type of multi-faceted bullying can also contribute to school violence:

Hey. I'm in grade 8 and have been bullied since I was in grade 6 and I seriously getting tired of the stress and mental pain I have been put through over the years, I cry myself to sleep almost ever night and I feel like and just want to round all my bullies up and punch their lights out. It has gotten so bad over the years that the police had to be called because they damaged my clothes and I am about ready to break down. Heres some advice to all you bullies GO AWAY BEFORE PEOPLE LIKE ME GET FED UP AND SHOOT ALL OF YOU LIKE I FEEL LIKE DOING RIGHT NOW!!!!

In the preceding section, I discussed emotional bullying that exclusively led to emotional harm, noting that in 137 (67.8 percent) of the 202 cases where the values were known for both negative consequences and frequency of bullying, the individuals reported having been bullied on an ongoing, daily or weekly basis. This type of emotional harm is apparently more highly associated

with frequency of bullying than it is with the type (seriousness) of bullying and/or how long it goes on for. Sixty-six of the messages that described suffering emotional, mental and/or physical harm indicated that the Web site participants had been bullied on an ongoing, daily or weekly basis. This suggests that those who experienced multiple negative effects were somewhat more likely to have been bullied frequently than those who experienced emotional harm only.

There were 104 messages about emotional bullying that resulted in emotional harm only in which the authors also provided adequate information about the time and place of the bullying. Of these 104 messages, only 23 indicated that the bullying had taken place before school, during school and after school. On the other hand, 27 of the 61 messages that described emotional, mental and/or physical harm—and that provided information regarding time and place—indicated that the person had been bullied before, during and after school. Thus, it could be said that those who experienced a combination of emotional, mental and/or physical harm were more likely to have been bullied in multiple domains than those who experienced emotional harm only.

#### **“Attempted Suicide Thanks to Bullying”**

The relationship between bullying and suicidality has been under investigation since the earliest days of bullying research (e.g., Herba et al., 2008; Olweus, 1993; Roland, 2002). There were 94 messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) about suicidal thoughts, self-harm, attempted suicide and completed suicides (see Table 8.1). The above subtitle, “Attempted Suicide Thanks to Bullying”, was the title of message 296, posted by Angela, a student in junior high school:

I was so sick and tired of all the teasing the fighting and the not being happy that I had started to cut myself. I did not cut my wrists so that I would die, I just did it to relieve anger. Then finally I over-dosed on some medicine. I ended up being rushed to the emergency. After I was transferred to a mental home. I stayed there for 2 1/2 weeks as an in-patient, then for another 2 1/2 weeks I was an out-patient.

Of the 94 messages about suicide or self-harm, 48 (over half) concerned suicidal ideation, with no evidence that the individuals posting the messages had made suicide plans or attempted to commit suicide. For example, JP, a female teen from Alberta, Canada remarks in message 117: "I started to get a bit suicidal, I knew I was depressed", but says nothing to suggest that matters progressed beyond that point. In message 121, a mother from Australia reports that her middle child "was close to considering suicide in the middle of grade 9 but had enough sense to talk to the school counsellor and ring a kids help-line". The author of "My Life by Anonymous" (message 221) says that "I have thought of suicide but can not do it because I think of the people who love me like mom and dad". Message 221 (above) is similar in content to message 551, "Suicidal thoughts", posted by an unidentified 14 year-old female victim from Canada:

I now think about quitting, committing suicide. Now sometimes people often think that suicide is selfish and wrong, but they haven't been in your shoes they don't know what you're going through. But then again I also think about the people that love me, friends, most family, etc.

Thirty of the Web site participants said in their messages that they had actually attempted to commit suicide. In message 244, Geoff from Ontario, Canada describes how he attempted suicide multiple times, and how he was prevented in his most recent attempt by a friend on the Internet:

You decide that death is the only way out. But the other 145 -150 times did not work (grades-5-9). Your friend comes online to talk to you. You tell her what you are going to do and 5 hours later your parents find out about it from her parents. You go and visit the school counsellor about it and she helps you.

In “Bullies Should Be Stopped” (message 419), 14 year-old Kathryn from the United Kingdom recounts how constant bullying by one boy over an eighteen month period caused her to progress from self-harm to attempted suicide:

I started cutting myself. It was a relief. I could get out my anger, however, the boy saw the marks and laughed. One day I could not take it anymore and tried to slit my wrists. At school he saw them and went boasting how he only had to push me a little more. Things went from bad to worse until I broke. I took an overdose.

Seven of the messages described serious self-harm where the authors—at least ostensibly—did not intend to commit suicide. In “The Bathroom Stall” (message 467), Stacey from Western Canada reports that:

I spent the majority of grade 8 sorting out my personality crisis and cutting myself. I felt that by hurting myself it made me more likable or more acceptable for them (the others). I was ashamed of myself because *I was too afraid to commit suicide* [emphasis added].

In message 510, “Hurtin and cutting”, Steffanie from the United States describes self-harm involving starvation and cutting herself, but does not specifically mention suicide:

They called me hamburger. It hurt my feelings but I never told anyone. So I started to skip meals. After a while it was every meal. it only lasted about two weeks because a friend found out and called one of my teachers after school and she told the counselor and she had a talk with me. I stopped that but now I resort to cutting. One of my teachers found out and told the counselor and she asked me but I told her it was not true. I still do cut sometimes but most of the time to hide it I don't cut my wrists but I do cut in other places.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the forms of serious self-harm outlined above are believed to be indicators of future suicide attempts (cf. O'Connor, Rasmussen, Miles, & Hawton, 2009).

There were nine messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that talked about completed acts of suicide. Of those nine messages, five were posted by cousins of the victim, while the remaining four were posted by a mother, a classmate, a friend, and an unidentified person who appeared to be a close relative. While all nine of the messages attributed the suicide to bullying, it was noted that four of the nine victims had underlying medical problems that could also have contributed to the bullying. To illustrate, Megan from the United States reports in message 795 that:

My cousin took his own life a few months ago. It is true that a big part of his problem centered around his depression, but the other part came from the outside. You see, my cousin was the kindest person you could ever meet, too kind for the harshness of this world. He was picked on by people at school that he once thought of as friends. They would call him names, make fun of his hair, throw bits of paper at him during class, and make him the butt of their jokes. Maybe another kid would have been able to shake it off, but not my cousin.

Another example would be message 647, in which “Special Cousin from Canada” indicates that her cousin also had autism:

He had a disease that made it so that when he took interest in a thing and if he made his mind up about something there was no changing his mind. Anyone who really took the time to know Rory, they would realize that Rory....just had deep thoughts and feelings.

Indeed, a number of recent research studies have reported that the majority of youth suicides involve a variety of contributory factors apart from bullying, including medical disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, single-parent

homes, parents with emotional or psychological problems, parental rejection, relationship problems with a boyfriend or girlfriend, and overall lack of social support (Cash & Bridge, 2009; Herba et al., 2008; O'Connor et al., 2009). Of the 94 messages on the Web site that specifically raised issues of suicidality or self-harm, there were six that mentioned pre-existing medical conditions, including two about autism, two about anxiety and depression, two about learning disorders, three about ADHD, one about dyslexia, and another where the individual apparently suffered simultaneously from epilepsy, obsessive-compulsive disorder and Tourette's Syndrome. Another seven messages described family situations such as broken homes and parents with "problems of their own".

As discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 7), lack of social support from teachers, parents and other prospective interveners—e.g., neighbours, counsellors, school bus drivers, older students, etc—is another important factor in victimization. Of the 94 messages about suicidality or self harm, 64 indicated that the victims were unable to obtain help from "traditional" social support networks. Nineteen messages mentioned that parents ignored the complaints or failed to respond, did not regard the bullying as a problem, said that there was nothing that they could do, or blamed the victim. Thirty more messages indicated that teachers ignored the bullying, blamed the victim, or did not see it as a problem. Fifteen said that they were unable to enlist the help of other prospective interveners such as older students or adult neighbours, with eight of those messages indicating that the prospective interveners made things worse

by either ignoring the problem altogether or blaming the victim. Nine of these 64 messages indicated that the victim had been unable to access social support from at least two different sources, while three more said they had been unable to get help from any of the three main sources.

