

**Children, Social Media, and  
the Trouble with “Bullying”:  
A Child-Centred Investigation of Definitions**

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## Abstract

Bullying troubles parents, teachers, and children themselves. The emergence of bullying in children's use of social media, often referred to as cyberbullying, has heightened concern for children's social and emotional wellbeing. Bullying is troublesome in the context of how it is defined and identified in children's social interactions with peers. The "trouble" with bullying for this thesis is that the common definitions and models of bullying are adult-generated and children's perspectives are often missing in existing bullying literature. I have developed a child-centred approach to deconstruct assumptions in adult-generated definitions of bullying. I argue that marginalisation of children's perspectives is a problem and present one approach to redressing the balance.

This thesis examines how children define bullying as a sense-making activity in the context of talking about their experiences of social media. It focuses on 11 – 13 year olds as a distinct social and emotional developmental stage, and a cohort for whom social media is becoming normal in their social world. Drawing on standpoint theory, social work theories, and childhood studies as a foundation, I developed a modified child-centred standpoint theory to critique the existing literature. The integrative research design I developed, including theoretical and analytic framework, supported an analysis of children's methods for defining bullying to address this gap. The rich multimodal data set for this study was recorded at three schools in Wellington, New Zealand, designed to be consistent with ordinary classroom activities. The T-shaped analytic framework applies constructivist grounded theory for cross-sectional analysis of the data set, and ethnomethodology and membership categorisation analysis for granular analysis at key points.

My analysis revealed a distinctive interactional approach to making sense of bullying in participants' accounts, in contrast with existing adult-generated definitions focused on behaviour or personality. Out of this analysis, I have developed a child-centred interactional model for defining bullying. This emergent model demonstrates the orderliness in children's methods for defining bullying in the broader context of interactions that range from the playful to the conflictual and hurtful. This thesis offers new theoretical and methodological contributions to understanding this complex social phenomenon by placing children's knowledges at the centre.





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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

We think we know what bullying is, but in reality what bullying is and what the term means for children may not be as simple as adults might assume. The term “bullying” is commonly used in the academic literature and in anti-bullying initiatives to refer to negative, repeated, and deliberate actions where there is some kind of imbalance of power between the protagonists (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2004; Smith, Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). It is frequently referred to in research literature as school bullying, being most often observed and studied in the school setting. As a notion with strong cultural currency, it has featured in fictional work including *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), *Mean Girls* (2004), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *The Bully Chip* (2013). A consistent feature that these have in common with the research literature is the attempt to understand bullying, what causes it, and how to deal with it. For some of its history, then, the concept of childhood bullying has been framed as an unpleasant yet normal part of children's interactions, particularly in the boarding school setting. More recently, it has been reframed as abnormal, problematic, and requiring adult intervention (Larsson, 2008).

Bullying between children creates trouble for the children involved. It has been identified as a source of immediate distress and harm (Campbell, Spears, Cross, & Slee, 2010; Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, & Kift, 2012; Lester, Cross, Dooley, & Shaw, 2013; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000), including self-harm and suicide (Beautrais, 2001; Burgess, Garbarino, & Carlson, 2006; Hay & Meldrum, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Klomek et al., 2008; Roxborough et al., 2012; Sinyor, Schaffer, & Cheung, 2014), and has been implicated in or connected with mental health and social problems in adulthood (Holt et al., 2014; Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014). As such, it is troubling for parents, teachers, and the wider community, as well as for children who may be involved in bullying or who are aware of it happening to others. Bullying is troublesome not only because of its effects on the children and families involved, but also because of the apparent limited effectiveness of interventions designed to counteract bullying. Reviews of the literature and specific evaluations of intervention

programmes show that many programmes designed to counteract bullying often have initially positive effects which are not sustained in the longer term (Rigby, 2002; Saarento, Boulton, & Salmivalli, 2015) and may only be partially successful (Rigby, 2011). Programme evaluations have identified some contributing factors to these problems, notably including the time, energy, and financial resources demanded in implementation and maintenance of programmes in school settings where teachers already face substantial curriculum-related demands on their time (e.g. Palmer & Raskauskas, 2010).

One of the less obvious 'troubles' with bullying is the recognition of the series of assumptions built into the concept of bullying as a whole, and the impact these assumptions have had on the ways bullying has been researched and theorised. Since bullying has become a focus of academic interest, the concept has expanded to recognise an increasing number of ways that bullying may occur. These include indirect bullying, social exclusion, and non-physical actions that are more difficult for adults to notice, often collectively referred to as 'indirect bullying' (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000; Rigby, 1998; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefvooghe, 2002). Most recently, the phenomenon of online bullying, commonly referred to as 'cyberbullying,' has emerged alongside the increasing accessibility and use of computers and the internet by children and adolescents.

Crucially, children's definitions of bullying are not treated as significant to defining the problem or understanding the experience. This presents a major theoretical and methodological problem for studies of the phenomenon. This study focuses on this gap from the perspective of children's knowledges to investigate how children themselves go about defining bullying. In this way, the focus of this thesis is about *defining* bullying and both the need to incorporate children's knowledges and investigating how to do so. As an adult, investigating children's approaches to sense-making in a way that is respectful of their experiences and perspectives is a complex undertaking. In this study, I have successfully developed and trialled one approach to undertaking a child-centred empirical investigation of children's sense-making activities regarding peer interactions and bullying in the context of social media.

This study was inspired by concerns raised about children and social media in the context of my work as a clinical social worker in a child and adolescent mental health service. Over the course of two to three years, concern regarding social media as a

source of bullying was being mentioned more frequently in referrals. These concerns were commonly raised by parents of teenagers but increasingly by parents of younger children as well. Parents, teachers and clinicians alike, appeared to attribute the problem to the use of social media. Having some familiarity with the online social context and technologies through my own social use, I became curious about whether this tendency to blame the technology was a fear of the unknown, and whether there was something missing from the discussion about bullying, social media, and the mental health of children and young people.

In this chapter, I introduce this study as an investigation of the 'trouble' with bullying in the context of children's use of social media. While the focus of this thesis is on how bullying gets defined and by whom as the theoretical and methodological groundwork for research, it is important to include some general background about the current literature on bullying and children's use of social media. The research literature is a major influence on defining bullying in wider social discourses and the concerns for children that arise from it. As such, it is useful to review the current focus of bullying research as salient background to the focus on defining bullying that appears in Chapter 2. Research on children's online social interactions similarly offers important context for the theoretical and methodological discussions at the core of this thesis. These two sections provide the backdrop for discussion of a series of problems with the existing research relevant to the focus of this study. These problems establish the broad context for this study as a child-centred investigation of how children define bullying in their accounts of using social media and troublesome interactions with peers. The remainder of the chapter sets out the scope and purpose of the study in more detail, including the aim, objectives and research questions for the study and an overview of the thesis.

## **1.2 General Background and Context**

### **1.2.1 Bullying Research**

#### ***Prevalence***

It has been estimated that between 3% and 40% of children and adolescents may experience bullying at some time in their lives (Denny et al., 2014; Griffin & Gross, 2004; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Vaillancourt et al., 2010; Wolke et al., 2000). The most recent iteration of the Youth 2000 study of high school students in New Zealand (years 9-13, aged 12-19) suggests a prevalence of 6% (Denny et al., 2014). Results from a multi-national international study using a similarly large survey sample reported prevalence

rates up to 30-40%, with the prevalence reported in some countries was as high as 66-67% (Due & Holstein, 2008). By way of contrast, a recent survey of New Zealand teachers of Years 1 – 13 (students aged 5 – 18 years) highlighted how widespread bullying problems are perceived to be in schools, with 94% of respondents agreeing that bullying problems occurred in their school (Green, Harcourt, Mattioni, & Prior, 2013). While this latter study focuses only on teachers' perceptions of the *presence* of bullying in their school rather than the *prevalence* of bullying at their school, it indicates that adults widely perceive bullying to be present in schools and potentially infer that this reflects a high prevalence.

The unusually large variation in prevalence raises questions about how bullying has been defined and measured. Experiences commonly included under descriptions of bullying behaviours may include physical assaults, verbal abuse, or social exclusion. In questionnaires, these abstract concepts may be translated into being hit, experiencing other children being mean, name-calling and insults, or being left out (e.g. Boulton, 1997 p. 227; Solberg & Olweus, 2003 p. 246). Another substantial variation between studies appears in the timeframes used, from the preceding six months or year to in participants' lifetimes (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). . This variability also presents the more theoretical and conceptual problem of how studies apply the term bullying. Bullying as a concept has experienced something of an evolution through the existing literature, and so, as I explore in more detail in Chapter 2, some of this variability may arise from shifts in the focus of the study. However, bullying is frequently treated as a stable, static concept across time with consistent meanings regardless of context. Most studies focus uncritically on individual aggressive behaviour as the defining feature of bullying. As Schott (2014) observes, the dominance of the individual psychology paradigm has produced a remarkably homogeneous literature. The lack of engagement with theoretical considerations may be seen in the unquestioned acceptance of this approach to defining bullying. Similarly, it is rare for researchers to recognise that bullying is a loaded term, even when carefully defined. Despite assurances of confidentiality, there may be instances where children resist categorising an interaction as bullying because of the moral and social consequences, which may be deemed out of proportion with the problem fitting the criteria used in a questionnaire or interview schedule.

## ***Impact***

Leaving aside the issue of prevalence, the impacts of bullying can be severe, even if the incidence is low. Bullying has been identified as a contributing factor to impaired emotional and social wellbeing, impaired social connectedness (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huitsing, Veenstra, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2010), to self-injury and suicide (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010), and identified as a source of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety (Denny, Clark, Fleming, & Wall, 2004; DeSmet et al., 2014; Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Takizawa et al., 2014; Ttofi, Bowes, Farrington, & Lösel, 2013; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Concerns about the negative impacts of bullying thus exist independently of prevalence. Moreover, negative outcomes have been observed in children instigating bullying as well as children who are victimised or targeted (Campbell, Slee, Spears, Butler, & Kift, 2013; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Rantanen, & Rimpelä, 2000; King, Horwitz, Berona, & Jiang, 2013; Olweus, 2011), and impacts have been observed to extend through the life-span, with some longitudinal studies suggesting that experiences of bullying in childhood may contribute to mental health problems in adulthood (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Klomek et al., 2009; McCabe, Miller, Laugesen, Antony, & Young, 2010). Some studies have compared the resulting trauma to child maltreatment or neglect (Bowes et al., 2013; Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015). Increased concern about immediate and longer term negative impacts may be observed in investigations of connections between bullying and such diverse areas as dental appearance (Seehra, Newton, & DiBiase, 2011), obesity (DeSmet et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2010), sleep problems (Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Potard, & Gimenes, 2014; O'Brien et al., 2011; Wolke & Lereya, 2014; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2001), and breakfast skipping (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Willmore, 2015).

This diversity of impacts has implications for clinical and helping professionals as well as teachers and families. The desire to understand the nature and scope of bullying problems arises from a concurrent desire to address problems where they occur and to prevent problems from arising where possible. Responses may aim to minimise or prevent the negative impacts of bullying, or to stop or prevent bullying problems from occurring. Intervention programmes for schools may focus on the behaviour of individuals and focus on changing the bullying behaviour (Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014; Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Greif & Furlong, 2006; Howard, Horne, & Jolliff, 2001; Lester et al., 2013), build up the victim (Huitsing et al., 2010; McVie, 2013; Papatraianou, Levine,

& West, 2014; Ttofi et al., 2013; Waseem et al., 2014), or, in more recent examples, seek to engage bystanders to challenge bullying (Salmivalli, 2014; Trach, Hymel, Waterhouse, & Neale, 2010). Another common focus applies social ecological theory to address potential problems in the school climate that may tacitly permit bullying to occur rather than solely focusing on problematic behaviour of individuals (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Espelage, 2014).

### ***Public Perception and Distortion***

Bullying research has a history of instigation following extreme and highly publicised negative outcomes (Shariff, 2008; Walton, 2005). As Hinduja and Patchin (2010) observe, "[w]hile these incidents are isolated and do not represent the norm, their gravity demands deeper inquiry and understanding" (p. 207). While focus on extreme cases is important, it can be argued that their helpfulness for understanding the norm is limited. Significantly, the sensationalist reporting of extreme cases contributes to an impression that behaviours included under the label 'bullying' are abnormal, extreme, and yet also ubiquitous and increasing. Mainstream media reportage of low incidence, high impact outcomes such as suicide feeds into adults' anxieties of adults about bullying (Shariff, 2008; Stassen Berger, 2007; Walton, 2005), which is often treated as a singular and unproblematic concept. As Walton (2005) observes, "school violence sells newspapers" (p. 92), however one of the major troubles created by this kind of media 'hype' is that it distorts the degree of danger to children.

This distortion is mirrored in the academic literature, where introductions often make mention of extreme outcomes attributed to bullying, including highly publicised suicide or homicide events, to add gravity to the importance of the study. Bullying is presented as a grave concern (e.g. Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Mills & Carwile, 2009), a cause of significant harm (Coggan, Bennett, Hooper, & Dickinson, 2003; Englander, 2012; Hay & Meldrum, 2010) or more prevalent than previously thought (Campbell, 2005; Entenman, Murnen, & Hendricks, 2005; Salmivalli, 2014; Stassen Berger, 2007; Walton, 2005), and therefore justifies the study in question. This practice persists despite the critical observation noted above that it runs the risk of overstating both prevalence and impact (Pieschl, Kuhlmann, & Porsch, 2014). Successive reviews of the literature comment on the trend in bullying research to be prompted by wider community concern following on from extreme events. The most common related incidents are of suicide or risk of suicide which are cited as a rationale for the investigation (Rigby & Slee, 1999; Shariff,



2008; Walton, 2005). Unfortunately, this practice in research literature may contribute to a kind of moral panic among parents, teachers, and legislators alike (Shariff, Wiseman, & Crestohl, 2012; Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2010). This trend can be seen as being amplified through the emergence of social media and incidents of suicide attributed to cyberbullying (Campbell et al., 2012; Cooper, Clements, & Holt, 2012; Gini & Espelage, 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013; Shariff et al., 2012; Sinyor et al., 2014). Whilst extreme events are a legitimate cause for concern, when they are the sole focus or rationale for research then the impression of the problem becomes distorted in academic literature as much as it does in the popular imagination courtesy of sensationalised reporting in mainstream media.

### ***Search for Prediction***

One of the major threads in bullying research is the search for causes or predictive factors, often focusing on behavioural or emotional problems. 'The bully' has variously been characterised as the callous and habitually cruel individual, or the coward, or the popular 'mean girls'. A range of candidate psychological and social or relational factors have been investigated, including other behavioural or emotional problems (Boyes, Bowes, Cluver, Ward, & Badcock, 2014; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Rigby, 2004; Smith, Polenik, Nakasita, & Jones, 2012; Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001), environmental problems including family stress and violence (Corvo & deLara, 2010; Espelage & De La Rue, 2012; Hay & Meldrum, 2010), relational deficits including empathy (Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 2000; Gini, 2006b; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006, 2011; Kaukiainen et al., 1999; Renati, Berrone, & Zanetti, 2012), and deficits in social skills (Gini, 2006b; Safran, 2008; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 2001). However, no definitive cause of bullying has been conclusively demonstrated. Despite predictions from other studies in aggression, children involved in bullying have been found to be throughout the spectrum of intelligence (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hauser, 2011; Huesmann, Eron, & Yarmel, 1987; Peeters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010; Shakoor et al., 2012), emotional intelligence and empathic capacity (Caravita, Di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009a, 2009b; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2007; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006, 2011), and even popularity (Duncan & Owens, 2011; Espelage & Holt, 2001; Owens et al., 2000; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & Patricia, 2003). Despite a strong desire to be able to characterise 'the bully, there appears to be no consensus as to the cause or the set of factors that gives rise to bullying problems. As consistently concluded in the studies mentioned

above and others across the existing literature, involvement in bullying cannot be consistently attributed to a single defining factor or personal attribute.

### ***Missing Threads***

The bullying literature does not have a strong focus on accounts, how children construct meaning or other interactional practices. Rather, the literature most often treats self or other reports as unproblematic and transparent reflections of events or feeling states. By contrast, a few discourse studies, including critical discourse studies (Duncan & Owens, 2011; Thornberg, 2011) and conversation analysis of social interactions (Danby & Osvaldsson, 2011; Svahn & Ewaldsson, 2011; Theobald & Danby, 2014), have analysed interactions as an approach to investigating bullying problems. They have illuminated events invisible to other types of analysis and shown how subtle interactional processes can result in bullying and social exclusion. Thus far, studies have not focused much on the post-event processes of accounting for events as bullying or not-bullying. However, it is these accounting practices that are the 'stuff' of categorising events as bullying to others when seeking help, or not seeking help. Taking post-event accounting practices as a focus presents a unique opportunity to extend both interactional and traditional approaches to studying experiences that may be categorised as bullying. Accounts are the 'stuff' of moral reasoning, most commonly studied using interview and questionnaire methods; however, they have not been analysed *as accounts*.

### **1.2.2 Children and Social Media**

*"[v]irtual spaces must be understood as social contexts ... where young people spend parts of their leisure lives" (Crow & Bradford, 2006 p. 331)*

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." (p. 61). This succinct definition captures the distinction between Web 2.0 as the technological base, social media as the medium, and the social interaction as the content. Social media can include blogs, social networking platforms, video sharing sites, microblogging sites, mobile phone applications for chatting, and social or multiplayer online games. While the technical details of Web 2.0 and social media platforms are beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to recognise that the significant changes Web 2.0 made to online communication. It enabled greater interactivity on web pages and sites, meaning that people could do more than just read. Although some interactive elements existed before,

notably internet relay chat, instant messaging, and discussion forums, Web 2.0 reduced the need for specialist knowledge and made the technology more accessible. It created the technological infrastructure to support user-created content and enabled participative rather than predominantly passive interaction with web sites. It has "transformed media audiences from content consumers to content producers" (Wei, 2012, p. 313). This is sometimes referred to as the participative web (*Participative Web: user-created content*, 2007) or the 'democratization' of the internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wei, 2012). This democratisation has resulted in greater accessibility for children as well as adults.

Children's use of the internet for socialising with peers predates the advent of social media. Children and young people have been inhabiting chat rooms, messaging services, discussion forums, and online role-playing games for at least two decades, in parallel with adult uses of internet communication (boyd<sup>1</sup>, 2014; Crowe & Bradford, 2006; Dowdall, 2009; Turkle, 1995; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). As such, this is hardly a new phenomenon. Previous studies have tended to focus on specific platforms, including specific games, such as Crowe and Bradford's (2006) study of Runescape, or identified social networking sites such as Myspace (Brown & Thomas, 2014; Cash, Thelwall, Peck, Ferrell, & Bridge, 2013), YouTube (Duncum, 2014), Bebo (Willett, 2009), or Facebook (Lim, Vadrevu, Chan, & Basnyat, 2012; Linne, 2014; Vanderhoven, Schellens, Valcke, & Raes, 2014; Wint, 2013). This approach confers some advantages in terms of narrowing the focus and allowing detailed examination of one setting. However, several significant disadvantages have emerged. One of these is the tendency for specific platforms to fall in or out of use, either through technological shifts or fashion. This can have the effect of limiting relevance of the study if too narrowly focused. Another disadvantage is that it requires the study design to anticipate which social media are currently in favour. Focus on a single platform may also miss children's uses of multiple types of social media in their day-to-day lives. Recent studies show that children and adolescents typically use more than one social media platform, often for a range of different purposes (Brito, 2012; Eynon & Malmberg, 2011; Holloway, Green, & Livingstone, 2013; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011; Mallan, Ashford, & Singh, 2010; Roe, 2000). For this study, I took social media to include any social networking sites, content sharing sites, and online games, including the newer console-based multiplayer games as well as

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<sup>1</sup> danah boyd does not to capitalise her name, thus I have followed her chosen convention here and in all subsequent references to her work.

computer-based games. Social media constitutes another space for children and young people to socialise with each other and to understand it as a setting for socialising requires investigation focused on these ordinary patterns of use.

General perceptions of social media and the internet exert an influence over adults' perceptions of children's social media use. These perceptions are often grouped into the broad categories of utopian and dystopian, to capture the polarity of optimistic and pessimistic perspectives (C. Bassett, Hartmann, & O'Riordan, 2011; Bavelier, Green, & Dye, 2010; boyd, 2014; Crowe & Bradford, 2006; Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012; Mallan et al., 2010; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). Turkle (1995) extended this to a tripartite structure, characterising responses to the internet as a social phenomenon as utopian, utilitarian, or apocalyptic (p.231). Utopian perceptions focus on the positive and beneficial aspects of social media and internet use, including reducing or eliminating geographic and other barriers to communication and reducing social distance, often of special value to marginalised groups (Craig & McNroy, 2014; Mohd Roffeei, Abdullah, & Basar, 2015; Valentine & Skelton, 2009). Dystopian or apocalyptic perceptions focus on negative and dangerous aspects of social media. This may include perceptions of the technology or online environments as unknown, unfamiliar, and uncontrolled, or as inherently dangerous and destructive. Utilitarian perceptions tend to adopt a more neutral stance and frame technology as a tool that may have advantages and disadvantages based on the uses to which it is put rather than any inherent positive or negative qualities.

Social media has become another focus of concern for adults about children as vulnerable beings in need of protection, particularly where dystopian or apocalyptic perceptions of the internet are prominent. As social media use has become more accessible to young people and to children, community fears about the dangers of the internet as an uncontrolled environment appear to have increased concurrently. Such anxieties focus on potential destruction of childhood innocence (Barth, 2014; Kneer, Glock, Beskes, & Bente, 2012; Nansen, Chakraborty, Gibbs, MacDougall, & Vetere, 2012; Staksrud, Ólafsson, & Livingstone, 2013; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2012; Weir, Toolan, & Smeed, 2011; Wolak et al., 2010). Many concerns are centred on access to violent or sexually explicit material, or online predators, as examples of intrusions of the adult world into children's innocence. As Valentine and Holloway (2002) note, these

fears become magnified where parents and teachers are less technologically literate, adding fear of the unknown to fears for children's safety.

One of the problems for understanding children's uses of social media may derive from some early empirical research of children and young people's uses of social media and the internet. The early focus on children with high internet use that Valentine and Holloway (2002) call "extreme users" (p.303) may have contributed to misperceptions that all children are likely to become 'computer obsessed', which does not offer fair or good insights into ordinary social media use in children's everyday worlds. Turkle (1995) proposes that "although it provides us with no easy answers, life online does provide new lenses through which to examine current complexities" (p. 232). Some more recent studies have begun to explore these complexities in ordinary children's everyday uses of technology (Danby et al., 2013; Livingstone et al., 2011).

### **1.2.3 Bullying and Technology**

Bullying via technology has become collectively referred to as cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008a; Smith et al., 2013). The origins of the term *cyberbullying* are unclear. Some commentators attribute it to Canadian educator Bill Besley in 2004 (Bauman, 2007; Campbell, 2005), however the term had appeared in mainstream media reporting to refer to bullying behaviour using websites or email that predate this (Benfer, 2001). Over the following two decades, the definition of cyberbullying has incorporated an array of different types of communication technology. The scope of technologies or technological devices often includes mobile phone calls and text messages as well as the internet. The increase in children's social media use has resulted in a concurrent popular and scholarly concern about children's involvement in bullying via technological means due to negative impacts and outcomes that appear similar to in-person bullying (Campbell et al., 2010; Campbell, 2005; Chisholm, 2014; den Hamer, Konijn, & Keijer, 2013; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Pettalia, Levin, & Dickinson, 2013; Sticca & Perren, 2013; Wingate, Minney, & Guadagno, 2013). As is the case with bullying more generally, adult anxieties about social media often underpin research in this area (Shariff & Churchill, 2010; Shariff, 2008). In addition, there is a growing body of research into comparison of involvement in cyberbullying and in-person bullying (Campbell et al., 2012; Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009; Hemphill et al., 2012; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012; Law, Shapka,

Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012; Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2014; Sticca & Perren, 2013; Wigderson & Lynch, 2013).

In their meta-analysis of quantitative research of cyberbullying among adolescents and young adults, Kowalski et al (2014) observe that cyberbullying has been linked with a range of negative outcomes comparable with those for in-person bullying, including anxiety and depressive disorders, school disruption, homicide, and suicide. As such, there is substantial overlap in the concerns for prevalence and impact across in-person bullying and cyberbullying. Kowalski et al (2014) similarly identify problems with scope and measurement. Reported prevalence of cyberbullying varies markedly between studies, most commonly ranging from 10% to 40%, with one study suggesting a high of 92%. This contributes to the broader problem of conceptual and methodological design, where studies may ask participants if they have experienced someone “being mean” to them online, which is analysed as an instance of bullying. Variations between countries in which studies are done suggest cultural influences may create further confounding factors. As such, Kowalski et al.’s (2014) meta-analysis suggests that the problems of scope and measurement evident in bullying research, as introduced in section 1.2.1 and discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, have been duplicated in cyberbullying research.

Online bullying has been framed in the literature as a variation of in-person bullying, sometimes called “traditional” bullying as a way of differentiating the two. For this study, I have used the term “in-person” rather than traditional, as it describes the difference in setting more precisely. It also avoids positive connotations of tradition as valued and valuable (Smith et al., 2013). Proposed definitions for cyberbullying include online aggression or victimization (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 152), and “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual problems replicated in the development of cyberbullying research as a sub-field of bullying research.

A smaller collection of recent studies have investigated children's concerns about using the internet, notably the EU Kids Online research project (Livingstone et al., 2011). As well as extensive investigation of adult interests and concerns with children's online presence, one of the reports to come from this study offers some insights on what

bothers children online in their own words (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, & Staksrud, 2013). Similarly, Wint (2013) took children's perspectives on what bothered them as the starting point for investigating the types of 'trouble' children encountered on Facebook. Wint argued that the concept and definition of cyberbullying was sufficiently unfocused and problematic that it was more useful to investigate what bothered the young people who participated in the study.

### **1.3 Problems with the Existing Research**

#### **1.3.1 Disproportionate Focus on Adolescents**

Existing research on bullying has a marked focus on adolescents. The 'storm and stress' view of adolescence as a time of emotional upheaval and rebellion remains a popular characterisation of adolescence, despite empirical evidence to suggest that this is not as universal as once thought (Arnett 1999). Arnett notes that even if it is not a universal experience, adolescence remains a developmental period when experiences such as conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risk-taking behaviour are higher than at other times. When bullying is seen as a type of conflict with peers that can result in mood disruptions and risk-taking behaviour, the concern for potential negative outcomes of bullying on adolescents makes sense. The intensity of focus on adolescence is understandable; however, it is only part of the picture. The experience or concerns for one age group or life stage does not necessarily translate seamlessly to others.

Some bullying research has extended the focus into younger age groups, informed by a variety of different theoretical stances. Some treat the concept of bullying as a constant and transpose the concept directly onto other life or developmental stages. This can be seen most clearly in discussion of much younger children's behaviour as bullying (e.g. Verlinden et al., 2014). This approach may illustrate the importance of social and emotional learning, but it carries a substantial risk of over-interpreting age-appropriate or expected behaviour as abnormal (Stassen Berger, 2007). For instance, it is unclear how helpful it is to classify young children's aggressive behaviour as bullying or precursors to bullying behaviour. This ignores the developmental perspective in evaluating children's behaviour and also ignores the socially loaded nature of the term 'bullying'.

The pre-adolescent age group, around 10-13 years, is seldom an exclusive focus in this field. Where this age group is included in studies, it is often subsumed into a broader

adolescence category (eg Sonck & de Haan 2012, Valentine & Holloway 2002, Görzig 2011, Copeland et al 2013). In one study on cyberbullying, the scope for adolescence was 12-20 years (Slonje & Smith 2008). While understandable given the heightened concern for adolescents, this appears curious in light of the developmental changes that begin during the pre-adolescent years, particularly in social and emotional development. The pre-adolescent age group coincides with the Intermediate level in the New Zealand education system, positioned structurally as a level between the lower primary (ages 5-10) and secondary (ages 13-18). As a consequence, this group is constructed as a distinctive grouping within the school system. In a 'full' primary school, these children are positioned as 'senior' students within the school community. In many places, there are separate Intermediate schools for students of this age (Years 7 and 8). These two distinctive aspects - social and emotional development and structural distinctiveness in the education system - contributed to my choice to make this specific age group the focus for the current study.

### **1.3.2 Mainstream Research Sidelines Children's Perspectives**

Prevailing definition and models of bullying are based in adults' concept of the problem. Children's experiences of and approaches to defining bullying and related behaviours are marginalised in the existing literature. It is common practice in research and in interventions to supply children with a definition of bullying rather than investigate how they themselves identify or experience bullying. This practice establishes and perpetuates an adult-centric formulation of the problem. Children's perspectives are routinely sidelined and this has implications for the conceptualisation of the problem, which in turn has implications for the focus and adequacy of interventions.

This adult-centric approach has a number of implications for theorising bullying. It isolates bullying from the wider frame of interactions between children. It obscures the diversity of interactions between children that children themselves may experience or perceive as aggressive, hurtful, harmful, or in some respect troublesome. The narrow focus on 'bullying' adds a further assumption that this is the only way to identify or label these interactions. It precludes other ways of identifying 'troubles' between peers that could be considered hurtful or harmful, but would not be classified as bullying by the children themselves.



The way that the definition and models of bullying have been constructed suggests that children's views are not valued, neither in research nor in the interventions designed to overcome bullying problems. Despite a clear concern for children's experiences of distress and harm arising from being involved in bullying problems, adult perspectives dominate the ways in which the concept has been described and theorised. When children's approaches to conceptualising the problem have been considered, the most common use to which this is put is to demonstrate the need for adult instruction on the proper identification of bullying according to the existing adult-generated concept. Implicitly or explicitly, this tells children that their way is wrong and their perspectives remain minimised and trivialised. Some studies have investigated how children describe or define bullying; however, they have commonly retained the assumption that the adult perspective is correct and compare children's definitions against it (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). This positions children's definitions as problematic and creates the perception that children are simplistic or overinclusive in how they identify bullying.

Most often, children's perspectives are treated as irrelevant and are obscured through the practice of priming. Priming refers to the interaction between triggers or cues and the activation of associated thoughts or feelings (e.g. Krcmar & Curtis, 2003). In research design, priming may occur overtly through presentation of a definition or vignette to guide participants' responses prior to completion of a questionnaire or interview (Campbell et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Less overt priming may occur through descriptions of the research focus, including mention of specific words or ideas. It is common practice in bullying research to prime participants, and I will discuss specific methodological problems created by this in more detail in Chapter 2.

This adult-centric focus interferes with adequate analysis and theorising of children's problematic interactions with peers, both online and in person. In effect, the complaint is that children appear not to mean the same thing as adults when they use the term bullying or identify something as bullying. Rather than investigate this, the dominant approach to research has framed this as the problem and in turn rendered children's perspectives the problem, insinuating that they are wrong and requiring correction. In this study, I have turned this question around. Informed by the empowerment approaches that have been applied to research (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 2012) as well as in social work practice (Lee, 2001), the starting point for

this study is to place children's experiences and their methods of defining and using the term bullying at the centre in order to generate an effective analysis and re-theorising of (online) bullying.

### **1.3.3 Troubling Definitions of Bullying**

Bullying behaviours continue to cause trouble, despite multiple evidence-based programmes to address bullying between children. Interventions are repeatedly observed to have limited impact, particularly in the longer term (Meyer, 2014; Rigby, 2011; Schott, 2014; Stassen Berger, 2007). The persistence of these problems raises questions which have ultimately led to the research discussed in this thesis. Why do interventions continue to have limited effect? Some of the evidence in evaluations indicates that there are logistic and structural reasons. These include waning enthusiasm and limited resources in terms of time and finances to sustain programmes after the initial burst of enthusiasm (Palmer & Raskauskas, 2010; Rigby, 2002, 2011). Some evaluations examined the framing of the problem alongside the structure and implementation of the programme. This additional point of focus is noteworthy because it contributed to a shift away from the focusing on the behaviour of individual children identified as bullies to thinking about school climate and whole community (Espelage & De La Rue, 2012; Naylor & Cowie, 1999; Saarento et al., 2015; Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). Even though whole-school approaches have good evidence, bullying troubles persist.

An aspect of bullying that is often not acknowledged or well examined in existing literature are the definition of bullying itself, and the theories and models that underpin the definition. This more fundamental 'trouble' is often glossed over. The definition of bullying frequently cited in the literature and applied in interventions has been treated as an abstract and stable construct, taken for granted as correct, and has seldom been critiqued since its formulation. However, the scope of actions under bullying as an umbrella term has increased exponentially. Bullying can now refer to everything from name calling to serious physical violence to social exclusion. It can be perpetrated by strangers, school peers, and even by friends. Any potentially hurtful or harmful interaction could be called bullying. In other words, it has lost specificity and become overgeneralised. This overgeneralisation of the concept of bullying is another part of the problem. It obscures children's definitions and uses of the term that are integral to their experiences of bullying.

This catch-all approach to defining bullying in general and cyberbullying in particular is being consistently identified in recent literature as a problem for bullying research (Kowalski et al., 2014; Lankshear & Knobel, 2010; Meyer, 2014; Schott, 2014; P. K. Smith et al., 2013), and as one example of a wider problem of concept creep for psychology (Haslam, 2016). There is a strong tendency to designate any online aggression as cyberbullying. This has created problems in relation to in-person bullying, which has usually been conceptualised as a specific subset of aggressive behaviour (P. K. Smith et al., 2013). In addition to this tendency, the derivation of definitions and concepts for cyberbullying from in-person bullying mean that cyberbullying shares many of the same definition and conceptual problems that I have identified above. These conceptual and definition problems in turn create methodological problems for identifying the prevalence and severity of bullying, and also practical problems for identifying the most helpful responses to both intervention and prevention. More recent theoretical discussions on cyberbullying have identified this problem and explore options for an expansion of terms for aggressive behaviour online (e.g. Pieschl et al., 2014; Pyżalski, 2012; Smith et al., 2013). What it has also highlighted is the underlying problem of overgeneralising the term 'bullying.' This is a recent shift in the existing literature on cyberbullying, offering an ideal position for this study. A persistent gap in these discussions is that they continue to come from an adult perspective and have not incorporated children's experiences or voices into the critique. This represents a significant omission in the theoretical and methodological groundwork that informs much of the current literature and forms the focus for this thesis.

## **1.4 Scope and Purpose of this Study**

### **1.4.1 Thesis Statement**

It is vital to understand how children define and use the term "bullying" for making sense of troublesome interactions with their peers in order to adequately theorise these complex social phenomena.

### **1.4.2 Scope of this Study**

#### **Aim:**

To investigate how 11-13 year olds define bullying as a sense-making activity in their accounts of using social media using a child-centred approach.

## **Objectives and Research Questions:**

To critically review existing models and definitions of childhood bullying and specifically online bullying or cyberbullying

- What definitions and models of bullying are used in the existing literature?
- How have these been applied to investigating children's use of social media and online bullying?

To develop fieldwork and analytic frameworks in line with the design principles required for a child-centred approach

- What methodological principles are required to design a child-centred investigation?
- What research design and analytic frameworks are best suited to generating and analysing data for this type of investigation?
- What are the right kinds of data to investigate how children make sense of experiences on social media commonly called bullying, either by adults or by children themselves?
- What is the object of analysis?

To retheorise how we define bullying emerging from children's sense-making activities about using social media and their approaches to defining bullying.

- What could a child-centred model for defining bullying and distinguishing it from other troublesome interactions be like?
- How do children co-construct and account for online bullying as a category?
- What implications does this have for how adults deal with children's peer interactions and bullying problems?

## **1.5 Overview of the Thesis**

### **1.5.1 Overview of Thesis**

This chapter has provided a broad overview of key issues that form the background for my study. This thesis investigates children's methods of defining bullying and making

sense of their experiences of the social media setting, using a child-centred approach to develop an integrated methodology and analytic framework. I propose an interactional model that contributes to a more helpful and rich theorising of bullying in the context of other troublesome interactions arising from children's definitions of bullying as a sense-making activity.

In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical foundations of the existing literature on bullying with a focus on approaches to defining the phenomenon and examining the underlying assumptions. What emerges from this review is that the definition commonly used in research and to inform interventions, which I have called the 'conventional definition,' is not fit for purpose. Both the definition and the predominant model have been generalised to an increasing variety of social interactions without attention to their theoretical framework and omissions. While existing theoretical critiques have identified many of these gaps, a more fundamental problem remains. The definition and models are adult-generated and propose to tell children what their experiences are rather than starting with investigation and analysis of how children make sense of their experiences and using these as the basis for understanding. The main focus for the following chapters is one approach to accomplishing exactly this. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the considerations for developing a child-centred standpoint theory as the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodological and design challenges arising from the theoretical parameters for developing a child-centred investigation outlined in Chapter 2. It outlines an integrative, child-centred fieldwork design and activities, and the analytic framework developed to identify how children approach the challenge of making sense of their experiences on social media and how notions of bullying intersect with those experiences. It incorporates a description of the data set, the process of analysis and introduces the model for defining 'bullying' that emerged from the analysis as an outline for the analysis and discussion chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 focuses on the setting of social media. One of the problems identified in review of the literature is that of excessive abstraction of the concept of bullying. Interactions between children are local and situated, shaped and constrained by the setting. Social media is still a relatively new social phenomenon, and in this chapter I analyse children's approaches to accounting for those experiences using an informed (Thornberg, 2012) constructivist (Charmaz, 2014) grounded theory approach. This

chapter addresses the breadth of experiences of social media: positive, negative, and ambivalent. It offers some insight into aspects of the setting and interactions that may be indexed in children's discussion of their experiences, including specific or technical uses of common and familiar words that may not be identifiable on a superficial level. This analysis demonstrates ways that children work with sophisticated and developing perspectives of the social media setting. It highlights the importance of context for understanding interactions.

Chapter 5 focuses specifically on how children make sense of their interactions with peers through the activity of defining bullying. The analytic framework shifts to membership categorisation analysis to explicate these as membership categories for activities. While membership categorisation analysis most commonly focuses on identity categories, the identity category of 'bully' was noticeably absent in the data set for this study. However, there were many categories of activities that were in some way connected with bullying either as closely related or as contrast. This chapter analyses and maps typical features and uses of these categories to investigate how children make sense of activities as 'bullying' or *not bullying*. What emerges from this analysis is that taking note of action alone is not sufficient to categorise an event as 'bullying'. The chapter also presents an exploration of 'activity' as a locus of categorisation. One surprising aspect emerging from this analysis was how participants were engaged in practical conversation analysis in their focus on the recipient's response as the primary determining factor for categorising an event as 'bullying' or *not bullying*. The category work analysed in this chapter illuminated how relational context featured as integral to the categorisation of events, leading to the focus on relational categories in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 picks up the element of relational context to examine the member category of friend in relation to accounting for an event as bullying. This chapter analyses the deployment of person categories in accounting for events as 'bullying' or *not bullying*, specifically focusing on relational context as an interpretive resource. This analysis includes teasing out how *people I know* intersects with 'friend' as member categories and the specific moral obligations implicated in 'friend-friend' as a standardised relational pair. Disarticulating the membership categorisation analysis notion of category-bound activity creates the opportunity to examine activity categories and person categories and a more complex interaction between categories and predicates. These notions are then explored through more granular analysis of an apparently

deviant case, where the categories of 'friend' and 'bullying' collide. This analysis illuminates a further component of the notion of bullying at work, namely that it also functions as a social and interactional resource that may be deployed to exert influence and claims to authority in interactions.

In chapter 7 I draw together the elements from the preceding chapters to re-theorise definitions of 'bullying' using the emergent interactional model from the data analysis. I argue that children's accounts of bullying are orderly, sophisticated, and complex. They are not naïve or overinclusive, as is frequently assumed in the existing literature. An interactional model for defining 'bullying' using the four lenses made salient in participants' accounts - situated interaction, activity, relational context, and social resource - assists in illuminating the methods and orderliness in children's approaches to defining bullying and accounting for an event as 'bullying' or 'not bullying.' This model re-situates 'bullying' within a wider category set of interactions that may be hurtful, harmful or troublesome, either for the parties involved, or for others, or both. It raises a further question about to what extent bullying is an aspect of ordinary interaction and how it may be situated in a broader field of unwanted, unpleasant, or troublesome interactions. This interactional model more closely reflects the complexity in participants' accounts and avoids problems of oversimplification as well as overgeneralisation that are pitfalls in the conventional definition of bullying and its associated models.