The severity of the bullying appeared to have little (if any) effect on suicidality. Of the 86 messages that mentioned suicidality and also included information on the type of bullying, 47 reported teasing and exclusion only, while 39 reported teasing and exclusion in combination with some form of criminal offence such as theft, damaging property, or assault. The duration of the bullying was more of a factor than the severity of the bullying. Of the 77 messages that mentioned suicidality and included information on duration, 39 reported bullying that had lasted for more than five years, 26 described bullying that had lasted for more than one year but less than five, while only 12 talked about bullying that lasted for less than a year. The frequency of the bullying had far and away the strongest influence in this regard—of the 85 messages that mentioned both suicidality and frequency of bullying, 80 described bullying that occurred on an ongoing, daily or weekly basis.

An important issue to address is whether these messages about suicidal ideation, self-harm, attempted suicide and completed suicide represent extreme examples, written by a unique group of self-selecting participants, who elected to post them on a victim-oriented, anti-bullying Web site. As noted several times in my dissertation, participants on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) were not specifically asked to provide information pertaining to suicidality. Thoughts about suicide—without

mention of suicide attempts or self-harm—appeared in 48 (6.6 percent) of the 729 messages in which the authors also claimed to have firsthand experience with bullying.<sup>30</sup> This 6.6 percent figure is considerably lower than the 14.5 percent of high school students who reported having suicidal thoughts in a recent study of youth suicide in the United States (Cash & Bridge, 2009). The 4.1 percent of the messages (30 out of 729 messages) that mentioned attempted suicide is also less than the 6.9 percent that reported suicide attempts in the US study cited above. A UK-based study found that rates of self-harm (including suicide attempts) amongst young people in five European countries were in the 13-14 percent range (O'Connor et al., 2009). This can be compared to the 6.3 percent of messages (46 out of 729 messages) on the Web site that mentioned either self-harm, attempted suicide or completed suicide. Additionally, it can be said that the prevalence of descriptions of suicidal ideation, self-harm and suicide attempts on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) is generally in line with the findings of studies on youth suicidality conducted in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta (Fedorowicz & Fombonne, 2007).

Over the past 10-15 years, youth suicide rates have generally been on the decline in most Western nations, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, to name a few (Biddle, Brock, Brookes, & Gunnell, 2008; Bursztein & Apter, 2009; Kutcher, 2008). This raises an important question: if claims that bullying is on the upswing—or is more sinister now than it was in the

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<sup>30</sup> These 729 messages do not include the 74 messages that were off-topic or repeated messages, nor does it include messages from the 196 commentators and respondents who claimed no personal experience with bullying.

past—are accurate, and if claims that bullying increases the risk for suicide are also accurate, why then are youth suicide rates going down? There has been considerable debate about the influence of “selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors” on this decline in youth suicide rates ( cf. Biddle et al., 2008; Cash & Bridge, 2009). While some observers argue that antidepressant medicines have reduced youth suicides, others argue that their use may actually increase the likelihood of suicide (cf. Bursztein & Apter, 2009; Kutcher, 2008). To date, nothing definitive has emerged from this debate. In any event, recent research challenges the long-held notion that there is a strong and/or direct link between victimization and suicidality, pointing out that there are many moderating or intervening variables—e.g., medical illnesses, parental rejection, serious boyfriend or girlfriend problems, etc—that need to be taken into account as well (cf. Cash & Bridge, 2009; Herba et al., 2008).

### **“They Have Left Their Scars”**

There were four other discernible discourses regarding the negative consequences of bullying: feeling scarred for life or wounded (25 messages), being a failure at life or afraid of life (30 messages), experiencing life-long hatred or thoughts of revenge (eight messages), and missing, failing or dropping out of school (39 messages). While these four discourses could be distinguished from each other in certain respects, they all described life-altering negative effects that did not fall under categories such as physical harm, relatively minor emotional harm, serious physical harm, or suicidality.

The above caption, “They Have Left their Scars”, was the title of message 469, submitted by Cate from Australia. In “Self-help for Adults and Victims of Bullying” (message 142), Tim from Canada remarks: “At age 21 the scars of bullying have left me with poor social skills, anxiety in 'new' situations, low self esteem and a depression”. Muni, who submitted a total of 15 messages to [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), says in message 772 that: “I have painful memories of being bullied and they will never ever go away. I am scarred for life as a result of these selfish jerks”. In her message about workplace bullying in the school setting, Gina, a teacher from Alberta reports: “I no longer work with this person, but whenever I hear her name, I start to feel anxious. I feel as though I have been scarred for life”.

In another account of workplace bullying (message 399)—this time in the army—David from the United Kingdom describes how he is still friendless and afraid 16 years later: “my life ever since then has been terrible. I live my life in fear of people not liking me, all I want is to be liked, to be normal”. In “I am no good” (message 540), “MeThomas” from the United States says that he works with “highly sophisticated computer equipment at [his] church”, but is afraid to get out into “the real world” as a result of the bullying he experienced in school. MeThomas adds: “So much for my life, I can't even get a job because of my past bullies in my life”. CJ from the United Kingdom, who posted 12 messages on the Web site says in message 590 that even several years after leaving school because of being bullied, she is still “scared of talking to people face to face”, that

she is “scared of being outside”, and as a consequence does not “go out much”.

This theme is captured well in message 901, by Dwight from Canada:

From the earliest moments of my formative school years, I was bullied. I have always felt that because I was different I was never given a fair chance in life, that people always looked at me as "weird", "odd" and "different". Being "me" was never an option. I was very lucky to get through the public education system, because no one, peers or adults, were able to help me. I just hid, and tried every day to hide myself from the hurtful and painful comments that other children chose to say to me. It cost me a lot. As a result of these events, I lived most of my adult life in fear of other people and most importantly I was truly afraid to be me.

There were eight messages where the authors specifically mentioned experiencing life-long hatred, or having ongoing thoughts of revenge. In message 215, Jane remarks:

I was constantly bullied from the time I entered elementary school until high school when I just withdrew so that I wouldn't have to talk to people. At one point I kicked the worst of the bullies in the face. I believe that bullying has made me into a somewhat bitter person, I sometimes find myself smiling when I hear of the misfortune of those who teased me earlier in life. To be honest I think they deserve it and worse.

In “Bullying in Scotland's Toughest City” (message 256), James from Manitoba, Canada recounts how he was bullied while attending school in Glasgow during the 1940s, and outlines in graphic detail what he would like to do with his main tormentor:

if our paths ever cross, swear I will kill him with my bare hands....If guns had been available during my nightmare schooldays in Glasgow, I most certainly would have shot \*\*\*\*\* without a backward glance, and there are millions of disturbed people like me all over the world....I am 3 years off seventy but that bully is still embroiled in my brain.

What James is saying in the above message is almost identical to what Erma from Ontario is saying in message 286 below:

years have passed and those painful memories still exist. It seems I can not let go of the past.... You see what anger does. It grows like a tree. Starting from the bottom and then branches out to acts of violence. Some where down the line I know I will blow up on someone from the past.

Missing, failing or dropping out of school can also have serious life-long repercussions. In message 146, Valerie G. describes herself as “an adult who was bullied as a teen in high school”:

It became so bad that despite being an A student and wanting to go to university, I could just not go on and dropped out of high school once I turned 16. I have since completed my education, but it took me years to overcome the emotional damage....

In “Bullying Has Got To Stop!”, N. H. talks about bullying that took place over 25 years ago, and how it affected him, but not his wife, who was also bullied:

My wife and I were both bullied through our years of High School. My wife graduated being able to deal with the bullying but for myself by the time I reached grade 11 and had bad marks through my High school years because of the bullying, I couldn't take it anymore so I quit. I am now 33 and still today it does have some effect still on my life.

“No Justice” (message 418), submitted by Clifford from the United Kingdom, underscores the difficulties involved in classifying text messages of this nature and assigning discrete numerical values to them. The negative consequences described by Clifford could easily have been categorized as “serious physical injury”, but he appeared to be more concerned about the potential life-altering experience of missing school:

Two days later, I was beaten up by the biggest of the gang. He was my height, but a lot bigger than me in build. He was the boy who threatened me in July the year before. As a result of this, I suffered five chipped teeth, a displaced fracture to my finger, cuts and bruises, as well as getting kicked and punched in the head....The only option for me is to go to school or my mum

teach me at home which she said she will do but I lose the right to do my GCSE's, but the bullies get a full time education.... It seems there is no real protection for the victims of bullying and no real justice. The education authority should put the victims first as we lose out on education while the bullies get it all and are better qualified to get the best jobs. It's not fair.

Another case where the negative results could well have been assessed as “physical harm or injury”, but were categorized instead as “missing, failing or dropping out of school” is “All My Life” (message 601), posted by Louise from the United Kingdom. Louise says that she is being victimized by someone whom she once considered her friend:

She calls me names and is racist towards me but I don't get it. I am constantly threatened to fail homework, refuse classwork and fail all exams. I get pushed, punched smacked pinched and kicked around by her everyday in most of my lessons. I was a bright kid and always happy but now I'm in trouble at school all the time when I'm forced to go by my dad. I was in school last year for 46% as I was too scared of her and her mates(who just laugh at me).... I am now in year 11 and it still goes on but I'm determined to sit my exams and not fail them as I'll have no life left.

As would be expected from a victim-oriented, anti-bullying Web site, there were many messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that focussed on the negative consequences of bullying. That said, the majority described relatively minor emotional or physical harm. However, others talked about serious physical injury (including death), suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and completed suicide, plus a host of other life-altering consequences of bullying, such as being “scarred for life”, being afraid of life, or failing school. Evidently, the negative consequences of bullying should not be underestimated.

## Positive discourses about bullying

None of what follows implies that I am endorsing bullying, or suggesting that it is a harmless social activity that should be ignored. As was reported in the preceding section, 561 of the messages posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) described bullying as harmful. Nevertheless, 231 of the messages posted on Web site mentioned “positive”—or at least “neutral”—outcomes of bullying, and/or described how the individuals had successfully overcome their bullying experiences (see Table 8.2).

**Table 8.2 Positive discourses about bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Normal, successful life	117	50.7
Found new friends, gained popularity	52	22.5
Excelled at school, challenging activity, career	39	16.9
Did well at school	12	5.2
Challenging career	7	3.0
Excelled at challenging activity	4	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>100.0</b>

There were 168 messages of these 231 messages where the authors declared that bullying was harmful, yet at the same time, indicated that it had not undermined their lives to a significant extent. This again underscores the difficulty in taking complex, multi-faceted discourse and assigning to it a specific (either-or) value or subsuming it under a single category. Thus, these 168 messages involving conflicting or multi-faceted discourse appear in Tables 8.1 and 8.2 (above), counted as examples of both negative and positive discourses

about bullying. To do otherwise would have misrepresented views expressed by a considerable number of Web site participants.

An excellent example of this sort of multi-faceted discourse comes from message 112, "You Have a Great Future", submitted by 37 year-old J. D. from Canada:

I remember very well being bullied when I was in school. For me it happened mostly in Junior High. I think part of the problem was that adults accepted that kids fight, so they didn't take it seriously....I think the worst part of it was how isolated and powerless it made me feel. I also figured there was something inadequate about me - I wasn't smart enough, cool enough, or attractive enough. I didn't want to go on like that, and often felt I couldn't stand another day....

Despite depicting bullying in such a negative light, however, J.D. goes on to describe a happy, successful life:

When I finally left for university at 17 I found there was a totally different, happier world waiting for me out there....they called me weak, and now I've run five marathons, and I spent the day cross country skiing yesterday. They called me stupid because I had trouble reading out loud, but now I'm a university professor, and I've written articles for The Globe and Mail. They called me a loser, and now I'm very happy and have the best friends anyone could hope for, and I get so much time off my work that my hardest decision is whether to go skiing or do some drawing. By the way, for all those kids who get called geeks: this "geek" makes \$133/hr. teaching and doing computer work. There's a saying: be kind to geeks because you will wind up working for one. What makes you a little different right now and causes you problems could make you happy or be a source of pride in the future.

Thus, J.D.'s message was scored under both positive and negative discourses about bullying. In fact, the positive elements in his message vastly outweighed the negative. If I had been forced to choose one discourse to the exclusion of the other, then his message would likely have been categorized under "positive discourses".

Another example of conflicting, multi-faceted discourse is “Suicide is NOT An Option: Somebody Loves You!” (message 261), posted by Murray, a parent from Saskatchewan, Canada:

I am a concerned parent. For a number of years our son went to his room and cried for hours, was sick to his stomach, and made numerous excuses not to go to school. When we would approach him or question him, he would deny anything was wrong. We were terrified he would commit suicide.

Murray’s message was categorized under negative outcomes of bullying, because of his mention of suicidality. However, as was the case with J.D. (above), the story of Murray’s son had a predominantly positive ending. Thus, it was also placed in the positive discourse category:

The bullying subsided. Our son went on to college, met new freinds and was elected PRESIDENT of his college! On his graduation he was asked to speak to the graduates, and received a STANDING OVATION from over seven hundred people! You see, there is nothing wrong with you.

#### **“You Can Overcome!”**

As indicated in Table 8.2 (above), 117 of the Web site participants reported that while their bullying experiences had been very unpleasant, they had overcome those experiences and gone on to lead normal, successful lives. “You Can Overcome!” is the title of message 195, submitted by Shawnda from Saskatchewan, Canada. In her message, Shawnda recounts how she was verbally and physically bullied continuously from kindergarten until she graduated from high school. However, she announces that at the age of 28, she is “a strong and self-confident woman”. In “Be Strong”, Ken from Canada recalls being bullied throughout elementary school and during the first two years of high school, but concludes by declaring: “I’ve learned to be strong, I’m my own

person, and I'm very happy with my life now". Ed, a 37 year-old from Newfoundland, Canada makes a similar statement in "We Will Survive". Ed, who was cited earlier as an example of an individual who had been a victim of homophobic bullying over 30 years ago, says that he is the "father of 3 boys, ages 7 and 11", and that he is "a public speaker now".

"Growing Up in Ottawa in the 1970s" (message 208), posted by an anonymous female from Canada, talks about female bullying that lasted from grade three to grade eight. She offers the following advice to victims of bullying:

Never look back. High School was a blast. Had lots of friends, had a steady boyfriend. Did well in school and graduated and went on to university. Got married, have a beautiful daughter, and 2 grey cats....Hang in there. If you are having problems like these, TALK to someone who will listen. You are so lucky in that there are places like this website. Please use them, and their resources. You can make your life happier, and saner.

In "I'm a Male in Canada Who Survived" (message 413), Nick from Montreal, Canada recalls that he was bullied "for about nine years straight". Nick recalls that he "fell into a serious depression" and had "two attempted suicides". Like the anonymous author of message 208 (above), Nick found that his situation improved dramatically when he changed schools and transitioned from junior to senior high school:

I changed schools and met some of the most wonderful people I had ever met at my new high school. The people there are much more understanding, and best of all, the school's population is mainly multicultural. Now, I am a senior at my new high school and my life has finally shifted to a great level and I am very, very happy! I survived on my own and that's what makes me prepared for life and anything thing else that's thrown my way.