The concluding chapter considers the strengths and limitations of this study and its implications for current research and interventions aimed at addressing bullying problems. It discusses how this child-centred approach contributes to investigation of children's lives in a respectful and rigorous way, and how this work may be made relevant and applicable to adults who work with children, including helping and health professionals, teachers, and parents. It considers future work and directions suggested by the approach, findings, and conclusions for this study.

## 1.6 Academic Papers

This doctoral thesis includes material from academic papers which are in various stages of the peer-reviewed publication process. The following table outlines these papers and provides detail on the authors, contribution of the candidate to the papers, locations of publication and current status at the time of printing. For both of the works listed below, the published material represents part of the chapter in this thesis. Permission has been given from the publisher to include the already published paper in this thesis.

**Table 1.1 Paper titles, authorship and candidate contribution for academic papers included in parts of this thesis**

Paper Title	Authors	Contribution of Candidate	Publication	Status	Thesis Chapter
The trouble with bullying - deconstructing the conventional definition of bullying for a child-centred investigation into children's use of social media	Canty, Stubbe, Steers, & Collings	Undertook review, collation and analysis of literature, wrote and revised the manuscript. Coauthors provided review and editorial input.	Children & Society (journal)	Published, vol 30, no 1 DOI: 10.1111/chso.12103	2, 8
"You can get cyberbullied by your friends": claiming authority to categorise a past event as bullying	Canty	Candidate undertook analysis and wrote the manuscript.	Children's knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in conversation analysis. Eds A. Bateman & A. Church	In press.	3, 6



## Chapter 2

### The Trouble with Defining Bullying - A Critical Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

Bullying and its impacts on children's lives are long-standing concerns, with modern research interest emerging in the late 19th century (Burk, 1897; Koo, 2007). While descriptions of bullying in earlier work are recognisably consistent with more recent portrayals in the last decade, the pioneering empirical work undertaken by Dan Olweus (1978) is frequently cited as an originating point for the research literature that has followed. The definition of bullying developed in his work continues to influence the broader field of bullying research, including bullying via social media. An enduring feature of current research is to treat the conventional definition of bullying as a given. The conventional definition commonly includes these four elements – negative acts, repetition, intention, and power imbalance (Olweus, 1978, 1993; Rigby, 2004). Consistent *a priori* application of this definition has created an aura of authority and temporal stability that obscures its origins and development, its disciplinary paradigm and assumptions, and emerging evidence that the term 'bullying' has multiple meanings and uses. Definitions, like theories, are made not born (Star, 1989); they are partial and situated knowledges that have histories.

This project focuses on defining online bullying and the specific setting of social media. I have opted for the terms 'childhood bullying' or simply 'bullying' rather than the more common 'school bullying,' and 'online bullying' rather than *cyberbullying*. Terminology can limit the view of a phenomenon, as seen in research where 'school bullying' resulted in a focus on peer interactions only in the classroom or school setting (Pyżalski, 2012). 'Childhood bullying' identifies the life stage of interest without restricting research to a specific setting. By contrast, the construction of bullying via communication technology referred to as *cyberbullying* may be overly broad and thereby obscure distinctive aspects of social media interactions. As I introduced in Chapter 1, cyberbullying is commonly defined as bullying or aggressive behaviour using electronic technology, including mobile phone calls, text (SMS), or the internet. The distinction between mobile phone functions and the internet has been substantially blurred with the development of internet access via smartphone technology and applications for making 'voice over IP'

phone calls and sending one-to-one messages. However, these communication functions remain primarily one-to-one, even though many have developed group message and conference call capabilities. One of the distinctive aspects of social media compared with phone calls or individual messaging is in the one-to-many potential audience, particularly for social networking sites. While private one-to-one messages are possible, they often appear as an adjunct to the primary functions of the site or application. Establishing consistent terminology for this project was complicated further during fieldwork by participants' use of 'bullying' and 'cyberbullying' interchangeably. For clarity, in this chapter I have used *cyberbullying* where this was the term used by authors and 'online bullying' to highlight the focus of this study on social media as internet-based interaction.

Investigation in the area of online bullying has been heavily influenced by the existing literature on in-person or 'traditional' bullying and the conventional definition of bullying. From a theoretical perspective, it is crucial to incorporate this broader literature on bullying into this critical review rather than narrow the focus to cyberbullying literature. As I outlined in Chapter 1 and will discuss in more detail in this chapter, research into cyberbullying carried over the theoretical and methodological assumptions inherent in the broader bullying literature, and these have influenced the conceptualisation and investigation of this new social phenomenon. As such, a critical historical review of bullying literature is necessary to situate the cyberbullying literature in context.

This chapter refines the focus of this discussion to definitions, building on the general background of current research on bullying and online bullying in Chapter 1. In the first section of this chapter I deconstruct the stability of the conventional definition of bullying. I use key observations from the historical context and omission illuminated by subsequent research into bullying to focus on gender, culture, the role of setting or context, and children's experiences of online bullying. In the second section I examine the key theoretical issues that create methodological problems that are connected with defining bullying in mainstream bullying research. These issues include the practice of priming, neglect of theory, and the privileging of adult focus. This discussion then leads into consideration of a philosophical and methodological foundation for a child-centred approach for this study in the third section.

## 2.2 Bullying Research - Theoretical Troubles

### 2.2.1 Historical Context

Bullying was not a new research focus when Dan Olweus adopted the term for his investigations into aggression in schools in Sweden in the early 1970s, but his work became and remains highly influential in discussion of bullying between children in the school setting. Scholarly interest has waxed and waned over the centuries, but it gained prominence in recent history associated with broader concern about violence in post-World War II Europe (Koo, 2007). Peter-Paul Heinemann (1969) introduced the Swedish word *mobbning* to describe interactions he witnessed where a group of children attacked an individual perceived to be different. He drew a parallel with apartheid and oppression in wider society, arguing that this had been tolerated by society in children's behaviour but instead should be unacceptable. It reframed bullying as a social problem (Larsson, 2012).

What Olweus presented in *Aggression in the schools: bullies and whipping boys* (1978) was a conceptual shift to focus on individuals through the lens of personality trait psychology. Olweus' background interest was in adult male violence. His search for predictive factors prompted the focus on boys when his attention turned to violence in the school setting. Psychological dimensions were one of a range of potential factors explored as potential explanations for violence, and specifically male violence. Theories and hypotheses in this field included social and physiological factors, including social stress (Agnew, 2001; Hay & Meldrum, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Wright & Li, 2012) and testosterone levels in men (Book, Starzyk, & Quinsey, 2001; Olweus, Mattsson, Schalling, & Löw, 1980). The hope was to establish a means for predicting which men may become violent in order to prevent or mitigate resulting harms, part of a broader project across several disciplines. Violence was perceived as a distinctively male problem, prompting Olweus' specific focus on boys.

Olweus criticised earlier theoretical formulations for excessively pathologising the victim and providing insufficient focus on aggressive individuals. The existing theories he criticised included Lorenz's (1963) ethological theory and Bandura, Ross & Ross' (1961) social learning theory (Olweus, 1978). He regarded group aggression towards a deviant individual as transitory and not as useful to his purpose of identifying in childhood potential predictive factors for adult violence, for which individual

psychological factors appeared more constant and relevant than situational factors. "[V]iewing school mobbing as a group phenomenon ... may lead to an *overemphasis on temporary and situationally determined circumstances*" (Olweus, 1978, p. 5, emphasis in original). Trait psychology offered a theoretical framework to explore whether aggression was in some sense innate to the individual and generally stable over time. The concept of stable personality traits sat comfortably alongside other individual attributes thought to affect aggression (Olweus, 1977, 1980). Olweus hypothesised aggression as a stable latent characteristic that manifested given the correct conditions. Like a predisposition to a non-infectious health condition, a trait resides within the individual awaiting the social trigger to become apparent. In Olweus' theoretical framework, that social trigger is the presence of the other type of individual – the 'whipping-boy'. He discusses the presence of *potential bullies* and *potential whipping-boys* in some classes, but claims that they were neither bullies nor whipping-boys because they did not have their polar opposite present to create the dyad and therefore the interaction. This is also reflected in Olweus' taxonomy of bullies and whipping-boys, where he describes 'potential', 'pronounced' and 'less pronounced' individuals of both kinds.

Olweus' bully was not just any boy. His intended focus was habitually cruel, highly aggressive individuals potentially at risk of becoming violent adults (Olweus, 1977, 1979, 1980). The factors used in the data collection surveys listed in the book *Aggression in the schools* illuminate the personality traits of interest, including significant antisocial behaviour or intent - enjoying the discomfiture of others, starting fights, finding it fun to start trouble (Olweus, 1978). Bullying was constructed as deviant and uncommon behaviour, a proper subject for the language of psychological disorder. Prevalence estimates from these studies were that around 3-5% of boys may be classified as "pronounced" bullies, and similar for "pronounced" whipping-boys (Olweus, 1978). This represents a continuous rather than categorical structure where a degree of severity is required for meeting the classification 'bully.' This is evident in later work on psychometric measures where establishing the most appropriate cut-off is positioned as crucial to avoiding pathologisation of ordinary interactions (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). The victim in Olweus' dyad was originally an equally deviant character, although this became less prominent in later writing.

While current research may not subscribe to trait psychology or the totality of Olweus' hypothesis, his definition of bullying remains highly influential, especially in quantitative research (Meyer, 2014). It reifies a dynamic and complex social interaction into an essentialist and reductionist object or fact (Berger & Pullberg, 1965; Lankshear & Knobel, 2010; Watson, 2015). The (now) Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire dominates prevalence and other quantitative studies (e.g. Berne et al., 2013; Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Potard, & Gimenes, 2014; Kyriakides, Kaloyirou, & Lindsay, 2006; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefhoghe, 2002; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Olweus' work also pioneered interventions to addressing bullying problems in schools (Hazelden Foundation, 2015; Olweus, 1978, 1993, 1996). The apparently clear and concise definition and psychological profiles of both bullies and victims form part of the appeal (Walton, 2005), along with a standardised measure that appears to capture the essence and measure the extent of bullying problems. These aspects of Olweus' research effectively established his definition as 'the' definition of bullying.

### **2.2.2 Omissions**

While the scope of bullying research has broadened substantially, the definition underpinning this work has remained distinctly static. The narrow focus inherent in the construction of Olweus' definition inevitably results in omissions which affect the adequacy of the conventional definition when abstracted too far from its context. Analysing these omissions through the lenses of gender, culture, and setting illuminates how the nature of the conventional definition has become increasingly problematic as bullying literature has developed. While not producing an exhaustive list, these lenses help to deconstruct the conventional definition's appearance of self-evidentiality and adequacy as a first step towards investigating children's accounts of their experiences.

#### ***Gender***

The very terms "bullies and whipping-boys" epitomises the gendered and binary view of this period in bullying literature. It reflected an assumption that aggression is a masculine characteristic and Olweus himself considered that the omission of girls from his initial studies was inconsequential (Olweus, 1978, 1979). While careful to clarify that his empirical investigations and theoretical sketch applied only to boys, tellingly he observed that "from a research technical point of view, the negative effects of the omission of the girls should be trivial" (1978, p. 18). As it turned out, this was far from trivial, both on technical and theoretical grounds. When girls were included in empirical

studies, higher rates of bullying problems among boys continued to appear, thus apparently supporting an assumption that girls were less involved in bullying (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1998). However, the crux of the matter here is generalisation from a limited sample, in this instance a single gender. This excluded girls' experiences from informing the development of theory.

Carol Gilligan's (1982) critique of the research basis for the Kohlberg model of moral development exposed the problem of representation in psychological theory, where the hegemonic 'male voice' was positioned as the norm. Similarly, bullying research was missing consideration of the impact of social and cultural norms related to gender on ways that aggression and power are enacted, and therefore potentially on how bullying is enacted (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 1998; Schott, 2014). The conventional definition of bullying was constructed with a specific focus on boys in a patriarchal sociocultural context. In this respect, it is unsurprising that it did not illuminate girls' bullying practices. Later work has focused on covert, relational and exclusionary interactions as pivotal to recognising girls' bullying (Duncan & Owens, 2011; Rigby, 1998; Simmons, 2002; Svahn & Ewaldsson, 2011). This work suggests that prevailing assumptions about gender and bullying problems arise from their constitution in research practices – a direct consequence of the gendered construction underpinning the conventional definition. Bevans, Bradshaw, and Waasdorp (2013) demonstrate how gendered assumptions extend into the structure and analysis of survey instruments used to quantify bullying problems and thus require attention in the context of research design. These examples illustrate the capacity for the conventional definition to hide aspects of the phenomenon it attempts to explain.

However, simply including girls and expanding the range of practices included as bullying does not constitute a critical review of gender socialisation, aggression, and power. Nor does it alter the gendered-ness of the construct of bullying that underpins the conventional definition. If anything, it perpetuates and emphasises heteronormative masculinity and femininity within a binary view of gender (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011). Among the consequences of preserving this inherent heteronormativity are how boys' and girls' behaviour are perceived and investigated. Discussion of girls' physical aggression is rendered effectively absent (Bhana, 2008; Swift, 2013, 2014; Walton, 2005). Such assumptions similarly obscure boys' uses of non-physical or relational aggression (Walton, 2005). As Hoff and Mitchell (2010) observe,

attention to gender socialisation is a vital dimension for a thorough understanding of gender in relation to bullying theoretically and empirically.

These erasures have remained surprisingly under-theorised, and this has created a curious gap in the literature. As Meyer (2014) notes, many studies report variation in rates of bullying based on gender. However, these studies often remain untouched by a critical analysis of gender, sexuality, and intersectionality to shape or impact on bullying behaviour and how it is perceived. A common focus for feminist analyses in bullying literature tends to concentrate on how bullying practices reproduce male violence against women and same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming people. Such analyses commonly highlight how sexism and homophobia from the wider social context are frequently reproduced in bullying and argue that recognising the reproduction of prejudices and practices of policing deviance from the norm implicit in bullying is crucial to its effective conceptualisation (Meyer, 2008, 2009, 2014; Schott, 2014). Others have focused on interactions between heteronormativity and mainstream views of girls' bullying (Duncan & Owens, 2011; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). While these are important analyses of gender in the context of bullying in their own right, two problems remain. Firstly, these critical perspectives have had little impact in mainstream bullying literature. Secondly, the gendered heteronormativity within both concept and definition of bullying itself remains largely uninterrogated.

### ***Culture***

Cross-cultural comparison presents a major issue for the conventional definition of bullying. As Smith et al. (2013) observe, bullying is a Western and specifically English-language term. As noted above in section 2.2.1, Olweus' influential formulation minimised the relevance of context to focus on individual behaviour. Subsequently, Western mainstream psychology has presupposed that bullying is an abstract, universal 'thing' which exists independent of contextual factors. Consistent with the universalist and essentialist assumptions inherent in Western psychological theory, Smith et al. (2013) propose that bullying is a natural category on the basis that something like bullying appears to exist and is recognised everywhere regardless of local differences. In making this case, they suggest that the core of bullying as a natural category can be reduced further to "in interpersonal relationships, some people will be tempted to take advantage of others in a more disadvantaged position, for their own benefit" (p. 28). This description could easily be applied to many other kinds of negative actions that

would not be considered bullying, and its vagueness appears very different from the precision commonly associated with defining bullying behaviour in mainstream bullying research.

Schott (2014) identifies the significance of language and cultural context, and questions whether a cross-cultural definition of bullying is possible. On closer examination, there are no simple cognate words or direct equivalents for 'bullying' in many other language and cultural settings that capture the nuances of the term in English. Some efforts at translation have used general terms for aggression and violence (Schott, 2014; Smith et al., 1999). A flaw in this approach is that these words miss the complexities implicit in the English word. Other researchers have introduced 'bullying' as a loanword from English, along with its definition, as an alternative solution to this problem (Smith et al., 2013). These struggles with translation expose the foreignness of the concept of 'bullying' in the non-English speaking cultures examined in these studies (Carrera et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2002). Either of these approaches may be viewed as a form of intellectual colonialism by imposing a Western cultural paradigm for interpreting interactions and ignoring the significance of social and cultural context.

A fascinating case study in the problem of cross-cultural comparison is presented by the concept of *ijime* in Japanese language and culture, which is possibly the longest-standing comparison with the Anglo-Saxon notion of bullying in the literature. As noted above, other terms used for translating the term bullying emphasise physical abuse, aggression, or violence. In contrast, the defining features of *ijime* are the qualities and effects of interactions, collective or group behaviour, social hierarchies and exclusion, and the broader social context. *Ijime* cannot be understood adequately without these qualities (Koo, 2007; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). These features point towards another dimension where *ijime* differs from bullying as theorised in Western literature. Walton (2005) discusses Japanese research showing *ijime* as distinctively non-gendered, neither taking gendered forms nor being theorised in gendered terms. As discussed above, the theoretical premise underlying the conventional definition of bullying emphasises not only individual behaviour but is also heavily gendered.

Moreover, *ijime* describes the behaviour of ordinary rather than abnormal children, and refers to practices of policing social order (Horton, 2011). In this respect, *ijime* is substantially different from the mainstream Western notion of bullying set within a paradigm of individual and abnormal psychology; however, it has not often been treated



by Western authors as presenting this degree of challenge to the Western paradigm. In this regard, *ijime* is not translatable as 'bullying' in the formal sense of the conventional definition. The Western notion of bullying is built on individual and pathological behaviour, whereas *ijime* is understood as normal behaviour and associated with enforcing social norms. While it may be reasonable to observe that most cultures would be familiar with situations where people take advantage of others' disadvantaged positions as Smith et al (2013) propose, this is not similar enough to the conventional definition of bullying to argue that bullying (in the Western sense) is a universal concept, and neither is it well enough distinguished from other interactions. In this light, Smith et al.'s (2013) assertion of bullying as a natural category becomes unconvincing. Proposing simple cross-cultural equivalence in this way and then to argue that a concept is universal ignores the power of linguistic and cultural and disciplinary paradigms to shape our view of a phenomenon (Coleyshaw, 2010).

### **Context**

In the historical origins of the conventional definition of bullying, as discussed in section 2.2.1, the intensive focus on the bully and victim as individuals allowed context factors to fade into the background. Olweus presented trait theory as a distinctive conceptual break from the contemporary group-focused models of ethology and social learning theory (Olweus 1978). However as a consequence of this narrowed focus, the pendulum arguably swung too far in the other direction and obscured bullying as a *social* event (Stassen Berger, 2007). Olweus' typology retained echoes of context and interaction, in that *potential* bullies and whipping boys only became *actual* bullies and whipping boys when they interacted in the context of the classroom, however the theoretical focus on individuals, personality traits, and behaviour has conceptualised the phenomenon as abstract rather than situated. As a result, the emphasis on individual behaviour independent of context has dominated the bullying literature. While it may be useful to focus on elements of individual behaviour that comprise social interactions, these cannot be examined and theorised adequately in isolation from the immediate setting and broader social and cultural context. Social interactions do not occur in a contextual vacuum.

Group-focused models of bullying have remained an adjunct in the existing literature. Investigations of the role of school and classroom climate and teacher attitude towards aggression (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Boulton, 1997; Naylor &

Cowie, 1999; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006), and the range of roles within peer groups connected with bullying (Gini, 2006a; Sutton & Smith, 1999), have prompted shifts in the literature to reintegrate some view of group activity and group dynamics into the concept of 'bullying', expanding the focus beyond Olweus' dyad. Analyses of school climate have identified how the individual behaviour model results in underestimation of the role of setting in permitting, encouraging or inhibiting bullying problems (Espelage & De La Rue, 2012; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). These studies have extended the view of bullying as an event that occurs in a social context, including identification of the 'bystander' as a role alongside the more commonly recognised 'bully' and 'victim' (e.g. Salmivalli, 2014). Incorporation of social exclusion as another expression of bullying, as discussed above in the context of gender, offered further grounds to reintegrate group activity and social interaction back into a broader concept of bullying. The impact of this can be observed in Olweus (1993), where he conceded to include group targeting of individuals in his later work as an expansion from his original and narrower focus on the one-on-one interaction of the bully-victim dyad. This shift has propagated through other mainstream research following the individual behaviour model. However, the challenge this expansion represents for the *definition* of bullying, which is still based in the theory of individual behaviour, has been left unexplored.

Another significant dimension of the role of context for theorising bullying has emerged from ways that bullying behaviour replicates prejudices and oppressions from the broader social and cultural context. This became most evident through investigations of racism, sexism and homophobia in bullying (e.g. Garnett et al., 2014; Hillard, Love, Franks, Laris, & Coyle, 2014; Meyer, 2008, 2009, 2014; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010; Wilson, 2014), although there are a growing number of studies examining weight (DeSmet et al., 2014; Jansen et al., 2014) and disability (Davis, Randall, Ambrose, & Orand, 2014; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Juvonen & Graham, 2014) among other personal attributes that may result in bullying or victimisation. The individual model struggles to account for the effects of racist, misogynist, ableist, homophobic or other derogatory language in bullying where the effect is amplified as a result of belonging to a particular group (Carrera et al., 2011; Scherr & Larson, 2010). It also misses the potential for negative impact on others who are not the direct target (e.g. Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Investigation of implicit bias has indicated that even casual use of phrases such as 'that's so gay' as a general negative activated negative attitudes and

increased prejudice in the social environment (Nicolas & Skinner, 2014). These dimensions of bullying point to ways in which the broader culture is reflected in the school context, to ways in which discrimination, harassment and exclusion may be normalised and minimised (Poteat, 2015), and how in their turn these local interactions maintain and help construct the broader discourses.

Turning to interventions, one of the key arguments for the significance of context is the comparative effectiveness of 'whole school' intervention activities over individual behaviour modification strategies focused on individuals alone (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2001). Sutton and Smith (1999) propose that, at the very least, a group dimension should be considered as a result of the frequent presence of a group of peers when bullying incidents occur, which has promoted interest in the potential for promoting 'bystander' intervention in anti-bullying initiatives (Denny et al., 2014; Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008; Salmivalli, 2014). However, while many such initiatives espouse a 'whole school' approach, often they remain focused on behaviour and a 'direct approach' to removing perceived social benefits. However, as Richard, Schneider, and Mallet (2011) note, such programmes often use a limited and arguably superficial notion of 'school climate' and is often focused on policy and implementation. By contrast, Espelage (2012, 2014), applies social ecological theory as a theoretical framework to support focus on the school environment as an ecology. This shift enables a view where influences on behaviour and interactions are shaped by the setting and context in which they occur. It recontextualises the individual behaviour of bully and victim. However, the individual behaviour model still dominates. The 'direct approach' initiatives remain predicated on the individual behaviour model and continue to minimise the role of setting and environment through inattention to the social ecology of the school. As Stassen Berger (2007) observes, bullying is very much a social event, and the social aspects should be considered in developing models for investigation and intervention (Coleyshaw, 2010; Espelage & De La Rue, 2012; Richard et al., 2011).

### **2.2.3 Defining Online Bullying**

As noted in section 1.2.3, online bullying was initially treated by researchers as being identical to in-person bullying, simply in a different setting (Mishna et al., 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008b; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). The conventional definition was applied uncritically to this new phenomenon. This uncritical application has been

especially characteristic of quantitative approaches seeking to establish prevalence and to validate measurement tools (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009; Topcu & Erdur-Baker, 2010), and has significant disadvantages for conceptualisation as well as measurement, particularly where such work predates exploratory studies. It does not usually include a critical evaluation of the construct of bullying, nor discussion of the theoretical assumptions at work. Moreover, existing measurement methods rely heavily on listing specific behaviours, which has proved increasingly problematic in online settings. Constantly evolving platforms and practices have made it effectively impossible to create a definitive list, in turn causing major problems for establishing a definition using this method (Lankshear & Knobel, 2010). Given that the influence of context was minimised in the originating historical context, it is unsurprising that this was not considered problematic. It exposes the reality that the conventional definition continues to be treated as axiomatic.

Exploratory and conceptual studies of online bullying have raised valuable questions about superimposing the conventional definition, unmodified from the in-person context, onto this new context. What has emerged is a complex picture of interactions that may fit elements of the conventional definition, but appears sufficiently distinct for some to argue that online bullying is a unique construct (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2010; Law, Shapka, Hymel, et al., 2012). The distinctive characteristics of computer-mediated communication have provided an opportunity to interrogate bullying at a more conceptual level. Some investigations have focused on how children or young people describe online bullying, which can be quite different from adult assumptions or definitions (Görzig, 2011; Livingstone et al., 2013; Wint, 2013). Law, Shapka, Domene, and Gagné (2012) go so far as arguing that cyberbullies are not bullies in the conventional sense. This argument arises from a number of significant differences they identify as being specific to cyberbullying. These include motivation and retaliation, blurring of the lines between aggressor and target, and substantial ambiguity regarding the element of power imbalance. If the concept of bullying is so significantly influenced by the setting in this new environment, then this insight poses serious problems for both the logic and utility of the conventional definition and its individualistic and decontextualised paradigm. As noted previously in the discussion on culture, this difficulty adds a further mark against the notion that 'bullying' constitutes an abstract and universal construct.

The notion of anonymity is a distinctive element of the online setting, made possible through its mediated dimension where nicknames have been a common feature of chatrooms and forums. It supports a degree of privacy and exploration of identities in the virtual setting in a way that may be impossible in most 'real life' contexts (Israelashvili, Kim, & Bukobza, 2012; Simpson, 2005; Sipal, Karakaya, & Hergul, 2011; Turkle, 1995). Anonymity has been represented as a unique danger in online bullying, permitting a screen for bullies to hide behind, and has been suggested as a distinctive element for defining online bullying (e.g. Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson, 2009). While not ruling out problematic interactions with strangers, online bullying may often be extensions of fraught interactions with people children know rather than strangers (Dooley et al., 2010; Kowalski et al., 2014; Kwan & Skoric, 2013; Law, Shapka, Hymel, et al., 2012). As discussed in section 1.2.2, children's social worlds online and offline are more connected than separate, and the online social setting is often an extension of their 'in person' social circle. On the other hand, some of the empirical data in these studies indicates children and young people do recognise a greater likelihood of doing or saying something they would not if it were face-to-face. 'Faceless' may become a more apt term to capture this difference rather than anonymous, connected with the notion of deindividuation, where there is a lack of a sense of 'person' in the absence of face, expressions and voice (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Mishna et al., 2009; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2014; Woong Yun & Park, 2011). The difference made by seeing a face, expression, and tone of voice emerged as a significant point in the data for this study, and how this connects with my proposal of 'faceless' as a more apt term will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

### **2.3 Bullying Research - Methodological Troubles**

The critical review of these omissions in the previous section suggests that there is not a single 'type' of bullying. Axiomatic use of the conventional definition imposes an artificial homogeneity over the complex phenomena actually or potentially associated with the term. While fertile ground clearly exists for feminist, post-colonial and critical interrogation, many of these possibilities remain un-explored or under-explored. The dominance of the individual psychology paradigm and lack of attention to theory, are characteristic of quantitative bullying research (Meyer, 2014). Both perpetuate issues of inadequacy of the ways that childhood bullying is defined compared with the actual phenomenon of interest. As discussed in Chapter 1, 'bullying' has come to dominate the

terms used in research and popular discourses for aggressive interactions between children. What the interrogation in this chapter clarifies from a theoretical perspective is that the term 'bullying' is inadequate to cover or describe the full diversity of hurtful or harmful interactions between children. This in turn helps to identify substantial methodological problems for the ways that the definition of bullying is used in research design and how knowledges are valued. These problems include priming, overgeneralising, and neglecting theory. Each of these 'troubles' contributes to privileging adult-centric perspective and lack of a child-centred standpoint.

### **2.3.1 Priming**

As a methodological tool, priming is commonly used to focus participant responses on the research topic and minimise variant interpretations of a word or concept. In bullying research, it is common to see in methods sections that participants were given a statement or vignette which translates the elements of the conventional definition prior to undertaking an interview or completing a survey. Precise wording may vary; however, it is common for these to be crafted to capture the key dimensions of the conventional definition of bullying: negative acts, intent to cause hurt or harm, repetition, and power imbalance, as in the example below.

*We say a young person is being bullied, or picked on, when another child or young person, or a group of young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a young person is hit, kicked or threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no-one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the young person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel. (Smith et al., 2002, p. 1120)*

Such uses of priming aim to address methodological problems, notably to increase consistency and comparability between studies and reduce over-inclusivity, especially (although not exclusively) within a quantitative paradigm. Over-inclusivity refers to the potential for multiple meanings and uses for a given term, and is routinely identified as a specific problem for children as participants (Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Solberg and Olweus (2003) recommended priming through presentation of a clear statement to define bullying, to avoid over- and under-reporting and to reduce inconsistency in responses. A crucial part of their argument for this was to establish a meaningful cut-off for severity such that low-level aggressive behaviour or conflict is not included in data as bullying. This has contributed to a perception of the conventional

definition as the 'correct' definition. This recommendation has developed into the canonical approach to investigation of bullying problems (e.g. Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, & Kift, 2012). While this may be seen as another aspect of Olweus' enduring influence in the field of bullying research, it is also common practice in psychological research. Priming can therefore be interpreted as the methodological outworking of the theoretical positing of an *a priori* definition of bullying and the axiomatic treatment of that definition.

While this methodological solution is appealing, imposition of an *a priori* definition of bullying does not reduce the multiple meanings and uses that a term such as bullying has in practice. The artificial homogeneity priming introduces in the research literature increases problems of circularity. Vaillancourt et al. (2008) addressed the variation in definitions of bullying to query whether researchers and young people were talking about the same thing. What emerged was a reflection of the blurred boundaries and variation in children's spontaneous definitions of bullying. Children's definitions consistently included negative acts, but frequently did not include the other elements distinctive to bullying – power imbalance, repetition and intent. Vaillancourt et al. (2008) concluded that priming is necessary in childhood bullying research, as children may be at risk of being overinclusive because their apparent concept of bullying is too broad in comparison with the key factors of the conventional definition. In fact, the converse could be argued. This conclusion perpetuates the assumption that the conventional definition of bullying is universal, static and correct, and that children's working definitions are inaccurate.

By contrast, exploratory approaches have illuminated aspects of children's perspectives and definitions of bullying that are obscured when priming is used. For example, Duncan (1998) discovered that richer data emerged when *a priori* categories were not introduced during group interviews. This was originally intended as preliminary research toward refining a questionnaire-based quantitative study. Participants raised subjects that they clearly identified as part of bullying, but which included factors that he as the researcher would not have anticipated. This and other similar studies present an alternative interpretation of the discord between a researcher-generated definition and children's definitions emerging from data.

Qualitative research designs that avoid priming also tend to elicit different insights into bullying as a complex phenomenon in the context of children's peer interactions. This

presents a counter-argument to the assumed need to impose *a priori* definitions. Variations between the conventional and children's definitions may be significant to understanding the real world contexts that research aims to reflect, analyse, and interpret. Rather than representing an inconvenience, such designs may instead point to some inadequacy in the definition or its uses and have potential to lead to new understandings and different approaches to intervention (Duncan, 2013; Espelage & De La Rue, 2012).

While priming has the benefit of establishing consistency between participants and studies, it also imposes a researcher-generated paradigm and categories. The practice of priming thus risks obscuring the very phenomenon that the research seeks to uncover. It also positions children's definitions as less valid interpretations of their own experiences than those of adults and marginalises their competence as reliable reporters of those experiences. It obscures those interactions that children may define as bullying but that may not fit the conventional definition, and concurrently highlights interactions that adults include as bullying but are not experienced as such by children. This points to a broader theoretical and methodological problem that this study seeks to address: that of how we position children and their experiences in research.

### **2.3.2 Overgeneralising**

One of the ironies in light of the above rationale for priming is evidence that the term 'bullying' itself has become overgeneralised in the research literature. 'Bullying' glosses crucial aspects of the phenomenon it proposes to explicate. As discussed in section 2.2.1, the conventional definition was formulated to identify a specific subtype of aggressive behaviour. This has usually been achieved in quantitative research through the combination of priming and designating a cut off point for severity, as I noted in section 2.3.1. Other types of aggressive behaviour that Olweus in particular was concerned to exclude from his focus on bullying included occasional or single events, or where the intensity was not as high, or there was a flatter social status between the protagonists. As discussed in Chapter 1, Stassen Berger (2007) also cautioned against a trend to interpreting age-normative behaviours as bullying, and specifically reactive behaviours, even if they are aggressive. Overgeneralisation obscures distinctions between bullying (as per Olweus' narrow focus on abnormal 'highly aggressive and habitually cruel' behaviour) and other types of peer aggression or conflict. However, 'bullying' has gradually been applied to an increasing diversity of aggressive interactions across



diverse settings and developmental stages - a creeping additional overgeneralisation, the implications of which have not been well explored.

A contributing factor may lie in the priming statements commonly used in bullying research. The example quoted in the previous section starts with the statement that the behaviours mentioned are bullying. Although there are qualifiers implying repetition and power imbalance, the focus is on the actions mentioned. Such descriptions of bullying potentially prime the discourses around bullying to focus on behaviours in isolation from the other factors of the conventional definition. The notion of severity is also lost, as the phrasing in these statements omits mention of a cut-off point to separate bullying from “not bullying” within a broader field of aggressive behaviour, effectively creating an impression that the difference is categorical rather than continuous. Consequently, it is possible to see how “saying nasty or unpleasant things” and other actions perceived as aggressive become subsumed under the term bullying. This trend has arguably contributed to a diminished vocabulary for peer aggression in childhood.

Nevertheless, some conceptual work from the 1960s onwards has maintained the distinction between bullying and other types of peer aggression (Humphreys & Smith, 1987; Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001; Mills & Carwile, 2009; Smith & Boulton, 1990). Among this broader field of terms sits teasing (Drew, 1987; Mills & Babrow, 2003), harassment (Land, 2003; Meyer, 2009), abuse (Finkelhor, Turner, & Hamby, 2012; Monks et al., 2009), playfighting and rough-and-tumble play (Pellegrini, 1989; Smith & Boulton, 1990) and conflict (Faris & Felmlee, 2014; Smith, Inder, & Ratcliff, 1995; Theobald & Danby, 2014). Each of these has social, theoretical and historical links with bullying while remaining a separate concept with distinctive meaning. For instance, teasing can be used for cruel and persistent interactions that would be consistent with bullying; however, unlike bullying, teasing can also refer to playful interactions that would never be considered bullying (Mills & Babrow, 2003; Smith et al., 1995). Where 'bullying' historically focused more closely on physical interactions, it was more common for teasing to encompass hostile interactions that would now more likely be categorised as bullying or harassment. This has both theoretical and practical implications for distinguishing between bullying and harassment or playful interactions. Overgeneralising 'bullying' to include any aggressive behaviour has implications for researchers about identifying the phenomenon of interest in terms of the theoretical problems I have discussed above, and also for adults,

most often teachers, discerning when to intervene with problems between children (Berkowitz, 2013; Davies, 2011; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006; Perren & Alsaker, 2006).

The multifaceted problem of overgeneralisation with the accompanying terminology erasure and diminished vocabulary has been recognised in some conceptual discussions of online bullying as well as bullying more generally. Some authors have proposed re-expanding the range of terms to classify aggressive interactions as a means to circumvent this dilemma, including cyberaggression (Smith et al., 2013) and electronic aggression (Pyżalski, 2012), thereby retaining 'bullying' as a more specific term. Others suggest a more radical shift in definition and paradigm that may result in a better fit with the phenomenon (Duncan, 2013; Schott, 2014), however at this point no clear direction has been established. These alternatives will be explored further in chapter 7.

### **2.3.3 Neglecting Theory**

An additional methodological problem for bullying research is the tendency to neglect theory, most noticeable in empirical quantitative paradigms. It creates an impression that the research is somehow neutral, describing objective facts in line with the ideals of 'value-free science' (Proctor, 1991). One reason for this atheoretical approach is the fact that positivist and essentialist approaches remain dominant in bullying research (Schott, 2014). 'Bullying' in this framework is reified into an abstract concept that is both universal and stable. Reifying involves transmuting "complex relationships, processes and practices into '*things*'" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2010, p. xii), which they also identify as reductionist. This ontological reduction creates an oversimplification, whereby increasing lists of hurtful, harmful, or unwanted interactions are defined as a more basic thing, bullying.

However, definitions and paradigms influence perception of the problem in real world settings, as well as in the literature. Discerning these theoretical frameworks can be difficult, as many quantitative studies do not make these explicit. Additionally, the conventional definition of bullying may be perceived as sufficiently established to capture the concept of bullying such that the need for critical questioning is assumed to be unnecessary. This contributes to the impression that these studies have treated the conventional definition of bullying as axiomatic. As I have demonstrated through this chapter, theory was integral to the development of the definition and concept now

known as 'bullying.' Engaging with theory is also vital for addressing the omissions and deficits inherent in this conceptualisation and to examine the implications for defining and identifying bullying. In a practical example of this problem, Davies (2011) discusses the dilemma for teachers mentioned above in distinguishing between normal conflict and unacceptable behaviour ('bullying') that requires intervention. This study highlights the problems associated with third party observation and perceiving the qualities of an interaction (see also Bateman, 2011). It also demonstrates some of the deficits associated with a positivist and essentialist theoretical stance. While there would be some interactions that could be considered obviously hurtful, observation of an activity or behaviour may be inadequate to determine whether the interaction is being experienced as *bullying* for the individuals involved.

Successive reviews of the literature have called for greater methodological pluralism and improved dialogue between quantitative and qualitative research to enhance the theoretical robustness of research on this troublesome phenomenon (Guerin, 2006; Monks et al., 2009; Smith & Brain, 2000; Stassen Berger, 2007; Thornberg, 2011; Walton, 2005). Yet there appears little evidence of this happening to date, particularly in quantitative studies (Meyer, 2014; Schott, 2014). As noted at the beginning of this chapter, theories are made, not born (Star 1989). The tendency to accept existing definitions uncritically and axiomatically, especially in relation to social phenomena, fails to recognise the theoretical and social context of their original formulation. Much of the existing literature on bullying research does not come from a personality trait theoretical perspective, and yet the definition of bullying remains predicated on this psychological theory. It is uncommon for such studies to make any theoretical assumptions explicit, leaving it unclear what models or assumptions have been made in their research design about bullying as a phenomenon.

#### **2.3.4 Privileging Adult Perspective**

Mainstream bullying literature adopts an adult-centric rather than child-centred approach.<sup>2</sup> The theoretical discussion above exposes the conventional definition as a researcher-generated artefact derived from an adult formulation of the problem. While some studies may not refer to the Olweus formulation in particular, the problem remains that adult researchers make *a priori* determinations of the scope and

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<sup>2</sup> I have used 'adult-centric' rather than 'adult-centred' here to signal its position as part of the existing and dominant paradigm. By contrast, 'child-centred' indicates specific theoretical and methodological decisions to bring children's knowledges into the centre from the margins.

boundaries of the problem and defining what bullying is from an adult perspective. Even where the research methods may be more child-friendly or child-focused, the axiomatic use of the conventional definition perpetuates an adult focus.

Adult-centric approaches perpetuate the marginalisation of children in research about their lives and experiences, even if such approaches may not be wrong in an absolute sense. Psychological theories, and particularly those from developmental psychology, still dominate theorisation of children and childhood (Burman, 2008; Greene, 2006; Mayall, 2013). This dominance is evident in the existing bullying literature in the continuing focus on psychological aspects of the phenomenon, whether that is behaviour or intrapsychic factors. Burman (2008) characterises the dominant model of childhood in psychological theory as a 'deficit' model, which theorises children as incomplete humans, alternately dependent and fragile or wild, uncontrolled and risky. As a consequence, children are positioned as incompetent and unreliable as reporters of their experiences (Burman, 2008; Hood, Kelley, & Mayall, 1996). In this model, children's incomplete formation provides the justification for marginalising and trivialising children's knowledges. From a methodological perspective, this theoretical stance amplifies and justifies the concern regarding over-inclusivity as reasonable adult management of children's incompetence.

The field of child-centred research presents an important counterargument to this model of children and childhood. Critiques of mainstream developmental psychology and recent sociology of childhood have challenged this 'deficit' model of childhood (Burman, 2008, 2012; Kidwell, 2013; Mayall, 2000). Mayall (2000) characterises adult-centric approaches as assuming the superiority of adult knowledge for interpreting childhood and children's experiences. These critical perspectives present constructions of children as competent social actors. In contrast with constructions of children as incomplete and incapable, such perspectives argue that children can be reliable reporters of their experiences (Kellett, Forrest, & Ward, 2004). As such, child-centred approaches offer a means to incorporate children's knowledges into bullying research and literature (Guerin, 2006; Kellett, 2005). I will develop this line of thinking further in section 2.4.

Placing children and their accounts of their experiences at the centre constitutes a key theoretical and methodological issue for this study. Developing a child-centred approach requires confronting the ways in which an adult focus is implemented throughout the

research process. These can be explicit in the approach to defining the problem and analysing data, but can also be implicit in choices made about the definitions and analytic approaches used. The conventional definition of bullying is an adult-generated concept, as can be seen in the review of its historical context. Developed *a priori* by an adult, it tells children involved in research what bullying is rather than seeking to listen to children about their strategies for identifying bullying (e.g. Cowie, 2011) or attending to instances where children use the term bullying. In the next section, I explore key theoretical and methodological considerations for developing a child-centred standpoint approach.

## **2.4 Theoretical foundations for a Child-Centred Investigation**

### **2.4.1 Seen and not Heard – Needing a Different Theoretical Frame**

*"... in everyday social life, we (as adults, parents, or researchers) tend not to be very respectful of children's views and opinions, and the challenge is to develop research strategies that are fair and respectful to the subjects of our research." – Morrow & Richards (1996)*

Undertaking a child-centred investigation of how children make sense of bullying in the context of social media required a different theoretical frame. The theoretical and methodological troubles discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 highlight how an adult-centric paradigm has marginalised children's knowledge in the existing literature on bullying. Outwardly, children appear to be included in research about their experiences of bullying. From Olweus onward, bullying research has relied on children as informants about bullying from their experience. This inclusion has allowed children to be 'seen' in bullying research. However, as I have shown, the field continues to impose an adult-centric perspective and definition onto how that information is gathered and how it is interpreted. There are, therefore, fundamental ways in which children are simultaneously not 'heard', because the focus remains on adult-centric perspectives of the problem. One of the theoretical challenges for this study has been to develop a child-centred approach to investigate how children make sense of their experiences, and, for this study, specifically in the context of social media and bullying.

The common theoretical frames used in bullying research are problematic for a child-centred investigation. By taking the conventional definition of bullying as axiomatic, children's definitions of bullying have been sidelined and positioned as inaccurate, unfocused, naive or simply wrong. Children's knowledges have been treated as trivial

rather than central to theorising a phenomenon based in their experiences. While this was unlikely to have been the intent of such research designs, it may be seen as an unintended consequence of the practice of priming and assuming that children as participants in research are at high risk of being overinclusive, as discussed in section 2.3 above. Priming instructs and inducts children into the adult-centric concept of bullying and glosses their understandings or uses of the term. In this sense, it may be argued that axiomatic use of the conventional definition of bullying constitutes an impediment to investigating children's experiences of bullying.

The discussion in this section flows on from the implications of the theoretical and methodological problems I have identified in the preceding sections of this chapter. In this section I turn to the theoretical and ethical considerations for developing a child-centred investigation that emerge from the literature on research with children. 'Child-centred' appears as a descriptor in a range of discourses, including research. Heary and Guerin (2006) suggested that research using the term 'child-centred' as a descriptor may be characterised as a continuum rather than a single methodology, and that being child-centred "involves placing the child at the centre of our inquiries" (p.6). The range of meanings used have varied from a minimal placing an abstract notion of 'the child' at the centre of the research concerns, through to advocating for children's active collaboration in every aspect of the research process (Greene, 2006). However, this does not go far enough. Simply placing children 'at the centre' does not challenge the adult-centric assumptions inherent in most approaches to research. Without attending to the theoretical and ethical considerations I discuss in this section, research will replicate the privileging of adult perspectives and marginalisation of children's knowledges while suggesting a veneer of inclusion.

As the introductory quote from sociologist Virginia Morrow suggests, adults doing research with children have tended not to be very respectful of children's views and opinions. There are a variety of descriptive terms used for active participatory research with children that places their perspectives and experience at the centre. These terms include child-focused (Atwool, 2013), participatory (Harwood, 2010; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998; Wickenden & Kembhavi-Tam, 2014), empowerment (Cowie, 2011; Munford & Sanders, 2004), children as active researchers (Kellett, 2005), and child-centred (Barker & Weller, 2003; Emond, 2006; Guerin, 2006). For this study, I have used "child-centred" to contrast with the adult-centric perspective in the existing literature. It also has useful

parallels with the client-centred approach in the social work literature as a shift away from professional-as-expert to place people's expertise in their lives at the centre (Clark & Statham, 2005; Saleebey, 2002).

#### **2.4.2 Theoretical Considerations**

A key theoretical consideration for this study to be 'child-centred' is in the way it conceptualises and engages with children's knowledges. As I have discussed in section 2.3.4 above, the existing literature on bullying continues to be dominated by psychological theories grounded in a deficit model of childhood. Such assumptions may be implicit rather than explicit, especially where the research does not engage overtly with theory. However, assumptions can be discerned in the ways that children and their knowledges are constituted within the design and analysis. Where these assumptions imply the deficit model (as discussed in the previous section 2.3.4), 'the child' is perceived as an object for study (Harwood, 2010) and children's knowledges are often dismissed or disregarded as simplistic or naive (Mayall, 2000). For my study to be child-centred, a different theoretical frame was needed.

The status of children's knowledges is a key theoretical consideration for this study, given the marginalisation of these knowledges in existing bullying research (Guerin, 2006). This study focuses on children's sense-making activities, that is, how they understand and make sense of their experiences within a social context of shared understandings. This focus is intimately connected with a broadly social constructivist concept of knowledge as a reflexive and interactional activity (Charmaz, 2014; Christensen & James, 2000; Mayall, 2000). Mayall (2000) argues that to credit children with knowledge "rather than the relatively transient and flimsy 'perspective', 'view', or 'opinion'" allows adults as researchers to learn about relationships between social groups where children are engaged (p. 120). Positioning children as engaged in the development of knowledge about their lives and experiences, the researcher recognises that this knowledge is not only valuable but vital to understanding and theorising children's experiences. A 'competence' model of childhood creates the theoretical context for this study as an empirical study that engages with children's knowledges. This model positions children as competent social actors engaged in reflecting, refining and enlarging on their experiences through interaction to develop (shared) knowledges (Burman, 2008; Mayall, 2000). Such a theoretical approach begins to respond to Morrow's challenge to be 'fair and respectful' to children as subjects in research

(Morrow & Richards, 1996). This has implications for the methodological and analytic framework, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3. The shift to placing children's knowledges at the centre for child-centred research helps distinguish the child-centred approach I have developed for this study from other studies that focus on children and their views but lack this critical stance.

Standpoint theory offers a theoretical and epistemological frame for an adult researcher to maintain a critical awareness of the power relations between children and adults. Standpoint theory developed out of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) and has been taken up in the fields of feminist theory and critical theory. In standpoint theory, the knowledges of oppressed or marginalised groups are privileged and given theoretical primacy in two respects. The first is regarding their knowledges of their own lives, and the second is regarding their knowledges of the dominant culture, as seen from 'below'. Standpoint theory argues that as a consequence of being oppressed by the dominant social order, the marginalised have superior knowledge of those oppressive structures and therefore are uniquely positioned to articulate and critique them (Christians, 2010; Denzin, 2012; Haraway, 1988; Tanesini, 1999). Similarly, standpoint theory proposes that marginalised people have superior knowledge of their own experiences (Stoecklin, 2012; Tanesini, 1999). One of the key epistemological advantages in feminist developments of standpoint theory is the notion that all knowledges are partial and situated (Haraway, 1988). In this context, abstracted and reified concepts can be deconstructed and re-examined. The existing bullying literature presents one set of knowledges about bullying among other partial, situated knowledges, rather than standing as correct and universal, of which children's knowledges appear as a crude and inaccurate reflection. Standpoint theory offers a theoretical framework for privileging children's knowledges of their own lives and experiences without needing to erase differences between children or between children and adults (Tanesini, 1999).

While standpoint theory has developed an epistemological framework for privileging marginalised knowledges, it commonly deals with knowledges of adults. Unlike marginalised knowledges of adults, children face greater barriers to having their knowledges treated fairly and respectfully compared with other marginalised groups. The age and educational attainment prerequisites to doing academic research (as independent researchers) usually occurs in people's lives at a point when they are no longer children. Lahmann (2008) explores this theoretical and ethical dilemma in terms



of 'the child as Other' in academic research. As I discuss in the next section, there are specific dimensions of social power between adults and children in research about children's lives and knowledges that create ethical considerations for using and modifying standpoint theory.

### **2.4.3 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for developing a child-centred standpoint theory may be divided into two linked concerns - participant positioning and researcher positioning. As with the theoretical considerations discussed in 2.4.2, these ethical considerations are not always explicit in the dominant approaches to research in the existing bullying literature. However, they are vital for addressing the social and institutional power inherent in adult-child interactions, as well as researcher-participant interactions.

The position or role created for children in research is a central ethical consideration for child-centred approaches. 'Child-centred' may be used to refer primarily to fieldwork and data generation methods (Barker & Weller, 2003; Clark, 2010; Cree, Kay, & Tisdall, 2002; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008) or to advocate for a greater active and integrated role for children as active co-constructors at every step of the research process (Kellett et al., 2004; Kellett, 2005). One of the major pitfalls for any initiatives to include children's voices, including for research practices, is tokenism (Hart, 1992). The paternalism underlying tokenistic inclusion is often seen as less problematic in relation to children compared with other groups of people who are commonly constructed as vulnerable (Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Powell & Smith, 2009; Witham, Beddow, & Haigh, 2013), and is linked to the deficit model discussed in 2.3.4. However, there are examples in family law (Hemrica & Heyting, 2004) and domestic violence interventions (Iversen, 2013) where predetermined participation methods and tokenism may result in children being given a voice, but not much 'say'. As noted earlier, such criticisms may be applied to research focused on children that retains an unexamined adult-centric perspective.

Participatory and action research methodologies have been a popular strategy to engage children as participants rather than simply being the objects of study and to mitigate against tokenism (Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Clark, 2010; Crivello, Camfield, & Woodhead, 2008; Harwood, 2010; Wickenden & Kembhavi-Tam, 2014). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) and

specifically the articles on participation rights are a common starting point, proposing that children have rights to an active voice in matters concerning their lives. A key ethical stance in participatory and action research methodologies involves sharing power between participants and researchers, in recognition of participants as subject matter experts in the focus of the research (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Participatory methodologies have a similar theoretical pedigree as standpoint theory, drawing on Freire and other critical theorists to acknowledge the expertise of participants. They build on political concepts of democracy and explicit commitment to power-sharing on the part of researchers (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Kellett, 2005). Child-centred participatory research aims to counterbalance to routine disempowerment of children as objects of research and 'democratise' some or all of the research process, including design, fieldwork and data analysis, and authorship on publications (Barker & Weller, 2003; Heary & Guerin, 2006; Kellett et al., 2004; Spyrou, 2011, 2015). In this context, children's knowledges about their everyday lives are positioned as an asset to the development of the research project as well as being the focus of the content. The fundamental aim in participatory approaches is not solely for participants to be given a voice, but to enable their voices to be heard (Bergold & Thomas, 2012), and for children to be empowered through collaboration in the *process* of research.

However, there are important notes of caution required for participatory research with children. Achieving the desired degree of sharing power between researchers (who are usually adults) and children creates additional demands on researchers using such methods for child-centred research. The pervasive influence of generational differences requires specific attention to account for children's capabilities. Spyrou (2011) argues for critical and reflexive researcher engagement in this process, in order to remain attentive to the limits associated with adults producing and reproducing children's voices in research. This adds a further dimension to the ethical considerations for researchers-as-adults conceiving and designing child-centred theory and methodology, and where a modified standpoint theory may help keep these complexities in the foreground.

The second of these linked ethical considerations is the role adopted by adult researchers in relation to participants who are children. Mandell's (1988) concept of the 'least-adult' role pioneered an ethnographic strategy for adult researchers to engage with children in fieldwork other than as a passive observer. The proposition to 'get in

the sandbox' and be an active participant rather than detached observer sought to redress social as well as physical difference. It also illuminated how children perceived adults as authority figures, which was automatically reproduced in existing approaches to ethnographic fieldwork. Variations on the 'least adult' role, including 'adult friend' (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988) and reactive roles (Corsaro, 1985), have been used in fieldwork by researchers to blend in with children's everyday activities and take a non-judgemental stance on children's interactions (e.g. Harwood, 2010; Spyrou, 2011; Thornberg, 2010). The primary aim is often identified as avoiding the perceived disciplinary authority implied in parent or teacher roles. The concept of the 'least adult' role offered a starting point for researchers seeking to understand children's worlds and experiences from children's perspectives (Raffety, 2014).

Although it is appealing, the 'least adult' concept ignores the social power adults hold in interactions with children (Lahman, 2008; Mayall, 2000; Raffety, 2014; Spyrou, 2011). It is not possible for adults to enter children's social worlds as if they were a child any more than an ethnographer of other cultures may become a member of another culture. Acceptance as a visitor or ally is not the same as having the status of an insider. Such attempts to blend in with children's social groups as a participant observer create a superficial impression of proximity and direct access to experiences of children's peer cultures (Spyrou 2011). Ultimately, researchers cannot "wish away the complexity of the differences and similarities between children and adults as they are currently constituted" (Christensen, 2004, p. 173). When these differences and similarities are ignored, there is a risk that social difference goes unrecognised and undertheorised. The 'least adult' position simultaneously ignores children's agency to categorise and position adults. In effect, it maintains the social difference through claiming a greater capacity for adults to define their relationship to children. It does not address the research relationship, where children as participants "relate to and define adults who enter their social worlds" (Raffety, 2014, pp. 4–5). It assumes that it is possible for an adult to acquire a child perspective through a nominal relinquishing of social power and yet retaining that power by unilaterally defining the relationship. It is important in child-centred research to establish the researcher role as seeking to learn from children rather than to instruct or discipline them; however, this must be distinguished from presuming that it is possible to stop being an adult.

By contrast, reducing social distance while respecting social difference offers a resolution to this problem (Raffety, 2014). Social difference and social distance represent distinct dimensions of interactions between adults and children, and conflation of the two is the primary ethical problem inherent in 'least adult' approaches. Even in collaborative and active participatory methods, social difference is not erased. Ignoring social difference only entrenches the power dynamic by assuming that adults can have direct access to children's worlds in a first-person experience. Raffety's (2014) approach appears more respectful of those differences in the cross-generational interaction of the 'doing' of research with children, as well as reflexive awareness on the part of adult researchers.

#### **2.4.4 A Child-Centred Approach as Modified Standpoint Theory**

Research with children routinely assumes that modifications are required to research practices used with adults to account for differences in children's cognitive, social, and educational development (Barker & Weller, 2003; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Greenfield, 2011; Thomson, 2007). However, there is a further dimension seldom addressed in such modifications, particularly in relation to the treatment of empirical data in a realist paradigm. The underlying assumption is that data such as survey, interview, and observation create direct access to children's experiences. These assumptions fail to account for the multiple meanings and experiences that may be implicated by a word, and that these may differ from a formal definition or concept. This epistemological intersection between theory and methodology has significant implications for how knowledges are constituted and analysed within a study, and also for the fair and respectful treatment of children's experiences within research. In this section, I bring together the theoretical and ethical considerations from 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 to discuss how standpoint theory may be modified to develop a child-centred standpoint theory.

At first glance, standpoint theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for dealing fairly and respectfully with children's knowledges in academic research (Akerstrom & Brunberg, 2012; Balen, 2006; Crivello et al., 2008; Renold, 2002). Why would it need to be modified? The answer to this lies in the ethical and political context of most common applications of standpoint theory in feminist, liberation, and critical theories. Standpoint theory has commonly focused on adult experiences, privileging knowledges that are marginalised through value-laden differences between adults. It is often used by theorists and researchers who have membership of the experience or community at the

centre of the theory or research (Christians, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2010). As such, the marginalised knowledges are often articulated from a first-person perspective. When shifting the focus to children and their knowledges as the marginalised experience, academic researchers, being adults, will always be non-members at the point of the research activity. Lahmann (2008) comments on the dangers of nostalgia and remembered childhood for adults generally and the implications for researchers. Such sentiments can cloud approaches to fieldwork, analysis, and interpretation, and create a false sense of familiarity or knowledge. This has especial relevance for research with children about experiences (such as using social media) that did not exist when many adult researchers were the age of participants. The projection by adults of their own remembered childhood onto children now is an expression of generation as key to understanding childhood and the relationships of children to the social order. Mayall (2000) compares generation with gender in its role as a key concept for understanding women's relationships to the social order, arguing that "the adult researcher who wishes to research with children must confront generational issues" (p. 121). Remaining attentive to social difference and social distance is crucial to the reflexive awareness of the researcher not only in fieldwork activities but also in the process of analysis.

Standpoint theory has the potential to work as a modified, non-member theoretical and epistemological approach through its emphasis on privileging marginalised knowledges. As can be seen through the discussion in this chapter, it is common for adults to make assumptions about the correctness of adult-generated concepts and definitions in relation to children's experiences. Modifying standpoint theory for adult research with children requires acknowledgement of the axiomatic use of these assumptions, how they are imposed on interpretation of children's experiences, and to adopt a consciously agnostic stance. I use 'agnostic' here in the sense of a conscious stance of not assuming meanings or definitions, either on the basis of existing academic literature or of ordinary use. Standpoint theory supports and is supported by 'bottom up' empirical approaches that allow for developing understandings of children's knowledges while at the same time recognising that dominant adult-centric knowledges are an influence present in the wider social context. It is the responsibility of the researcher as a non-member of the social group 'children' to recognise and consciously set aside *a priori* assumptions, so as to be in a position to place children's knowledges from the margins to the centre. This ethical stance contributed to design decisions for the methodological and analytic framework for this study (to be discussed in Chapter 3).

Like standpoint theory, participatory research has developed in an adult context and similarly requires attention to what modifications are needed for participatory research with children. Participatory research methodologies share some political ground with standpoint theory in seeking to empower people often treated as objects of research to be active collaborators in academic knowledge creation. Participatory methodologies create a partial bridge of the gap for children in research. However, there are a number of crucial points that they cannot overcome. Despite active collaboration in the research process, participatory research still does not give direct access to 'experiences' in a realist sense. Spyrou (2011) notes a specific problem related to the notion of 'voice' and authenticity in some research that focuses only on fieldwork or data collection practices. Such approaches may end up assuming that the research data generated offers direct access to children's authentic experiences, without attending to problems of social power and the co-constructed nature of data generated. There is a need to unpick and make explicit simplistic assumptions about what access a researcher has to children's peer worlds when using ethnographic or other co-constructive methods for generating data. In this respect, the notion of collaborative sense-making in the interaction between participants and researchers offers a theoretical frame for data and knowledges generated in participatory research (Nicholls, 2009; Nind, 2011).

Some participatory research can appear naïve if the influence of generation and the multiple aspects of social power are not adequately dealt with at theoretical as well as methodological levels (Spyrou, 2011, 2015). Where children are engaged as active researchers, the ethical and methodological problems of the power dynamic between researcher and researched are translated into peer interactions. Omissions may exist for Some active participation approaches such as Kellett et al. (2004) endeavour to share power between adult researchers and child researchers. However, this appeared not to include discussion of how positioning some children as researchers changes the power dynamic between children-as-researchers and children-as-participants. The decision to work with an extension group as collaborators in research also inadvertently reinforces another potential power dynamic within the peer group based on intellectual ability and achievement.

A further significant component for this modification is recognition of the limits of participation for children. Children are excluded from full participation in academic research as equals due to the prerequisites of cognitive development and educational

attainment. By the time these prerequisites are met, the individuals will no longer belong to the social group 'children'. Child-centred research also needs to do more than simply position children as participants. It needs to account for ways that children are theorised and 'othered' in theorising about their knowledges. Lahman (2008) proposes that "even the most understanding, sensitive early childhood researcher cannot fully achieve a relationship that is not othered, between adult and child, researched and researcher due to inherent differences. In essence the child will remain always Othered" (p. 286). This notion of children as the least powerful 'other' in the social order connects with Mayall's (2000) proposal of generation as a key concept for theorising childhood and children's relationship to the social order. Research that places children's knowledges at the centre is crucial for improving our knowledge of children's lives and experiences in general. Critical awareness of the multiple dynamics of social power is equally vital to such research being genuinely child-centred. Modifying standpoint theory offers a sensitive theoretical base to develop such an approach for this study. Standpoint theory together with participatory methodologies creates an overall approach to co-creating knowledges with children about their experiences. Such an approach also allows for recording of co-construction of knowledges in participants' peer interactions.

A child-centred approach as a standpoint theory is complicated by the fact that it cannot be predicated on current first-person experience of the theoriser in the manner of other standpoint theories. It requires analysis of subtle ways in which children's knowledges are marginalised and the limits on the researcher to articulate them. Privileging an adult perspective is not sustainable, and as noted earlier, it is similarly problematic to assume that adults have direct access children's knowledges through joining peer activities. As Spyrou (2011) observes, "power mediates all research production" (p. 154), and this is inevitable in research that focuses on children. It creates additional demands on the researcher to attune to ways that power infuses theoretical stances along with fieldwork methods. These represent core theoretical and methodological challenges for adult-led, adult-designed research that seeks to be fair and respectful in positioning children and their knowledges.

As discussed in 2.4.3, Raffety's (2014) notion of respecting social difference while reducing social distance may offer a theoretical as well as methodological direction for developing child-centred research as a modified standpoint theory. While there have

been diverse approaches to placing children at the centre of research, the starting point for genuinely child-centred research must be to constitute itself as doing research *with* children and placing their knowledges and expertise in what it means to be a child at the centre. Given that bullying and other hurtful, harmful, or troublesome interactions between children are children's experiences, it is crucial that children are both seen and heard within the research literature and in theorising these phenomena.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In the first two sections of this chapter, I have undertaken a critical review of existing literature and approaches to researching bullying, with a specific focus on the trouble associated with defining bullying. This has illuminated the way in which the conventional definition of bullying has become an uncritically accepted gloss. As a result, it has become evident that the term 'bullying' obscures the complexity of what may be inferred as the underlying concern for adults and for children themselves, that of troublesome interactions between children that may result in hurt or harm. One of the major problems associated with a positivist, essentialist approach is the process of reifying a concept or definition. This ends up with the concept being treated as the thing itself. As I show through this study, such a process is inadequate for understanding complex social interactions. The dominance of adult-centric perspectives and consequent marginalisation of children's knowledges in the existing literature on bullying is a major contributor to these theoretical troubles.

In the third section of this chapter I have used the critical review of research practices with children to develop a theoretical and ethical base for this study as a child-centred investigation that is fair and respectful of children's knowledges. I discuss how standpoint theory offers a robust theoretical frame to augment participatory research with children. These approaches offer substantial theoretical strengths for redressing the marginalisation of children in research; however, both also require modification to address specific theoretical and ethical considerations for developing a child-centred standpoint theory as the approach for this study. I have presented an initial theoretical outline and cautions for developing a child-centred standpoint theory that recognises the influences of generation on children's relationships to the social order and the multiple theoretical, ethical and practical implications this has for research with children.



Deciding what a concept is prior to investigating it reveals the stance taken by the researcher in relation to the social knowledge held by the participants. This becomes most obvious in the context of bullying research through the practice of priming, which imposes the adult-formulated conventional definition of bullying onto children's input to the research. There is an inference that children's definitions of bullying are not valid or precise and that they require instruction. It implies that children's approaches to identifying an interaction as bullying are less legitimate and require correction. However, it is clear that the variance between children's definitions of bullying and the conventional, adult-generated definition is no longer simply an inconvenience. This is a key theoretical and methodological dilemma that requires critical examination. Understanding how children make sense of their experiences is vital for theorising bullying, and this cannot be done using an adult-centric perspective. It requires an explicit child-centred approach because how children define bullying matters. This discussion sets the critical theoretical frame for the methodological and analytic framework I developed for this study as a child-centred investigation, which I discuss next in Chapter 3.



## Chapter 3

### Materialising the Virtual - Methodology and Analytic Framework

*Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him. It is a gift for dealing with the accidents of existence, not the accidents themselves. – Aldous Huxley Texts and Pretexts (1932), p. 5*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the BBC television series *Dr Who*, the travelling machine called the TARDIS arrives in a place by 'materialising' out of the vortex through which it moves between different spaces and times. This offers a rich metaphor for children's sense-making activities as the focus of this study, and the data generation processes that have rendered them available for analysis and interpretation. The term 'virtual' is often used to describe things that are not tangible and is a common synonym for 'online' as distinct from 'real life' in-person interactions. However, in this study, participants' experiences of social media were interwoven with their in-person socialising. 'Materialising the virtual' creates a metaphor for interwoven methodological, ethical, and practical elements needed for the design of this study as an investigation of children's sense-making activities. Some of these elements are specific to social media and online interactions, and some are common to research of experience. The metaphor also captures an aspect of the collaborative sense-making work of participants and researcher in co-constructing the data. Experience and knowledges can also be understood as virtual phenomena that need materialising as data in order to be available for analysis. To characterise the process of generating data as "making material" offers a new perspective on the processes of fieldwork and data analysis for social scientific investigations.

This chapter focuses on the methodology, methods and analytic framework for this study. In the first section I build on the theoretical considerations raised in 2.4 and discuss how I addressed them in developing a child-centred investigation. In the second section I outline the novel T-shaped analytic framework I developed for this study. The third section describes the iterative fieldwork design and practical application. The fourth section outlines the data set generated through the fieldwork activities and introduces the process of analysis. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the

data analysis chapters and the interactional model that organises the discussion of the analysis.

## **3.2 Methodological Challenges for a Child-Centred Investigation**

### **3.2.1 Modifying Participatory Methodologies for This Study**

This study investigates how children make sense of their experiences of social media and defining bullying. While these sense-making activities are at the core of children's knowledges, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, they are rarely a feature of research into children and bullying. The critical review of existing approaches to research with children in 2.4 illustrates the need for developing a child-centred and participatory methodology and also the challenges involved in doing so. Despite a clear rationale for methodological pluralism (Thornberg, 2011), bullying research continues to be dominated by studies of prevalence, commonly using self- and other- report surveys and priming participants with the conventional definition or a similar variant. This is often rationalised as improving the validity of responses (e.g. Campbell et al., 2012).

Observational methods have been less common. There are challenges associated with access to the phenomenon of interest, particularly where it occurs away from the adult gaze or is actively hidden. However some observational studies have achieved this serendipitously (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1993). The common problem with these research strategies from a child-centred perspective is the underlying adult-centric assumptions about defining or identifying bullying. Here I discuss how I have addressed these challenges in the design of this study.

For this study, I have used an empirical, 'bottom up' methodology consistent with participatory research. Participatory research is one type of empirical research, distinguished by use of strategies that emphasise collaboration with participants and suited to the needs of the study rather than predetermined data generation methods (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). The need for research methods to be relevant, interesting, and child-friendly is essential to empower participants to articulate themselves to the best of their ability (Barker & Weller, 2003; Clark, 2005a; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). The limits for children's participation in a participatory methodology are subtle and complex. As discussed in 2.4, there are theoretical challenges connected with generation and unequal social power between adults and children that participatory research strategies cannot elide. The researcher is responsible for creating the context for

children's participation, including consideration of data generation options and flexibility in fieldwork and analytic framework to accommodate different data types. There are a number of multiple or blended methods for child-centred and participatory data generation (Clark & Statham, 2005; Clarke & Moss, 2001; Greenfield, 2011). However many do not address the question of how *the analysis of the data* might also be child-centred (Nind, 2011). There remains, therefore, a risk that adult-centric assumptions may be perpetuated at the point of analysis and interpretation. In their outline of the Mosaic approach to research with young children, Clarke and Moss (2001) incorporate multiple data generation methods to generate a living picture of young children's worlds in their Mosaic approach. Mosaic draws on active participatory research practices to create a framework for under 5 year old children to be understood as active co-creators of meaning in the research process. The approach addresses the question of analytic sensitivity to children's interests and concerns through processes of internal and multiple listening (Clark, 2005b; Greenfield, 2011). However, these processes do not offer much detail on how to explicitly bracketing adult assumptions in the process of analysis, especially about basic concepts. The focus in this study on meaning and how children make sense of experiences created space for participant engagement in critical review and extending analysis from a 'member' standpoint as a crucial part of the design. Following Nind (2011), my intent was to integrate fieldwork and analytic approaches that positioned participants as knowledgeable and competent co-creators in the research process and remained mindful of my status as a non-member of the social group "children".

For this study, I sought to strike a balance of reducing social distance while respecting the social difference between myself as researcher and participants (Raffety, 2014). Although requiring effort, time, and sensitivity, social distance can be reduced through relationship-building in the design and conduct of fieldwork activities. The decision to work within school classrooms created the opportunity to develop a mutual familiarity that supported fieldwork activities. In practical terms, this involved relationship-building with the principal and teachers at each school, respecting protocols for introduction to class members, contributing to class learning activities, and spending time in the class environment talking with class members. At the same time, I explicitly acknowledged social difference from the outset. It governed my approach to talking about the rationale for the investigation in the written documentation for information and consent (see Appendix A), and for discussing the study during fieldwork activities. I

positioned myself as an adult who, by virtue of being an adult, could not know what it is like to be a child of the participants' age at this point in time. In social work theory and practice, such positioning is well recognised within person-centred (Corey, 2009), empowerment (Lee, 2001) and strengths-based approaches (Saleebey, 2002), and articulated in the narrative approach as the person being 'expert in their own life' (White & Epston, 1990). This provided a useful starting point for operationalising a child-centred approach to fieldwork and analysis. The matter of researcher positioning thus emerged as a crucial ethical dimension in relation to participants in the context of fieldwork, and to the process of developing an analytic framework for data analysis and interpretation.

### **3.2.2 Technology-Related Challenges**

There is a cluster of technological characteristics of social media that create challenges for studying children's interactions using social media. These include access to the phenomena of interest, gaining consent to participate or permit personal information to be recorded and used for research, and recording the phenomena of interest for analysis. These challenges contribute to ethical problems that were significant for this study as a child-centred investigation.

Access to the phenomena of interest is an enduring challenge for research into children's peer interactions in person as well as online. Developments in childhood studies have recognised that significant aspects of children's lives and children's culture occur in peer interactions that are not visible to adults either by circumstance or design (Alton-Lee et al., 1993; Faris & Felmlee, 2014; Radliff & Joseph, 2011; Spears et al., 2009; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). Children's cultures include private interactions that are intended to be hidden from adults by virtue of them being adults, not simply because they are outside of the members' friendship circle. Solutions used by other studies include use of publicly visible posts to social media (Duncum, 2014; Lomborg, 2012; McDermott, Roen, & Piela, 2013) and passive or participant observation on specific spaces or online game communities (e.g. Boynton & Auerbach, 2004; Crowe & Bradford, 2006). Some ethnographic studies have blended online and in-person strategies including direct observation, participant interview, and focus groups (Baker, 2013; boyd, 2014; Dyke, 2013; Turkle, 1995). The diversity and innovation in strategies highlights methodological and practical challenges for research of this new social phenomenon and

either the limits of, or need for adaptation of, traditional research strategies for investigating online interaction.

Some studies of in-person bullying have been made possible through incidental capture of interactions as a result of recording for a different purpose (Alton-Lee et al., 1993) or through long term recording of social interactions (Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). This kind of spontaneous materialising of interactions into analysable data is less possible in the online setting. Opportunities for overhearing or inadvertent recording of peer interactions are reduced by privacy and visibility settings that offer users substantial control over audience. While it is possible to 'lurk'<sup>3</sup> or use an assumed identity to gain access to some settings, recording these interactions for later analysis is problematic in relation to privacy and consent. An additional underexplored problem in relation to online data is connected with ownership and access rights to the material. User agreements may prohibit or limit licence to record and archive chat interactions for any purpose, including research. Even if the technological problems were overcome, the challenge for analysis and interpretation from an adult-centric perspective would remain.

Accessing personal information from social media, not simply demographic information but including all information stored in an account or page, has emerged as an increasing concern where technological challenges begin to overlap with ethical implications (Bone, Emele, Abdul, Coghill, & Pang, 2016). Zimmer (2010) reviewed the community furore over a study based on data gleaned from a social networking site without explicit consent for participation in the research. While the incident discussed did not involve children specifically, the general public outrage that followed highlighted problems with assumed consent based on clauses buried in complex terms and conditions of specific social media sites. It uncovered a range of significant gaps in the implications of privacy and consent for research related to accessing social media data (Verma, 2014; Zimmer, 2010).

While there is an assumption in the broader society that children are naïve or do not care about privacy online, recent studies highlighting children's aptitude with privacy or visibility settings that control the audience of posts and interactions have suggested the

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<sup>3</sup> 'Lurking' is an established term in online forums, usually referring to joining a discussion list, forum, or chat group and observing without participating. It can be perceived as benign and acceptable prior to engaging more actively, or as voyeuristic and unwelcome.

opposite is true (boyd, 2014; Davis & James, 2013; Faris & Felmlee, 2014; Hugl, 2011; Livingstone, 2008). Publicly visible online interactions are only part of the picture and cannot include all aspects of children's online interactions with peers. This creates a substantial disadvantage to investigation of online bullying, where such interactions may occur behind privacy settings. Another option is to lurk, as mentioned above. However, such strategies create ethical problems in terms of deception and informed consent for data to be used in research. Children are routinely identified as a vulnerable population, and as a consequence any ethical concerns are heightened in the minds of researchers, parents and other gatekeepers, and research ethics committees.

### **3.2.3 Agency, Consent and Gatekeeping**

In 2.4.3, I discussed ethical considerations for child-centred research for creating a basis of participation beyond tokenism. Agency, consent, and gatekeeping are practical implications for the theoretical ethical stance of participatory research with children. Obtaining genuine informed consent is a substantial focus for research generally, and it is a frequent concern for research involving children. Protection against exploitation remains a central function of informed consent processes for any research involving people. The stakes are elevated when the research involves people perceived as vulnerable and requiring protection (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012; Kendrick, Steckley, & Lerpiniere, 2008; Mahon et al., 1996; Marshall et al., 2012; National Ethics Advisory Committee, 2012; Ryen, 2008; Witham et al., 2013). The default expectation of prioritising parental consent is made plain when studies encounter parental refusal or unavailability, even though the child or young person is willing (Munford & Sanders, 2004), or when there is no parent to give consent (Hopkins, 2008). While neither of these situations applied to this study, the integration of a child-centred standpoint meant confronting how and from whom consent would be sought, and why.

Research with children involves negotiation with adult stakeholders in children's lives who may take a gatekeeping role (Clark, 2010; Coyne, 2009; Kawulich, 2010; Powell & Smith, 2009; Wanat, 2008). Gatekeepers in relation to children are most often parents and family, but may also involve adults *in loco parentis* at fieldwork sites, and research ethics committees. For this study, schools were the proposed fieldwork sites and the initial contact point for recruiting, and so school principals, governance boards and teachers were included as gatekeepers. It is common practice for schools to request parental permission for special activities outside of ordinary expectations. To place



children's consent for this study at the centre, I drew on insights from Munford and Sanders (2004) on prioritising participants' agency within the consent process. The primary indicators of consent to participate in any of the activities remained with the children as participants.

A foundational component of informed consent across settings, including health and research, is providing sufficient information in a way that is understandable. This principle has been used with even very young children in medical research, to establish their consent independent of parental consent (Hunter & Pierscionek, 2007; Valentine, 1999). Making information about the study understandable formed an important principle for designing information sheets about the study for parents and for children as participants, and also for revising these documents in response to feedback from participants and parents (see Appendix A).

One of the key decisions for this study as child-centred related to gaining explicit and informed consent from children as the participants. A significant implication of this stance was to consider how *all* participants could be given the option to consent or decline. This decision presented a major obstacle for using online observational methods, as it would require gaining consent not only from the nominated participants themselves but also from all of their contacts. Such an undertaking would be beyond the resources available for this study. Other studies have sought alternative solutions to the consent problem, notably using closed groups where alerting group members to the study and gaining explicit consent were simpler processes (e.g. Boynton & Auerbach, 2004; Mohd Roffeei et al., 2015). Although internet research is not new, as noted in section 1.2.2, it is arguable that establishing genuine and informed consent processes for online research are still in their infancy, particularly in relation to these diffuse network aspects of social media interactions.

A further challenge regarding consent for this study was respect for privacy and children's peer interactions online. In addition to the technological challenges discussed in section 3.2.2, one of the practical difficulties envisaged during the initial research design process was the likelihood of potential participants being willing to offer access to their online interactions with peers, interactions often viewed as private and conducted deliberately away from the view of adults (De Souza & Dick, 2009; Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009; Livingstone, 2008; Osvaldsson, 2011; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). Requests to view these interactions may be perceived as excessively

intrusive and a potentially insurmountable barrier to participation. Zimmer (2010) notes that "just because personal information is made available in some fashion on a social network, does not mean it is fair game for capture and release to all" (p. 323). Given that this study focused on potentially sensitive topics, I concluded that direct observation was unsustainable.

### **3.2.4 Materialising the Virtual - an Evolving Focus of Inquiry**

A key methodological challenge for this study was to materialise the 'virtual' phenomenon of children's experiences of social media. In response to the technical and ethical issues discussed above, the focus of inquiry for this study evolved from focus on what children *do* on social media, which would require some kind of direct observation, to *how they make sense of these experiences*. This area is rarely focussed on within the existing literature. As such, this shift presented an opportunity to extend knowledge of how children construct meaning in their talk about these experiences. Previous research into online bullying had highlighted the significance of interpretation (Dooley et al., 2010; Law, Shapka, Hymel, et al., 2012). This insight suggested a means to resolving the data generation issue, namely that it may be more fruitful to focus on how children account for online bullying, and how they use the notion of 'bullying' in making sense of their experiences. This is a step removed from direct analysis of bullying interactions themselves. However, examining the process of accounting for events as 'bullying' or *not bullying* establishes a focus on how children make sense of their experiences.

Bullying literature does not have a strong focus on accounting practices, most often treating self or other reports as unproblematic and transparent reflections of events or feeling states. Existing discourse studies, including critical discourse studies (Duncan & Owens, 2011; Thornberg, 2011, 2013) and detailed interaction studies (Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011), have analysed interactions that illuminate how subtle interactional processes can result in bullying and social exclusion that is invisible to other types of analysis. Thus far, studies have not focused much on the process of constructing post-event accounts. However, it is these accounting practices that categorise events as 'bullying' or *not bullying*. Accounts of bullying are the 'stuff' of studies of moral reasoning, interview and questionnaire methods, yet they have not previously been analysed *as accounts* in their own right.

'Post-event' accounts are also significant as interactions in themselves, particularly as a feature of talking about and seeking help with 'troubles.' Such accounts may appear in conversation between peers, such as when a past event may be discussed in retrospect as a shared experience, or when it is disclosed to a third party. They also appear in discussions with adults where the event may be constructed as a trouble. Post-event accounts are frequently the only knowledge available to educators, parents and helping professionals about an event and its impacts for the people involved. This means that the account of a past event as 'bullying' or *not bullying* forms a significant focus for study, irrespective of whether the interaction in which the accounting occurs is between peers or between child and adult. The role of post-event accounting in defining 'bullying' or distinguishing it from other hurtful, harmful, or troublesome interactions between children has not featured in existing literature. The account is a key aspect of ethnomethodology, and 'troubles' have been identified as an 'accountable' phenomenon in conversation (Garfinkel, 1967; Hester, 2000; Jefferson, 1980, 1988). In this view, accounts are integral to producing meaning and everyday social orders. I discuss the contribution of ethnomethodology to the analytic framework I developed for this study in greater detail in section 3.3.3.