### **“My Story Then and Now”**

Twelve Web site participants said that they went on to do well in school. Seven reported that they had found a challenging career such as being a police officer, a probation officer or a professional model, four that they had excelled at a challenging activity like competitive sports or becoming an advocate for the disabled, and 39 that they had excelled in multiple areas, including at school, a challenging career, and/or a challenging activity. Message 451, “My Story Then and Now”, was submitted by Ashlea, a second year journalism student at a highly reputed university in Ontario, Canada. Ashlea, who was bullied for being overweight throughout elementary school and junior high, offers the following advice:

As I got older, I still got teased, but it lessend. In 10th or 11th grade, it pretty much stopped. I wish I knew then what I know now about life. I am 20, and I am still big, but I have a boyfriend of 8 months who loves me, as he says "for your heart- for who you are, not what you are". I have friends who are REALLY friends, and would die for me, as I would for them. I have a loving and supportive family, who have always told me I am beautiful, and when I hit 18, I started to believe them. My message to anyone who is being bullied is this:

**DON'T LET IT CONTINUE! DON'T BE A VICTIM!**

Ian, also from Ontario, offers similar advice in “School Is Not Life ... Thank God!” (message 227):

Even in university, I noticed it, horizons broaden tremendously and everyone is able to find their niche(s) where they can feel safe to flourish. We all grow, and many of the awkward "geeks" of school are now flourishing at work and in life. I stick up for myself now, especially at work, and take responsibility for making my concerns and wishes known in a constructive manner. In my personal life, I treat others with respect and expect the same and if they don't reciprocate, I move on. I seek to spend my time with others who appreciate me for me and avoid those who conflict with my values and attitudes. So, hang tough, be strong, get help and remember - there is a big world out there

outside of school and there is room for a large variety of people who are just like you who value you for your unique talents and insights. Stay strong and you will get through it (Remember, living well is the best revenge!)

In “Please Don't Give Up!” (message 372), Rachel from Philadelphia says that she “was bullied from around Grade 5 through high school”. She adds:

I am now 28 years old, own my own business, am happily married and have many friends. I just want to say to all of the kids who are being bullied - it WILL end. School can be so hard if you're different from others, but when you graduate and go to college you'll find tons of people willing and eager to be your friends. The very things that people bullied you about as a kid will become assets in the wider world....Recently I went to my 10 year high school reunion. I was apprehensive about seeing these people but was determined to go. Guess what? It was wonderful. All of my classmates who attended (former jocks, geeks, bullies and bullied) laughed and joked together, some apologized for former behavior and we all enjoyed each other's company. It helped me resolve all of these old feelings I had about my childhood.

### **“Will You Be My Friend?”**

“Will You Be My Friend?” is the title of message 136, by Rachel from Alberta, Canada. Rachel begins by announcing: “I have barely any friends. Lots of people make fun of me”. She ends on a positive note, however, saying that: “I found someone who needed a friend as much as I did. So I decided to be her friend. Ever since that day I've had a friend”. Michelle from Egypt reports in message 947 that she used to be a bully herself, largely due to issues concerning popularity and friendship. Michelle says she has recognized that this behaviour was inappropriate, and that she has taken the step of befriending her former victims:

I used to be a bully. I would pick on people all the time because they weren't as "cool" as me and my friends. But, I've decided to stop. I said I'm sorry to all my victims, became their friend and now I'm going to say sorry here.

In "Trying To Trust People" (message 314), 17 year-old Bastian from Australia touches on a number of themes that have been dealt with at numerous points in my dissertation, including the significance of friendship, betrayal by friends, and the buffering effects of social capital and social support networks:

I know from experience that when you are being bullied it is very hard to trust people, especially after they have betrayed you and sometimes you get to the point where you feel that you will never be able to trust anyone, because of what they might say or do to you. I was in this situation and I found that the people who I thought were my friends suddenly found that it was more fun to play tricks, try to pressure me and push me around, than actually be friends. Eventually I got sick of it and retreated, trying not to trust anyone at all....Last year I met some really nice people and although I was very cautious about trusting them, I found that they were trust worthy. It took me almost twelve months to work this out, but in the end I found I could talk with them and have fun. This didn't come easily, as they were bullied for liking me, but when they ignored what people said to them for liking me I knew I could trust them.

Message 351, "A Story of Life by Kim Fissel, a survivor of school bullying" was used in Chapter 7 to illustrate how victims may come to be stigmatized or labelled as "outcasts" or "untouchable". Indeed, Kim remarks that she and some of the other outcasts had been "given the name the 'Petting Zoo'". She says that "notes began appearing such as: 'Twenty-five cents admission for the Petting Zoo' and 'Beware of Lice, Fleas and Ticks'". However, her story also provides an excellent example of the importance of friendship and social support in counterbalancing bullying:

The 'Petting Zoo' may have been the most loathed group in my school but we were the closest and we saved each others lives too many times to count. This support system has been carried over from graduation when most

groups in schools break up we all still keep in touch, we still support each other even though some have moved to other areas, even as far Newfoundland and Nunavut, we still phone each other and talk about everything and nothing. Though we were not well liked in school, we stuck together and fought off the anger and depression that gets to most people, we fought and we won and that is the point in the end....P.S. Jodie is still my best friend as she has been for the past seven years.

While messages dealing exclusively with “finding new friends” accounted for only 52 (22.5 percent) of the 213 messages describing how people had overcome bullying, the positive influence of friendship was clear throughout. Ten messages that talked about the importance of finding new friends were categorized instead under having a “normal and successful life”, and three others under “excelling at school and a challenging activity or career”, because “finding new friends” was only a part of the overall discourse about overcoming bullying. Moreover, three messages that were couched strictly in negative terms mentioned “finding new friends” as one of the more viable solutions to bullying. Even Rosie from Alberta, the author of “I Always Feared The Bell”, ultimately found friendship and happiness:

I met the person who changed my life forever. A woman who possesses the greatest plethora of wisdom that I have ever known. I finally realized how beautiful I could be. She laughed at what I had to say. She allowed me to be silly and have my anger and sadness, and even blonde moments, plentiful as they are. I could do anything and not be judged. I finally realized that I could not longer be a victim.

#### **“I am a better person for it”**

In all, 19 of the Web site participants explicitly mentioned that they had become stronger as a consequence of their bullying experiences. In message 172, Amy advises the other site participants to remember that it is ultimately their lives. She says that she has “pretty much grown up with bullying”, but that she is

“a better person for it”. According to Amy, she has “learnt that what people think doesn't matter, so long as you're happy”. In “Survivor Skills” (message 230), 38 year-old Denis from Quebec, Canada recounts how he and his identical twin brother were both bullied in primary school, but says that as a consequence, they “became stronger, smarter and eventually... achievers”. Denis explains that he and his brother became successful coaches, and helped “three of our athletes (who were also bullied when they were younger!!!) to go to 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games”. Denis then talks about how his wife and her family were also bullied, and became achievers as a result:

My wife is from chinese origin but was born in a small town here in Quebec where she and her 4 sisters and brother were the only chinese family. Not only they were bullied at school, on the streets, in the park, etc... etc... but day, after day, after day... for over ten years! They had, of course, no friend except themselves. But they learned to fight back and survive....Today, they are all achievers and... live a happy life.

Mike, a 37 year-old member of the Canadian Forces, recalls in message 110 that he “was always picked on because of [his] height”. However, he declares that his small size “only made [him] try harder to be a better person”—that it caused him to “work harder” and “run faster” than those around him. Mike’s message, which was written in response to “I Am Small” (message 109) from 11 year-old Allison from Alberta, Canada, concludes: “Because of what she [Allison] is going through now, it WILL make her a better person in the future”. A few other brief examples follow:

“Through those trials they gave me I learned and I grew. I became stronger, more able, and better able to cope with what else life had to throw at me” (message 147, by a school teacher from Canada).

“I have just been signed with a major record label. If it weren't for those bullies, I would probably have been too shy to ever perform on stage. I'm also completing my degree in law at the end of the year” (Message 302, by Mikey, a young adult from Australia).

“I know it does not happen for every one, but it has only made me stronger!!” (message 320 by Michelle, a teenager from the United Kingdom).

“[It] was a good experience for me. It taught me a lot of things, like how to stand up for myself” (message 893 by Melissa, a young adult from Canada).