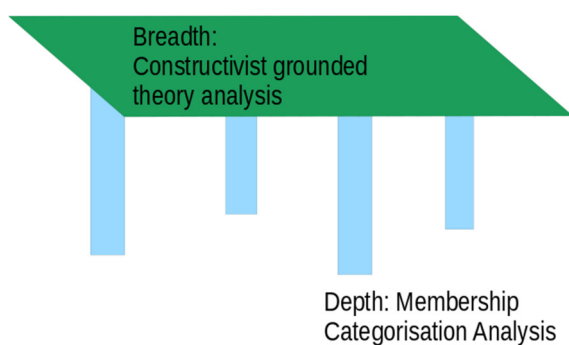
In this study, the data consists of post-event accounts. This allows for a shift of focus from what children *do* on social media to their sense-making activities *about* these experiences. The recording of fieldwork activities enabled 'materialisation' of children's sense-making activities as an interactional phenomenon that otherwise remains intangible. The data set materialises interactions where children are engaged in the social action of making sense of their experiences, and makes them available for analysis. In addition to understanding the fieldwork activities as 'materialising the virtual' of participants' sense-making activities, it is important to recognise participants' agency in doing the materialising. They were engaged in co-constructing sense-making activities to, for, and with each other in the context of fieldwork activities. These were rendered available for observation and analysis in the process of recording, coding, and transcribing selected excerpts, which represent further layers of materialising.

### 3.3 A T-shaped Analytic Framework

#### 3.3.1 Developing a T-shaped Analytic Framework

This study uses multiple qualitative methods in analysis. It draws together constructivist grounded theory for cross-sectional analysis to explore the field of terms invoked by participants in their accounts, and membership categorisation analysis for in-depth analysis of key points that emerged within this field. A major analytic challenge for this study to be child-centred was to approach the data with sensitivity to children's specific meanings and cultures, especially where the focus is on a familiar term or activity. This extends the common focus in child-centred studies on appropriate data generation methods (as discussed in 3.2.1) to employing analytic techniques that supported a child-centred ethic, alongside participatory fieldwork methods. It is easy to fall into assuming that meanings for children are identical to meanings ascribed by adults. For this reason, it was important to use analytic tools that focused attention on meanings as generated by participants, and avoided either overinterpreting or underinterpreting the data. Constructivist grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis both encourage the analyst to recognise and bracket their own assumptions in order to focus on what is made salient by participants in the data. Both also offer robust and systematic analytic methods for achieving this. They have shared origins as critiques of mainstream American sociology of the 1960s (ten Have, 2007), which adds a further level of interest to enlisting them together as components of an integrated analytic framework for this investigation.

The analytic framework I developed for this study can be represented graphically as a T-shaped framework (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1 T-shaped Analytic Framework.**

Constructivist grounded theory offers a robust means to explore the breadth of children's experiences. The cross-sectional analysis functions as 'mapping the terrain' (the horizontal bar of the T) and informed my analysis of participants' accounts of using social media. This component established an explicit and robust analytic method within this framework for exploring children's knowledges of social media and bullying, and for dealing with ethnographic data as an interpretive resource for me as the analyst to use membership categorisation analysis.

A number of key points emerged from the cross-sectional analysis of the data that warranted a more granular analysis (the vertical bars of the T). The ethnomethodological approach of membership categorisation analysis offered a useful method to achieve this. The fine grained analysis focused on participants' sense-making activities in 'doing' the defining of bullying and developed an interactional perspective. As suggested by the multiple vertical bars in Figure 3.1, there were in fact several salient points where more in depth analysis was undertaken. Membership categorisation analysis permitted more detailed examination of ways children deploy the term bullying and its associated social and cultural knowledges in classroom interactions. The creative interweaving of the strengths of each approach supported a multi-layered empirical approach to data generation and analysis.

A distinctive aspect in this study is the integrative approach to using constructivist grounded theory as a purposeful and explicit method for building a collection of analyst interpretive resources to support categorisation analysis. A previous study used these two analytic approaches as 'partner' analyses previously to investigate meaning (Ruane & Ramcharan, 2006), however the approach was more additive than the integrative approach I have developed in this analytic framework. The novel and synergistic application of these two analytic methods in this study established a rigorous approach to mapping this contextual knowledge in a manner consistent with an ethnomethodological perspective by remaining grounded in member categories. In the following sections I present key characteristics of constructivist grounded theory, ethnomethodology and membership categorisation analysis, and discuss key challenges that had to be addressed.

### 3.3.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory presented a number of methodological strengths for the cross-sectional analysis. It begins from a position of not-knowing and not-assuming (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) suggests that it has particular application for experiences that are undertheorised. It eschews any *a priori* assumptions and setting aside prior knowledges associated with a phenomenon. It sets out a 'bottom up' and emergent process for developing theory from multiple empirical data sources, broadly described as ethnographic in approach (Charmaz 2014). Earlier grounded theory approaches advocated complete agnosis, proposing that researchers should know nothing about the focus for the study and engage in no reading of prior research, in order to avoid introducing external theories to the data and its analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This has been viewed by some as more aspirational than realistic (Charmaz, 2014; Mills & Francis, 2006). It fails to acknowledge that most researchers will have some prior concept of the phenomenon or experience of interest, even if they are existing assumptions from the wider culture. An 'informed' grounded theory approach presents a modified stance to this ideal (Thornberg, 2012). The crucial point is that the researcher recognises assumptions and how prior research has theorised a phenomenon, and then is able to set that aside in a conscious and reflexive manner. This sustains the analyst's responsibility to remain grounded in the data for their analysis and development of theory while acknowledging the effective impossibility of absolutely knowing nothing about a phenomenon of interest.

The process of coding in constructivist grounded theory demands attention to actions and activities. Unlike approaches to coding themes or content, constructivist grounded theory encourages focus on actions and dynamic features of social interactions by encouragement to use the gerund form of verbs ("-ing") for codes. This transforms the coding task to focus on processes over concepts as a step towards theorising (Charmaz 2014). This is the foundation of the specific advantage of constructivist grounded theory for theorising, by developing conceptual categories from these processes. This approach focuses the analysis and theoretical development on how people develop understandings of their experiences and make sense of them. Categories must emerge from coding of the empirical data and carry explanatory power (Charmaz 2014). They must also withstand the process of constant comparison back to the data. In this respect,

analytic codes must earn their way into the analysis and developing theory (Charmaz 2014).

While this study is not exclusively a constructivist grounded theory study, the iterative structure for fieldwork and analysis developed by constructivist grounded theory offered a useful template. Along with advocating an iterative approach to fieldwork, which I discuss in greater detail in 3.4 below, the analytic approach allowed development of a map of participants' social knowledges relating to their experiences and opinions of social media. The template enabled an iterative design between the schools that were fieldwork sites for this study, and also between the different fieldwork activities and data points at each school. The techniques of coding for processes and constant comparison provided a methodical approach to setting out the scope for the social knowledges 'in play' in the data. In addition, the respect for participants' knowledges fitted well with the ethical stance of privileging children's expertise in their own lives. The focus on generating theory recommended it for this cross-sectional work in the light of the critique of existing theories discussed in Chapter 2, which informed my approach to the fieldwork and analysis.

### **3.3.3 Ethnomethodology and Membership Categorisation Analysis**

Ethnomethodology originated in the work of Harold Garfinkel as an empirical and rigorous approach to studying the order and social actions within apparently disorderly everyday social interaction (Garfinkel, 1967; ten Have, 2007; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). The term ethnomethodology (ethno + method) reflected his focus on the methods used by members of a society for constructing social orders and meaning in ordinary interactions as the 'phenomenon of interest' (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 11). Membership categorisation analysis offers a way to examine how people use social and cultural knowledge in ordinary activities to make sense of their experiences (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015; Sacks, 1995; Watson, 2015). It uses "member" in the ethnomethodological sense to focus on "the way people used social categories for describing people in the world and also how social categories were used to account for, explain, justify, and make sense of people's actions" (Fitzgerald, 2015). It developed alongside conversation analysis in the work of Harvey Sacks, a student of Garfinkel, and shared the focus on everyday social actions, with specific attention to how these are achieved in ordinary conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Sacks, 1972, 1995).

As Sacks (2014) illustrated in a detailed analysis of a child's story "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up", member categories and categorisation devices hold and invoke social and cultural knowledges that are hearable to other members of the group or society. Categories can invoke multiple layers of social knowledges, a quality Sacks referred to as "inference rich" (Sacks, 1989). Member categories can be a site of ambiguity, and arguably incorporate necessary ambiguity as part of their inference richness (Stokoe & Attenborough, 2015). Categories also render members of the category as representative of the category for the purpose of those knowledges stored in the category (Sacks, 1989). These qualities distinguish member categorisation from a purely descriptive function, although categories are certainly descriptive as well as being inference rich and representative (Stokoe & Attenborough, 2015). This focus on how people use social categories in accounting for and making sense of people's actions offered a way to analyse how social order was achieved in the fine detail of ordinary interactions.

Ethnomethodological approaches have been used for investigating children's interactions and social orders, including teacher-child interactions (Mackay, 1974), playground interactions between peers (Cobb-Moore, Danby, & Farrell, 2008; Danby & Baker, 2000; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Theobald & Danby, 2014), helpline telephone calls (Danby, Butler, & Emmison, 2011), disputes (Hester & Hester, 2012; Maynard, 1985a), development of mind (Wootton, 1997) and children crying (Kidwell, 2013). Such investigations, including conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis, are uncommon in the research literature on bullying. Such studies have demonstrated how granular analysis of interaction can render aspects of interactions available to analysis that are otherwise invisible, including indirect or covert bullying and social exclusion (Bateman, 2012; Danby & Baker, 2000; Evaldsson & Svahn, 2012; Goodwin, 1991, 2002; Loyd, 2012; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Theobald & Danby, 2012, 2014). Osvaldsson (2011) investigated how young people described bullying in the context of an internet discussion forum. Her analysis incorporated a focus on category work in the context of support-seeking and advice-giving between peers. She concluded that peer interaction represented an under-examined resource for insights into children's sense-making activities about the social phenomenon called 'bullying'. Svahn and Evaldsson's (2011) study of in-person interactions demonstrated the value of detailed attention to sequence and category for identifying how interactions between peers shifted subtly and at times almost imperceptibly from friendship to social



exclusion, illuminating a common indirect practice commonly identified as bullying that is invisible to other types of analysis.

Membership categorisation analysis has commonly focused on person categories, emerging from the wider sociological interest in identity and social types (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015), and in particular Sacks' analysis of categories of people that a suicidal person might turn to for help (Sacks, 1972). As became evident in the data, the use of bullying or cyberbullying as a type of activity to account for a past event is a term that invokes significantly rich inference about the activity itself as well as the persons involved. When the focus of categorisation practices is on persons, then activities become a feature of the category, especially in relation to the concept of the category-bound activity (Sacks, 2014; Stokoe, 2012). The second viewer's maxim, that "doing a category-tied action places the doer in that category" (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015, p. 104; Sacks, 1995), implies the person category through the explicit mention of the activity. The interrelationships between categories, activities, and features, which incorporates but also extends beyond the notion of category-bound activity (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015), emerged as a rich focus for the in-depth analysis for this study.

Membership categorisation analysis offered a number of advantages to the analytic framework for investigating children's knowledges. The detailed focus enables analysis of how members invoke shared understandings to achieve social actions. It therefore examines social orders as local and situated achievements rather than abstracted generalisations. There is recognition of the broader culture as a resource that members may invoke in interactions, but the analytic emphasis is on what is evidenced in the interaction rather than assumptions made by the analyst. As will become evident in the data analysis for this study, membership categorisation analysis creates the analytic space to investigate how categories are used and contested to achieve social actions, including analysis of how defining is in itself a local and situated social action.

### **3.3.4 Researcher Subjectivity and Reflexivity**

Researcher subjectivity and reflexivity are important to rigour and transparency for any study. They are explicitly addressed in both constructivist grounded theory and ethnomethodological approaches through similar means. Both incorporate a strict focus on grounding analysis in empirical data and warranting any analysis or interpretation clearly from within the data under consideration. Both also eschew *a priori* assumptions

and theories associated with a nominated phenomenon of interest. The explicit bracketing of analysts' assumptions in the process of developing analyses, interpretations and theories contributes to the rigour and transparency of these approaches in general, and this study in particular. In more recent years, both analytic approaches have moved away from positivist and realist paradigms and recognised the need for researchers to identify implicit assumptions arising from their own standpoint. This is significant where unrecognised assumptions may inadvertently influence analysis, and forms a response to potential critique that the researcher cannot claim an objective 'god's eye view' (de Montigny, 2007; Thornberg, 2012, 2015). This is especially significant for analysing children's accounts, where it is easy for adult analysts to fall into assuming that the meanings for children are identical to meanings ascribed by adults. For this reason, it was essential to use analytic tools that required attention to meanings as generated by participants.

Constructivist grounded theory proposes the notion that concepts must 'earn their way in' to any grounded theory analysis, whether extant from previous theories or emergent from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). This grounding of the analysis and constant comparison with the data has useful methodological parallels with the ethnomethodological emphasis on analysing social actions as achieved (and therefore observable) in interaction. Similarly, the emphasis on actions and processes over topics or themes in constructivist grounded theory has strong synergy with ethnomethodology's focus on local and situated social actions. One important point of difference in their respective approaches to data lies in how data is treated. For constructivist grounded theory, similarly to other social science research, the data is treated as a resource and the focus is on the content. By contrast, ethnomethodology and membership categorisation analysis focus on how social concepts (categories) appear in the data as social and interactional resources for achieving social actions. For ethnomethodology and membership categorisation analysis, the data is treated and analysed as an interaction, and the focus is on how members invoke and orient to shared understandings in the interaction. A further distinctive aspect of membership categorisation analysis is the 'cognitive agnostic' perspective (Kitzinger & Mandelbaum, 2013; Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Analyses of member category work do not seek to provide an examination or make inferences about mental states from the data. This stance is distinctively different from the cognitivist psychological theories underlying mainstream bullying research discussed in chapters 1 and 2. The focus on process and

interaction made possible in the combination of these two analytic approaches presents a challenge to reductionist and individualistic theories in the existing bullying literature.

### 3.3.5 Key Challenges

There are specific challenges arising for the analytic framework for this study, including problems of terminology, refining the focus of the inquiry and what is 'materialised' in the data, and the use of extracontextual resources for data analysis. Some of these challenges are general challenges for this study as a child-centred approach, and some are specific to the analytic methods I have brought together in the T-shaped analytic framework.

Constructivist grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis use the same term 'category' in quite different ways. This created a problem of clarity in distinguishing the concepts and functions for doing and then writing about the analysis. Categories in constructivist grounded theory indicate analytic development. The initial analytic phase is referred to as coding, and the 'grounded' aspect of the analysis is that these codes remain as close to the data as possible. Categorising is an analyst activity, where certain codes emerge or are selected as having overriding significance. The analyst raises them from a position of description to a more abstract level and significance for developing theory (Charmaz, 2014). This is very different from the meaning of 'category' in an ethnomethodological context. For membership categorisation analysis, the focus for membership categorisation analysis is analysis of members' shared understandings evidenced within the interaction itself, rather than analyst categories projected onto the data (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Sacks, 1989; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012). This clash required resolution within the analysis process, as well as for clarity in terminology.

Nevertheless, an element of synergy emerged in the process of developing this analytic framework, which supported smooth transition from developing codes and analyst categories in a constructivist grounded theory approach to analysing *members'* category work using an ethnomethodological and membership categorisation analysis approach. For the sake of clarity, I have generally restricted my use of the term 'category' to refer to member categories. This will be seen in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 where I predominantly use terms that feature in participants' talk. There are aspects of my analysis that would fit a constructivist grounded theory use of 'category', however in the analysis chapters I

have specified where these are *analytic* categories or used alternate terms such as 'code' or 'notion' to highlight these as analyst conceptual work and distinguish from *member* categories.

A combination of ethical and practical problems emerged during the design phase, discussed in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, which ruled out direct observation as a method. The ethical and practical dilemmas connected with gaining access to children's interactions online were substantial, particularly associated with the opportunity for informed consent for all parties and access to non-public settings. As a result, this study does not capture or analyse online bullying interactions themselves. The existing literature did not present viable options for overcoming the ethical and practical problems within the principles and values set for the study. As such, it is important to recognise the limits of this data set and what it does not and cannot account for. However, it is relevant to note that while this is a limitation for this study, it is also a limitation consistent with most bullying research. As noted earlier in this chapter, direct observation studies are rare in mainstream bullying literature. More common methods focus similarly on post-event accounts, either aggregated in the form of questionnaire or survey responses, or as in-depth interviews. In this respect, the data for this study is comparable. What the focus on post-event accounts in this study adds is valuable illumination of a rarely analysed aspect of children's sense-making activities and their knowledges which are marginalised in existing theories of 'bullying'. In this respect, what may have constituted a limit for this study is, in fact, a strength.

Another challenge was to identify what types of interactions are captured in the data, and what phenomena they may explicate. In ethnomethodology and membership categorisation analysis, there is a preference for using naturally-occurring data arising from the analytic focus on ordinary interactions. Potter and Hepburn (Potter & Hepburn, 2005) critiqued the use of open-ended or conversational qualitative interviews as a default means for studying social phenomena, arguing that interviewing methods prompt participants to "offer abstract conceptual rumination on some aspect of their lives" (p. 301) and that analysis of interview data routinely fails to consider the interview itself as an interaction. They suggested that interview technique can implicitly or explicitly introduce social science categories into the interview, and as a result categories invoked in an interview may not be analysable as *member* categories. These

problems highlight one of the reasons that ethnomethodological studies give preference to data generated independently of any researcher instigation or involvement.<sup>4</sup>

However, discussion of 'society' in the classroom context creates a fascinating grey area. McHoul (1978) proposed classroom talk as 'somewhere in between' ordinary conversation and institutional talk, as it encompasses both teacher-student and peer-peer interactions. ten Have (2007) argues that

*whether some piece of talk can be treated as 'natural' or not depends not only on its setting, but also on the way it is being analysed. Data that seem to be 'artificial' in terms of their content being provoked by the researcher or the situation of being recorded may be considered 'natural' in terms of the ways in which the participants interact while responding to this provocation (p. 69).*

This offered a way forward, to focus the inquiry on post-event accounts and analyse the data set as classroom interactions. While the specific fieldwork activities that generated the data for this study were researcher-instigated, they were consistent with ordinary and familiar classroom activities, and therefore analysable as naturally organised ordinary activities (Lynch, 2002) of classroom interaction. As such, the data set for this study has qualities closely akin to naturally-occurring classroom interaction, and this supported incorporation of membership categorisation analysis in the analytic framework. In this regard, the object of analysis is different from other the other ethnomethodological studies discussed in 3.3.3. By refining this view of the data set and what it materialises, I was able to analyse the data as post-event accounts in the context of classroom talk about using social media where participants orient to bullying as an inference rich social category.

While it is more usual for ethnomethodological and membership categorisation analysis studies to rely only on what is made explicit in the data, this becomes problematic where the analyst is a non-member of the social group or institution and not privy to specific social knowledge implicit in the talk. There are a number of settings where analysts need to draw on external information in order to make sense of the interaction. Useful parallels for comparison are cross-cultural research and analysis of institutional interactions where words and categories draw on idiosyncratic or technical meanings that are not part of the wider culture (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Kapellidi, 2013;

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<sup>4</sup> Potter (2002) uses the evocative phrase 'the dead social scientist test' as an illustration of this concept. The question to be posed of any data is "would the data be the same, or be there at all, if the researcher got run over on the way to work?" (p. 541)

Makitalo & Saljo, 2001; Weatherall & Gibson, 2015). Such settings feature both specialised uses of familiar words and use of unfamiliar words, and an analysis would be impoverished without such extracontextual interpretive resources. For analysis of category work, the analyst needs to "recognise the culturally and institutionally oriented resources" to which members have access (Evaldsson 2007, p. 383). The challenge for this study was not only to recognise it but also to investigate these resources, which in turn could support analysis of members' category work. Integrating analysis of ethnographic data with detailed interactional analysis enables the researcher to identify where these resources appear in the data and this in turn enables more effective analysis of the interaction (Evaldsson, 2007). Without some investigation of and reference to additional data where that social knowledge, their 'what everybody knows' (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015; Sacks, 1989), is relevant, we risk missing those pivotal variances in meaning through assumption.

In the next section I discuss how this dual framework worked in practice in the fieldwork activities and analysis of the data generated.

### **3.4 Fieldwork methods**

#### **3.4.1 Scope and Design for this Study**

This study investigates how children define 'bullying' in the context of their accounts of using social media. Participants were aged 10 - 13 years old attending government funded schools in the Wellington region. This age bracket corresponds to the Intermediate year levels (7 and 8) in the New Zealand education system. Three schools in the Wellington region of New Zealand agreed to host fieldwork activities between September 2013 and September 2014. The sampling strategy and the recruitment of schools, classes, and individual participants are described below in 3.4.2. I focused on government funded schools as a means of recruiting a demographically diverse sample from the general New Zealand population within this age group (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). The broad approach was empirically-based and inductive. Refinement of the sample involved a blend of voluntary participation by individual class members and an iterative theoretical sampling process consistent with constructivist grounded theory methodology.

The focus for the study was described in all fieldwork activities and communication as an investigation of 11-13-year-old children's experiences of social media, with no

reference to 'bullying' (see Appendix A). Importantly, this included all discussions with school principals and teachers. As discussed in Chapter 2, priming appears as a central problem for inductive investigations of children's definitions of bullying. Therefore, a more general description was appropriate in the context of the methodological decision to reduce problems of both explicit and implicit priming. At a practical level, it was important to be aware that implicit priming can occur as an automatic association through word use (Nicolas & Skinner, 2012). For this study, there was potential for a type of priming by implicit association. There was a chance that participants may orient to what they perceive adults usually mean by bullying if I were to introduce the term, rather than allowing it to emerge spontaneously. This may have precluded their own usages and meanings from emerging in the generated data. There was a converse risk that the term 'bullying' or accounts of it (as defined by the children) may not emerge spontaneously, which I acknowledged in the initial design process. Had this eventuated, this aspect of the design would have required revision. As it happened, such revision was not required. This decision enabled participants themselves to attend to bullying as relevant to accounting for experiences social media. As such, it did not constitute an ethical barrier for the design. Instead, it permitted both topic and definitions to arise spontaneously in the data.

### **3.4.2 Sampling Strategy and Recruitment**

The sampling strategy aimed to include diversity on multiple characteristics, including demographics and experiences of social media and of bullying. Figure 3.2 shows the sampling and recruitment process from school, to class, to individual participants in flowchart form, developed from a qualitative adaptation of the CONSORT diagram (Shearer, Dion, & Lavis, 2014). The general list of schools in the Wellington region was limited by region, target year levels, and funding source. All shortlisted schools were government-funded schools. This offered the broadest scope for recruiting a diverse general population sample, compared with schools that charge tuition fees.

Schools were further shortlisted based on decile,<sup>5</sup> information on school websites about the school community, and some knowledge of the local community from my previous professional employment. The school catchment zones included areas of social housing and relative deprivation alongside areas of substantial affluence. This decision was

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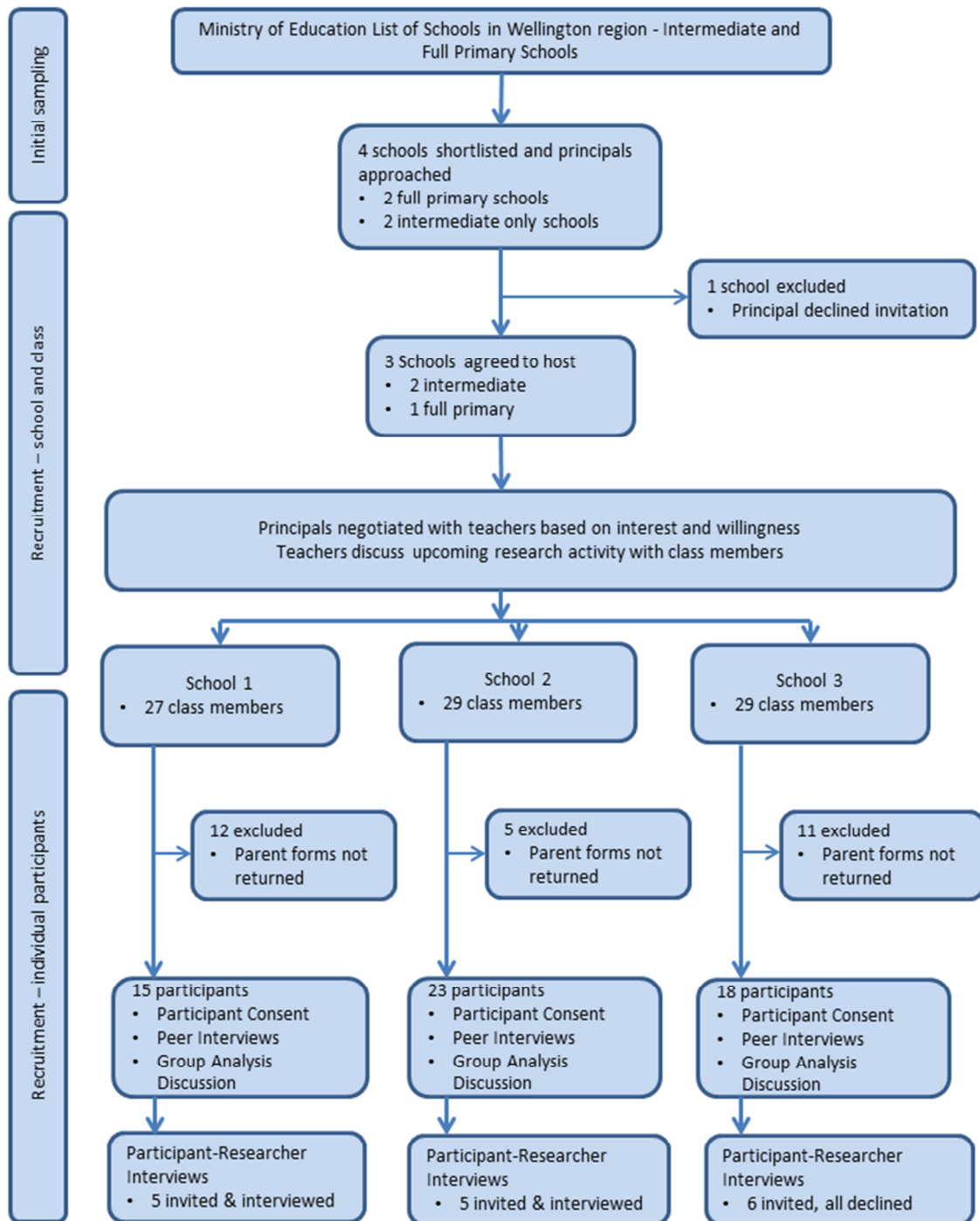
<sup>5</sup> School deciles in New Zealand are a rough measure of relative affluence of the surrounding community and are used primarily by the New Zealand Government as a tool for allocation of funding. This information was sourced from the NZ Government Ministry of Education website.

vindicated in discussion with the teachers of each class, all of whom commented on the socioeconomic and cultural diversity among class members. This was consistent even for the highest decile school of the three (School 1).

I used two strategies for recruiting shortlisted schools; cold contact by email or phone call to the principal, and using existing professional networks to mediate introductions to school principals. Although Wellington is a capital city, it does not have a large population. Therefore, I have chosen not to identify the schools who agreed to host the study as an additional means of preserving confidentiality for participants, instead referring them as by number (as shown in Fig. 3.2). My initial approach to each school included offers to speak to the Board as part of promotion of the study. In New Zealand, government-funded schools receive primary oversight from a school Board of Trustees which includes the Principal, staff, parent and elected community representatives. In practice, the offer to meet with the Board was never taken up. The principal at each school undertook the initial negotiations and gave permission for the fieldwork to be undertaken at the school. These negotiations included discussion with teachers. Teachers were approached by principals based on the principal's assessment of interest, or as a request presented at a staff meeting for a teacher who may be interested to work with the researcher to nominate themselves. This local governance structure allowed for a streamlined recruiting process for this study. More significant concerns for the Principal and teachers were the objectives of the study and how they would be of interest to and benefit the participants.

There are a number of challenges for researchers seeking to undertake fieldwork in schools. At a practical level, these can include lack of knowledge by researchers of specific demands on school time and resources, comprehension of curriculum and pitching research activities at a suitable level for the age of intended participants, and gaining access to the initial gatekeepers. Internationally, experience of undertaking research in schools is highly varied, and can be problematic in the face of excessive focus on perceived vulnerability by gatekeepers, including principals, teachers, and parents or guardians (Powell & Smith, 2009; Wanat, 2008).





**Figure 3.2 Sampling and recruitment diagram**

One school I approached declined the invitation due to circumstances at the school. The principal stated that the school community had too many existing demands on their resources. While the topic of social media was seen to be interesting and relevant, it was beyond the capacity of the school to support at the time. Even where there is a flexible

design and intensive researcher coordination and leadership of research activities, hosting research creates demands on schools in time and resources.

During initial planning, the teacher commented on how many approaches schools may receive to participate in research or curriculum trials. This may be amplified where a school community includes a visibly high multicultural diversity among their student community. Such requests included marketing research and other perceived 'vested interests' as well as academic research. The teacher commented that these were often declined due to low perceived value for the school or for children as participants. The teacher indicated that the school agreed to host this study due to its focus on something of high relevance and interest to the school community, and therefore perceived as worth supporting.

Class selection relied on interest and agreement from a class teacher at each school. All three classes were composite classes of Years 7 and 8 and broadly reflected the diversity of the school community. Individual participants in this study self-selected from within the host class on an opt-in basis.

### **3.4.3 Participants**

There were a total of 56 participants across the three schools. Numbers of class members and participants for each school are shown in Fig 3.2. A variety of factors appeared to influence the proportion of the class who agreed to participate, including individual interest, enthusiasm and preparatory discussion from the teacher, class characteristics, and parent permission. Verbal and written introductory material clarified that students did not need to be currently using social media in order to participate in this study. Among participants, all reported that they had internet access at home and many had internet access through their own smartphone or a comparable mobile device with WiFi access. However, as emerged in the data discussed in Chapter 4, this did not translate into all of them using social media.

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included questions about age, year level, gender, ethnicity identifications, and access to technology to confirm diversity among individual participants. Responses established that participants overall reflected diversity in the New Zealand population with no need for more focused sampling to address gaps. The demographic questionnaire did not ask for household income information and so comment on the socioeconomic context of

individual participants is not possible. While there was a set of questions about internet use and means of access, it is important to avoid drawing conclusions about socio-economic status from this. Some demographic analyses have identified that internet and smartphone use are not reliable proxies for socio-economic status, particularly among younger people (Gibson, Miller, Smith, Bell, & Crothers, 2013; Statistics New Zealand, 2009; Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). This highlights a trend for people to use mobile phones as a cheaper option than a landline. One important side effect relevant for children's social media use is that the internet becomes accessible wherever WiFi is available and is not necessarily restricted to a home internet account.

Diversity in experiences that might be called bullying was another important consideration for how those experiences are defined and interpreted, and therefore another important sampling consideration. The methodological decision to avoid priming for the reasons discussed above meant that I did not ask about this outright. Participants spontaneously discussed a range of negative interactions occurring on social media and in person, from the mild and transitory to serious and enduring, that they described as bullying. This range was consistent at all three schools and included interactions where they were personally involved or had witnessed. I applied the constructivist grounded theory strategy of theoretical sampling for shortlisting the invitations for participant-researcher interviews to ensure that this dimension of diversity was included in the data.

#### **3.4.4 Fieldwork Ethics and Consent Procedures**

The research design was granted ethics approval by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, Category A, reference number 13/028. There were a range of ethical concerns that needed to be addressed in the research design and consent processes employed for this study. These included more theoretical ethical considerations explored in section 2.4.3 connected with the principles of active participation alongside basic standards required for any research with children. These informed the methodological deliberations in section 3.2.3 on how to balance children's agency and autonomy with responsibilities for protecting children's rights that generally rest with adults. These discussions set the groundwork for the ethical conduct of the study as a whole.

Consent by participants was achieved through the following sequence in line with the recruitment process in Fig 3.2: school principals and teachers agreed to host the research activities in the school working in a specific classroom; parent permission was obtained for class members to participate in the research through information and permission form that was given to all class members; and class members indicated their willingness to participate in the research implicitly through return of parent permission forms, then explicitly through completion of individual consent forms. Parental permission was sought in line with university ethics guidelines and in recognition of parental responsibilities for overseeing the protection of the rights of their child. For the purposes of this study, active consent from participants was central and not a tokenistic exercise. Child participants were provided with information about the study and consent forms written in accessible language and opportunity to ask questions for clarification, and consent requests on the child participant consent form mirror those on the parent form (see Appendix A). While consent of child participants was achieved last in chronological order, the preceding supportive procedures established a context where participants were enabled to give informed consent.

Informed consent is a significant issue for undertaking research with children. The institutional needs of the university and schools for parental consent needed to be balanced with the principle of privileging children's consent within a child-centred study design, as discussed in section 3.2.3. It was also important to recognise that consent is not a one-off event, concluded at the signing of a form for any study. This is especially the case for this study where there were several points where data were generated over a period of time. While the consent form document represents one component of consent for this study, I reviewed consent with participants throughout the fieldwork activities, emphasising the voluntary nature of the study.

The fieldwork design provided multiple points for participants to exercise autonomy to decline or withdraw their consent to participation. The use of schools, and particularly classrooms, has been raised as a potential ethical problem due to institutional norms of expected participation in classroom activities creating implicit coercion (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). While current pedagogical practice is less rigid compared with practices when this concern was first identified, it was nonetheless important to remain alert to the way the study was framed in the classroom context. I discussed the voluntary nature of the study with class members

throughout the fieldwork activities to emphasise that participation in the study was optional and not a mandatory curriculum activity. I also discussed this with teachers to ensure that messages from teachers were consistent, even though they were keen to support the study by encouraging class members to participate.

Written information and forms were given to potential participants for themselves and to give to parents or guardians, outlining in clear and simple terms the focus of the study and what participants would be asked to do (see Appendix A). Feedback from parents received via the teacher at School 1 indicated that the parent information form was too long and complicated. This resulted in substantial revision for subsequent iterations to condense and simplify the information provided. The revised form was constructed using a sample from a fellow researcher as a template (Elley, 2013, personal communication).

Class members retained substantial control and autonomy over consent for participation for the study as a whole or for specific activities. Schools do not have permission to share parent contact information with third parties, and so I did not contact parents directly. Non-return of parent consent was treated as declining to participate in the study. Some class members stated either to me or to their teacher that their parents did not want them to be involved. Due to the restrictions on access to parent contact information and timeframe for the study, investigation of reasons for this was not pursued. Some studies have established alternate processes to establish informed consent for children and young people in research in the absence of parental consent or even active objection from parents (Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, & Schwartz, 2011; Munford & Sanders, 2004). However, it was equally possible that class members were communicating non-consent through not returning forms. These multiple potential meanings of non-returned forms are beyond the scope of this study to clarify further. A further demonstration of participants' autonomy available emerged in relation to the participant-researcher activity at School 3. All participants who were invited to individual participant-researcher interviews declined. Again, the reasons for this were not explored with participants. The teacher suggested that because the timing coincided with rehearsals for the school production the participants were simply too busy and focused on other activities.

As part of the consent process with individual participants, I discussed the study and each of the points on the consent form in small groups of 2-4 prior to completion of the

participant form. This was done after return of the parent consent form. The discussion included emphasis on the voluntary nature of the study, the limits of confidentiality and my professional responsibility regarding notification of concerns (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2013), and how I would use their contributions. I encouraged questions about any information on the form that was not clear or to raise any concerns that I had not addressed. Participants frequently queried Question 4, on sharing information with parents or teachers (see Appendix A, Participant Consent Form). I explained that this would guide me if a parent or teacher asked me to tell them what a participant had said in the study. I framed this as showing respect for their private lives and acknowledgment that children do not always share everything with their parents. I was careful to state that indicating 'no' here did not cover safety concerns, where legal and ethical obligations to disclose risks of harm still applied. This process was very positively received. Some participants indicated that they did not care whether their parents knew. Some were pleased that I would respect their confidentiality by saying that I did not have permission to share information, and that I would encourage parents or teachers to talk directly to the participant instead. As it happened, I received no such requests, either from parents or from teachers, and no safety concerns emerged.

#### **3.4.5 Timeframe**

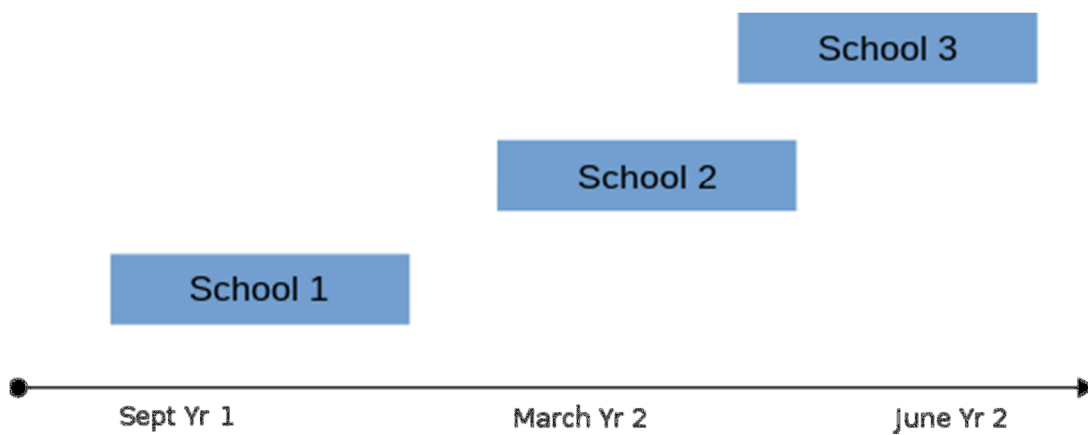
The fieldwork for this study was undertaken between September 2013 and September 2014. The iterative design (described in detail in 3.4.6) enabled fieldwork to start at the first school while recruitment activities continued for two other schools. The design enabled iterations to run concurrently or with offset starting times, as required. Fieldwork activities in each school took place over approximately 3-4 months, depending on local needs and other class activities. Activities were able to be adapted so that they could be undertaken in more frequent and shorter blocks of time or less frequently in longer blocks according to the needs of the class schedule. Each iteration ran over two terms, coinciding with a two-week term break in the middle. This was unplanned, but enabled initial analysis of the peer interviews to be undertaken during school holidays and provided a natural break in my presence at the school while effectively being 'seamless' for participants.

### **3.4.6 Iterative Design**

The iterative design for the fieldwork and analysis drew on the constructivist grounded theory principle of constant comparison (Charmaz 2014). There were a range of practical as well as methodological advantages to this approach. These included designing in flexibility to work with each school setting according to their local needs. Imposition on the setting represents a barrier to participation that can be overcome through research design. As this was not an intervention study or clinical trial, there were no requirements that the fieldwork process be identical between iterations. An iterative design also allows for development to occur between iterations such that the process can be refined, informed and modified to augment the fieldwork activities at subsequent sites (B. R. Bassett, 2010; Burck, 2005; Carter & Little, 2007; Pratt, 2009). Like stepping stones, each iteration built on the previous one to extend the knowledge generated about the process of research with children in the school setting, and to extend the focus on generating data of accounts relating to online bullying.

The initial design for fieldwork activities was deliberately general and flexible. Discussion with schools was not undertaken prior to confirmed ethics approval, and I was aware from previous professional experience in school settings that the structure and environment in schools can vary enormously. This made it important to be able to tailor the design to the setting in the process of recruiting sites and negotiating the details of the fieldwork activities. This required some initial vagueness in some aspects of the design; however, it allowed for a higher degree of responsiveness to the needs of the setting, and provided capacity to adapt the fieldwork activities to work effectively in three distinctively different environments. It would be a significant mistake to assume a high degree of homogeneity between schools, even working within the same system and in the same local area.

Each iteration benefited from learning gained in the fieldwork from the previous iterations. School 1 also functioned as a pilot for the process and was the source for a peer video interview activity, described further in 3.4.4 and 3.5.3. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, there was a short period of overlap between the second and third iterations as a result of timing for recruitment and completion.



**Figure 3.3 Iterative Fieldwork Design.**

The initial classroom activities similarly developed greater sophistication and improvements as a result of iterative learning from the fieldwork activities and resulting adaptation. One of the major advantages of this design was its flexibility. This enabled a high degree of responsiveness to the local needs of each school and class. Overly onerous demands on teacher time, class availability or novel activities can constitute barriers for schools to participate in research. The mix of consistent features with adaptability in their implementation in each iteration made it simple to negotiate with teachers about times and days for being present in the class environment.

### **3.4.7 Fieldwork Activities**

The iterative design allowed for the time and energy intensity of the fieldwork activities to be spread over a 12-month period, and for subsequent iterations to be informed by preceding fieldwork. The research and fieldwork design for this study incorporated planned, flexible and emergent elements. The initial design for activities with participants was kept flexible in order to be adaptable to the needs and strengths of the school, to the routine and characteristics of each class, and to the individual participants. During my initial meeting with the class teacher at each school, we discussed what specific adaptations would be needed to work effectively with class members and the school routine.

The structure of the fieldwork was as follows:

- Ethnographic observations in the classroom
- Classroom input on 'social media' and 'what makes an interesting interview' - developed out of informal classroom activities at School 1, refined as learning activities for Schools 2 and 3



- Relationship building through input activities, including informed consent process
- Peer video interviews - a format for generating accounts of using social media based on an existing learning activity at School 1, used successfully for subsequent iterations
- Group discussion with participants that incorporated informant checking and contributions to analysis
- Focused interviews with individual participants (up to six) to follow up on points requiring further investigation, in line with constructivist grounded theory methods

(see 3.4.7 for a full description on how this was operationalised in each school)

I undertook, coordinated and facilitated all fieldwork activities. This range of fieldwork activities offered a structure to develop an iterative process within each school, as well as between schools. The data for this study was generated in collaboration with participants and my role as researcher was integral to the generation of the data set. My involvement in the fieldwork meant that I held the primary responsibility for managing the consent process for the duration of the fieldwork for each iteration. Although this was a comparatively intensive and time-consuming process, it yielded substantial benefits in relationship building with schools and participants.

### **3.4.8 Integrating into Classroom**

The fieldwork design involved intensive work within the classroom, and therefore it was important to establish times in the classroom schedule where this could occur. This timing was different for each iteration, based on the teacher's timetable and knowledge of the class members. One teacher recommended mornings on specific days, she knew class members worked best at this time and the fieldwork activities would not interfere with class routines. At other schools it was preferable to fit in with subject timeslots, often social studies. The flexible research design enabled me to adapt the fieldwork activities to three substantially different timetable structures, and supported positive working relationships with the teachers and host schools.

The integration of fieldwork activities into the classroom was informed by the curriculum approach of the teacher in School 1. This teacher took a flexible approach to discussing with class members what curriculum objectives they had met in a given learning activity. This enabled me to consider how the topic of social media and fieldwork activities could contribute to learning. As a result, a distinctive aspect of this

study created by the fieldwork design was that it created genuine and independent learning opportunities for the whole class. This had several advantages. Firstly, it facilitated collaborative work with the teachers and perceived value by the host schools. Secondly, there was benefit for the whole class and not only those who had agreed to participate in the study, thus also avoiding creating disadvantage by excluding class members if they chose to decline or if their parents did not consent. Thirdly, fieldwork activities connected with other class and curriculum activities in ways I had not anticipated, notably thinking about effective interviewing as a type of storytelling or narrative genre (School 2, discussion with teacher).

While all activities were adapted to suit the needs of each school, the classroom input activities in particular evolved through the iterative process between schools. The format at School 1 was informal small group discussions introducing the research topic and prompting participants to think about their experiences of social media. For subsequent iterations, these discussions developed into more structured whole-class input activities as an orientation to the topic. Included in these activities was a brainstorm on what social media people in the class used and what they used it for, and an icebreaker activity known as a 'values walk' to stimulate discussion on their opinions, perspectives, and experiences of using social media. The 'values walk' is useful for exploring diversity in perspectives and experiences. Participants were given a pair of statements and instructed to position themselves along a line to represent where their perspective lay between the two 'poles' (see Appendix B). Including online multiplayer games under the 'umbrella' of social media challenged assumptions and prompted further reflection by participants on what could be thought of as social media. The second was a presentation from me on 'what makes a good interview', following which class members developed a list of questions to choose from during the peer video interviews. These sessions were discussed with the teachers beforehand and running of the sessions was adapted to the local class context. I drew on previous professional experience in designing activities with children and young people to create the input activities and facilitating the group discussion.

The feedback and analysis discussions offered another point of integration into the classroom. They created an opportunity to give timely feedback of initial findings to participants. They also afforded participants a means to contribute to the analysis through review of my initial analysis, and a shared elaboration and extension of the

analysis. This variant on informant checking (Carroll, Iedema, & Kerridge, 2008; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013) was respectful of their experiences and did not require a particular skill level or training in specialist skills. The steps taken to integrate this study into general classroom activities created a research context to support authentic reciprocal learning (Nind, 2011) within the context of a genuine learning activity in a familiar social studies curriculum format.

### **3.5 Data and Analysis**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction**

In this section I describe the characteristics of the data set and process of analysis. The data set for this project is a rich, intertextual, multimodal snapshot. It comprises solicited co-constructed data generated through activities undertaken explicitly but not exclusively for the purpose of this study, as per comments above. The data has qualities akin to naturally occurring data, balancing 'ordinary activities' as constituted in the classroom with respectful and explicit consent processes consistent with the child-centred and participatory stance for this study. The data types corresponded to discrete points in the fieldwork activities which generated a rich multimodal data set that included opportunity to involve participants in the analytic process. The layered iterative process for generating the data and resulting data set suggested a complementary layered approach to analysis. As a result, I developed the T-shaped analytic framework outlined in 3.3 above to examine both breadth and depth within a broadly social constructionist epistemology. To conclude this section, I present an outline of Chapters 4 – 7 which present the resulting analysis and interpretation.

#### **3.5.2 Data Processing and Analysis**

The video and audio recordings were imported into QSR NVivo 10 for initial coding. This programme supports annotating the initial coding directly to the video or audio file in the NVivo project without requiring transcribing or other conversion to text. This was a major advantage for managing a large multimodal data set. It supported incorporation of nonverbal aspects of the data into the initial coding and analysis, including gesture and recording environment, as well as tone of voice. It served to renew this attention during subsequent analysis by forcing a return to the recordings rather than relying on a transcript as a 'stable' intermediary. Coding to the recording provided a straightforward

process for identifying specific segments selected for subsequent transcription and micro-analysis.

I undertook the initial coding and identification of salient member categories for further analysis. The analysis process included supervisor review and group discussions. A common feature of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and membership categorisation analysis as analytic techniques is the use of group data discussion sessions. Selected data excerpts, including transcript, audio, and video recordings, which had been de-identified were shared with local and international data analysis group meetings and at an international conference workshop. These group discussions allowed for peer review of the analysis and insights, which enabled further extension of the analytic insights that form part of this thesis.

I have opted to use a single transcription convention throughout the thesis, following the convention commonly used in ethnomethodological studies and are a modified version of the Jefferson Transcription System commonly used in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Hepburn & Bolden, 2014, see Appendix C for detail). As the focus for this study is word choice, semantics, and meaning, there was no need to use the level of detail required for a conversation analysis study. I therefore took a broadly orthographic approach, using some common spellings for contractions and elisions where they appear, such as 'wanna' instead of 'want to'. For ease of reading, I used bold typeface instead of side arrows to highlight the features of talk relevant to the current analysis. Longer excerpts include line numbering where needed for ease of reference to salient features. It is important to note that transcripts are re-presentations and interpretations of interactions (Ayass, 2015; Ross, 2010), which are the primary data for this study. They remain 'works in progress' as approximations of the interactions represented. As a result, some transcripts incorporate more detail than is needed for the immediate analysis; however, it also avoids confusion of switching between transcription approaches. The advantage is that this approach to transcription does not smooth out features such as hesitations or overlaps in talk, thereby maintaining the visibility of interactional and co-constructed elements in the data.

All instances of participant names appearing in the excerpts throughout this thesis are pseudonyms, and other potentially identifying information has been obscured or omitted to preserve confidentiality. I informed participants that I would use pseudonyms. Some expressed a preference about what this might be. It was not possible

to meet all of these requests due to concerns they may remain inadvertently identifying. I selected pseudonyms using an online random name generator that offered a range of language and ethnicity options. Some pseudonyms retain a similar number of syllables where this was needed to fit with the analysis. I have retained my own name in the transcripts to make explicit where I participated in co-constructing the data.

### 3.5.3 Description of Data Set

There are four main types of data that correspond to the fieldwork structure described in section 3.4.4. The data generation points that make up the data set for this study were:

- Ethnographic data, including observations and reflections from classroom input and relationship building activities (handwritten and electronic notes)
- Peer interviews (video-recorded)
- Group analysis discussions (video-recorded)
- Focused participant-researcher interviews (audio-recorded)

**Table 3.1 Recorded data set – types and duration**

Iteration	Data point	Duration of recordings for data point (approximate)	Total recording duration for iteration
School 1	Peer interviews (PI)	44 minutes	2 hours 15 minutes
	Group analysis discussion (GA)	51 minutes	
	Participant-researcher interview (PR)	40 minutes	
School 2	Peer interviews (PI)	2 hours 10 minutes	4 hours 55 minutes
	Group analysis discussion (GA)	52 minutes	
	Participant-researcher interview (PR)	1 hour 53 minutes	
School 3	Peer interviews (PI)	1 hour 31 minutes	2 hours 22 minutes
	Group analysis discussion (GA)	51 minutes	
	Participant-researcher interview (PR)	No interviews completed	

The video and audio recordings totalled approximately 9 hours 32 minutes. Table 3.1 shows a summary of the different types of recordings at each school. Recordings and other materials were named to identify the project, iteration, data type, and document number (see Appendix C.1). These appear in the excerpt headings in the analysis chapters.

### **Ethnographic data**

A range of ethnographic data was generated through the fieldwork. This included a handwritten notebook to record observations and conversations during sessions in classrooms, as well as general notes. The active role I took in some of the fieldwork activities meant that records of these were written immediately after finishing the session. Notes included observations of the classroom environment and interactions, classroom layout and decoration, preparatory notes for classroom activities, and record of groupings for peer video interviews. Other ethnographic data generated includes email contact with principals and teachers during recruitment as well as during fieldwork, New Zealand Ministry of Education information about school decile ratings, and information on school websites. These data were used as complementary information for planning recruitment, development and adaptation of the fieldwork activities, and as supporting information for data analysis.

### **Peer video interviews**

The peer video interviews were created by the child participants with no adults present. Each group had a list of questions generated by class members during the classroom input activity; however, these had the status of a guide rather than strict interview schedule. The recording took place in a room separate from other classroom areas where the groups could complete the recording activity relatively undisturbed as well as unsupervised. The task was to interview each other on their experiences of social media. At no point were participants asked to focus on bullying, and so where this emerged in the data it was spontaneous and at their own instigation. Participants had complete control over the recording process, including having free choice over which questions they chose to ask.

These peer video interviews developed from an existing class activity at School 1. In the initial design phase, I had an open format for participants to record accounts of using social media. This is reflected in the wording of the information sheets designed for

School 1. The teacher had an existing activity where class members created a video documentary of their school year by recording interviews with each other. The structure was set by the teacher; however, the activity itself was autonomous. The interviews occurred in the school 'green room' away from the regular classroom and with no adult supervision. Video recording was a regular part of learning activities and participants were familiar with operation of the video camera. This activity meant that they were also familiar with the process of interviewing one another. The teacher suggested appending some questions on social media to this activity rather than relying on participants to produce something which may be experienced as 'more homework'. The teacher and I co-facilitated two brief and focused classroom sessions where participants to create a list of interesting and relevant questions for interviewing classmates about using social media, while leaving it to participants to choose which questions they used in the recordings.

The resulting interviews created exceptionally rich data, resulting in the decision to adopt this as a core data generation activity in subsequent iterations. It fitted with the child-centred stance from at least two directions. First, it created an 'adult free' space for participants to record their own video interviews and allowed them control over the recording process and product. This mitigated some methodological concern over influence. Second, participants were not directed to ask specific questions. The questions were generated by participants themselves and focused on issues important to them about people of their age using social media. There was a risk that bullying might not emerge as a topic, but the methodological decision to avoid priming meant this was a necessary risk. As it happened, *bullying* or *cyberbullying* emerged spontaneously from the input activities and appeared in the list of questions generated and were routinely used in the peer interviews in each iteration, which may be seen as an important finding in itself.

### **Group analysis discussions**

The group analysis discussion created a forum for informant checking and an opportunity for a type of participatory analysis as described in section 3.4.9. These discussions were video recorded using a single static digital video camera and two audio recorders used as back up. The format for each discussion comprised a presentation by me of key codes that had emerged from my analysis of the peer interviews from that school, followed by a facilitated group discussion that extended analysis of these codes. I

asked participants how accurately my analysis reflected their experiences and thoughts, and ideas or questions they considered important arising from my presentation. It was important for me to pitch the presentation and discussion so that participants could contribute meaningfully and to avoid it lapsing into a tokenistic exercise. These discussions were also an opportunity to seek clarification on points where I as an outsider was uncertain about specific meanings for words or actions used in the peer videos, such as *snobbing* and *mocking* as well as 'bullying', as I discuss in Chapter 5. This proved a useful approach to generating further discussion and created a further check on whether these uses were local to that particular school as a 'community of practice' (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999; B. W. King, 2014) or more widely recognised.

### **Focused participant-researcher interviews**

The fourth data type is the focused participant-researcher interview. These were audio recorded. The emergence of video recording as a data generation strategy as described above in this section emerged after the initial design, and there did not appear a strong rationale for video recording these interviews. Initially I envisaged these interviews would be the main focus, in line with the prominence of participant-researcher interviews in social science research. As the design and fieldwork progressed, however, the role of these interviews shifted from the envisaged main focus to a supplementary role as focused brief interviews to seek further discussion of specific questions, ideas or accounts. There were up to six invitations made for these interviews as the final activity in each school. Invitations were based on specific aspects of a participant's accounts of experiences. These interviews also offered an opportunity to ask participants for reflections on participating in the fieldwork activities. The rationale for shortlisting participants for invitations applied theoretical sampling as a strategy. The shortlist of participants was based on points of interest in previous data recordings that warranted further investigation and included sampling for diverse experiences, as noted in section 3.3.3. For School 1, this included participants who were absent from the group analysis discussion. The richness of the data already generated meant that it was not problematic for there to be less than six interviews, or for the interviews to be declined.

### **3.5.4 Layers of Data, Layers of Analysis**

The iterative design of the fieldwork activities generated interwoven layers of data. This has methodological advantages, in that it reduces reliance on a single interaction or mode of expression, and also reduces problems that may arise with variable literacy

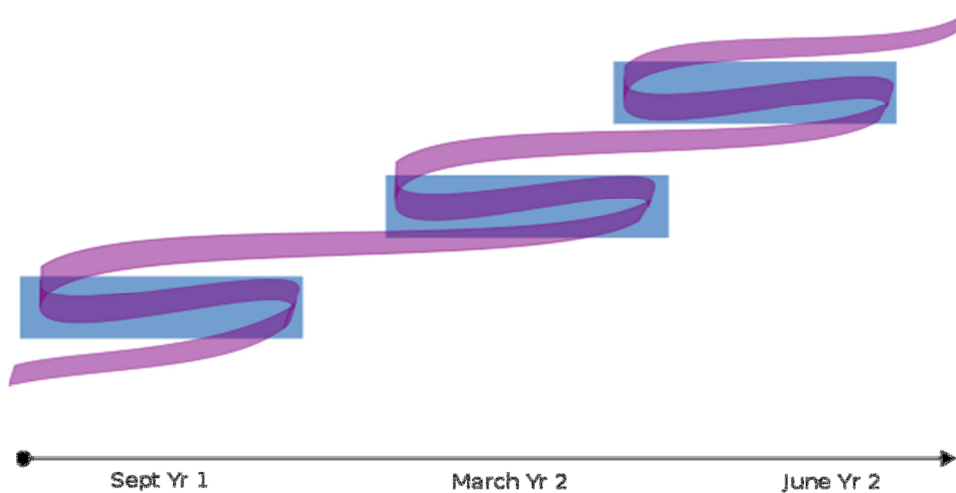


skills, developmental stage, or impairments. As such, it offers a template for incorporating multiple types of data in a single investigation that supports children's expression of their perspectives. From an analytic perspective, multiple data types increase the data points from which to develop a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). This is particularly useful for exploratory studies investigating complex social phenomena where interaction and interpretation are crucial for grasping the meaning. The layers of data within each iteration, and between iterations, served several purposes. They allowed for greater integration into the classroom setting, even though it created additional time demand for the classroom and for the researcher undertaking the fieldwork. They allowed for individual variation and comfort among participants, and the possibility that some accounts may be more 'sayable' in some contexts and company compared with others. This was borne out in comments from participants. Importantly, they allowed for development of ideas within each iteration, and more immediate dissemination of research findings to participants than would be possible if it had been necessary to wait until the conclusion of the project and completion of the analysis and this thesis.

The data used in this study occupy a methodological middle ground. The activities generating the data were researcher-designed and instigated. This data set would not exist independently of the fieldwork activities and researcher involvement in the classrooms of the hosting schools. At the same time, they are genuine recordings of naturally organised ordinary activities (Lynch, 2002) of classroom interaction, where it is common for participants to engage in learning activities organised around topics of interest and social relevance. In this respect, the data is akin to naturally occurring data. They are not naturally occurring conversations in a purist sense; however, they nevertheless represent naturally occurring peer interactions and child-adult interactions within the institutional setting of the classroom, which may include interaction with adults other than the teacher. These interactions included exploring shared experiential knowledges, challenging each other's existing knowledge and extending learning, experiencing cognitive dissonance, and explaining to a naïve adult.

The process of analysis for this study was also layered through application of the T-shaped framework. As described in section 3.3, constructivist grounded theory and membership conversation analysis worked synergistically to produce a cross-sectional analysis of the whole data set and detailed analysis at key points. I drew on

constructivist grounded theory analysis for an initial analysis of participants' accounts of using social media and the context for online bullying. The initial coding process of the peer video interview data illuminated a number of terms for activities used by participants that were highly salient to defining 'bullying'. As member categories (categories used by parties in the interaction rather than observer or analyst categories) these presented a strong case for fine grained analysis using membership categorisation analysis to provide more detailed analysis of both typical and deviant cases within the broader data set. The constructivist grounded theory principle of constant comparison offered a useful template to shift attention and compare between codes and categories as they emerged in the analysis within each iteration and between iterations, as illustrated in Fig. 3.4.



**Figure 3.4 Iterative Analysis.**

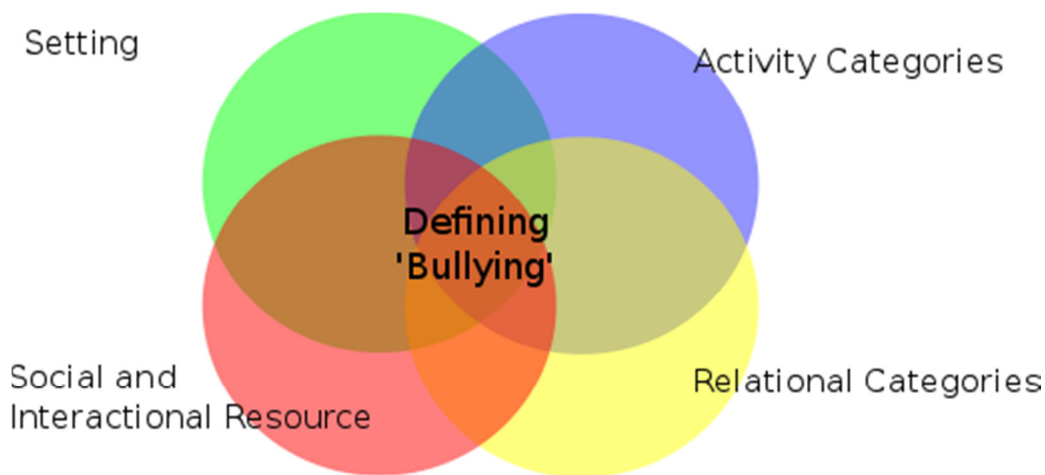
The layered approach created scope to 'map the terrain' of children's accounts of using social media and how they understood their interactions with the technology as well as with peers via the technology, while also investigating in depth how participants categorised activities and people within those accounts. This blend of breadth and depth (courtesy of the T-shaped analytic framework) provides opportunity for analysing aspects of social knowledge accessible to participants as members of children's cultures that may not be explicit or accessible to adult researchers. It also allows detailed analysis of category work within individual case examples. The constant comparison technique supported increasing sophistication in the emerging analysis and permitted checking for both strengths and conceptual gaps. The strategy of checking and refinement is a recognised advantage in iterative design and engaging in analysis during the fieldwork process.

In 3.3.5, I discussed the problems associated with use of the term “category” to mean different things in the analytic approaches used, and by extension in other theoretical contexts. A parallel problem for discussing the analysis is to differentiate in the text between words that may be member categories, concepts or categories from the wider culture, or formally constituted categories in research. In order to tease out where these diverge as a step in my analysis, I have used italics to signal where I am focusing on words in use as member categories in the data. While not perfect, this approach results in a less cluttered text compared with use of quotation marks.

### **3.5.5 An Emergent Interactional Model for Defining Bullying**

The next four chapters in this thesis discuss in detail the analysis and interpretation of the data for this study, and focus on the activity of defining bullying. This emerged as a key problem in accounting for bullying in a broader context of other social interactions that may be hurtful, harmful, or in some other way troublesome. As will become evident in the discussion in Chapter 5, some activities in this broader context may be mistakenly defined by adults as bullying, and so the methods of doing this defining are crucial to how children make sense of their experience of these interactions.

Emerging from analysis of participants’ accounts was an interactional model for doing this activity of defining bullying and differentiating it from other kinds of hurtful, harmful, or troublesome interactions. I have designed the diagram below as one possible graphic representation of this model and the four features that participants made salient for defining bullying in their accounts. This model, as illustrated in Figure 3.5, offers a structure for the discussion of the data analysis and interpretation, focusing on each of the ‘lenses’ separately in order to tease out their significance. I have used the term lens, as each of these features appeared in participants accounts as something through which participants interpreted and categorised their interactions with peers. These four lenses are (i) setting, (ii) activity categories, (iii) relational categories, and (iv) social and interactional resource.



**Figure 3.5** An interactional model for defining bullying.

The following chapters will discuss in greater depth how each of these lenses contributes to this model for defining bullying that emerged from participants' accounts.

In Chapter 4, I discuss setting and its salience to the activity of defining 'bullying'. The chapter focuses on participants' accounts of using social media as a setting for socialising and one where *bullying* appears as a troublesome social interaction.

Investigating participants' experiences of social media and how they made sense of it in the context of their lives was a vital foundation for developing an understanding of how they made sense of 'bullying' in that context. What emerged from this analysis is how participants oriented to the role of the setting, its affordances and its constraints in their methods for making sense of 'bullying' in that context. The analysis in this chapter derives predominantly from the horizontal bar of the T-shaped analytic framework, applying constructivist grounded theory coding to develop a cross sectional analysis of the whole data set and establish a sense of the 'field' of participants' experiences of social media.

Chapter 5 focuses on activity categories. This chapter draws on the constructivist grounded theory coding to establish a sense of the breadth of terms made relevant to *bullying* by participants, either to compare or contrast. The accounts in the data set focused on *bullying*, in the verb form, rather than 'bullies' as a category of person. This was a curious and enlightening characteristic to emerge from the analysis. This feature in the data allowed for a shift in the analytic focus on category work to consider how activities are categorised. Focusing attention on activity as a locus of categorisation is a novel aspect of my analysis, as an unexplored direction for membership categorisation

analysis. This fruitful analysis illustrates how the focus on actions or activities is necessary but not sufficient for defining an interaction as *bullying* in participants' accounts. As will be seen through the discussion in this chapter, the relational context (as indicated by the third lens of relational categories) is equally significant in participants' sense-making activities.

In Chapter 6, I focus the analysis on person categories, and in particular the category *friend*. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part uses an analytic approach similar to Chapter 5 to examine the third lens of relational categories. It incorporates examination of typical uses of *friend* as salient to differentiating an activity from *bullying*, and how person category work and activity category work complicate each other in the analytic concept of category-bound activities. In the second part, the detailed analysis of a category/activity puzzle draws out problems connected with a focus on person categories, especially where these are conceived of as static and essentialist. The granular analysis of the apparently deviant case where this category puzzle appears illustrates the fourth lens in the interactional model, how *bullying* features in category work as a social and interactional resource.

Chapter 7 moves towards theorising *bullying* from a child-centred standpoint, drawing on insights from the constructivist grounded theory and ethnomethodological analyses of participants' accounts in the preceding chapters. It draws together the analytic insights from Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to examine the implications for existing models of bullying. I critique the existing models of bullying in light of the empirical data and analysis to augment my theoretical critique in Chapter 2. Drawing on my analysis of the data for this study, I present a constructivist interactional model to theorise *bullying* as a complex, dynamic and fluid category related to setting, activity and relationships that is interactionally negotiated and co-constructed.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described methodological principles and approach, iterative fieldwork design and activities, and T-shaped analytic framework that I developed for this study. It has set out my methodological, ethical and practical responses to the theoretical challenges for developing the child-centred standpoint approach I discussed in Chapter 2. 'Materialising the virtual' created a rich metaphor for discussion of the methodological challenges and conceptual development of the focus of the inquiry for

this study and suitable fieldwork, data generation and analytic approaches for a child-centred investigation. I have described the outline for the T-shaped analytic framework I developed for this study, its rationale, and how the two elements of constructivist grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis work synergistically in the analysis. I have discussed how the analytic framework worked in concert with the fieldwork activities to create a rich intertextual and multimodal data set and an emergent interactional model for defining bullying as a complex, dynamic, and fluid category. This model contributes to deconstructing the conventional definition from a child-centred standpoint approach, furthering the theoretical and methodological critique of the conventional definition of bullying already discussed in Chapter 2. As I have outlined in 3.5.5, the next four chapters present the analysis and interpretation of the data for this study using this interactional model as a framework.

## Chapter 4

### Claiming Social Spaces Online - Constructing Social Media in Children's Accounts

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the setting and context for online bullying. In it, I examine how the child participants describe their perceptions and experiences of social media. This supports the objectives of this study in two ways. Firstly, it establishes the scene for children's uses of social media more generally, thus clarifying and extending the existing studies of children's online cultures and socialising online outlined in Chapter 1.

Secondly, this chapter starts to build a map of the interpretive resources relevant to and within this data set, that underpins the detailed analysis of participants' category work in accounts of social media and bullying that follows in Chapters 5 and 6. I present an analysis of four main focus points or threads: (i) social media as normal and normative, (ii) how participants accounted for using social media, (iii) online sources of trouble, and (iv) how participants claimed social spaces online. These threads weave together to reveal a sophisticated standpoint on social media and socialising online that emerges from participants' accounts. This chapter offers significant detail on the setting for participants' accounts of socialising online, as well as their approaches to defining online bullying. Importantly, it avoids the pitfall of assuming that children's uses and perspectives of social media are naïve and simplistic or are the same as those of adults. As discussed in Chapter 3, ethnomethodological analyses of children's interactions have similarities with research on institutional settings, in that the analyst needs to attend to technical terms and potential for specific meanings attached to apparently familiar words. The application of constructivist grounded theory for examining the ethnographic and establishing the interpretive context for participants' accounts is a novel dimension of this study and provides a rigorous approach to mapping this context. One key function for this chapter, then, is to build a contextual map that avoids bringing assumptions from an external perspective to my analysis of participants accounts of *bullying* in the context of using social media.

Together, these aspects establish the significance of setting for theorising bullying. This formed the first lens of the interactional model for defining *bullying* that emerged from

analysis of participants accounts in the data set for this study. Given the newness of social media generally and the experience of beginning to use it for this age group, it became evident that understanding how participants used social media and the characteristics of their experiences in this social setting. As emerged in the analysis in this chapter, understanding the setting is integral to re-theorising *bullying*.

#### **4.1.1 The Data**

The data excerpts analysed in this chapter come predominantly from the peer video interviews and the three group analysis discussions. The data types are indicated in the filenames as outlined in section 3.5.3. As described in Chapter 3, there was minimal adult direction or involvement in the peer video interviews. Participants at each school generated lists of questions, and choosing which questions to ask and in which order they were asked was at the discretion of the child participants in the role of 'interviewer'. As such, the codes and categories emerging from the analysis are composed and made relevant by children talking with each other about these experiences, reflecting their interests and concerns.

As I outlined in section 1.2.2, for the purposes of this study I defined 'social media' as including: (i) traditional social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, along with newer apps and platforms where one-to-many communications are possible, such as Snapchat, (ii) websites that incorporated posting, comment and discussion including traditional blogs, micro-blogs, video sharing sites, and discussion forums such as Tumblr, YouTube and Vine, and (iii) online multiplayer and social games. This was a deliberate choice in light of the age of participants, for whom online games with multiplayer or chat options may have greater appeal than blogs or other social web activities. I encouraged participants to think about games where they socialised with others alongside game play. The rationale for providing these suggestions was to encourage participant focus on one-to-many online social interactions.

While it seems logical that children see themselves at the centre of their lives, studies of children often marginalise or redefine children's perspectives to fit adult concepts. At times it may seem that almost anything is central to children's lives except children themselves. In the introduction to *The People in the Playground*, children's folklorist Iona Opie observed that "[c]hildren call themselves 'people', rather than 'children'. They say 'You need six people for this game'" (1993, p. 3). Referring to children as people in this



way centres them in analysis of their accounts. For this chapter and the following chapters, I use 'participants' where the discussion focuses on specific points from the data set for this study and 'people' where participants were using this to referring to peers or others in their experiences. 'Children' appears where age difference or generation is relevant to the analysis.

## 4.2 Normal and Normative

### 4.2.1 A “New” Normal?

Computer and internet access were normal (in the sense of ‘common’) within this group, reflecting the current literature on children and social media use as discussed in section 1.2.2. According to responses given on the participant information questionnaires, all had some means of access to computers and the internet, and two-thirds were able to access the internet via their own smartphone or other personal device. By contrast, older communication technologies were characterised as 'a bit weird'. This represents a substantial generational shift, where an earlier stereotype of teenagers was spending hours on the telephone. The following excerpt exemplifies this shift, with participants displaying a very different characterisation of phone calls as a communication medium.

#### Excerpt 1: CaSM\_3\_PI\_018 - phone calls are 'awkward as'

Madison: Wait wait wait (indistinct) why don't you just call them.  
Daria: [Well it's ]  
Eddie: [Because ] (.) it's like (..) **I hate calling people, it's like ((hand gesture with thumb and little finger extended, mimicking talking on phone handset)) so uh ye:e:a:h**  
Daria: It's kinda  
Lila: **It's awkward**  
Daria: awkward  
Eddie: **It's awkward. It's awkward as.**  
Lila: **Awkward silence**  
Eddie: And when you're like texting the people ((hand gestures as if using keyboard)) as well (.) um if you're like um on Facebook messaging (.) them you can also be checking your news feed on Facebook as well,

Eddie accounts for hating phone calls through a simulation of speaking on the phone. Lila's proffer of 'awkward' functions as a response to Madison's question and as an explication of Eddie's performance of talking on the phone. Daria and Eddie display alignment with Lila's word offer through repetition and intensification. The phrase

“awkward as” is a recognised colloquial phrase in New Zealand English, and functions as an intensifier rather than an incomplete utterance. While Eddie uses the term 'texting' here, a term more commonly associated with SMS, her hand gestures are of typing using a full keyboard rather than a mobile phone keypad. It is not clear whether she refers to texting on the phone while simultaneously using social media via a computer, or switching between two or more applications on a computer. Through this shared accounting sequence, talking on the phone is categorised as awkward, which Eddie then contrasts with the ease of using social media for socialising. In this regard, using social media for talking with friends has become normal not only in the sense of 'common', but also as ordinary, familiar, and easy. If telephone calls were the old normal that has become strange, using social media may be seen as a 'new normal'.

The fieldwork activities were designed to explore diversity in participants' experiences and uses of social media without presuming that participants were using (or not using) social media. In this respect, the fieldwork activities I described in 3.4.4, including the classroom input activities, peer video interviews, and group analysis discussions, resulted in shared 'discovery' of diversity of social media use among class members. The classroom input session on 'what is social media' unearthed assumptions by participants that 'everyone' was using it 'all the time,' including people their age. The discussion starter activities proved useful for identifying and disrupting these assumptions. In particular, the 'values walk' activity (described in section 4.4.9 and Appendix B) showed a spectrum of use among participants at each school, ranging from 'not at all' to 'every day' use. This activity was similarly useful for exploring ideas about benefits and drawbacks to using social media. In the next excerpt, Heather credits the classroom input activities with revealing more diverse patterns of use among her peers. Her account illustrates her orientation to the normative aspects of using social media as not only 'normal' but also ubiquitous.

**Excerpt 2: CaSM\_2\_PR\_05 – I didn't want to say I didn't have it**

Heather: **I was scared of saying I didn't like using social media and stuff** cos then **my friends could've thought it was strange** but then **since I found out there were quite a lot of people in my class who didn't use it either**

Justin: Mmm

Heather: **It made it easier to say that because I wasn't the only one** and so it was like, **I didn't tell my friends at first** that I didn't have like an

email or stuff like that **because I was embarrassed**

Justin: mmm

Heather: that I didn't have a different way of communicating

Justin: yep

Heather: and I only got a phone last year so it was like I couldn't communicate them at all without the:e without meeting them face-to-face or using a home phone, and so **I was quite shy of saying things like but now I'm not because there are quite a few people like that**

Heather's account illustrates how something that is normal (in the sense of common) may also be normative. Her impression was that "everyone" is on social media "all the time" and any non-use or lesser use would have been embarrassing and her friends "could've thought it was strange". Her comment that it was like not being able to communicate at all without meeting in person or using the home phone also fits with a normalisation of social media for communicating with friends. The norm is powerful enough for Heather to be embarrassed about not having access to social media before getting her phone, and also to be shy about saying she does not like using social media. Discovering that there were "quite a few people like that" in her class disrupted the perceived norm and shifted her account from a theme of social impairment – "I was embarrassed", "couldn't communicate with them at all", "I was quite shy of saying" - to social empowerment – "now I'm not", "quite a few people like that", "I don't always need to". The actuality of using social media may not have been the 'new normal' for everyone; however, the data did suggest there was a perceived norm to which participants were orienting. Using social media as a perceived norm is further highlighted in the next section 4.2.2 in the need to account for not using social media.

This excerpt also highlighted the triangulation made possible by the various fieldwork activities (Denzin, 2012). Using diverse interactional contexts (peer-peer, adult-children, group, and one-on-one) offered multiple opportunities for different accounts to emerge in the data. It offered an insight into how different settings and interlocutors make different accounts 'sayable'. It also illuminated a crucial point about the experience of the fieldwork activities as an empowering process. This has important implications for prevention and interventions focused on bullying, and for education on digital citizenship. Simple activities that problematise and disrupt apparent norms can have significant impact.

#### 4.2.2 'Why Aren't You on Facebook?'

In the previous section, Heather's account complicated and resisted the perceived norm of everyone being on social media as normal. This dissenting view appeared in the context of peer interviews as well as during initial class discussions. Some instances of not using social media were presented as simple and requiring little explication:

##### Excerpt 3: CaSM\_2\_PI\_006 - I just look up videos

Timothy: Um, what social media sites do you use.  
Blossom: Well the only one I use is Youtube? So and **I (.) use it for um (.) looking up how they do like gymnastics fings and (.) um (.) like songs and stuff**

The strength of the perceived social norm of using social media resulted in the need to offer some rationale for not doing so, that is, it is accountable not to use social media. Its accountability offered further evidence that using social media is normative. In the above excerpt, Blossom presents an alternative interest, using videos to learn gymnastics skills, as grounds for not engaging with the social interaction aspects of social media.

Accounting for not using social media was sometimes straightforward, as in the approach Blossom took in the above excerpt. In other accounts, departing from or resisting the perceived norm appeared to take on characteristics of a social trouble requiring more complex accounting. In the next excerpt, Bridget identifies that she does not find Facebook interesting.

##### Excerpt 4: CaSM\_1\_PI\_023 - I don't find it interesting

Andi: Umm so:o when do you think you'll get a Facebook?  
Bridget: When I'm much older.  
Hazel: (3.2) Think I'm gonna m(h)ake one um soon in the holidays [h h h ]  
Bridget: **[I'm not really] interested**  
Andi: Why aren't you into Facebook,  
Bridget: **I just don't find it interesting**

Andi formulated her question as a "when" rather than if, which may be seen as an explicit orientation to using social media as normative. Bridget's initial response proffers age as a candidate reason for not being on Facebook. However, Hazel's stated intent to create a Facebook account turned this into a trouble, as Bridget and Hazel were both in Year 7. As a result, age by itself became insufficient as a sole rationale for not

having a Facebook, and a source of trouble, as evidenced in Bridget's interjection of "not really interested" as a further reason.

As in the excerpt above, participants frequently oriented to age as grounds for using or not using social media, particularly social networking sites. In the following account, Kamini similarly proffers a notion of not liking chatting as the reason for not using social media, while Andi proffers age as legitimate grounds for a lack of interest in chatting. Kamini orients to using social media as an expected activity of older people, as well as lack of interest in chatting as a reason for not using social media.

**Excerpt 5: CaSM\_1\_PI\_016 - don't like chatting, but I'd do it if I was allowed**

Andi: Social media questions now? What sites do you use.  
Kamini: I use (5.0) none.  
Andi: Wha um why don't you use these sites.  
Kamini: Because (1.7) ((slight frown, gaze shifts away from eye contact with interviewer, looking down)) **I don' actually (1.0) like (0.4) chatting ((resumes eye contact with interviewer)) n stuff.**  
Andi: Mmhmm (1.8) Umm. When (..) **do you think you'll use them when you get older or no?**  
Kamini: **Maybe I will.**  
Andi: **Why why do you say maybe.**  
Kamini: **Because sometimes you have to chat when you're (.) big (...) [older]**  
Andi: [mmhmm] Do:o do your friends use them?  
Kamini: Yes.  
Andi: **Um do you wish you had them if your parents would let you?**  
Kamini: **Yes.**

Kamini's account for non-use of social media appears straightforward, framed around a claim to disinterest and dislike of chatting. However, she then contradicts her initial clear personally focused rationale of "I don't actually like chatting" a few turns later, emphatically stating that she would use social media if her parents allowed it. Along with constituting a social trouble as a breach of the perceived norm, the above excerpt illustrates how 'not chatting' may also have constituted an interactional trouble requiring further account. Not being interested in chatting may have been a breach of the social norm, as suggested by the long pauses and changes in gaze during this interaction. However, offering this as the first reason may have preserved more personal agency for Kamini than 'not being allowed'. Not being allowed by parents may be an 'excuse' for disinterest, however, it is not clear that is what Kamini was doing in this

account. Restrictions from parents are commonly associated with younger children, with an expectation that as people get older they are permitted greater freedom. Kamini's friends use social media, and her response to Andi's proffer of "if your parents would let you" is a swift and definite "yes". Which is the genuine reason and which is the excuse is unclear, as Kamini renders both of these salient.