Several of these messages about bullying making you stronger were part of a larger discourse, in which 99 of the Web site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying declared that in the long run, victims were the winners, and bullies were the losers. Of those 99 messages, 58 came from adults, young adults or older teenagers, who were able to evaluate their bullying experiences from the vantage point of age and maturity. While there is always the possibility that some of the positive results were exaggerated in an effort to show the victim in a better light, 91 of these messages were judged by me to be clearly authentic, and 89 were deemed to be either highly or at least moderately relevant. Generally, I can say that an appreciable number of these individuals had come to see their bullying experiences as part of a process that contributed to their successes in life.

### **“Aging out” of bullying and victimization**

Maturation—also referred to as “aging out”—is a well-recognized and common outcome of most youth “misbehaviour”, including bullying and victimization (cf. Moffitt, 1993; Pepler et al., 2008; Rigby, 2008). Maturation is not a consequence of bullying per se, but rather, of the aging process and the

passage of time. This is also consistent with the notion that a significant portion of bullying tends to be transitional in nature, and of reasonably short duration (cf. Marsh et al., 2004; Solberg et al., 2007). Of the 131 Web site participants who provided sufficiently precise information regarding the onset of bullying, 53 (40.5 percent) described bullying that started when they moved from elementary school to junior high, while another 44 (30.5 percent) indicated that it started when they moved into a new school. Many of the site participants “aged out” of bullying when they reached senior high school, or if not, when they left school.

Although I did not treat maturation or aging out as a positive result of bullying, of the 231 participants in [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) whose messages were categorized under “positive discourses about bullying”, 101 also mentioned maturation or aging out as an eventual route to overcoming bullying. Additionally, 39 messages that were categorized exclusively under “negative discourses about bullying” described maturation or aging out as a practical solution to bullying. A few brief examples should suffice:

My Heart Goes Out To You All By Maureen in Saskatchewan, Canada (message 222)

My daughter was treated very badly through elementary and part of high school. I quit my job so I could be home when she got there. She was called names, ridiculed, excluded from birthday parties, etc...She is now in College and is a very strong and compassionate person. Her class voted her Valedictorian, the year she graduated from high school.

Response to "I Don't See How I Can Live Any Longer" by Alicia, an adult in Nova Scotia, Canada (message 324)

I experienced bullying and teasing during my childhood, but not to the extent that my sister did. She was a victim for many years from middle school to high school....My sister is 22 years old and the scars of bullying still exist.

Her self-esteem is low. However, she is leading a wonderful, happy life now and has a successful job.

Like a Jungle - Submitted by Cayley from Canada (message 507)

Let's just say my old school was a jungle and I was an animal. There was a hunter. She hunted me and caught me, but she didn't kill me. She held me away from my friends....I had no idea what a real friend was like. Over the years, as she captured others, I found people who would be kind to me and wouldn't put pressure on me to do things I didn't want to do. One year, I found the courage to stand up for myself and escaped her grasp....

Story of a girl - Submitted by Yvonne from Canada (message 547)

I think that Junior High is the time where the most bullying happens; if you can live through that than you can live through almost anything else you heart desires.

Other People Will Help You !!!!! - Submitted by Harriet from United Kingdom (message 789)

When I was about 13 or 14 I got bullied a lot by people from different year groups - for what I looked like. I used to get called names and things used to get thrown at me. I used to think that I had nobody, but there was one friend that stood by me and helped me to stick up for myself. I did get bullied for a little while but they soon got bored of not being able to push me around. Now I'm 16 and most of the people who were horrible to me in the past are now actually my friends.

While only 140 messages mentioned aging out or maturation as a solution to bullying, it should be kept in mind that these were unstructured messages, where the authors were neither required to follow a script, nor prompted to offer specific solutions for bullying. Thus, it is likely that more of the Web site participants would have identified this solution if they had been asked about it. The fact that many do age out of bullying, however, raises an important issue for school-based anti-bullying programs. If a significant portion of the bullying tends to be short-lived and transitional in nature, and if many bullies, victims and bully-

victims age out of bullying regardless, then how can we say for certain whether bullying is being reduced by the school programs themselves, rather than simply by the aging process and the passage of time?

## **8.2 Anti-bullying programs in schools**

In Chapter 1, I touched briefly on a number of anti-bullying initiatives, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Bully Busters, the Bully B'Ware Campaign and the Friendly Schools Project. I also listed more programs and self-help books at the beginning of this concluding chapter. However, these examples are truly just the tip of the iceberg. It would take many pages to enumerate all of the anti-bullying programs presently in existence, and perhaps an entire chapter to accurately describe those programs, their stated objectives, and what evidence (if any) exists to demonstrate their effectiveness. A few additional examples of such programs are as follows:

- FearNot: An anti-bullying intervention (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008)
- Method of Shared Concern (cf. Csóti, 2008)
- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008)
- Get Real About Violence (GRAV) (cf. Freeman & Mims, 2007)
- The Support Group Method (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2007)
- Help Increase the Peace Program (HIPP) (cf. Morrison, 2007)
- Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP) (cf. Morrison, 2007)

- The Participatory Culture-Specific Intervention Model (PCSIM) (cf. Varjas et al., 2006)
- Bernese Prevention Program Against Victimization (Be-Prox) (cf. Alsaker, 2004)

In his meta-evaluation of research studies on anti-bullying programs, undertaken on behalf of the Australian government, Rigby (2002) was able to identify only thirteen studies that were designed with sufficient sophistication to warrant inclusion in his evaluation.<sup>31</sup> Rigby concluded that overall, those thirteen studies reported modest improvements at best, with some showing little or no evidence of success. Smith, Schneider, Smith and Ananiadou (2004) encountered similar difficulties with their subsequent meta-evaluation of “whole-school antibullying programs”, saying that only 14 studies met their inclusion criteria. Of the fourteen studies that Smith et al investigated, almost all reported small, negligible or even negative results.

In a more recent study on the effectiveness of intervention programs, Merrell, Gueldner, Isava and Ross (2008) found 16 studies that met inclusion criteria, from which they were able to identify 28 outcome types. Of those outcome types, 17 did not produce significant effect sizes. However, Merrell et al (2008) reported somewhat more favourable outcomes than Rigby (2002) and Smith et al (2004), saying that four of the 28 outcome types involved large (desirable) effect sizes, while six others had small to medium effects. In a still

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<sup>31</sup> According to Rigby, most programs did not provide adequate descriptions of their intervention techniques, and the evaluative studies of those programs normally did not include control groups, pre-test/post-test design, etc.

more current meta-evaluation of 31 studies, however, Ryan and Smith (2009) cautioned that virtually all contemporary studies of anti-bullying programs lacked the methodological rigour and sophistication of research design necessary to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the efficacy of those programs.

### **Do school programs work?**

I did not set out with the intention of evaluating school bullying programs or making definitive statements about their efficacy or lack thereof. Indeed, it would have been difficult to do so, because only 292 of the Web site participants who had first hand experience with bullying thought to discuss the subject of school programs. Of those 292 messages, however, 196 (67.1 percent) indicated that there ought to be a school program to deal with bullying, yet apparently felt that none existed. Only 96 messages (32.9 percent) acknowledged the existence of a school program (see Table 8.3).

It is noteworthy that 209 of the messages from the first set (harvested in December 2002) mentioned the presence or absence of school programs, as compared to only 83 from the second set (harvested in August 2006). If all of the recent hyperbole about—and worldwide implementation of—anti-bullying legislation and school programs was making significant inroads into the public imagination, I would have expected to see more discussion about this topic in the second (more recent) set of messages. Apart from the larger number of messages in the first set mentioning the presence or absence of school programs, however, there was no statistical difference between the first and

second sets of messages when it came to the subject of programs and whether they existed or not ( $\chi^2(1, N = 292) = 1.694, p = .193$ ).