In the next excerpt, Jon presents a different type of trouble as a reason for not using social media. He positions himself in relation to social media as someone who does not need its type of help with socialising.

#### Excerpt 6: CaSM\_2\_PI\_019 - don't need help with my social life

Drew: So. Do you go on social media. (.) at all.  
Jon: No.  
Drew: (...) Okay↑ (.) Why.  
Jon: I do not go on social media because (..) I don't think it's (.) really (.) what does it, **what does it um do, what does it help you with, only helps you with social life (.) and I don't think I actually need that.**  
Drew: You sure? (leans in smiling) Nah. (sits back) So:o (..) what is your opinion of it.  
Jon: I think that it's alright? Um (.) like (.) I don't really mind, my pa(h)rents my Mum has a Facebook,

Jon responds to Drew's question with another question formulation "what does it um do, what does it help you with", which then he proceeds to answer. Drew pursues the question of using the social aspects of YouTube as an example of social media a little later in the interview. Here Jon offers a different type of reason not to engage in social interaction on social media, connected with negative comments that he does not even want to read.

#### Excerpt 7: CaSM\_2\_PI\_019 - haters and trolls

Jon: I just watch Youtube (.) on it  
Drew: It can be counted as social media, do you have an account an account on Youtube,  
Jon: Nah,  
Drew: Right. Um, uhhheheheh (.) Do (.) you um hhh (3.0) ((hand waving while composing next question)) um **do you ever comment on any of the um videos on Youtube? Because you can do, [right?]**  
Jon: [Yeah] **I can I can**  
Drew: Mmm  
Jon: **But I don't** coz,  
Drew: Okay.

Jon: **Because I don't like looking at all the haters,**  
Drew: Ahhh [heh]  
Jon: **[The] people who troll it's not very nice  
if you ask me**

Jon grounded his dismissiveness of socialising online in knowing what people do online, rather than inferring as in the previous two excerpts. While he starts with a very general low estimation of the usefulness of socialising online, in the later excerpt he makes explicit an example of reasons that he would not want to get involved in social media. Haters and trolls in comments provided a clear reason not to want to get into reading or making comments and as such may be seen as a type of 'trouble' that must be managed. While troubles did not preclude interest or engagement with socialising online, they were legitimate grounds for choosing not to use social media. In this way, Jon positioned himself as empowered. He characterised himself as someone knowledgeable about what happens on social media but who dislikes it and exercises agency and self-efficacy in deciding not to engage with it. This offered a contrasting account compared with Kamini's account in the previous excerpt, where 'parents' are co-constructed by Kamini and Andi as holding agency and Kamini as being disempowered.

This analysis presents a complex picture of reasons given by participants for not using social media, in response to a breach of the perceived norm that people of their age are using social media. In the first excerpt, Blossom accounts for the breach with reference to a limited interest and avoids the need to account for not engaging in the social aspects. Orientations to age as a salient factor offered a potential face-saving account for not being interested or not having parental permission, although as was evident in the excerpts featuring Bridget and Kamini, using age to account for not using social media may be problematic. Jon's account of informed dislike offered an alternative from a position of agency rather than reference to externally imposed limits.

#### **4.2.3 Technological Competence**

Technological competence emerged as a significant aspect of participants accounting for themselves in their experiences of social media. The birth cohort to which participants in this study belong could be characterised as growing up with social media. While I have used the phrase "new" normal, the excerpts in 4.2.1 suggest it is simply a normal and accepted communication method for participants in this study, rather than new. Participants had learned computer skills in the same way that they had learned other seemingly intuitive skills. Similarly, the ways participants accounted for learning how to

use social media highlighted experiential and experimental learning over formal instruction. The next excerpt shows an example of these two modes of learning used to account for how participants learned to use social media.

**Excerpt 8: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - learning from siblings, trial and error**

Kathryn: **I learnt it off my sister. She taught me everything.**  
Justin: How old's your sister?  
Kathryn: Um 14.  
Justin: So she's a couple of years older than you?  
Kathryn: Yeah.  
Justin: Where did she learn  
Kathryn: Um **she learnt off her friend**  
Paula: **I just pick it up as I go along**  
(someone): **Y(h)eah**  
Justin: **Just exploring stuff?** 'Oh this is how this works'  
Paula: **Just pressing buttons**

Where participants attributed other people as sources of knowledge about using social media, it was older siblings, family members close in age, or peers. Kathryn begins the account in the excerpt above orienting to both of these - she learned from her older sister, who had learned from her friend. Paula then expands the sources of knowledge for learning how to use social media with “just picking it up as I go along”. This added independent experimental discovery as a source of learning, and also developed the above account into a shared account. A little later in the group discussion, Bridget cites an uncommon source of learning, parents.

**Excerpt 9: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - learning from parents, copying others**

Bridget: I learn from my parents and um just seeing other people do some of these things I also learn off them

As noted in 4.1.1, participants in this study tended to use 'people' when referring to similar aged peers. Bridget proffered the notion that learning from parents remains relevant for learning to use social media, even though it is more typical to learn from peers. However, as will be seen in 4.2.5, learning from parents is not a typical account.

Interestingly, learning about social media was itself often accounted for as a social interaction. Both Kathryn and Bridget put the learning in a social context. Kathryn attributes her learning to her sister who “taught her everything” and Bridget accounts for learning by reference to watching other people as well as learning from her parents.



Older siblings also appear as sources of support when problems emerge, as illustrated in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 10: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - my big sister showed me how**

Kieran: Umm **when I first got a Snapchat my big sister was on it**  
Justin: Yep  
Kieran: half sister and she um there's this random guy that has the same name as one of my cousins  
Justin: Oh okay,  
Kieran: And I was friends with them my cousins um twenty and he's really nice and um this guy? Zz I thought my cousin he didn't send anything bad he just sent pictures of him walking around selfies and stuff  
Justin: Oh okay  
[others] Laughter  
Kieran: I don't think he knew who I (...) was? So I  
Justin: Uhhhh  
Kieran: **So I didn't send anything she um sort of taught me how to go through privacy settings**

Kieran positions his older sister's experiential knowledge as key to how he learned to use Snapchat, and specifically to manage privacy settings. As evidenced in Kieran's account above and in the next excerpt, experiential learning is frequently invoked to account for developing technological competence with social media.

**Excerpt 11: CaSM\_1\_PR\_01 - just learn as you go**

Justin: So:o how did you pick up (0.5) how to do (0.5) all of that stuff like where did you learn from,  
Melissa: Using Facebook?  
Justin: Yeah  
Melissa: **You just (0.5) learn as you go I guess, it's just (2.5) just look through things comment or like n just talk to people=**  
Justin: =mmhmm  
Melissa: really

Significantly, there were no discussions by participants of learning how to use social media in the school context. This is curious, as two of the teachers were highly proactive in incorporating interactive computer technology in the classroom environment, as well as in discussing their personal use of social media during class input fieldwork activities. The teacher at School 1 hosted a class blog, to which students posted comments; and incorporated explicit elements of online social interaction skills, colloquially referred to as 'netiquette', as a regular part of curriculum. This was not an issue of accuracy in participants' recollection, although some adults may be affronted at their input to

children's learning being overlooked. There may have been a contextual element at play, where curriculum-based activities such as a class blog are not perceived as social, even though they use a social media platform. However, this was not explored with participants during fieldwork activities.

This analysis also illuminates the value attributed to experiential learning, and which sources are identified as knowledgeable. Friends and similar-aged family members are more often positioned as trusted or reliable sources of learning about social media across the data set. As discussed in Chapter 1, participants in this study were at a life stage where the influence of friends and peer groups begins to outweigh that of parents and teachers. Bridget's nomination of parents as a source of learning was unusual, as it was more common to characterise parents as lacking knowledge and skill, which I discuss further in section 4.2.5. This later section also highlights participants' accounts of technological competence through comparison with parents' lack of competence. Together, these sections illuminate the strong agency present in participants' accounts associated with the technological aspects of using social media.

#### **4.2.4 Social and Moral Confidence**

Social confidence and moral confidence are important partners to technological competence in terms of skills needed for social media. The significance of social and moral confidence is arguably less recognised, or it is at least obscured by the emphasis on externally imposed boundaries on children's online activities. In this context, I use the word moral to indicate actions 'in the moment' rather than an abstract code of conduct. This dimension of confidence may be attributed, in part, to technological competence; however, it is also connected with notions of agency and self-efficacy. Jon's account of choosing not to use social media in 4.2.2 displays this agentic confidence.

How people act towards other people occupied a lot of discussion time in all three iterations. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, these discussions frequently clustered around discerning whether an activity might be considered bullying or not. The following excerpt comes from a broader discussion of how people behave online, where Andi introduces the concept of morals as having a broader relevance.

### Excerpt 12: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - normal morals

Andi: But it's like **most of the values you have** you know like they you know **they compensate for the ones** and yeah [like ]  
Aruna: [I was gonna say that]  
Andi: Social media so like it's **it's normal morals you'd normally have if you were talking to this person**

Andi argues that social media is not a special setting requiring special rules. The normal values and morals that govern people's interactions in person should be the same on social media. There is no licence to act however you like. In contrast with early characterisations of the virtual as separate and divorced from “real life” in academic and public discourses, as discussed in Chapter 1, this offered an insight into how participants' saw their online and in-person socialising as intertwined. “Most of the values you have” compensate for the constraints of the setting and it should not matter whether the setting is immediate (in-person) or mediated (online). Andi contends that the setting does not absolve people from the social and moral demands that apply to any social interaction. This has connections with notions of responsibility and maturity discussed later in section 4.5.2. Andi's claim may be situated as reflecting the developing independence and self-regulation in peer interactions commonly part of the social and emotional life stage for people of this age (Parke & Gauvin, 2009).

Alongside this emergent confidence, parents were frequently positioned as less knowledgeable about social media. However, this was not equated with being useless:

### Excerpt 13: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - parents can be useful for support

Bridget: **Um I reckon parents are there for you as well coz I was in the same room on a computer playing Minecraft while my Dad was over there and these people on Minecraft were asking me all these personal questions and he (.)**  
Aruna: Already [(indistinct) side conversation]  
Bridget: [and I just said to him oh yeah] **I shouldn't talk to 'em he said yeh and hehh yeah they give you good advice sometimes your parents?**  
Justin: Yep  
Bridget: Yeah  
Aruna: They ask a lot of questions  
Justin: Yeh  
Andi: Yeah **but I think it is harder for them because they didn't grow up with social media so I s'po:ose they wouldn't totally understand it anyway if they try to give you help about it?**

In other words, while it may be difficult for parents to understand the technological aspects, their input and support can still be useful. Bridget's talk traversed an intriguing balance between positioning parents as valued sources of emotional support and advice (“there for you”) and retaining her own agency in her online social interactions. In this account she accounts for an online interaction that she experienced as uncomfortable. However, her account is not one of asking her father what she should do. Rather, she had already taken a moral stance, suggesting a level of confidence in this choice of action, and had sought assurance and validation from a supportive parent.

Bridget's proposal that parents give good advice about how to handle situations that come up on social media is challenged by Andi's counterclaim that parents do not understand the setting as well because they did not grow up with it, and therefore are less able to give good advice. These competing accounts capture the tension between the distinctive qualities of social media and the common qualities of how to interact with other people regardless of setting. Whether or not her parents were technically literate, Bridget's experience of being supported in the context of a troubling interaction was a significant benefit, even in light of their incompetence with the technological aspects of social media (see Excerpt 15 in section 4.2.5). Bridget's orientation to parents as good support in relation to social media becomes modified in the shared peer construction of parents as technically less literate. She claimed a role for parents as moral compass or touchstone for how she dealt with the intricacies of social interaction. For Bridget, parental lack of technological competence was less important than the social and emotional support for developing social and moral confidence.

While Andi and Bridget constructed different sources as moral guides in the social media setting, they had underlying parallels, in that a person's values or morals apply to any social interaction and are therefore context-neutral. Similarly, they both situated developing social and moral confidence as important for effective social interaction in the social media setting. These paired skills are typically accounted for as developing through experience, which I discuss further in section 4.5.1.

#### **4.2.5 Parents and Social Media**

As identified in the previous section, the relationship for participants at this particular age and stage between parents and social media is a complex mix of growing social independence and continuing reliance on parents as sources of social support and

guidance. Parents were the most frequently discussed adults that were salient to participants' experience of social media. This may be anticipated, given the continuing social and legal responsibilities that sit with parents, whānau<sup>7</sup> or guardians in relation to consent, evaluation of age-appropriateness, and sanction of activities, including access to social media.

Parents were often described by participants as either less literate than them, or entirely illiterate in relation to social media. Some participants recounted parents' attempts to use social media with substantial amusement over their lack of technological skill. This amusement over parental lack of understanding appears frequently in the context of whether parents knew what social media participants use and what they do on social media, as exemplified in the following excerpt.

**Excerpt 14: CaSM\_2\_PI\_048 - parents don't understand social media**

Edwin: They know what oh social media sites I have  
Zac: Yeah [same]  
Edwin: [But **they**] **don't know what I do**  
Zac: Th(h)ey know what I go on they yeah **they don't I don't think they understand social media that much**  
Edwin: Yeah **hahaha**  
Zac: **They don't know all the new things like Snapchat and Instagram**

Zac differentiates between parents knowing what social media he uses and having awareness of what he does. He accounts for parents' not understanding social media "that much" through reference to "all the new things". This offered a further insight into perceived norms associated with social media as normal, new, and rapidly changing. It is new to parents who may struggle to learn as quickly as children and as a consequence not be as knowledgeable or skilled, as evidenced in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 15: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - 'how do I put a comment on this page?'**

Justin: Yeah, how many people reckon that their pa- like their parents either use social media or really understand it. (3.0)  
Toby: Hm  
Paula: **My parents are on Facebook but I don't think they know how to use it prop'ly heh**  
Justin: Yeah [hehh]  
All: **[laughter]**

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<sup>7</sup> Whānau is a word in New Zealand Māori often translated into English as 'family'. It has been adopted into general New Zealand English usage as well as retaining specific cultural meanings. It is commonly understood to include extended family and may also refer to support networks, not exclusively related by birth.

Bridget: [hey yeah hehehhehh same here]  
 Aruna: [All my parents do is like look at everything and then they're like 'what do I do now?']  
 Bridget: Hey yeah, [**'how do I put a comment on this page?'**]  
**Severall: (laughter)**  
 Aruna: They ask me some[thing (indistinct)]  
 Justin: [So they're coming to] you for advice  
 Bridget: Oh **they don't even know how to use it**

Parents' lack of knowledge of social media, and their fumbling with the technical skills of social media use is presented as comic and laughable.

**Excerpt 16: CaSM\_1\_PI\_015 - my Dad's too dumb**

Cam: Does your Mum (.) or your Dad (.) know you have Facebook.  
 Brad: Yes my whole family does.  
 Cam: Are you friends wif your parents,  
 Brad: (2.2) **Only my Mum coz my Dad's too dumb.** (smiling)  
 Cam: Ehehhhh (laughing)

As Brad's account for not friending his Dad on Facebook illustrates, it was funny that parents, who hold substantial social power over people of their age and are normally viewed as more competent than children, were incompetent with social media. The comic element intensified in the role reversal when parents ask their children for help with an action that participants considered simple.

Participants typically oriented to age and experience as reasons that parents struggled with understanding or learning to use social media, as observable in Andi's account in Excerpt 13 above, partially reproduced here for convenience.

**Excerpt 17: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01**

Andi: Yeah but I think it is harder for them because they didn't grow up with social media so I s'po:ose they wouldn't totally understand it anyway if they try to give you help about it?

Andi offers the concession that because “they didn’t grow up with social media”, it is fair rationale that parents lack of knowledge or understanding. Familiarity from childhood (“growing up with it”) offered a way to interpret adult ineptitude, given that it appeared as a deviation from the norm that adults are more developed and skilled than children. As mentioned above in section 4.2.4, Andi claims that understanding the setting is a

prerequisite for being able to give advice about it. This also emerged during the initial classroom activities, where parents were often described as neither understanding how platforms work nor understanding norms of interaction on social media. 'Not understanding' emerged as salient to parents potentially misunderstanding how friends talk with each other, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

As discussed in sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4, participants typically talked about learning how to use social media through independent exploration and help from older siblings, similar-age cousins or friends. Consistently missing from these accounts were parents and teachers, even though, as noted earlier, at least two of the teachers were highly literate in terms of computer technology and social media, utilising them in curriculum activities as well as discussing social media use with class members. Using social media appeared in participants' accounts as an influential perceived norm. This normative influence is an important quality for understanding how participants as children are accounting for using or not using social media in discussions with peers and with adults. It also provides an important analytic insight as a landmark for the remainder of the chapter, offering a reference point for understanding how participants are using social media, how they account for online sources of trouble, and the significance of 'claiming social spaces online'.

### **4.3 Using Social Media**

#### **4.3.1 "What Social Media Do You Use?"**

As discussed in section 1.2.2, children's online social interaction is not new. However, the new dimension is having social media as part of the social landscape. For the age group at the focus for this study, the oldest were around 6 years old when Facebook was opened to public access in September 2006.<sup>8</sup> For practical purposes, social media has always been there for this cohort. It appears ubiquitous and an ordinary part of social interaction, at least for their generation. As discussed in section 4.2.1, it appears as both normal and normative. This section presents an outline of the types of social media that participants talk about using and what they do with them. This offers some insights into the scope of the terrain mapped in this cross-sectional analysis.

What types of social media participants used generated a lot of interest across the class input discussions and peer video interviews. The level of engagement in the fieldwork

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/welcome-to-facebook-everyone/2210227130>

activities suggested that social media was a topic of high relevance and interest for people their age. While substantial discussion centred on Facebook, it shared the social networking stage with a range of other websites and apps. This included more established websites where interactive functions have been integrated, such as YouTube adding commenting function to hosted videos, and newer platforms designed for smartphone use, including Snapchat and Instagram. The excerpts below present a sample of the types of social media participants nominated. As well as the range of types, it highlights substantial diversity from participants who use just one type to others who used multiple types.

**Excerpt 18: CaSM\_1\_PI\_020**

Andi:           Soo when do you guys use the sites on the internet what sites do you use,  
Cam:           (0.5) Phh ummmm **Youtube and Minecraft?** Usually?  
Andi:           How about [you Dan?]  
Daniel:                 [Yeah um] **same.**

**Excerpt 19: CaSM\_2\_PI\_092**

Sean:           What social media do you use,  
Aroha:           I have a **Facebook um an Instagram, a Kik, a Skype, a Snapchat** (.)

**Excerpt 20: CaSM\_3\_PI\_024**

Kiri:           I use **Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, What's App, Voxer**  
Melody:           (off camera, indistinct)  
Kiri:           um (.) **ask.fm? And I used to have Bebo, but then I deleted it.**

As illustrated in the sample excerpts above, it was common for participants who used social media to use more than one platform, though not necessarily all at the same time. Participants at the different schools appeared to have preferred different platforms for socialising with friends, and while Facebook was popular across the data set, other popular platforms varied between schools. The rates of mention for platforms reflect the broader popularity of the sites in question, but also specific local preferences among friends and social contacts. As becomes clear in the discussion in section 4.3.3, participants linked their interest in social media in general, and the overall relevance of specific platforms, with friends using it.



#### Excerpt 21: CaSM\_1\_PI\_017 - email

Andi:           Soo what social media sites do you guys go on,  
Hazel:           Uhhh I don't really have like Facebook or  
                  anything but **I like mail my friends and stuff**  
                  (0.5) sometimes

As discussed in Chapter 1, I had excluded from my description of social media one-to-one functions of mobile phones and applications, and email. Nevertheless, participants sometimes included them in their discussions. This illustrated the blurred boundaries between one-to-one and one-to-many application functions, as many social media applications are capable of both. However, it also illustrated an important dimension of social media, the capacity to modify and control audience. There are now a range of steps between private one-to-one communications and unrestricted publicly viewable communications. Developments in visibility and privacy settings permit the creation of spaces that are shared with selected groups but not everyone.

Username on social media applications create a space for expressions of individuality, creativity and orientation to popular culture.

#### Excerpt 22: CaSM\_2\_PI\_045 - badass

Zac:            Hey what's your Snapchat?  
Brett:           Uh brettthebadass  
Edwin:           °hehehe°  
Brett:           eight ninety [one    ]  
Off Camera:     [oh my ] ga:a:a  
                  ((laughter))

“Badass” is a colloquial term from US English that has been adopted into New Zealand popular culture. It suggests qualities of being tough and intimidating, and appears as a noun and adjective. It also has connotations of impressive and formidable. The laughter and off camera comment “oh my ga:a:a” demonstrate the other participants orienting to the risqué connotations of “badass” as a borderline swearword, and potential incongruity between Brett's personal qualities and his claim to being “badass.” The grounds upon which Brett stakes his claim to being badass remain unclear. The injunctions against swearing emerge later in this analysis specifically in relation to *bullying*, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. As such, the exclamation may be orienting to the presence of the video camera and the conversation being recorded. However, the shared laughter here also pointed towards swearing as an social action that breaches the normal rules of conduct for people of this age (Franzen & Aronsson, 2013).

### 4.3.2 Online Games as Social Media

While it is more common to focus on social networking platforms in discussions of social media, online games have developed as another social setting for children. Online games as a social space where children interact can be traced to older role playing games such as Runescape (Crowe & Bradford, 2006). The social aspects have developed alongside technological improvements that integrate collaborative and multi-player options in the game with chatrooms. These game features require social interaction, similar to other role playing games where teamwork is part of the game play. Some games, such as Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters mentioned in excerpts below, have been developed as safe spaces for children online, where structures built into the platform allow for parental controls on access and interactions and are more assertively monitored environments.

Participants at all three schools did not initially think of online games during the initial classroom discussions of social media. However, questions that prompted reflection on places online where they chatted with friends readily elicited a number of popular online games where multi-player or team functions are integral to the game play, including Minecraft and Clash of Clans. This extended beyond computer or device based games to include console-based games where online multiplayer options have been developed, most commonly Microsoft X-Box. This proved a useful and relevant extension to the category of social media, as many participants who were not currently using social networking sites were playing online social games and engaging in multiplayer game play or casual chat functions within the game. Excerpts in section 4.3.1 include mention of games alongside other types of social media. The next excerpts present further examples.

#### Excerpt 23: CaSM\_2\_PI\_091 - Minecraft

Aroha: Do you go on social media. And what do you do on social media (.) if you  
Joel: Umm I do go on social media and I usually go on for Youtube or **Minecraft**.

#### Excerpt 24: CaSM\_3\_PI\_004 – Clash of Clans

Tristan: Do you use social media,=  
Ray: =**of course I do. I talk to random people in chat .hh to get them to join our clan that's how**  
(indistinct)  
Stan: in **Clash of Clans (off camera)**

Most of the games nominated by participants were unrestricted environments, where people of any age may be playing with or against each other. By contrast, Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters are moderated environments designed for children.<sup>9</sup> As can be seen in Chloe's account below, mention of such games were often framed as past interest or as an activity properly for younger children.

**Excerpt 25: CaSM\_2\_PI\_006 – from a very long time ago**

Timothy: mmhm↑  
 Chloe: I:: use (..) um (.) I have the social media websites I have are (..) .hhh I(h)nstagram, Snapchat, Facebook (.) Twitter (..) Skype? (...) I u- shh I don't have a Youtube account but I go on Youtube a:nd **I have quite a few game websites (.) Would you like to know them**  
 Timothy: Yes please.  
 Chloe: O(h)k(h)ay **some of them are from a very long time ago**↑ but Moshi Monsters  
 Blossom: .HHH I had a Moshi Mon[sters]  
 Chloe: [shh] okay yep. Stardoll

Chloe's emphasis on “a very long time ago” in connection with Moshi Monsters contains an implicit orientation to age. Her account positions these game websites as being proper for younger children, carrying the implication that as an older person it is proper for her to use the unrestricted type of social media platforms. While she does not identify how long ago the “very long time” is, this distance may be a relatively short from an adult perspective. However, Chloe's characterisation of these websites simultaneously distanced herself from the implied category of younger children who play these games. Chloe laughs through her preface “O(h)k(h)ay” to her list of game websites. This laughter suggested embarrassment in admitting to having these more childish websites (Jefferson, 2015). By contrast, both Chloe in this excerpt and other participants across the data set presented the unrestricted social media sites as both proper and desirable online social settings for people their age.

**4.3.3 'What Do You Do on Social Media?'**

Participants described using a range of different social media that varied across the three types described in section 4.1.1. In the context of the peer interviews, participants in the interviewer role often asked about the kinds of social media their interviewees

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<sup>9</sup> A common feature of social games specifically designed for children is age restriction, and active parental involvement is required for account creation. These games often include content filters that block swear words and other content deemed inappropriate.

used, and the reasons they used them. Participants' reasons for using social media spanned a wide range of interactions that are made possible by the setting. These reasons included keeping in touch with family who lived in other cities or countries, and being able to stay friends with people when they moved. Organising in-person activities, and introducing friends from different settings to each other were also identified as reasons to use social media.

There was substantial variety in the specific actions and interactions discussed, which were shaped and constrained by the type of social media being used. This included the types of interactions within the platform structure itself, such as posting comments or pictures, “liking” and “friending.” Others were influenced by other concerns such as security, privacy and visibility of an interaction, as implicated in the excerpts below. Greater disclosure and more intimate peer interactions were considered 'do-able' on platforms that offered greater control to restrict visibility, most often raised in discussion of concern about parents or other adults misunderstanding if they observed how participants talked with their friends, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5. Throughout the data set, participants typically tended to describe being more reserved in 'open' environments like chat rooms. In this excerpt, Bridget proffers “just saying hi” in the open Minecraft chatroom as a 'safe' activity.

**Excerpt 26: CaSM\_1\_PI\_017 - just saying hi**

Andi:            So (.) c'n do you talk to other people online  
                  (indistinct) Bridget?  
Bridget:        Eeeyep **but we just really just say hi?**  
Andi:            Yeah what else do you say,  
Bridget:        Um what country do you guys come from? And they  
                  say Australia or Mexico or just something like  
                  that

Bridget contrasted “just saying hi” with “asking personal questions”, an activity which had appeared in an earlier segment of the peer video interview as inappropriate. This has connections with sharing or disclosing personal information on social media, which often emerged as a potential 'trouble' linked with privacy. I discuss this in greater detail as an aspect of managing privacy in 4.4.5. Another type of legitimate activity in open chat rooms was conversation related to game play, as illustrated by Ray's account in the following excerpt.

### Excerpt 27: CaSM\_3\_PI\_004 - expanding my clan

Tristan: What do you use social media for,  
Ray: (0.5) **Getting people to join the clan**, talking to random people **trying to find Chris and someone else**, and that was not Chris that was Xilven.  
Stan: You make up the worst names.

Ray accounts for his main use of social media in terms of the gameplay for the online game 'Clash of Clans', where team ("clan") size is a factor for increasing success and rank within the game structure. Ray's account added another purpose for social interactions online, where recruiting other people to join games brings benefits for players and increases the market for games. Chris, who was mentioned in this excerpt, was a member of the peer video interview group from which this excerpt is taken, and a friend of the other members of the group. While this type of interaction may be seen as social, the focus on gameplay casts it in a more functional or instrumental light than what might commonly be considered social.

Using social media in a more general way had both instrumental and relational purposes. This included curating and sharing artwork, interests, and updates. The following excerpt is from a piece of writing by Paula at School 1, where she accounts for the ways she uses social media (spelling reproduced verbatim).

### Excerpt 28: CaSM\_1\_O\_001 - different sites for different activities

*I use social media sights to keep in touch with my friends and family in other cities or countries, like **my best friend who moved to Christchurch** so we post friendship photos and saying and we tag each other in them and **comment on each others pictures on Instagram**, and I chat with my cousins in Perth on Facebook ... I also use my Tumblr page to express myself, and show off my art work.*

Helen orients to self-expression as an equally legitimate use of social media as the social purpose of keeping in touch with friends and family. Although Tumblr as a blog site incorporates substantial social interaction as part of the website practices, Helen contrasts her use of it as personal expression rather than the social connection use she makes of Instagram and Facebook. In this regard, using social media did not by necessity always have a social rationale.

As mentioned by Paula in the excerpt above, one of the factors often mentioned as relevant to parental sanction for participants having a Facebook account was for staying

in contact with geographically distant family members. This was often highly valued by participants, meaning they were able to have a relationship with family members who they would otherwise not know.

**Excerpt 29: CaSM\_3\_PI\_033**

Sililo: A:and yeah because (.) if you have like uh **if you have family overseas that you never ever see, n just chat to them**

**Excerpt 30: CaSM\_3\_PI\_032**

Erik: Do you believe it's good?  
Derek: Uh I believe it's good for (.) uh kids our age? Because (.) it **gives us immediate ties** to the family information,

**Excerpt 31: CaSM\_3\_PI\_017**

Madison: Yeah like **long distance stuff.**  
Lila: Yeah or can't be bothered  
Eddie: Like different countries,  
Madison: Yeah, yeah. Like **it's easier for me coz you know I have people in America that I want to talk to**

Maintaining relationships, whether with friends or family members, by using social media was strongly valued. This activity was most often connected with using Facebook. The event of moving suburbs or changing schools was presented as a situation where participants would otherwise lose friendships through lack of ability to stay in contact, however with the benefit of social media they were able to remain friends.

**Excerpt 32: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - staying in touch when people move**

Kieran: **I think it's more interesting because people (1.0) you know and like people since other schools=**  
Justin: =Yep=  
Kieran: =are actually on it now, you can  
(Kit): Yeah  
Kieran: **it's my fifth school so I can be know people from other schools**  
Justin: Yeah that you'd otherwise not have any way of staying in touch with, yeah  
Aroha: **Yeah it's like one of my best friends lives out in Waikanae and I like never see her so it's just like another way [(indistinct)]**  
Justin: [yeah ]

In the above excerpt, Kieran proffers staying in contact with friends when changing schools as a reason that using social media is interesting. Aroha elaborates on this

through an account of being able to stay friends with a best friend who now lives in a town approximately 60 kilometres away from Aroha's home in Wellington. In the past, such distances would have been substantial geographical barriers to maintaining friendships for children whose social lives are often dependent on parents to provide opportunities and transport. The advantage of social media for participants in maintaining relational ties was that it enabled these to be direct and immediate, as can be seen in Excerpts 30, 31, and 32.

In addition, the accounts of using social media in these excerpts highlighted the agency afforded to participants through social media as a way of staying in touch with friends and family. It is “immediate” and you can “just chat with them” rather than having to rely on parents or another family member to arrange a visit. As such, it is also empowering. The ability to maintain relationships with family overseas independently also featured in the classroom input discussions as a reason that parents were comfortable with participants using social media, most frequently Facebook, even though they were “under age.” The relevance of age limits within platform terms and conditions emerged as another source of trouble connected with participants' use of Facebook, which I discuss further in section 4.4.3.

#### **4.3.4 Socialising with Friends**

Participants in this study presented their online and in person social worlds as intertwined in a way that reflected the literature discussed in section 1.2.2. *Friend* was used consistently to refer to existing friends and continuing social connections from school or other in-person contexts. Socialising with friends was the primary and most consistent reason for participants to give for using social media across the data set. As was evident in section 4.2.2, socialising with friends underpinned the salience of social media in participants' accounts even if they were not currently using social media themselves. The next excerpt provides an example of a typical account of the scope for participants' contacts on the social media across the data set.

#### **Excerpt 33: CaSM\_1\_PI\_022 - most of my friends in my class**

Andi:           Soo what kind of sites do you guys go on,  
Brad:           Facebook,  
Toby:           Yeah Facebook?  
Andi:           **Why do y- why do you have Facebook,**  
Toby:           U:uhh **so I can**  
Brad:           T-  
Toby:           **can say [hi]**

Brad: [keep] in  
 Toby: **to my friends?**  
 Brad: Keep in tou- ay contact with 'em?  
 Andi: A:and so who a- who are your friends on  
 Facebook,  
 Brad: Toby ((nodding head sideways towards Toby)),  
 (classmate), Tamati=  
 Toby: **=most of my friends in my class.**  
 Brad: Yeah.

Social media presented another setting for social contact with friends, who were commonly identified as friends from school. Keeping in contact with friends may simply mean being able to say “hi,” as Toby comments above. Being able to socialise with friends provided the justification for wanting to be on social media, as may be seen in section 4.2.2 and also in the following excerpt.

**Excerpt 34: CaSM\_1\_PI\_017 - wanting to make a Facebook account to talk with friends easier**

Andi: Umm so:o when do you think you'll get a  
 Facebook?  
 Bridget: When I'm much older.  
 Hazel: (3.2) **Think I'm gonna m(h)ake one um soon in the  
 holidays** [hhh ]  
 Bridget: [I'm not really] interested  
 Andi: Why aren't you into Facebook  
 Bridget: I just don't find it interesting  
 Andi: **How about you Hazel why not?**  
 Hazel: (0.5) Mm **oh nah I'm making one.**  
 Andi: When?  
 Hazel: Like in the holidays  
 Andi: Oh coz you your why do you want one?  
 Hazel: **Coz it'll be it'll (.) sorta easier to talk to  
 my fri[ends an ]**  
 Bridget: [Will your Dad know] about it?  
 Hazel: Ye:e:ah  
 Bridget: Okay heh [ohh s-]  
 Andi: [Ohh will] he?  
 Hazel: Yeh

Hazel's account for wanting to be on Facebook is to make it “easier to talk with my friends”. Here there are no additional justifications in terms of distance or other physical barriers, such as offered in section 4.3.3. Hazel linked her decision to create a Facebook account with convenience. Friends and socialising with friends appeared consistently across the data set in accounts of wanting to start using social media, even though it was simultaneously oriented to as problematic because of participants' ages. Many participants who were currently using social media reported not being interested in social media at a younger age, even if they had accounts at that time. In the next excerpt, Ravi offers an account for this change in interest and relevance.



### Excerpt 35: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - more people using it

Justin: Other, are there other reasons people think y'know it's more, it's more something I want to do more now (.) than before, Ravi,  
Ravi: Coz when you, **when y- more people have it so there's more people to talk to**

The above excerpt is from the group analysis discussion and elaborates on Ravi's comments in one of the peer video interviews. In the peer video interview, he mentioned that he had a Facebook account for two years before coming to intermediate, but had only started using it a lot recently. In the above excerpt, he explicates a reason for the change in interest. Similarly, social media held less appeal to participants when there were not as many people using it with whom people wanted to be social. In a broader social sense, this may be seen to reflect the notion of 'critical mass' in social dynamics, where it refers to the minimum number of adopters for interest to become self-sustaining (e.g. Markus, 1987). The suggestion that "more people have it so there's more people to talk to" displayed an increasing orientation to socialising with peers, which is recognised as a common feature of the life stage of participants in this study (Parke & Gauvin, 2009).

While typical accounts of using or being interested in social media were associated with existing friends, some accounts highlighted the potential for extending friendship networks through social media by making new friends, or introducing people to each other, who then become friends. In the next excerpt, Aruna presented an argument for the benefits of social media because it can be a good way of introducing people who may then become friends.

### Excerpt 36: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - introducing friends to each other

Aruna: Yeah, **I know this guy called Fred** an (beeping noise - library checkout) **he goes to (nearby secondary school) and uh we're playing,** (0.5) and then (1.0) **Mark was online so I invited him and then he joined** (0.5) I added and even **the next day Fred told me and they got along and uh, (.) they're and they're friends now**  
Justin: Cool,  
Aruna: Uh in real life.

In this excerpt, the friend Mark mentioned was a classmate and fellow participant in the study who was not present for this discussion. The event Aruna narrated occurred within an unspecified online multiplayer game. Prior to this account, Aruna presented a

similar account of when he had introduced two of his friends to each other in person when they met in the street, who had previously met each other online in the context of playing a game. This crossover between online and in-person introductions framed social media as simply another social setting where new friends may be made and people known from other settings introduced. Although Aruna's account was uncommon in this data set, it highlighted how a recognised benefit of social media for other age groups (that of developing and extending friendship networks) appeared as salient for participants in this study and part of their personal experience.

Some participants talked about having lots of Facebook friends, including adding people they did not know in person; however, the activity of collecting numerous contacts was not as indiscriminate as it may initially have appeared. In the next excerpt, Tamati attaches value to having a large number of Facebook friends and adding a lot of people he does not know. This introduces a notion of social status derived from quantity of friends.

**Excerpt 37a: CaSM\_1\_PI\_023 - having heaps of friends on Facebook**

Andi: Mm okay. **So do y' are you friends with people you don't know?**

Tamati: (nods, smile) **A lot?**

Andi: A lot of friends do do:o mind or no

Tamati: (shaking head)

Andi: So you meet new people on Facebook

Tamati: (small shake of head) °**I just add them, yeah**°  
(nodding head)

Andi: (3.0) Hmm **why do you add them**

Tamati: ((shrug)) (...) **To get more friends.**

Andi: Yeah why do you want so many friends?

Tamati: (shrug) **I dunno (1.8) think it's cool**

Andi: **Think it's cool to have heaps of friends on Facebook?**

Tamati: **Mmhmm**

Andi: Mmhmm? Okay? Hmm what else is here. So do **those people you don't know do you talk to them on Facebook?**

Tamati: (2.5) **Nope** (4.5) (slowly breaking into smile, then covering face with hands appearing to start laughing)

Andi: Mmokay

It is interesting that Tamati emphasises that he “just adds them” but does not share any personal information nor talk with them. He does not agree with Andi's suggestion that

the purpose is to meet new people. The important activity is accumulating a large number of friends “to be cool”, rather than to interact with them.

This excerpt also highlights that what is co-constructed in these data are accounts. They are not necessarily a transparent reflection of what participants actually do in practice. However, they are evidence of what participants orient to as significant. Throughout the recording, Tamati's gestures and pauses suggest some embarrassment. While it would be simple to attribute this simply to the presence of the camera, a segment which precedes the current excerpt not transcribed here explicated that Andi and Tamati are friends. On the basis of personal knowledge and experience, Andi challenges Tamati's account of what he talks about on social media.

**Excerpt 37b: CaSM\_1\_PI\_023 – I know you're lying**

Andi: Mm ye- what do you talk to your friends about.  
Tamati: ((playing with hair, voice creaking slightly))  
Um (2.0) tsch school subjects. ((ceases playing with hair, nods with a mock serious facial expression)) (2.0) ((laughing silently, covers face with hands))  
Andi: Hehh wh(heh)at? S(h)ch(h)ool sub(h)jects are you talking about,  
Tamati: Um (3.0)  
Andi: Maths=  
Tamati: =yeah maths  
Andi: Yep (4.0) **umm okay eehheh I know you're lying because I've talked to you on Facebook and it wasn't about maths.**

In this excerpt, Tamati and Andi orient to appropriate topics for discussion between friends. Tamati's proffer of “school subjects” accounts for talking with friends offers a respectable topic of conversation that could be seen as above reproach. Andi's rejoinder “I know you're lying” disputes Tamati's account without actually disrupting the gloss he used to cover over what he actually talks about with his friends on social media.

In this section I have focused on how participants account for social media as simply another setting for socialising with friends. This presents a distinct contrast from some stereotypes associated with internet use, particularly the isolated and lonely individual interacting with people they have never met in person. The typical experiences and perceived value that was introduced in these accounts is of online socialising being intertwined with existing friends and in-person socialising. In the next section, I focus on some of the sources of trouble identified by participants.

## 4.4 Online Sources of Trouble

### 4.4.1 Random “Creepy People” and Strangers

Participants were typically positive yet realistic in their descriptions of social media. The benefits to which participants oriented in accounting for using social media or wanting to use social media did not preclude orientation to 'troubles' in the online environment. In this section, I discuss some of the sources of 'trouble' that participants accounted for across the data set. Although *bullying* and other hurtful interactions were prominent among the troubles that participants made salient in talking about using social media, I address them specifically in Chapters 5 and 6. As Wint (2013) and Fenaughty (2010) also observed, bullying is not the only trouble that bothers children and young people online, and sometimes it is not the most significant source of trouble. This section focuses on other such troubles to which participants in this study oriented.