**Table 8.3 Crosstabulation of message set with existence of school program**

	<b>Messages 1-475</b>	<b>Messages 476-950</b>	<b>Total</b>
Does not exist But should	145 69.4%	51 61.4%	196 67.1%
School program exists	64 30.6%	32 38.6%	96 32.9%
<b>Total</b>	209 100.0%	83 100.0%3	292 100.0%

Of the 96 messages mentioning the existence of school programs, only 42 indicated that such programs helped. Even this figure was heavily weighted in favour of school programs, because I counted 15 of the messages that came in clusters from schools in Arizona, Prince Edward Island and Port Nolloth in South Africa as evidence that school programs existed and were helping. However, these 15 messages were all poems, stories, or parables that could best be described as anti-bullying “infomercials”, most likely posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in order to comply with the requirements of a school assignment. To express it differently, there was no real evidence that the programs were having a desirable outcome, beyond the obvious one of raising awareness about school bullying. If these 15 messages were removed from the equation, then only 27 of the 96 messages that mentioned the existence of a school program would have been seen as offering evidence that the programs were having any real effect.

### **“Do not expect school authorities to do anything”**

The above subheading was taken from message 254, submitted by Phil, a high school teacher from Ontario, Canada. Phil said what many of the participants on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) said when it came to the level of support they could expect to receive from school principals and/or school boards (cf. Besag, 2006; Rigby, 2008). Of the 115 Web site participants who had firsthand experience with bullying and who also mentioned involvement of the school administration, 75 (65.2 percent) indicated that it did not help or actually made things worse, while only 40 (34.8 percent) said that it helped a bit or helped a lot. The most common response of the school administration was simply to ignore the problem or deny that it existed, followed closely by blaming the victim for their own victimization (see Table 8.4).

**Table 8.4 Reaction of school administration to bullying**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Ignore, say no problem	34	29.6
Blame victim	27	23.5
Caution or educate bully or victim	19	16.5
Punish bully or involve police	19	16.5
Multiple responses (e.g., police, counselling)	11	9.6
Involve parents of bully, victim or both	5	4.3
<b>Total</b>	115	100.0

In “What’s A Parent To Do?” (message 122), Cindy, a single mother from Alberta, Canada reports that her oldest boy is being “teased, pushed around and told no one likes him”. Cindy adds that she has “been in to see the principal many times, but has to see proof before anything can be done”. In message

201, 13 year-old Julie from Ontario, Canada announces: "I decided that I didn't need any more pain from people who I thought were my friends". She talked to her mother, who "decided that [she] should switch schools because the principal wasn't taking charge and wasn't doing anything about it!" In "Understanding Bullies" (message 384), nine year-old Kevin from Ontario, Canada, describes how both he and his best friend are being incessantly bullied. Kevin concludes his message by saying that his "mom and dad even tried talking to the principal. But it still didn't help".

As noted above, one of the most common responses of the administration is to deny that there is a problem. Brian, a 26 year-old from Kentucky, reports in message 328 that he was bullied from fifth grade through senior high school, and that the school administration was well aware of what was going on:

I had the principal calling my house wondering why I missed so many school days. People say to go to teachers or principals but that doesn't work. The teachers or principals brushed it off as a part of going to school and used phrases like " kids will be kids".

Sabrina, a high school student from the United States, says in message 750 that her "parents went to school almost every day, but the school said that there was nothing wrong at that school". She adds that:

to this day I still have the same problem. I've even got to where I want to change schools. Next year I will only have 2 years left and my options were to drop out or suffer with the everyday bullying.

### **"Some Teachers are Bullies Also"**

In "Some Teachers are Bullies Also" (message 127), Paul describes how his son is being bullied by the vice-principal and by his teachers:

I was just crying and telling the vice principal this morning how she made my son in grade 4 feel like sh.. and he wants to quit school. He didn't even take lunch yesterday. He was very upset why should he eat when all she did is yell at him. That is what all his teachers do.

In all, 28 of the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) referred to principals, vice-principals and teachers as bullies (cf. Rigby, 2008; Whitted & Dupper, 2008). In Message 379, Sara describes how she was bullied over 25 years ago by her peers and her teacher, and how she was blamed by her parents and the school administration for what was happening:

It all came to a head in grade four. That year, I had the misfortune of getting a sociopath for a teacher. He joined in the bullying and encouraged the 'cool' kids in their tormenting me. He called me retarded many times in front of the class. He moved my desk to the very back corner of the room, despite my vision problems. He dumped the contents of my desk onto the floor in front of the class weekly. He openly made fun of my problems with math, even to writing about them in huge letters on the blackboard. He hit me with a meter stick and with his hands. He spoke to me only in the sarcastic, long-suffering voice that a cruel person would use when speaking to a very slow child. His sarcasm flicked on the raw....When I told my parents about this, they did not take action, believing that I 'brought it on myself' by being different. They also feared that complaining would cause my mother to lose her job in the same school district. When I told the principal myself, he told me I was lying.

In “I Feel Ashamed” (message 838), 41 year-old Brian from the United Kingdom recounts how he was bullied by a teacher, and then by the headmaster:

the first episode started one afternoon when I had made a mess of my homework. I knew that I had done that and asked the teacher if I could redo the assignment after school. He pushed me into the corner of the room and punched me, turned and walked away. he then threw my homework book at me.... I was beaten up almost each day. My nose was broken and I had three cracked ribs but in those days the schools just said that there was no bullying in their school. The worst was when I was put on report. I asked the headmaster to explain why I was always on report he just said that it was because I was stupid, his idea of motivation was three of the cane for each C on the card. so each day I had this teacher he always managed to put a C on my card, my parents went to the board of governors but they also closed ranks.

“This is Ridiculous” (message 941), posted by Nicole from the United States, was cited in Chapter 7 as an example of a bully-victim who was portraying herself as a victim. Nicole complains:

I have teachers who have basically called me a "worthless b\*tch" in so many forms. They say that I'm the one that is bullying others--so when I ask them who said it they say, "I CAN'T TELL YOU. THAT'S TOP SECRET!".... And don't these teachers know by insulting me--they are doing the same thing that they claim I have been doing.

Nicole adds that she wants to report the most recent incident of bullying to the school principal, but on the basis of previous experience, she is certain that she will end up being blamed by the administration as well.

### **Institutional anomie theory at work**

In Message 381, Sandra from Ontario, Canada makes the following observation:

I hope that all children, parents and teachers are out there in our community showing their children how civil life should be. But with road rage, and air attacks, and bombings happening all over the world, how can we be teaching our children to live in peace?

Sara raises an important issue—one that clearly poses a problem for educators everywhere. If adults cannot behave civilly toward each other, then how can adults expect to legislate and educate children and teenagers into behaving civilly? Many adults go out of their way to avoid socializing with people whom they dislike, or whom they consider to be of lower social status. Why should adults expect their children to behave any differently? Why should children be expected to “play nicely with other children”, when many adults do not play nicely with other adults?

Messner and Rosenfeld's (2007) institutional anomie theory is rooted in Durkheim's (1951) original conception of anomie as a social condition of normlessness, lawlessness or unregulated choice. Messner and Rosenfeld also draw extensively from Merton's (1938) use of the concept of anomie to explain the high levels of crime caused by the disjunction in capitalist society between the cultural goals of consumerism and social advancement and the availability of institutional means—e.g., educational and employment opportunities—through which to achieve those goals. Messner and Rosenfeld (2006; 2007) take this a step further, arguing that there is an imbalance in power (or a disjunction) between the major social institutions, whose role it is to facilitate social integration and provide social regulation. Moreover, the goals or objectives of those institutions are often poorly defined or misunderstood by the institutions themselves, thus creating yet another internal disjunction between institutional goals and institutional structure.

There is little doubt that the institution of education has become progressively devalued when compared to financial, political and other social institutions (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2007). School closures, teacher lay-offs and educational funding cut-backs have become commonplace, not only across Canada, but in many other countries around the world (cf. Basu, 2007; Bushong, 2009; Cooper, 2010a; Morton & Seskus, 2006). Advocates of school anti-bullying programs often lament the fact that teachers and school administrators do not appear to wholeheartedly “buy in” to their programs (cf. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). However, we should not be surprised to learn

that school personnel are reluctant to buy into anti-bullying programs at a time when their jobs are being threatened, their workloads are being increased, and there are insufficient funds for classroom supplies, library books, and after-school recreational activities.