Strangers initiating contact with participants emerged as an instance of potential or experienced 'trouble' across the data set. It was typically mentioned by girls, but not exclusively so. Unwanted interactions initiated by unknown people towards children is a common danger theme raised in wider social discussions of online safety, and frequently invokes parallels with the 'stranger danger' messages about physical safety for children. These messages from the broader culture frequently position children as naive and vulnerable. By contrast, as we have already seen in section 4.2, participants consistently invoked their sense of agency and empowerment, based on technological competence and social confidence, to deal with this as a source of 'trouble'. In the next excerpt, Jo orients to the notion of being in a position of agency, even if there are scary people on the internet.

#### Excerpt 38: CaSM\_2\_PI\_027 - there are scary people but you can be safe

Tiana: So do you think social media's a good idea,  
(off camera indistinct)  
Jo: Social media is kind of a good idea. It's not  
(0.5) but it is. Coz  
Tiana: Why,  
Jo: Like (0.5) **there are scary people hhH o(h)n the  
internet and like some sites that are (2.0) bad.**  
And  
Ravi: Like (off camera)  
Jo: But there are also some (.) like coz (1.5) there  
are sites† (.) which **you can choose to be (0.5)  
good or choose to be (0.5) bad on** like you can  
have **safety** (1.0) an' yeah.



risks of disclosing personal information. This demonstrated evidence of participants internalising education about online safety and not sharing personal information through orientation 'being uncomfortable' when strangers asked questions. In the next excerpt, Melissa also accounts for unsolicited invitations from a stranger.

**Excerpt 40: CaSM\_1\_PI\_001 - 'this weird guy'**

Bridget: Uhhh do you talk to strangers online,  
Melissa: Oh yeah↑ no. (.) N[oooo]oo↑=  
Bridget: [Okay]  
Melissa: =**No but I had this weird Indian guy? that  
friends me all the time? (1.0) And e's weird.**  
(1.0)  
(off camera muffled laughter)  
Melissa: Hahahaha  
Wendy: ((off camera)) Don't don't be racist.

A surprising quality of these accounts was how participants constructed personal agency and empowerment for dealing with unwanted attention. Melissa's account of a stranger who *friends* her all the time appears after responding with an emphatic negative to the question about talking to strangers online. The "yeah no" formulation with a sarcastic intonation implies that a negative answer should be obvious. While the persistent requests from an unknown person could be construed as intrusive, annoying, or scary, Melissa referred dismissively to the stranger as 'weird', with the implication that she declines the requests.

In the next excerpt, Wendy's account of an unsolicited approach has the potential to frighten parents as well as children; however, it illustrates the power and protections available to participants by the 'virtual' environment through physical and psychological distance.

**Excerpt 41: CaSM\_1\_PI\_008 - 'block, delete'**

Aruna: Do you know who they are, like are you friends  
with someone and you don't know who they are.  
Like strangers.  
Wendy: Uh **I friended a handicap** (2.5) coz he had uh his  
face was all mushed (laughing) but **I felt really  
sorry for him so I friended him** but then **he  
turned out to be a paedophile so (.) I kind  
of (.) went (.)**.HHH **block, delete** ((gesturing  
key strokes)) (laughing)

While the event Wendy recounts here was unique in the data set, her pragmatic, matter-of-fact and empowered approach to dealing with problematic interactions is instructive. Each of her statements commences exclusively with the pronoun 'I': "I friended ...", "I felt sorry ...", "I blocked ..." She does not make any mitigations by referring to external authorities such as parents or rules. It offers a case study of the paired skills of technological competence and social and moral confidence discussed in sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4. Wendy presents the "handicap" as a figure of potential ridicule, someone who is likely to be socially rejected due to disfigurement and whom it is appropriate to "feel really sorry" for. This suggested a characterisation of people with disabilities as being limited and innocuous. Wendy's use of the extreme case formulation of *really* sorry elevates this effect. Wendy pauses for dramatic effect and her final action in removing the source of unwanted attention is emphasised by her physical gestures that mimic keyboard actions. She presents this as an extreme case by describing the stranger for whom she initially felt sorry as a "paedophile." This term invokes a strong sense of unwanted sexual attention, requests, or sharing sexually explicit material. While not literally proven, "he turned out to be a paedophile" presents another extreme case formulation that accounts for a stranger behaving in a 'sleazy' way.

Events such as that described by Wendy are regular points of concern about the dangers present on the internet, especially for children. In such discussions online predators are often presented as a bogeyman figure, arguably out of proportion to the actual risk (Wolak et al., 2010). Wendy's account presented an alternative to the automatic assumption that children are vulnerable and disempowered upon receipt of an inappropriate approach online. Her account did not suggest distress or disempowerment, but rather empowerment and safety through the technological tools at her disposal. Her initial categorisation of the stranger as "a handicap" positioned the other as the less powerful party, for whom she felt sorry and provided a justification for the breach of normal 'stranger danger' rules. Wendy presented this as a humorous scandal during which she retained agency and power by choosing to friend the stranger initially, and then block and delete them when the contact turned inappropriate.

#### **4.4.2 Real, Not Real, and Pretending**

One of the enduring tensions in the interface between online and in person socialising is the perception about reality and realness. As discussed in section 4.3.4, participants typically talked about using social media for socialising with friends and people they

knew in person. However, there were two accounts in the group analysis discussion at School 1 where participants oriented to online interaction as not real or not in person as an advantage rather than problematic. In the next excerpt, Aruna and Andi explain entering a chatroom under an assumed name for fun.

**Excerpt 42: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - pretending to be a different person from who you are**

Justin: so there's not that mu- you think there's not that much difference between the sorts of things that you do and be online and who you are in person.

Aruna: **Unless you like to play a character.**

Justin: Unless you wha?

Aruna: Unless you like to play a character with someone

Justin: **Ohhh okay like role playing,**

Aruna: **Yeah they act like they're not (0.2) like um different that they usually are, like hey my name's Rick ((looks at Andi)) uh yeah**

Andi: hh hh

Justin: Hhheheh

Several: Heheheheh

Justin: **Hehehe is it like a chance to pretend? Or [something, ]**

Andi: **[yeah] like sometimes you just I like to go Minecraft and (.) y'know [like]**

Aruna: **[You] named yourself G(h)a(h)ry**

Andi: Hehehe yeah me **just y'know (1.0) just mess people around**

Justin: HHHhhh

Andi: **Like you I'm (Onenzereck) but you can call me Eck and stuff like that, y'know↑ it's just (0.5) yeh**

Justin: **So it's a bit of joking and a bit of fun?=  
=yeah**

Aruna introduces the activity of pretending to be someone different through the notion of playing a character, which I mistakenly interpret as referring to a role playing game. However, Aruna and Andi correct me and clarify the activity in question as pretending to be someone else in Minecraft chat by using different or silly names “just to mess people around”. The mediated setting of a chatroom makes such pretend play possible. This kind of activity as play is constructed here as not troublesome. However, there is clear potential for deception that may contribute to 'trouble' where the activity of “messaging people around” is experienced as malicious rather than light-hearted.

The other example, which appears in the next excerpt, also orients to pretending to be someone different online. However, the activity and the context was not linked to having fun and suggested a different type of trouble.



#### Excerpt 43: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - to get away from their real life

Justin: Is there stuff that you think (.) that I might have missed?  
Someone: No.  
Andi: Umm **like when you're like you know how you said like people don't know who you are?**  
Justin: mhm  
Andi: I dunno **some people:e like that because they can get away from their real life or something↑**  
Justin: Yeah,  
Andi: but I dunno

In this excerpt, Andi takes up and expands on a comment I had made earlier in the session about other people not being able to see who you are online. This account is unique in the data set in orienting to the notion that some people may want to “get away from their real life” and use the affordances available in the online setting to achieve this. Andi suggests that social media offers a setting where people can achieve this without their identity being known, which may include being safe from discovery. In this way, the anonymity possible through social media could be experienced as a benefit for escaping constraints in “real life,” even if this escape is transitory. However, Andi does not make explicit what she is orienting to as “real life” troubles.

#### 4.4.3 Privacy

Privacy was a clear focus of interest within participant accounts, both for those using and those not using social media. Participants typically oriented to not posting personal or identifying information online, not sharing passwords, and making use of privacy settings to limit the audience of material they posted. However, the most common 'trouble' connected with privacy centred on parents. This appeared most often in terms of parents not understanding how interactions on social media work. Participants who were using social media consistently commented that their parents knew what social media they used but did not always know what participants did.

#### Excerpt 44: CaSM\_2\_PR\_01 – parents don't know what goes on

Kieran: **Well I've talked with my parents about what things go on at school, what things are said an (0.5) how people (.) act with each other**  
Justin: mhm  
Kieran: And they know I (.) say things like that and stuff, they know I do that, but um they don't know I (2.0) it's **they know I have a Facebook wh'ch you're technically not allowed to .hh my**

Mum ac'shilly helped me set it up and everything  
 so they're all good with that but=  
 Justin: =Okay=  
 Kieran: =they're not sure what goes on? And what's said↑

This gap between knowing that participants were using social media and knowing what they were doing is consistent with other investigations of children's cultures, where privacy, particularly from adults and most especially from parents, is integral to children's social worlds and not unique to social media (Alton-Lee et al., 1993; Corsaro, 2009). In the data for this study, participants typically accounted for this gap in two ways. One group of accounts focused on lack of technological competence, as discussed in 4.2.5. Parents were characterised as “too dumb” (Excerpt 16) about social media to understand how to behave, or to understand what participants did. The other group of accounts was focused on privacy for participants' interactions with their peers that were potentially prone to misinterpretation by parents. Often the potential for misinterpretation was accounted for by suggesting that parents “would not be happy” if they knew what participants did on social media, as illustrated in this next excerpt.

**Excerpt 45: CaSM\_2\_PI\_033 - secrets from parents**

Jo: **do they know?** ((off camera))  
 Ravi: **like what kind of stuff do you think they  
 wouldn't be happy with,**  
 Luke: **I dunno,**  
 Ravi: Whadda you mean you don' know,  
 Jo: **Secrets**  
 Luke: **Yeah**  
 Jo: **I know. Secrets**

Jo proffers the notion of “secrets” as a general description for “stuff” that people their age may do on social media that parents would not be happy with. In this excerpt, 'secrets' invokes notions of a particular aspect of privacy, more closely associated with privileged personal insights, which may be shared with a chosen audience of friends. Having secrets, and keeping secrets from parents, can be seen as an expected dimension of children's private lives with friends to which parents are not privy. Having secrets may function as another empowering experience in the context of social media, putting children in a position to limit parental 'snooping'. Privacy as an aspect of socialising online becomes a trouble in the face of advice to parents to monitor children's activity on social media due to safety concerns. Parental 'snooping' becomes problematic for trust between parents and children when fears for children's safety are treated as

trumping the rights of children to privacy (Rooney, 2015). I address the specific trouble of misunderstanding in greater detail in Chapter 5, as it was most frequently made salient in relation to *bullying* and related troublesome interactions.

#### 4.4.4 'It's illegal to be on Facebook'

As already alluded to, the Facebook age limit was a frequent point of discussion across the data set and constituted another source of trouble. One of the more intriguing ways participants oriented to this trouble was by invoking the notion of illegality, as Cam does in the next excerpt.

##### Excerpt 46: CaSM\_1\_PI\_020 - it's illegal to be on Facebook

Andi: Why don't you use those sites,  
Daniel: Because  
Cam: Um because **our parents won't allow us=**  
Daniel: =yeah. **Gotta wait until we're older.**  
Andi: **Why do you think your parents won't allow you,**  
Daniel: Because  
Cam: Um because **it's illegal to be on Facebook this young**  
Daniel: Well some kids do go on it an' eh  
Cam: °**illegal**°  
Daniel: Well (0.5) some kids at my primary school like they used to be on it,  
Cam: **Illegal.**  
Andi: **Did you wish you were on it?=  
Cam: =[Yes.]  
Daniel: =[Nah ]  
(1.0)  
Andi: [D'you]  
Daniel: [Arrh ] ((mimes stabbing Cam)) [SHH!]  
Andi: [No no] okay  
Cam: [Heheheheheh ]  
Daniel: [Heheheheheh ]  
Andi: [**Why do you wish you went on it,**  
Cam: **So I can talk to my friends whenn they're like sick or something** and so (0.5) after school I can talk to them,  
Andi: How about you Daniel why do you wish you didn't have it,  
Daniel: Because (.) um (.) **I don't really need it** (0.5) **I'm waiting til I'm 14 like my brother,****

Initially, Cam and Daniel invoke parental restriction to account for not using Facebook. Andi's subsequent question asks what they perceive to be the rationale, to which Cam responds with "it's illegal to be on Facebook this young." The external authority is not parents, but the law. Cam accounts for wanting to use Facebook to "talk to my friends when they're sick or something" or "after school". These reasons share features in common with using social media for staying in contact with friends and family despite

geographical distance, as identified in excerpts in section 4.3.3. Equally, Daniel is in the position of needing to account for not wanting to be on Facebook. Daniel's account remains focused on age; even though he starts with "I don't really need it", he continues with "waiting til I'm 14 like my brother".

An interactional effect of this trouble is that it makes being on Facebook specifically an accountable activity for participants. This effect emerged similarly in discussion of general use of social media, as discussed in section 4.2.2. "Illegal" is intertwined with age, but invoked additional connotations of social and structural sanction. Interestingly in this data set, illegality was not discussed in relation to other social networking platforms that are similarly unrestricted and unmoderated, such as Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat. Similarly, online games that are open access and unrestricted were not constructed as problematic in this data set in the way that Facebook was. The focus on Facebook may reflect its broader popularity and media reporting on age limits.<sup>10</sup> Age typically appeared as grounds for not using social media, but, as will be discussed further in 4.5.2, the legitimacy for using age as a basis for restriction was perceived as arbitrary and disputed. This trouble emerges from participants' experiences of agency and empowerment that conflict with the social norms that perceive children as vulnerable and in need of protection.

In this section, I have explored some of the troubles that emerged from participants' accounts of using social media. While the context is social media, the 'trouble' itself is not always associated with online interactions themselves, as in the case of privacy from parents or escaping real life. Similarly, there emerged aspects of these troubles that could be assumed to be problematic, such as anonymity and the ease of pretending to be someone else, but in practice were not unequivocally negative. In the next section, I draw together threads from earlier parts of this chapter to discuss how participants claimed social spaces online.

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<sup>10</sup> While not specifically the focus of this discussion, it is useful to note that the legal context for the age restriction imposed in US law is to prevent corporations from collecting and using personal information of people under 13 years of age, particularly for marketing. In this respect, the legal framework is not associated with safety concerns. This is mentioned in some 'advice to parents' articles written for a US audience (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015; NetSafe, n.d.; Rayworth, 2015; Rooney, 2015; Stewart, n.d.). However, as evident in 4.3.2, these were constructed by participants in this study as for children younger than them. This legal limit is quite different in sense from a personal legal limit indexed in Cam's comments in Excerpt 47.

## 4.5 Claiming Social Spaces Online

### 4.5.1 Experience for Learning Skills

Agency and empowerment emerged as significant threads woven through participants' accounts of using social media. In combination they highlight the resources that participants used within these accounts to claim social spaces online. In this section, I explore the arguments that participants presented in favour of people their age using social media. While not all of them occurred frequently across the data set, they emphasise key features for this analysis of how participants account for their experiences of social media as an interactional setting.

Experience formed part of the case made by participants for people of their age to use social media. This resource emerged explicitly during the classroom input activity at School 2, in the context of presenting reasons that it was appropriate for participants and people their age to be using social media. The discussion focused on the role of experiential learning and the importance of skills development through experience. As evidenced in the comment below, experience was especially salient to aspects of the online environment that were perceived to be difficult or dangerous.

*"If people don't experience any risky or bad or dangerous stuff then how do we learn how to deal with it?" (Edwin, classroom input activity, recorded in fieldwork notebook)*

Edwin proposed this as a rhetorical question in the context of a class input activity discussing whether it was okay for people their age to use social media, even if there are problems with it or situations that might be dangerous. Learning to deal with it through experience proposes an implicit link with other skills that must be learned through experience and cannot be learned abstracted from the setting, similar to physical and academic skills that are learned and improved through practice as a specific type of experience. An under-examined notion with relevance to managing interactions is the role of experience in learning and improving social and emotional skills. The "risky or bad or dangerous stuff" on social media occurs in interactions that have social and emotional implications, and Edwin's comment offers a direct challenge to the notion that protecting children's safety requires restricting their use of social media.

As I discussed in section 4.2, participants in this study and people their age have grown up with social media as normal. There has been the opportunity for them to develop

their technological confidence during periods of intensive learning such that the learning may be experienced as intuitive for them. However, people of all ages who use social media have needed to learn how to deal with technological pitfalls, such as managing privacy settings, and interactional pitfalls, such as unwanted approaches or strangers asking personal or intrusive questions. In the next excerpt, Joel and Sean orient to another aspect of the value associated with 'people your age' going on social media.

**Excerpt 47: CaSM\_2\_PI\_093 - getting experience**

Joel: Do you think (2.0) so:cia:l media should be like  
(.) **do you think people your age should be going**  
**on social media?**

Sean: Yeah coz it'll like (1.0) **give them experience**  
**of what happens on it** (.) when they're  
older.

Joel's question appears in a yes-preferring form, and also uses “should”, which is most often associated with implied obligation. It is arguable that both the question and response oriented to the value of experience for learning how to manage the online setting. As discussed in 4.2.3, participants' concerns about skills for using social media were not typically associated with technological competence. As illustrated in the excerpt above, the value of gaining experience on social media is to develop skills for managing “what happens” on it “when they're older”. While the formulation “what happens on it” is ambiguous, Sean's orientation to age suggests it indexes gaining experience in socio-emotional skills to manage interpersonal challenges.

Experience was typically valued in participants' accounts not only for its future relevance, but also for its role in the present. Both Sean and Edwin's observations invoke the notion of practical learning through engagement. Competence requires learning and experience, and it is impossible to gain competence without them. Managing online interactions is framed as a kind of practical, experiential competence, similar to other interactional activities that cannot be acquired in isolation from the setting.

#### **4.5.2 Responsibility and maturity**

In claiming social spaces online, participants sought to disentangle notions of maturity and responsibility from age. Whether people ‘their age’ were responsible enough to use social media was a popular question in the peer interviews at all the schools. It often

emerged in discussion of the nominal age limit for using Facebook as discussed in 4.4.4, and was generalised to other platforms in terms of being responsible enough rather than being old enough. Some participants did orient to a connection between age and maturity, as evidenced in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 48: CaSM\_3\_PI\_017 - social media unsafe for littler kids**

Eddie: So (...) do you think social media's safe (.) for everyone? All ages,  
Lila: It depends what you do on it.  
Madison: Yeah n **I think it's like for people who are (..) mature** I mean like if you're an immature and you see something that you don't want to see you could (..) it could really affect you.  
Eddie: **So you think it is kinda unsafe for some people.**  
Madison: **Yeah. I me[an you have to]**  
Lila: **[Like littler kids] ((hand action in descending step motion))**  
Madison: **know how to use it**  
Lila: to use it.  
Madison: Yeah. (('high 5' hand slap))

Lila associates “immature” with “littler kids”, implying age groups younger than the participants. She further associates both these terms with people perceived to be at risk of negative impact from exposure to inappropriate material online. Her hand gesture accompanying “littler kids” emphasises the implied 'younger than us'. Madison and Lila co-construct this account of social media use as suitable for people who are mature and know how to use it, which implicitly includes them. Many, although not all, participants thought that they were mature enough to be on social media, even though they were under the age limit for a Facebook account. Simple correlation of a nominated age with being old enough to use social media was actively disputed in accounts across the data set when the discussion focused on participants and people of their age. The excerpt below presents a typical example.

**Excerpt 49: CaSM\_3\_PI\_034 - if they're mature enough at school**

Derek: D'y have (...) do you think (...) **people (..) your age (..) are responsible enough** to use social media?  
Sililo: (1.0) Yes, if **they're well mature at school, they can be well mature on social media.**

Sililo's straightforward reflection on maturity argues that there is no reason to make a distinction between social settings. If a person is mature in one setting, then it is

reasonable to infer that they will behave maturely in other settings. This echoes the excerpt from Andi in 4.2.4, where she suggests that the values a person has are the same no matter what the social setting. What constituted “responsible” or “mature” remained implied rather than explicit. It was easier for participants to assert their own status as “responsible” in the context of their own use of social media, and express uncertainty about whether others could be responsible enough. However, the consistent determining factor for participants to deem someone responsible enough to use social media was the perceived maturity of the person, not their age.

The notion of trust appeared intertwined with the assessment of maturity. In the next excerpt, Andi's account explicates the connection between being trusted by parents and being allowed to use social media even though she is younger than the nominal age limit.

**Excerpt 50: CaSM\_1\_PI\_021 - Mum knows that I'm responsible**

Andi: Um (...) my mum does know that I have it, I don't think (.) she doesn't really mind because **she trusts me she knows that I'm responsible that I wouldn't do anything stupid**

“Being responsible” was typically linked with not doing silly or careless things and being safe online. Some participants reported that their parents required them to be *friends* on Facebook. Other safety strategies reported included not posting pictures of the inside or outside of their home. Demonstrating “being responsible” offered a path to increased independence and parents not monitoring online activity, as illustrated in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 51: CaSM\_2\_PI\_092 - if you're safe on it**

Sean: Do your parents follow up on what you do, on social media?  
Aroha: Ummm well like **on Facebook she can see everyfing um I do** (.) but she (..) I don't know if no ohh I think she knows I have an Instagram and Snapchat but (.) she doesn't really know what that is so I don't no **she doesn't follow up** (..) on (..) anything.  
Sean: Is she happy that you have a Facebook?  
Aroha: Ummm hhh well **first to begin with she didn't want me to have one and then I kept on asking her?** And then **she said oh well if you're safe on it?** And that was like **our deal**↑ so yep

In this excerpt, it is part of the “deal” that Aroha has with her mother that she if she is safe on social media then she is allowed to use it. 'Doing being responsible' also results



in Aroha's mother not following up on her activities on social media. This becomes important in the context of having fun with friends where interactions might be misunderstood by parents, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5. Aroha's account illustrated how a 'scaffolding' approach (Bruner, 1985) by parents can be used to promote independence and responsibility as normal development from pre-adolescence into adolescence. As discussed earlier in section 4.4.1, "not doing anything stupid" or "being safe" suggests a degree of internalisation of messages or negotiations with parents, and possibly also from teachers and other sources.

#### **4.5.3 'Like a Hammer' - Developing a Sophisticated Perspective**

Participants displayed interest in and enthusiasm for using social media, including extremely positive descriptions as expressed by Tristan below.

##### **Excerpt 52: CaSM\_3\_PI\_001 – the best thing**

Tristan:        No I would never sell it it's the best thing  
                      that's ever happened to me.

Nevertheless, participants had a remarkably balanced view of social media and the online setting for socialising. As discussed in the previous sections, the value of social media was tempered by acknowledgement of troubles associated with the technology (privacy and visibility of information) and with other people (strangers, misunderstandings), reflecting a rejection of simplistic positive or negative formulations connected with social media.

The 'values walk' activity used in the classroom input session at Schools 2 and 3 presented several discussion opportunities to explore participants' perspectives on social media for people their age (see Appendix B). In response to the prompt statements, most class members positioned themselves 'somewhere in the middle,' with some more towards the positive end and others towards the negative end. There may have been some potential for a priming effect in this activity; however, as discussed in Chapter 3, people of this age participate in the broader culture and it is not possible to remove those effects to access a pristine perspective. The diversity in thoughts and opinions reflected many positives as well as concerns from the broader culture. However, as can be observed in the excerpts and analysis presented in this chapter, these opinions were critiqued and evaluated based on participants' own experiences.

The typical evaluation of social media to emerge from the discussion during this activity was one of dynamic balance between the positive and negative aspects. Some class members who stood towards the 'bad' end identified negative factors they thought were more important than good things, but acknowledged good aspects. The converse was true for class members who stood closer to the 'good' end. While the 'values walk' was a fun activity involving a lot of movement and chatter, it created a stimulus for more serious discussion and elicited a sophisticated range of perspectives. Participants rejected both utopian and dystopian caricatures of social media, and also the excessive focus on dangers on social media for children. Their balanced or utilitarian perspective revolved around two factors: the perceived characteristics of the person, and their actions. This was most often articulated as "it depends on the person, and what you do with it." It is important to highlight that participants did not characterise this as a static balance, but, rather, as a dynamic balance that could shift depending on the circumstances.

Rod takes this a step further using a sophisticated 'tool versus weapon' metaphor:

**Excerpt 53: CaSM\_3\_PI\_012 - like a hammer**

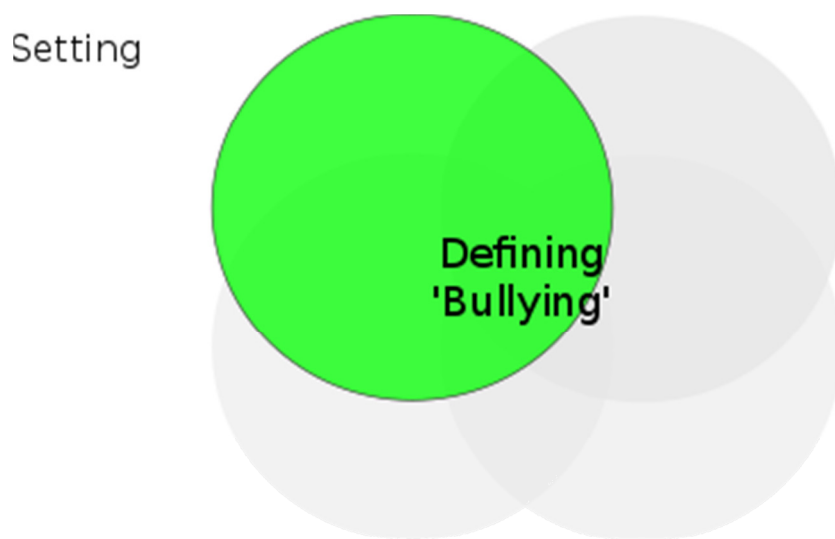
Truc: Hih .HHH what is social med(h)i(h)a.  
Mike: Social media something that you use to connect with friends and family. Whaddo you have to say about social media, [Rod Nee]  
Rod: [Well] I think **if it's used in the right way social media can be amazing. Like a hammer.** ((gestures with toy hammer in hand, looking down at item)) **I(h)f you use a hammer the right way, it can be very useful. But if you go around hitting people in the head** (moving hammer up and down imitating hitting motion) **and breaking their skulls then it's not amazing it hurts people**

Rod has a toy hammer in his hands at the beginning of the recording and taps it in his palm at points throughout the recording. The group had chosen a 'tv chat show' style of presentation for the activity and had put on hats and wigs as part of the presentation. It is not possible to infer either that Rod's selection of the toy hammer as a prop was a deliberate choice to fit with the tool metaphor, or if this account was spontaneous inspiration in response to the question combined with the prop in his hand. Regardless, it presents a rich metaphor in the immediate context of the interaction. The appearance of this metaphor in this excerpt also illuminated an important perspective implicit in the broader data set. There was consistent rejection of both utopian and dystopian views of

social media common in popular and academic discussion, in favour of a view that may be characterised as instrumental or utilitarian. Rod's tool analogy summarised the most consistent evaluation of social media among participants. There was a lot to like about it, even though there were dangers. These could be mitigated through knowledge and skills related to the technological aspects of the setting. Trickier social and emotional dangers could have simple solutions, including using privacy settings, and blocking and deleting unwanted contacts. When there were not technological solutions or the issues were beyond the person's level of social confidence to manage independently, parents and other adults were seen as reasonable sources of support.

#### 4.5.4 Settings Shape Interactions

Setting appeared as the first lens of the interactional model for defining *bullying* I introduced in Chapter 3. As will become evident in the Chapter 5, the affordances and constraints of the setting emerged as salient features for defining *bullying*. In this way, this chapter sets important groundwork about participants' experiences of the environmental context in which they are occur.



**Figure 4.1** An interactional model for defining *bullying* - setting.

Settings shape interactions. Even a blank stage enables and constrains possible interactions. The role of the setting and participants' uses of it form an important component for investigating what is possible and what is important. For this reason, I have positioned it as the first lens of the interactional model to discuss (Figure 4.1). It sets the stage for investigating how participants account for interactions that are potentially perceived as bullying. Too few studies have sought to understand the

influence of setting to ground research into online bullying or cyberbullying.

Participants' accounts of using social media in this study illuminate their complex interactions and negotiations with social media as a setting for social interaction, and also show a sophisticated alertness to its ambiguities, constraints and affordances that may surprise some adults.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Participants in this cohort are growing up with social media in a way that even their older siblings did not. It appears as normal and normative, and in some respects is becoming more normal than older technologies. The 'always been there' quality makes it a challenge for them to conceive of social interaction without social media as one of the options. Socialising online is interwoven with living in a material world and forms another 'place' to maintain relationships with friends and family. In a nutshell, while it is not interesting or accessible to everyone, it forms part of their social landscape.

It was evident in the discussions that people this age are claiming social spaces on social media. Significantly, participants were far from naïve in their characterisation of social media. The hammer metaphor epitomised the general evaluation of social media as neither inherently good nor bad. The effects and experiences were entirely dependent on how people use it. In this collection of accounts, social media is a tool for achieving the desired activity of socialising with friends and having fun. This perspective allows for recognition of dangers and problems alongside perceiving its usefulness. Social media is a setting that requires experience in order to acquire the skills for its safe and effective use. The practical aspect of these skills means that familiarity and exploration are necessary and restriction becomes an unsustainable approach to protecting children against danger, because this prevents acquisition and practice of the needed skills. Social media is valued as an interactional setting because of its capacity to overcome the limits of other social spaces. Significantly, social media is not a replacement for 'in person' interaction, except where that is rendered impossible due to separation, whether that is due to illness, distance, or other reasons. It has some advantages as a springboard for exploration, because if trouble is encountered, it can be escaped through easily accessible tools.

To sum up, social media is a significant setting where children socialise with peers, one where there are distinctive affordances and constraints on interactions. As the

discussion in this chapter illuminates, it has specific characteristics in children's experiences, as evident in participants' accounts. Some of these characteristics are shared with adult experiences of social media as a setting and some of which are particular to children's experiences. Understanding how setting shapes children's interactions online provides an important background to analysis of their accounts of online bullying and their approach to defining *bullying*. In the next two chapters, I focus on the specific 'trouble' of bullying in the context of social media as a key point requiring finer grained analysis.



## Chapter 5

### Action Alone Is Not Enough - *Bullying* as an Activity Category

*French Soldier: I don't want to talk to you no more, you empty-headed animal food trough wiper! I fart in your general direction! Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries! - Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)*

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on activity categories invoked by participants in defining *bullying* in the context of using social media. The cross-sectional analysis illuminated a number of member categories potentially glossed by *bullying*, which I develop in section 5.2 and return to in aspects of section 5.4. While the focus throughout the chapter is on members' category work, sections 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5 adopt a more detailed and fine-grained focus on features of the categories in participants' accounts and how these were made salient to defining *bullying* as an interactional project. This chapter develops the way in which the cross-sectional and fine-grained analyses in the T-shaped analytic framework connect and inform each other. The discussion develops activity categories as the second lens of the interactional model for defining *bullying*, and reveals how action was necessary, but not sufficient, to define *bullying* in participants' accounts.

While the broader literature uses the term cyberbullying, as did some participants, most participants typically referred simply to *bullying*. The analysis focuses specifically on peer interactions. Participants did not use *bullying* to account for problematic adult-child interactions, and so these are out of scope for this chapter. Consistent with an ethnomethodological approach, I have preferenced terms employed by participants, in order to retain focus on these as *member* categories instead of homogenising the diverse terms participants invoke in the data. This was analytically significant for teasing out the category work related to *bullying* being done by participants in their accounts. Analysing members' categorisation in this way also has the advantage of de-reifying categories and enabling examination of their co-construction in interaction (Watson, 2015).

##### 5.1.1 Categorising Activities

A core focus in this study is looking at activities as a locus of categorisation. As discussed in section 3.3.3, membership categorisation analysis commonly focuses on identity or

person categories - "the way people do and recognise descriptions of themselves or others" (Butler & Weatherall, 2006). Sacks' (1972) initial focus on membership categories focused on the types of people someone might turn to for help, and included analysis of rules for categorisation, collections of categories, and features associated with those categories. The rules of categorisation and application emerging from Sacks' work illuminated the cultural inferences contained and invoked in categories that go beyond simple description (Stokoe & Attenborough, 2015). Some analytic investigations have shown how these rules may apply to formulating other phenomena, notably location categories (Lepper, 2000; Schegloff, 1972; Smith, 2013).

In Chapter 3, I introduced Sacks' second hearer's maxim and the most common analysis of activities in membership categorisation, as features of person categories as evidenced in the category-bound activity. The focus on the person, the doer, has resulted in less attention to how activities may also be a locus of categorisation and used to make inferences. One of the unexpected aspects to emerge from my analysis of this data set was that the person category "bully" is conspicuously absent. The category work in participants' accounts of *bullying* centred on categorising the *activity*, rather than the person. While the second hearer's maxim proposes that a doer of a category-bound activity (such as bullying) may be considered to belong to that category (bully), the diverse array of terms used for activities indicated that participants were invoking cultural inferences through these as categories of activity. In addition, the inference rich and representative qualities of bullying as a type of activity that may be applied to many individual actions suggested it may be valuable to consider categorisation practices in relation to activities as well as persons. This analytic shift also offers theoretical insight into the applicability of membership categorisation analysis to category work in relation to activities, actions, or behaviour; this constitutes an unexplored direction in the field (Smith, 2013, personal communication).

Many excerpts in this chapter come from the group analysis discussions held after my initial coding of the peer interviews. This is a logical outcome of the research design, as these discussions included participants in the process of extending the analysis of my initial coding. Questions about *bullying* were a popular choice in the peer interviews, but it was not often clear from the data what specific social knowledge or actions were implicated by *bullying* within either questions or responses. As described in Chapter 3, the group analysis discussions provided a forum for informant checking of my initial



analysis and a critical step to maintain a child-centred standpoint. It explicitly acknowledged my position as a non-member of the group whose knowledges I was analysing, and allowed participants to review my analysis. In addition to the informant checking function, these discussions extended exploration of how participants made sense of *bullying* and the interpretive resources they invoked when accounting for hurtful, harmful or troublesome interactions. As such, they were a vital component for the emergent child-centred standpoint theory. These discussions also generated data, as the participants and I engaged in co-constructing accounts of strategies the participants oriented to for differentiating an activity that was *bullying* from one that was *not bullying*. The inferences invoked by *bullying* as a category suggest that it may function also as a categorisation device: "a collection of categories plus rules of application" (Sacks, 1972, p. 32). The discussion in this chapter is a beginning exploration into how categorisation analysis may be refocused onto categorising activities.

A diverse array of activities potentially categorisable as *bullying* emerged, as did features of activities made salient by participants in their category work. Another advantage of membership categorisation analysis is its capacity to de-reify categories, to counterbalance the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness': "the analyst's attribution of a false substantiality to some social phenomenon, mistakenly conceiving of that phenomenon as a thing, or as thing-like" (Watson, 2015, p. 23). The focus on activity categories contributes to de-reifying categories used for complex social actions that, like *bullying*, have been reified in academic and popular discourses. This application of categorisation analysis creates a space to examine how activities are categorised in interaction, and to look beneath the gloss of *bullying* as a reified concept to what is being obscured.

## 5.2 Beneath the Gloss

### 5.2.1 What Does *Bullying* Obscure?

In this section, I turn to the diverse categories used by participants in the context of defining *bullying*. These categories include terms for activities that may be potentially *bullying* or could be mistaken for *bullying*. It also includes activities that are clearly situated by participants as outside the scope of *bullying*. Mackay (1974) observes that from an ethnomethodological perspective, socialisation is "a gloss that precludes explication of the phenomenon it glosses, i.e. the interaction between adults and

children." By describing learning interactions between adults and children as 'socialisation', their explication is precluded. I propose that bullying is similarly a gloss, precluding explication of troublesome interactions between children. As discussed in Chapter 2, more and more types of unpleasant or unwanted interactions are being subsumed under bullying as an umbrella term. A fundamental trouble with bullying as an umbrella or catch-all is this effect of glossing: namely, that it obscures distinctive aspects of interactions potentially categorisable as *bullying*, regardless of whether the parties themselves would actually categorise them as *bullying*. It also precludes investigation of the range of distinctive uses, meanings and implications of *bullying* for children.

In this study, participants accounted for activities that may be experienced or construed as negative, either by the parties involved or by an external observer, using a wide variety of terms, of which *bullying* was one. Emerging from this collection of terms were two distinct category collections, which I have called *being serious* and *just for fun*. For categorisation analysis, a collection of categories refers to groups of categories that a community of users group together (Sacks, 1972) The names I have used for these collections echo phrases used by participants themselves in the class discussion of the data. *Being serious* included unpleasant, hurtful, or unwanted activities, such as being mean, name calling, *fighting*, and threatening. *Just for fun* included *playfighting*, *joking*, having fun, and *screwing around*. As became evident through the analysis, these sets have blurred and permeable boundaries, that could be complicated by contextual factors. Participants' accounts oriented to activities belonging in either or both sets, depending on interactional context. What emerges in this analysis challenges the practice in the literature of categorising an activity as negative purely on the basis of the abstracted activity and stripped of contextual factors.

This challenge becomes especially relevant for dealing with category troubles and categorising activities as *bullying* or *not bullying*, which will be discussed in later sections of this chapter. Rather than being situated by participants in this study as a pre-eminent category, *bullying* sits within a field of other categories and collections available to account for activities. All of these categories include substantial ambiguity and resist simple classification as bullying in an abstract or absolute sense.

The analysis in this chapter is organised around members' category work in the sense-making activities of defining *bullying*, negotiating category troubles and negotiating

interactional troubles. As was the case in Chapter 4, this chapter incorporates cross-sectional analysis to explore the diverse category work participants oriented to in their accounts. There was some variation between schools in the spontaneous categorising that emerged, with distinctive and apparently unusual uses of words. Two specific categories needing this attention were *snobbing* and *mocking*, which stood out as distinctive activity categories at School 1. They were superficially familiar words with distinctive uses, which suggested they implied specific social knowledge. In order to maintain consistency with the child-centred approach to analysis, it was important to investigate the knowledges to which participants were orienting. As discussed in Chapter 3, it was important to clarify whether they were distinctive terms to the individual school as a community of practice or more widely known. The social knowledge invoked in the process of defining them to a naïve adult proved to be consistent between research sites, and provided a useful demonstration of the suitability of the fieldwork design and analytic framework.

### **5.2.2 Snobbing**

*Snobbing* appeared in verb form rather than the more familiar noun 'snob', meaning a person who considers themselves superior and looks down on others. In this data set it appears exclusively as a category of activities rather than of persons. Where 'a snob' appears in the data, the context indicates it refers to an action rather than a person. As an activity of ignoring another person, this category may appear to be unproblematically negative. Deliberate ignoring could be interpreted as social exclusion, which is often included as bullying in the existing literature. However, as the analysis shows, there is substantial ambiguity in the meanings surrounding this as an activity category. *Snobbing* may categorise activities that may be 'just for fun' or *being serious*, and, as I discuss in section 5.3, not all *being serious* activities were *bullying*.