It is easy to see how teachers and school administrators could become confused about the goals or objectives of education. Increasingly, educators are being called upon to fulfill the role that society hopes will be filled (at least in part) by parents—i.e., to take over the responsibility for instilling in children and teenagers the sort of civil behaviour and respect for others that are necessary for a civil and orderly society (cf. Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). To complicate matters further, dual-income parents have come to rely upon schools to look after and supervise their children while the parents are at work. Indeed, when school breaks or holidays are lengthened in order to compensate for budgetary deficits, one of the most common complaints we hear from parents is that their employment is being compromised because they have nobody to look after their children for them. Clearly, there are limits to the doctrine of “in loco parentis”.

Educational institutions are also expected to prepare students for their adult roles in society. In this regard, it is widely assumed by parents, the community, future employers and the government that education will produce “normal”, conforming adults, who will be committed to socially-approved educational or occupational endeavours, and who will subscribe to pro-social attitudes, beliefs and values. Thus, educators are more likely to approve of and support “normal”, high status students who behave in a socially-accepted

manner. On the other hand, they are apt to disapprove of non-conforming, “social outcasts” who disrupt the smooth operation of the institution and block it from achieving its institutional goals and objectives. Given the financial strains that contemporary educational institutions are working under, and the many competing expectations placed upon them, we should not be surprised to find that they lack the resources and enthusiasm to deal effectively with bullying.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

Many bullying researchers—including those who openly question the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs—seem compelled to offer their own highly detailed advice on how to solve the bullying “problem” (e.g., Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Rigby, 2008; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008). I do not propose to do the same here. There is already a plethora of anti-bullying programs, and one more is unlikely to make a great deal of a difference, one way or the other. In any event, I am not sure that the problem is as drastic as it is made out to be, or that it can be completely resolved at the school level. There is little doubt that bullying can be harmful. On the other hand, many people have been “bullied” at some point in their lives—if not at school, then at work, at home, or in some other social situation (cf. Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Ireland, 2005; Randall, 2001)—and most have escaped relatively unscathed. Moreover, the phenomenon of bullying is not restricted to the contemporary school setting; rather, it is longstanding in nature, and deeply embedded within the fabric of society itself (cf. Gilbert, 2005; Midlarsky & Klain, 2005).

Schools are often depicted by bullying researchers as small “communities”, exhibiting or reflecting values and norms similar to those of the larger communities that surround them (e.g., Gini, 2008; Jones, 2002; Morrison, 2006). Durkheimian notions of integration, regulation, and social cohesion can be found in many such depictions, hand-in-hand with elements of Travis Hirschi’s social bond theory. To illustrate, the anti-bullying program of the Saskatchewan Provincial Government proclaims that schools can be viewed as “learning communities”, “collegial communities”, “caring communities”, and “inclusive communities” (Tunney, 2004, p. 6). The Saskatchewan Government’s document goes on to talk about “consensus”, and “the extent to which members share interpersonal bonds” and “share a commitment to values, norms and beliefs” (, p. 7-8). Similar language can be found in the anti-bullying program of the British Columbia Provincial Government, which discusses the roles of “the school community”, “community-based agencies” and “the broader community”, and goes on to talk about “attachments”, “commitments”, “involvement”, and “a sense of belonging or connectedness” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004, pp. iii, 1, 14, 29). Both documents look as though they could have been written by Emile Durkheim, or by Travis Hirschi, or by Durkheim and Hirschi working in collaboration with each other.

In *Visions of Social Control*, Stanley Cohen (1985) examines what he calls “the rhetorical quest for community”, asking whether such idyllic, organic communities ever really existed. Although schools are often described as interconnected “communities”, where individuals assumedly experience a sense of

inclusion or belonging, it could also be argued that they are not communities in the truest sense of the word. Until they reach a certain age, students in many countries are forced to go to school—if not by their parents, then by law (cf. Schostak, 1986). If schooling was not compulsory, then rates of attendance and enrolment would probably drop precipitously. Once compelled to attend, students find themselves in the midst of a hierarchical power structure that is sometimes rife with conflict, including open and occasionally violent conflict over values, norms and beliefs (cf. Lines, 2008). Students are subjected to discipline, expected to be obedient, and are required to spend a substantial portion of their school time engaged in tasks which they would probably avoid if given the choice (cf. Staples, 2000).

While schools may indeed reflect the values, beliefs and attitudes of the societies in which they are situated, those societal values and beliefs are not necessarily “caring” or “inclusive” (cf. Staples, 2000). For a broader perspective on the culture of bullying, we can turn to the contemporary power relationships in the so-called “international community”, where larger, more powerful nations threaten to bomb smaller, less powerful nations back into The Stone Age, and then proceed to make good on their threats. While greed may be a factor, such aggression is often driven by conflict over values, beliefs and attitudes. If we want historical examples of school bullying, we can look at Dickensian England, where bullying by headmasters and older students was literally “institutionalized”, and widely accepted as part of the school culture. Present-day concerns about workplace bullying of course pale in comparison to the type of workplace

discipline meted out by the Romans, who crucified army deserters and reluctant slaves, not to mention just about anyone else who happened to get in their way (cf. Gilbert, 2005).

In *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Stanley Cohen described how the Mods and Rockers—two relatively small, disorganized youth groups that had existed in England for years—suddenly attracted widespread media and public attention, leading to police crackdowns, stiffer sentencing, and calls for new legislative initiatives to deal with the “problem”. Cohen (1987, p. 46) made the observation that the media created the “problem” of the Mods and Rockers in order to justify the news. In a re-deployment of Cohen’s renowned observation, it could be suggested that bullying has been presented as “new” or more threatening, at least in part to justify the massive attention that it has been attracting. While there are limitations to the type of Internet sample employed in my research, it does have the unique advantage of providing historical accounts of bullying from forty, fifty, and even sixty years ago. This type of historical perspective is invariably missing in contemporary school-based studies, because they—needless to say—study contemporary school populations. My assertion that bullying has not changed dramatically over the years is testable, and I would encourage researchers to put it to the test.

In my opinion, bullying researchers should be interviewing stratified samples of former school teachers from the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, while the opportunity still exists. They should also be interviewing stratified samples of former students from those same time periods. Researchers should

be asking open-ended, neutral questions, because of the negative connotations now associated with terms such as “bully”, “bullying” or “bullies”.<sup>32</sup> Teachers should be asked if they ever saw a student hit another student, steal or damage another student’s property, ridicule another student or call them names, or refuse to play with them. If teachers answer in the affirmative, then they should be asked how often they witnessed such events, how many students were involved, and over what periods of time. Instead of asking former students if they ever bullied anyone, were ever bullied themselves, or ever saw anyone else being bullied, they should be asked if they ever hit or were hit by another student, or ever witnessed another student being hit. They should be asked if they were ever made fun of, or called names by other students, and if so, by how many other students, how often this happened, and for how long. If it turns out that teachers and students from earlier times report anywhere near the quantity and quality of bullying that is being reported nowadays, this might cause bullying researchers and anti-bullying advocates to reflect on their present, intense focus on this topic, and ask themselves: “Why now? Why not thirty years ago? Why not forty years ago? Why not fifty years ago? How and why did bullying become such a big issue in recent years?”

At the same time, researchers should explore the explanations for bullying offered by those who had firsthand experience with bullying in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It is unlikely that researchers will uncover explanations of

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<sup>32</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), the word “bully” used to be a term of endearment, while expressions like “bully for you” were intended to be a compliment, not an insult.

bullying involving co-morbid conduct disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome, because they were not a part of the lexicon in those days. Instead, I think they will find explanations involving popular bullies and unpopular victims, shifting friendships, and victims who received little or no support from their peers, teachers or families. If asked, I think that bullies would be able to offer cogent explanations for why they bullied certain individuals, and victims would likewise be able to offer explanations for why they were bullied. Many victims would even recall the names (labels) that they were given, and how they wore them.

Future research could also include a critical analysis of actual implementations of contemporary, ongoing initiatives designed to foster social inclusion and safety for students (for example, see the British Columbia Ministry of Education's Web site at <http://www.bced.gov.ca/health/>). In addition, it would be interesting to examine cross-national differences in cultures of bullying, for instance, between Canada and the United States, or between Canada and the United Kingdom.

I mentioned earlier that I was not planning to offer detailed advice on how to prevent bullying. That said, certain bullying behaviours are clearly harmful and potentially life-threatening, and should be treated as such. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 8.5 (below), the school administration *is* capable of having a positive impact if they are willing to take proactive measures. All 61 of the messages that complained that the school administration ignored the problem or blamed the victim also indicated that the administration's response (or lack of

response) was of no help, or made the situation worse. On the other hand, 40 of the 54 messages that said the administration actually tried to resolve the problem reported that the response had at least helped a bit, if not a lot.

**Table 8.5 Crosstabulation of reaction of school administration with type of outcome**

	<b>Negative responses (e.g., blame victim, ignore)</b>	<b>Proactive responses (e.g., counselling, detentions)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Doesn't help or makes things worse	61 100.0%	14 25.9%	75 65.2%
Helps somewhat or Helps a lot	0 0.0%,	40 74.1%	40 34.8%
<b>Total</b>	61 100.0%	54 100.0%	115 100.0%

There were three main administrative responses that appeared to produce results that Web site participants regarded as desirable:

1. Multi-pronged responses involving parents, principals and vice-principals, teachers, school counsellors and community counsellors, and if necessary, the police. All 11 of the Web site participants who mentioned these multi-pronged responses said that they helped somewhat.
2. Education-based responses, such as cautioning the bully, or trying to educate either the bully or the victim (or both). This variously involved a principal or vice-principal speaking to the class about bullying, referrals to the school counsellor, arranging meetings between the bully and the victim, or the principal or school office staff providing

protection or emotional support to the victim. Of the 19 site participants who described responses of this nature, 12 said that they helped. However, six of the 19 said that such responses did not help, and one said they made things worse.

3. Disciplinary responses, including detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and on six occasions, some degree of police presence. Of the 19 participants who described responses of this nature, 13 said that they helped a bit, or helped a lot. However, six of the 19 said that disciplinary responses did not help, or made things worse. In four of the six cases, this was due to fear of retaliation by the bullies. In the other two, the messages were submitted by a bully-victim and by the parent of a bully, both of whom had been on the receiving end of the disciplinary measures.

This does not necessarily mean that the school administration acted voluntarily and with dispatch in the cases mentioned above. In “Speak Out” (message 119), for example, a mother describes how her son was being bullied, and indicates that the school refused to do anything until she tackled the situation head on:

I am not proud of the fact that I lost my cool that day in front of the principal, but I am glad I stepped in. Because I wouldn't let it drop the school did address it. And with the help of a new principal, and a new elementary school counsellor, the next year my son slowly began to heal.

In message 197, “Bullying with No Consequences, another mother talks about the many hurdles she had to leap in order to obtain results:

I spoke to the principle, but he originally was only going to speak to the boys involved. I insisted on the parents being called, and further action, however their only punishment was a phone call to the parents. I was horrified. I contacted the school board, but didn't get a response until 5 days later, after I called a "second" time. However, I did not get any help from them either. I then had to take it to the local police, followed by letters to the Minister of Education. Just now I am "starting to be heard", but far from satisfied at present.

While this may not sit well with some educators, I would suggest that a “culture of bullying” does exist in many schools—bullying is tacitly tolerated, if not actively encouraged. There were 220 messages where it was possible to say with certainty that bystanders-observers were present when the bullying occurred. Of these, 141 indicated that the bullying took place in front of a large audience such as an entire classroom or playground, 59 that it happened in the presence of a medium-sized group (e.g., 4 to 10 bystanders), while 20 mentioned that at least two or three bystanders were present. In 199 of those 220 cases, the bystanders contributed to the escalation of the bullying—168 actively participated in the bullying themselves, while 31 laughed at or ridiculed the victim, thus encouraging the bully. There were another 177 messages where I was able to determine the exact location of the bullying. In 160 of those 177 cases, the bullying took place in classrooms, in hallways, in the cafeteria, on playgrounds or on the school bus, where prospective adult interveners—e.g., teachers, playground monitors, bus drivers, etc—could have prevented or de-escalated the bullying if they had so chosen. If something is ever to be done about the situation, then steps need to be taken to chip away at this engrained culture of bullying.

It is possible that teachers, principals and other adult figures in some schools are not aware of the fact that many students and parents think that they are tolerating, deliberately ignoring or even aiding and abetting school bullying. This is a relatively simple matter to address, and one that does not require a great deal of time, money or a special school program. Someone could download and compile into a manual all of the messages on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) that depict school personnel as being unsympathetic, unconcerned, and/or actively engaged in bullying themselves. While it may not be feasible to make it compulsory reading, teachers, principals, coaches, school counsellors, playground monitors, and other prospective adult interveners should be strongly encouraged to read the manual. A number of them would undoubtedly recognize themselves in those messages, and modify their behaviour accordingly. If it became apparent to bullies that teachers, principals and other school personnel were no longer ignoring, tolerating or encouraging bullying, then perhaps, bullies would modify their behaviour as well.

A similar approach could be used with bullies. Someone could assemble a manual of messages downloaded from [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org), but in this case, include only those messages that describe negative outcomes of bullying (e.g., suicides, serious self-harm, ruined lives), or that depict bullies as being deviant, as having low self esteem, or as being losers later in life. In lieu of detentions or suspensions, bullies could be required to read the manual, demonstrate that they have actually done so, and also be required to write an essay to be posted on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org). This would create a learning approach to bullying, as opposed

to a punitive approach. Hopefully, some of the of bullies would even recognize themselves in those messages, and come to view their bullying activities in a different light.

It is apparent that many victims are deficient in social capital and social support. On the other hand, victims who are supported by existing friends or who are able to establish new friendship networks (and thus enhance their social status) have a better chance of coping with or overcoming bullying. There was an abundance of “helping” behaviour in evidence on [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)—570 of the messages offered some form of help, advice, sympathy or friendship. Where possible, teachers should identify individuals who are friendless and unpopular, and try to bring them together in a supportive environment. If these individuals were encouraged to engage in the type of helping behaviour witnessed on the Web site, then a number of them might well overcome their sense of isolation and helplessness. However, this should be done in connection with a constructive but inexpensive activity such as chess, soccer or martial arts, to avoid the appearance that they are being further isolated because they are victims, and to provide them with the opportunity to develop skills that could increase their confidence and even help to buffer them from future bullying. Use of the term “victim” in such “informal” programs should be eschewed at all times, because it would only add to the stigmatization that these individuals are already experiencing. Worse yet, some might actually come to embrace their “victim” identity, thereby triggering a cascading series of negative life events.

Unless they are given significant additional resources, it is doubtful that schools will ever have the time, energy or wherewithal to completely eliminate school bullying. “Uncivil” behaviours such as gossiping, rumour-mongering, or making nasty faces or nasty gestures permeate all levels of our society, and have been with us since the dawn of recorded history (and probably for much longer). However, the suggestions that I have made above would be relatively easy and inexpensive to implement, and could help to ameliorate the situation. At the same time, the school administration should definitely take steps to discourage behaviours that are clearly serious in nature— theft of or damage to personal property that has some tangible monetary value, criminal harassment, sexual harassment, assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon, etc. If students are found to be engaging in such harmful or potentially life-threatening activities, and refuse to desist after being warned sternly by a principal or vice-principal, then the administration should consider detentions, followed by suspensions, and if absolutely necessary, expulsions. If the behavior is egregious enough, then the school may wish to consider involving the police. While the police may not be willing or able to offer much from a law enforcement perspective, their presence alone appears in some cases to help to emphasize the seriousness of the behaviour. If an escalating series of warnings, detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and police presence proves to be ineffective in curtailing extreme forms of bullying, then it is doubtful that my suggestions—or those of the hundreds of school bullying programs presently in existence—will achieve a significantly greater measure of success.

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