Wendy offers this comment to a question about fights online:

#### **Excerpt 1: CaSM\_1\_PI\_008 - I only snob people I hate**

Aruna:           What happens when fights breaks out, do you  
                      carry it to school?  
Wendy:           **U:u:h=I only snob the people I hate, (.) pretty  
                      much. But apart from that no.**

For Wendy, *snobbing* constitutes an expression of her dislike. In this excerpt, she characterises herself as a forthright person who refuses to interact with people she hates. This implies that she will respond at least cordially to everyone else, because she “only” snobs the people she hates. It would be simple to infer that the term extends directly from formal meanings of the noun 'snob' transmuted into a verb and possibly blended with the verb 'snub', which has connotations of deliberately ignoring another person as a consequence of snobbery. However, the verb form and distinctive use warranted more focused investigation of how this category makes sense of the interactions it categorises, and particularly to clarify how it may be salient to the category *bullying*. Wendy invokes *snobbing* in the context of fights and people she hates. As such, the negative and aggressive implications created potential connections with *bullying*.

During the group analysis discussion at School 1 (CaSM\_1\_GA\_01), participants presented the following descriptions of interactions that could be called *snobbing*, from both the social media setting and the playground, all of which centred on lack of response to a greeting. For the playground setting, the example was straightforward: “if you yell 'hi' at someone across the playground and they don't reply” (Paula). On social media, confirming lack of response to a greeting becomes more complicated. Receiving or viewing a message may not always be immediate, and this creates problems for describing the activity. Kathryn proposed a candidate explanation for online *snobbing*: “if you messaged them 'hi' and they don't reply then that's snobbing you” (Andi). This was then elaborated by Aruna and Paula, arising from the possibility that the person may not have seen the message yet: “if it says they've seen it then it's snobbing, but if it doesn't say they've seen it, it's not actually snobbing” (Aruna).<sup>11</sup> This activity category is necessarily interactional, in that it is a type of response. In conversation analytic terms, greetings are a type of adjacency pair, where greetings typically solicit a response (Sacks et al., 1974). Therefore, a lack of response becomes accountable and *snobbing* offers a type of activity category to do this. *snobbing* categorises a type of response (or non-response) that disrupts the normative sequence and simultaneously makes sense of it. It

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<sup>11</sup> Some platforms include a function that displays a changed icon when a recipient has viewed a message. At the time of writing, Facebook chat was one example of this, where a tick appears next to a message when it has been viewed. However, this is not a consistent function across all social media, which was subsequently acknowledged in the discussion by participants. The participants clarified that if you could not tell whether the message was being deliberately ignored, then it was not possible to be certain that you were being snobbed.

is categorisable only through the action of ignoring in response to a greeting, whether that was an online message or yelling across the playground.

In the next excerpt, Andi presents a candidate definition of *snobbing* that differentiates it from *bullying*. Aruna then creates a sample demonstration of a snob by seeking attention from someone who has come into the space where the discussion is being held. Unlike Wendy's straightforward approach, where *snobbing* was an activity within the broader context of hostile interactions, here *snobbing* becomes more complex.

#### Excerpt 2: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - demonstrating snobbing

Justin: An:nd so so if I was going to go back to the the other words that you were using as well, snobbing and mocking can so:ometimes be bullying as well?

Andi: **Well not to talking to a person is snobbing but it's not bullying**

Justin: So snobbing's not bullying, okay.  
**((a couple of students who are not classmates walk in to library))**

Aruna: (over shoulder) **Hi Gemma.**  
(visitor ~off camera~ gives no acknowledgement))

Aruna: **Snob! See?**  
(laughter)

Paula: Gemma, hi

Aruna: See? Snob. Hi Gemma

Paula: She normally says hi to me.

Kathryn: And me!

Aruna: She's only talking to the person that's already been messaging her, just her, and they don't talk to the people who's just messaged them

Andi: **Maybe she saw the video camera**

Consistent with the social norms in a school setting about entering a shared space where a class is in progress, the person addressed attends to their task of using the photocopier and does not acknowledge the greeting initiations from Aruna and Paula. Paula's comment that "she normally says hi to me" offered further support for *snobbing* as a more complex interactional activity that is not automatically equivalent to *bullying*. *snobbing* is created through non-response to a greeting as an initiation of an interactional sequence. While this instance occurred in the context of a constructed practical demonstration for a naïve adult, the pattern of persistence in seeking to initiate an interaction suggested it may be an established response to *snobbing*. However, it is not possible to take this beyond speculation, as there are no further instances in this data set with which to compare.

Aruna connects this back to the context of social media by reprising discussion of online messaging that occurred just prior to the start of this excerpt. As was common in this discussion, participants oriented to interpermeability between online and in-person interactions, making comparisons between social settings as might also be made between home and school. In the subsequent turn, Andi returns to the immediate in-person interaction and offers an intersubjective formulation: “maybe she saw the camera”. This supported her candidate definition of *snobbing* as ignoring but not *bullying*. This excerpt demonstrated that there may be contextual reasons for ignoring a greeting or other initiation. *Snobbing* may have implications that are not hostile or aggressive, and are thus not legitimately categorisable as *bullying*.

*Snobbing* as ignoring, as suggested by Andi, may have diverse implications, including benign ones. The term may derive from elitism and social exclusion, as the action of a person who considers themselves as superior and not condescending to interact with their social inferiors. However, as illustrated in these excerpts, as a member category *snobbing* is considerably more ambiguous in both its general meaning and potential association with *bullying*.

### 5.2.3 Mocking

*Mocking* emerged as another distinctive activity category during class input sessions in School 1. Similar to *snobbing*, *mocking* is a sufficiently familiar term for an analyst to be tempted to assume meanings consistent with adult uses. It shares the potential connection with *bullying*, which recommended similar investigation in the group discussion. The next excerpt, from the School 1 group discussion, explicated how *mocking* as a member category in this data set shared attributes with a mockery in a conventional sense. However, the definition constructed here for *mocking* over a number of turns built a picture consistent with the mock impoliteness that is a hallmark of interactional exchanges referred to as teasing, jocular mockery or jocular abuse (Drew, 1987; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2010, 2014; Mills & Babrow, 2003; Parkin, 1980).

#### Excerpt 3: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - explaining mocking

Kathryn:       **When you make fun of other people, like calling them names**  
Paula:            Yeh  
Andi, Bridget, Hazel, Paula, Kathryn (nodding)  
Toby:            Yep. Like (indistinct)

Justin: (1.5) Are there other ways that you might mock someone?

Toby: Brad (indistinct)

Andi: Yeah like mock (indistinct) **what they've done, what they n wearing** or

Paula: Try [to copy ]

Kathryn: [They also mock] your (indistinct)

Paula: **Copy stuff that someone says just like do it in a funny voice**

Justin: Oh okay so kinda like sarcastic sort of

Andi: Yeah

Aruna: **So they think it's serious cos you can't say jokes really quickly**

Bridget: Heheheh yeah

Aruna: Or some person they might real (indistinct)

Justin: (2.0) Where's the line between something being funny and it being not funny. Like how do you [tell,]

Andi: **[some ]times mocking can be just (..) like (.) fun, like when you do the sarcasm thing**

Aruna: **If you're like really good friends with a person then it's not that**

Paula: Mmm yeah.

Making fun, name calling, mimicking, and criticising actions or attire would be familiar practices in the context of teasing or humour. Consistent with broader social understandings about both teasing and humour, these can be experienced as funny and light-hearted, or as serious and hurtful. The blurred boundaries between *just for fun* and *being serious* create a specific category trouble that requires negotiation for making sense of these interactions, as discussed below in section 5.4.

The collaborative building and qualifying of a definition for the focus of interest over a series of turns was a consistent feature of the interaction in the group discussions. The layering of salient components is suggestive of a shared social knowledge about the interactions and categories being defined. In this data set, defining a complex interactional category was not straightforward and often involved input from several people over extended sequences. Each turn tended to add detail to or voice support for candidate definitions that had been proffered. However, as will be notable in later discussion of category troubles, there were times when a deviant case, an apparent contradiction to a candidate definition, was proposed. This required further work, either to reject or amend the categorising or definition to accommodate it. This process of accommodation illustrates how interaction is integral to defining and category work as much as it is to the activities being categorised, and that definitions and making sense of interactions are themselves co-constructed in interaction.

This interactional process of defining may also be understood as an expression of the complexity of the interactions that participants are working to categorise. In the case of *mocking*, it includes self-deprecation in an explicitly humorous way, as demonstrated by Aruna and Wendy below. The next excerpt comes from one of the peer interviews where the focus was on the 'personal documentary' task, rather than questions about social media. Wendy's facial expression and the drawling tone used by both parties created a humorous effect, suggesting boredom with the banal familiarity of the exercise.

#### Excerpt 4: CaSM\_1\_PI\_009 - mocking myself

Aruna: What was th- best part o- th- term.  
 Wendy: Production.  
 Aruna: Why.  
 Wendy: Cuz **I got to wear makeup and I got to wear a dress and it was really funny (0.5) -s I kept mocking myself ((wide grin, exaggerated eye roll))**

Wendy's exaggerated facial expression and drawl combined with the drawn out delivery of Aruna's question accentuate the self-mockery she offers in her response. By positioning the wearing makeup and a dress here as funny, Wendy implies that they are unusual for her and thus are presented as legitimate candidate activities for *mocking*. This category work could be considered as pre-emptive self-mocking to circumvent *mocking* by others that may have a more serious edge.

Other accounts of *mocking* focused on explicitly negative or aggressive interactions. Melissa's conceptualisation of *mocking* in the excerpt below was absolutely negative. Her account picks up the cruel edge of *mocking* where making fun of the other person is not funny to them.

#### Excerpt 5: CaSM\_1\_PR\_01 - 'mocking' is always mean

Justin: How would you describe (.) what mocking is,  
 Melissa: Um (1.8) **Mocking's jus- like if there's something wrong wif you people mock you:u (.)**  
 'specially on Facebook they go (2.0) really far  
 Justin: Mhm? Like, can you give me an exa:ample?  
 Melissa: Um people mocking you? [Um]  
 Justin: [Yeah]  
 Melissa: <I've been mocked by> someone in this class  
 Justin: Mhm  
 Melissa: And they they (..) they don't really stop (.) until you give in (.) [really]  
 Justin: [Mhm]  
 (background noise starts)



Justin: Okay umm (2.5) without necessarily like naming names or anything like that can you describe to me what happened that made it mocking?  
 Melissa: Well I put a (1.5) post up as I normally do,  
 Justin: Mhm  
 Melissa: **And this person just came in and was being really offensive and rude and mean** (throat clear)

*Mocking* is not benign or light-hearted here. Melissa starts from stigmatised personal attributes “something wrong wif you” that function as the subject of *mocking*, enacted by being “offensive”, “rude”, and “mean”. Her characterisation of *mocking* highlights the hostile and hurtful potential within actions like name calling, copying in a funny voice, and *mocking* over another's actions or attire. In an informal discussion during a classroom activity between Melissa and myself, Melissa explicitly categorised the event in the above excerpt as *bullying* (fieldwork note 19/9/13). See also discussion of this excerpt below in 5.3.1.

*Mocking* did not appear spontaneously in the data from School 2. This presented analytic questions about whether it was a localised category at School 1. As a means to clarify this, I included a question about *mocking* for the participant-researcher interviews at School 2. The next excerpt presents a typical example of the consistency in characteristics attributed to *mocking* by participants across iterations.

#### Excerpt 6: CaSM\_2\_PR\_04 - defining ‘mocking’

Justin: What do you what do you understand by mocking?  
 Like how would you define it for someone.  
 Jo: like define the word mock? Or  
 Justin: Yep  
 Jo: **Someone being teased kind of about something they could have done in the past, or yeah.**  
 Justin: Mmhmm  
 Jo: **Or sometimes like people with disabilities would get mocked. Yeah**  
 Justin: **Is it always mean or is it sometimes joking or ...**  
 Jo: **Yeah it is sometimes it's sometimes sarcastic or sometimes joking but normally mockery I think is kind of true it's more true mockery than sarcastic mockery**  
 Justin: Ah okay so by true you mean they're being serious?  
 Jo: **Yeah. Serious mockery.**

Jo's use of qualifiers for *mocking* as joking, sarcastic, true or serious illuminates further the ambiguity connected with *mocking* as an activity category. There are specific

personal attributes that can be mocked, including “people with disabilities or something they could have done”. In another participant-researcher interview from School 2 (CaSM\_2\_PR\_01), Kieran offered a similar set of characteristics, summarised here. *Mocking* can simply be joking between friends; however, it can have a hostile edge. It can also be mean or serious, with the implication that this is not between friends. Kieran added a further layer to this complex picture through an account of one case where friends *mocking* each other later turned serious and became a fight. People can be mocked for less skillful performance, as a general principle; however, *mocking* can be done to “guys who do Stage Challenge”.<sup>12</sup> Boys who do dance or drama will be mocked for breach of social norms, in this instance heteronormativity, with an exemption for skilled performance: “if they were really good at it”.

Notably absent from these definitions is the notion of intention. Crucially for these groups of participants, identifying intent was not necessary to legitimate categorising of an interaction as *mocking*. Being mean, making fun of, copying, and joking are presented here as aspects of interaction, rather than making any claim to intersubjectivity that would be needed to infer the intent of the party doing the *mocking*. This is consistent with the defining of *snobbing*, as seen in the previous section. It did not matter why a person was ignoring someone for it to be *snobbing*. This is an interesting contrast with the inference in the more conventional understanding of ‘snob’ and ‘snub’ arising from a sense of personal superiority. Similarly, here, *mocking* as an activity is constituted within the interaction. In participants’ accounts, defining *mocking* did not rely on knowing what the party doing the *mocking* wanted to convey. While there are aspects of *mocking* that mesh well with the conventional definition of bullying, these excerpts point to a marked ambiguity in *mocking* as a category of activity. It would be problematic to propose simple equivalence between the categories of *mocking* and *bullying*.

#### **5.2.4 Dramas**

*Dramas* was a category unique in the data from Iteration 2. It is worth noting, as was evident in the cases of *mocking* and *snobbing*, the lack of mention does not necessarily indicate that it was unknown at the other schools. Timothy resorts to a popular culture reference in order to capture the distinctive characteristics of this as a category.

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<sup>12</sup> Stage Challenge is a popular New Zealand dance and drama production competition for schools and community groups <http://www.stagechallenge.co.nz/about-stage-challenge/>

### Excerpt 7: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - 'Shortland Street'

Timothy: **It's like intensity kind of? Combined with like arguing and gets all (3.0) like lying and keeping secrets (..)**

Justin: Yep

Timothy: (1.0) **Shortland Street** (looking down).

Justin, Jo, Kieran, Drew, others: laughing

Justin: And Shortland Stre[et]

Jo: [Um]

Justin: Yeh

Jo: Like Aroha's one like **if someone takes something the wrong way?** Then they normally start having fights and everything

Justin: Yeh (0.5) **So it uh turns into dramas like (..) soapie dramas (..) and little things turn into big stuff ((nods, mouthing 'yes'))**

Jo

Justin: Okay. Yeh?

Aroha: Oh and sometimes if there's like a big fight on a comment and then like n you can think it's like broke up their whole friendship and they go back to school and it's all normal again sometimes?

Jo: Ye[ah]

Aroha: [Li]ke

Justin: Oooo

Aroha: **Like like I see some people like that have put me in a post and then they come back to school like all friends again and I'm like what was all that about?** Sometimes? Some[times it's like that]

Justin: [Ohhh

The comparison with popular television soap opera *Shortland Street* suggests a level of fraught and emotive interpersonal interactions out of proportion with everyday life. The soap opera genre condenses everyday interactions such as gossip, disputes, alliances, and romance into tightly scripted high drama television show episodes at an intensity that is anything but ordinary. Timothy's initial comment was highly dramatic, almost melodramatic, and very well timed. His evocative listing of problematic interactions, spoken in a heavily dramatic vocal tone with pauses, builds tension to match his topic. His final comment "Shortland Street" follows a dramatic pause and is delivered in a deadpan fashion. The laughter from many class members in response suggests that this was more than just a funny comment. There was an element of knowing laughter, acknowledging multiple layers of meaning conveyed in Timothy's description. It described the engaging and superficial qualities of *dramas*, cleverly building through a sequence of categories that culminated in a recognisable and popular example of the soap opera genre in New Zealand.

*Dramas* become an echo of soap opera melodrama written into participants' lives through the machinations of peer social networks. Jo draws in an element from an earlier point in the discussion to extend the range of *dramas* to include “someone takes something the wrong way”. This is marked as the point at which something that could be a joke can then turn into a fight or something more serious. Similarly, fights can break out online and seem serious to the point where it may seem like the friendship has broken up, only to “come back to school all friends again”. One of the common dramatic devices in the soap opera is the cliffhanger at the end of the episode, followed by an unexpected resolution through the plot of the next episode. The element of disorientation and confusion involved in these sudden changes in the significance of interactions means that *dramas* is a loaded term with which to categorise these interactions. For participants, they may be as simultaneously trivial and intense as the plot lines and twists in a television drama crafted to draw viewers in and keep them engaged.

These activity categories - *snobbing*, *mocking*, and *dramas* - constitute three examples of activities that are potentially categorisable as *bullying*. For each, however, there are distinctive features that render the activities more specific in terms of their interactional qualities. The terms appeared in participants' accounts to be more useful than generically using *bullying* for categorising some troublesome peer interactions. Each illuminates the contingent and ambiguous dimensions salient to the category work, namely that the initiating activity may be unpleasant, unwanted, hurtful, or harmful. However, this potential does not make them equivalent to *bullying*. As I discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter 6, categorising an activity as *bullying* creates its own troubles in interactional and social terms.

### **5.2.5 “Just for Fun”**

The collection *just for fun* introduces yet another layer of complexity to activity categorising. The boundaries between *just for fun* and *being serious* are substantially blurred and contingent on the interactional context. This collection revolved around the notion of having fun, usually within friendship groups. It collects together terms like *playfighting*, *screwing around*, and *joking*. The distinguishing feature of *just for fun* categories is that any conflict within the interaction is presented and received as not serious. It does not preclude challenges to a person's skill, competence, appearance or other personal attributes. In the next excerpt, Cam engages in an extended explanation

to me as a naïve adult inquirer and non-member of the community of users how name calling or insulting may be categorised as something other than *bullying*. Immediately prior to this excerpt, Toby proposes that categorising an interaction as *bullying* or not is contingent on the other person being his friend or someone he knows. The relational context is also a salient component of this co-constructed definition of these *just for fun* categories (see also discussion of this excerpt in section 6.2.2). This excerpt illustrated clearly the role of contextual factors in distinguishing when activities that may appear superficially to be *bullying* are not categorised as such by the parties involved.

**Excerpt 8: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - it may seem like bullying but is not**

Cam: And if like me and him ((pointing to Toby)) (.)  
if we were playing the same game

Justin: Yep.

Cam: **and we were like like doing funny stuff like  
we'll bully each other but just for fun**

Justin: Oh okay.

Cam: **and we'll think that's not bullying? And then  
bullying is like some random person just comes  
and says [something ]**

Brad: [And says you're a ] beeeeep

Cam: Yeas hhheh

Justin: Okay  
(laughter, indistinct)

Cam: you're really bad at this game

Brad: You're beep bad at this

Aruna: (indistinct)

Cam, Toby, Brad (laughter, indistinct)

Aruna: I've got more talent than you in my little  
finger than you have in your [whole body]

Justin: [Okay], so is there  
(...) So if I've got this if I've got this  
right, this uh it is about being mean and it's  
about how (...) the other person feels?

Andi: Yep

Justin: An:nd (..) y'know if you you're just kind of  
like calling each other names and you know each  
other really well and you know the other  
person's not going to take it seriously that's  
not

Toby: Mmm

Cam: Yep

Justin: bullying?

Toby: **Playfighting.**

Justin: **Playfigh[ting. ]**

Toby: **[Like Play]fighting**

Justin: So playfighting is differ[ent.]

Brad: [(indistinct)] [funny]

Aruna: **[We]**  
**call it screwing around.**

In other words, actions alone do not constitute *bullying*. The interactional context, including the speaker's relationship to the recipient, is integral to defining an action as *bullying*. Cam introduces the notion of doing 'funny stuff' in the context of an online game being "like bullying" but with the important qualifier of it being "just for fun." This activity includes a shared understanding that it is not *bullying*. Subsequent turns by Brad and Aruna take up this category work through reference to activities of name calling, indicated by their insertion of the "beep" sound commonly used to censor swear words in audio media, and taunts over lack of skill. Aruna's final comment "we call it screwing around" continues the category work as playful interaction, and simultaneously orients to generation by instructing a naïve adult about an in-group term assumed to be unknown to adults. The categorising Cam initiated builds through these subsequent turns as a collaborative process to explain how these activities are potentially categorisable as *bullying* but are not legitimately categorisable as such. Insults in the form of taunts or name calling involving profanity would be recognisable as common features connected with bullying and other aggressive or hostile interactions. The significance for defining *bullying* of the account in this extract is that this group of participants proposed that these actions, in themselves, are not the defining feature. In this excerpt, the speakers co-construct categories eventually named as *playfighting* or *screwing around*. This negative comparison approach to defining *bullying* implies engagement with broader cultural definitions of bullying, including one of the simplified approaches of listing behaviours as discussed in Chapter 2, and by use of the word itself. Simultaneously, it poses a direct challenge to such methods for identifying bullying, particularly by external (adult) observers, by negative comparison. The significance of the relational context, that these interactions occur and are understood in particular ways by friends, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Analysing the methods that the participants used to co-construct definitions illuminates how a range of distinct member categories have become glossed by *bullying*. It is significant that these categories were explicitly distinguished from the category *bullying* in participants' accounts. As will continue to become evident through the remainder of this chapter, this category work is neither haphazard nor overinclusive, and displays an orderliness in categorising that is obscured through imposition of an adult-generated definition of bullying in existing research. In the next section, I focus more specifically on participants' approaches to defining *bullying* as such.

## 5.3 Category Work: Defining *Bullying*

### 5.3.1 Defining *Bullying*

There was a risk that the topic of bullying in the context of social media might not be raised spontaneously by participants in this study. However, it proved to be a point of notable interest during the initial class activities and participants' choice of questions in the peer interviews. Nevertheless, although this was such a strong focus in the interviews, the typical response from participants in the peer interviews to the question 'have you been bullied on social media?' was 'no'. What was implied by the term *bullying* in both question and answer remained unstated and it was unclear what definitions were implicated. This negative response to being asked about being bullied may indicate that they are engaged in face-work connected with the negative social implications of being a bully or being victimised rather than not having had the experience (Goffman, 1967; Lim et al., 2012). Nevertheless, participants from each school did account for experiences of bullying on social media. These accounts present a number of candidate definitions of *bullying*, including repeated threats of physical violence and intimidation, to nasty comments, to name-calling and insults situated in the context of game-playing banter. In this excerpt, Erik's account of being threatened presents an activity that is easily identifiable as belonging to the category *cyberbullying*.

#### Excerpt 9: CaSM\_3\_PI\_034 - they were gonna come and kill me

Derek: Have you ever been targeted in cyberbullying,  
Erik: (1.0) Once.  
Derek: (1.0) What happened.  
Erik: (1.0) **I um I got told to eff off like hard out  
an:d (0.8) they uh (.) they were gonna come and  
kill me:e** (1.0) so I unfriended them (1.0) and  
made a new account. (nods)  
Derek: What happened after that.  
Erik: (1.0) I didn't mm hear from them ever again.  
(1.5) Turns out they're actually in Auckl(h)and  
heh. (smiles)  
Derek: Are you scared that that might happen?=  
Erik: =No  
Derek: Somebody might come and kill you?  
Erik: No. (3.0) Coz I don't put out information like  
that so people can, unless they know me they  
know where I live and they can come and get me.

Erik recounts a rare but extreme experience. It becomes hearable as *cyberbullying* courtesy of the elements of threats, swearing, intensity, risk of physical violence and

unknown interlocutors and that he took steps to prevent it from recurring. While it was a single event, the threats of physical harm were intense enough to warrant unfriending the person and making a new account. His use of extreme case formulation (“hard out”) and intense threats (“gonna kill me”) raise the stakes, and position this as an account of serious trouble (Pomerantz, 1986). This is reflected also in the delivery of the telling, evident in Erik’s extended pauses. These pauses are longer than the ‘thinking time’ pauses in his other responses to being interviewed, where the focus is on lighter topics (Benwell, 2005). Erik’s account defines *bullying* as an extreme case. Of all the possible types of negative or aggressive interactions he may have experienced online, he identified that he had only been bullied this one time.

Melissa presents another approach to defining *bullying*. The following excerpt also appears in section 5.2.3 in the discussion of *mocking*. The excerpt is partly reproduced here for convenience to illustrate the overlap between categories when the focus is on negative interactions and *being serious*. Namely, whilst not all *mocking* constitutes *bullying*, in some cases *mocking* can fall into this category.

**Excerpt 10a: CaSM\_1\_PR\_001 - offensive and rude and wouldn't stop**

Melissa: <I've been mocked by> someone in this class  
Justin: Mhm  
Melissa: And they they (..) they don't really stop (.)  
          until you give in (.) [really]  
Justin: [Mhm]  
(background noise starts)  
Justin: Okay umm (2.5) without necessarily like naming  
          names or anything like that can you describe to  
          me what happened that made it mocking?  
Melissa: Well I put a (1.5) post up as I normally do,  
Justin: Mhm  
Melissa: **And this person just came in and was being  
          really offensive and rude and mean** (throat  
          clear)  
Justin: hhh  
Melissa: **And they wouldn't stop so I told them to stop  
          and it made it worse**

Melissa describes the interaction as “being really offensive and rude and mean”. Later in the interview, she offers the following clarification.

**Excerpt 10b: CaSM\_1\_PR\_002 – mocking is pretty much bullying**

Melissa: Well (1.0) sss=mocking is pretty much bullying  
          but (.) not um (.) not snobbing because they're  
          not saying anything to anyone.



In this excerpt, Melissa’s comment illustrates how activities that are hurtful or harmful may not be categorised as *bullying* explicitly (Melissa categorises the event as *mocking*), and yet may index *bullying* as a collection. Such activities may be hurtful, but this contrasts with Erik’s account of threats of physical violence. What is not clear is how Melissa positions herself in relation to her earlier example of people being mocked if there is something wrong with them. Her account focuses on her doing what she normally does and the other party intruded on her online space (“just came in”), started doing hurtful things towards her, and escalated when she asked them to stop. Melissa indexes hurtfulness through predicates such as “being offensive and rude and mean” and “it made it worse”. In this approach to defining *bullying*, Melissa orients to negative impact (hurtfulness) as the grounds for making a case for the incident to be categorised as *bullying* and that it was a clear action committed, rather than *snobbing* which, as discussed in 5.2.2, appears more ambiguous. This appears to contrast with Erik’s response to intimidation and threats in the previous excerpt, where he denies any negative impact.

Even apparently inconsequential events could be accounted for as *cyberbullying*. In this third example, Ray proffers an account that remains consistent with mainstream definitions of cyberbullying that focus on elements of behaviour, in this instance name calling.

**Excerpt 11: CaSM\_3\_PI\_004 - basically *cyberbullying* everyone in the clan**<sup>13</sup>

Tristan: Have you ever been cyberbullied. [how.]  
 Ray: [U: u]u:hh  
 (2.0)  
 Chris: (indistinct)=  
 Stan: =De[fine cyberbullying.]  
 Ray: **[People have called ] the (.) clan (.) mean↑  
 which is basically cyberbullying↑ everyone in  
 the clan, except they can't hear [it,]**  
 Tristan: [What's] the  
 clan called again?=  
 Ray: =so I (0.5) It's called (.) (indignant tone) Why  
 am I going to give that?

Ray takes name calling, an activity commonly included in lists of bullying and cyberbullying behaviours, and transposes it into the context of an online multiplayer game chat. The chat space functions as a general and unrestricted social area where a

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Clan’ – here refers to the popular online multiplayer game “Clash of Clans.” The game incorporates a social dimension by encouraging the building of teams (clans) to play against other teams

range of activities may be carried out, including talking with friends and clan members, recruiting new clan members, and banter between rivals in the game. While Stan challenges the statement of the interview question (“define cyberbullying”), Ray responds with a candidate activity that could be characterised as *cyberbullying* - someone else insulting the clan by suggesting that the clan is mean. Ray's thoughtful steps in constructing the logic in his answer are marked out by micropauses. These emphasise the logical steps between his observation about name calling and the conclusion that this allegation was effectively *cyberbullying* all clan members. This allegation could in turn be interpreted as being mean to everyone in the clan, whether the individuals in it had acted meanly or not. An additional quirk in this account is that the allegation (that the clan is mean) suggested that the clan itself is at risk of being accused of cyberbullying, as well as being cyberbullied. However, in his repair (“except they can't hear it”) Ray poses a trouble for this categorisation. In the style of the Buddhist koan about whether a tree falling in the woods makes a sound if no-one were there to hear it, Ray signals a category trouble about whether the activity can be legitimately categorised as *cyberbullying* if the targets did not receive it.

These three excerpts present accounts of incidents that are all categorised by the speakers as *bullying* or *cyberbullying*. Each has markedly different characteristics and different relationships to the conventional definition of bullying. Whilst all are accounting for verbal interactions, the activities being accounted for in this category work are very different. This diversity could be dismissed as evidence of the problem of over-inclusivity. It would be difficult to argue that Ray's account of name calling in a game is of the same significance or severity as Erik's account of specific threats against him personally. However, each of the accounts reflects the range of approaches to defining and identifying *bullying* found elsewhere. The variety of activities being categorised as *bullying* raised useful analytic questions about participants' candidate definitions for *bullying* or *cyberbullying*, and the qualities they invoke. The group analysis discussions offered a forum to investigate with participants how they used *bullying* and other categories to make sense of hurtful, harmful, or fraught interactions. These discussions offered insights into the interactional resources and characteristics of the shared understandings implicated in participants' accounting for *bullying*.

Given the prevalence of bullying commonly reported in the existing literature, it was surprising that participants nominating *bullying* or *cyberbullying* as an important aspect

of talking about social media for people of the participants' ages and yet tended not to account for their experiences as *bullying*. This presented an opportunity to refine the focus for this study onto ways that participants went about defining *bullying* as part of how they made sense of negative experiences online. I included questions in the group analysis discussions about what characteristics participants used to differentiate between something that was *bullying* and something that was *not bullying*. Three features stood out in how participants made sense of 'doing' this defining: negative impact, *being serious*, and *keeping on going*. These emerged from the constructivist grounded theory coding process as consistent across the diversity of participants' experiences. Focus on the category terms used by participants themselves forces the analysis to attend to participants' methods of doing the defining and resists abstracting away from the interactional context in which the categories were produced, as well as resisting the imposition of an *a priori* definition. In the next three sections, I examine negative impact, *being serious* and *keeping on going* as explicated by participants in the activity of defining *bullying*.

### 5.3.2 Negative Impact

Negative impact stood out as a key feature for typical approaches to defining *bullying* across the data set. This may seem common-sense, given that bullying is generally viewed as aggressive behaviour causing hurt or harm. However, it was the interactional qualities of this feature as these emerged in participants' accounts that were critical to the activity of defining an interaction as *bullying* or *not bullying*. Participants proposed that aggressive behaviour in isolation was not sufficient to categorise an incident as *bullying*. Excerpts 12 - 15 below are from group analysis discussions where the focus was on how participants differentiated between *bullying* and *not bullying*.

#### Excerpt 12a: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - depends how it affects the other person

Justin: So, okay, I think I've got what snobbing is and what mocking is. How hemm you mentioned bullying a little bit. How do those things connect with bullying? Or do they?

Bridget: Matters how you feel really ...

Justin: How you feel

Andi: **Depends how it affects the other person.**

Justin: Oh okay.

Andi: **If you're trying to do it in a mean way then I spose it is, like if you've meant it in a mean way.**

Aruna: **Like if you're being serious**

Andi elaborates on this idea of how it affects the other person a little later in the discussion as a criterion for differentiating *bullying* from something that is not *bullying*. Although Andi introduces the idea that if someone intended the action “in a mean way” then it might be *bullying*, the distinguishing feature remains the other person's response, as evident in the next section of this excerpt.

**Excerpt 12b: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01**

Andi: If the other person is offended by it I think that's bullying  
Justin: Yep  
Brad: Yeh  
Andi: **If the other person isn't offended then it's not (.) bullying. But if they are, it is.**

As previously identified in discussion of 'just for fun' in 5.2.5, according to the participants' categorisations, action alone is not enough to categorise an interaction as *bullying*. The instigating action is only one part of the interaction, that is, it is necessary but not sufficient. The key to categorising an interaction is the receipt.

This analysis illuminated a distinctly interactional dimension to defining *bullying* and revealed a practical conversation analytic perspective in participants' attention to qualities of the interaction. The response of the other person as affected or not affected is a necessary part of the interaction, and arguably of greater significance than the instigating action for categorising the interaction as *bullying* or not. Andi's proffer of “in a mean way” in Excerpt 12a points to a related interactional feature, *being serious*, which I discuss in more detail in the next section. Thus, Andi orients to intent as an influence on the potential receipt of the action, but as evident in the continuation in Excerpt 12b, it does not determine the receipt. As I discuss further in section 5.3.3, *being serious* is an important feature for defining *bullying* but it is not a guarantee of a “being affected by it” or “being offended by it” response.

The following excerpts from School 3 expand these ideas further and highlight intersubjective elements that remained implicit in the previous excerpt.

**Excerpt 13: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - it's really about the person on the other end of it**

Daria: Okay, **so when you know the person (.) well, and you know when their boundaries are ((drawing lines on floor with hand)) and you know if they cross boundaries then they'll (indistinct)**

**something bad and then you would know they're actual (.) bad**  
 Justin: Okay so **there's something about knowing the person and understanding what they mean? (0.3)**  
 Okay Eddie.  
 Eddie: It's kind of not really about the people that send it? It's about what kinda what Daria said is (.) if you know the person or you know about them you know the types of things? And **it's really about how the person on the other (0.8) end of it not the person (..) doing the cyberbullying the person receiving it it's it's if that affects them or not?**  
 Justin: Ah ok[kay]  
 Eddie: **[And] that's how you can tell if it's cyberbullying if it affects them then therefore that's bullying because you know that it's gonna (0.5) to make them feel bad.**

Eddie emphasises the salience of impact, partially aligning with Daria's proposal of overstepping boundaries, which requires knowing the other person and how far you can go. Eddie shifts the focus from the instigator needing to know how far they can go to suggest that it is not about the person doing the action - intention becomes irrelevant. How it affects the other person is the determining factor. Eddie uses similar words to Andi in the preceding example ("it's if that affects them or not"), although at the end of the excerpt Eddie assigns responsibility to the instigator to know in advance if an action is going to make the other person feel bad.

A little later in the discussion, Rod reasserts the primacy of receipt, that how an action is received and responded to provides the key to interpreting the interaction, and legitimates the categorisation of an interaction as *bullying*. It is the response demonstrating how the action is being treated by the recipient that makes it categorisable, either as *bullying* or as some other kind of interaction.

**Excerpt 14: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - it's however the person takes it**

Rod: Nuhnunuh bullying's whatever eh whether bullying or cyberbullying **it's however the person being bullied (..) or not bullied however they take [it?]**  
 Eddie: [See?]

Interactions may seem like *bullying* to an outsider, but in these accounts the relational context is crucial to establishing the meaning-in-interaction of the event (see Chapter 6 for further elaboration of this point). Participants frequently oriented to the potential for interactions potentially categorisable as *bullying* to be misinterpreted by either the

recipient or an observer. The problem of interpretation is a type of interactional trouble that I discuss in more detail in section 5.5 below.

Similarly, when personal experiences were accounted for as *bullying* or *cyberbullying*, negative impact in the form of being hurt or frightened was the key to allowing the interaction to be recognised as *bullying*. This is evident the accounts in section 5.3.1, and in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 15: CaSM\_3\_PI\_009 – how did you feel**

Rod: =have either of you ever been cyberbullied†  
Mike: [heheh]  
Noah: [hehehe] yes I have quite a few times actually  
Rod: **Oo how did you feel when you were being socia-  
cyberbullied,**  
Noah: Well, the people were using inappropriate  
language? And also were um (0.5)  
Mike: Putting inappropriate pictures.  
Noah: Yeah (1.0) and cyberbullying me in gener[al]  
Rod: [yeah]  
**but how did you feel,** were you sad were you  
angry? Did you want to go rip their heads off?  
Noah: **Umm I was actually quite hurt?**  
Rod: Yeah  
Noah: Yeah

Noah's account was one of a few instances of direct “yes” answers to the question of “have you been bullied” in the peer interviews. Counter to the focus on behaviour in adult perspectives, Rod’s follow-up question did not focus on what happened, but on “how did it make you feel”. Even though Noah turns to what happened, Rod treats recount of the instigating actions as secondary and almost inconsequential. The salient feature for establishing this as an account of *cyberbullying* rests on Noah's response, which Rod pursues in repeating and elaborating on his follow up question “yeah but how did you feel”.

Conversely, as we see in the following excerpt, if no-one gets hurt then potential categorisation of an activity as *cyberbullying* falls over.

**Excerpt 16: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - if no-one gets hurt**

Justin: so if they don't mean it and if most people know  
it's a joke then it doesn't count as  
cyberbullying,  
Natalie: No cos  
Justin: Okay so  
Kiri: Oh wait

Madison: **If no-one's getting hurt then it's not really cyberbullying**

This analysis illuminates the pivotal role played by negative impact for the activity of defining *bullying* and categorising an interaction as *bullying* or *not bullying*. The primacy of receipt in these accounts provided a key point of difference with the focus of the conventional definition on negative acts. An action may be aggressive or mean, but this is not enough for it to be categorisable as *bullying*; that is, it is necessary but not sufficient. The receipt, demonstrating how the other person responds to the action, is necessary to complete an understanding of the interaction. This feature also clearly demonstrates attention to *bullying* as an interaction.

### 5.3.3 *Being Serious*

*Being serious* formed another key aspect of an interaction for defining *bullying* and for contrasting it with other kinds of activities. However, while it was treated by participants as a step towards an interaction changing from potentially to actually categorisable as 'bullying,' it did not have the same crucial defining role as "how it affects the other person". As a description in participants' accounts, *being serious* has features that draw on notions of intent and cognitive attribution. However, for this analysis it is important to focus on its role as a quality of interaction. In the excerpts below it will become evident that *being serious* features as a quality of interactions that is most often attributed to the instigator of an action, as in "they were being serious".

#### Excerpt 17: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - if you know them you can tell

Kieran: If you **know them from school or something then you'd be able to tell** if they were joking  
Justin: mmhmm  
Aroha: [yeah coz]  
Kieran: **[But if you] had [no idea] who they are**  
Aroha: [friends]  
Kieran: like someone from another school you'd probably think  
Justin: Yep  
(off camera side conversation - indistinct)  
Kieran: **it was being serious**  
Justin: So knowing the perso- knowing the other person and knowing how they usually talk is that is that makes th- makes a difference?  
Kieran: yeah  
Justin: Yep  
Aroha: **And if there was like a group chat and um somebody like started beating (?) up on one**

**person like but they started it as a joke but everybody joined in as like a serious thing**

In this excerpt, Kieran responds to a question about how to tell whether someone is *joking* or *being serious* by contrasting known and unknown people as a point of differentiation. He proposes that knowing the other person and their usual behaviour offers useful context for interpreting the interaction. It highlights a number of intersubjective dilemmas created by the inherent ambiguity involved in discerning intent. However, it is not serious intent as such that makes an action definable as *bullying*, but that interpreting an action as *serious* or *not serious* may influence how the recipient feels about it. Aroha's elaboration at the end of the excerpt demonstrates the dynamic quality of interactions, where additional parties joining the interaction can create *being serious* and hurtful out of something that started as a joke.

Chloe orients to another dimension of *being serious* developing through an interaction that did not start out as serious.

**Excerpt 18: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - started as joking but turned into *bullying***

Chloe:            sort of ta- it's sort of **like it's been going on for like six months and like sort of now it's turned into bullying because it's not like it's not like they were sort of joking around with each o- each other**

Justin:           mm

Chloe:           and **then like it started to get serious**

Interactions develop over successive turns or occasions, and here Chloe describes how they may start out as *joking* and become *serious*. Duration becomes an additional consideration, where these dynamic shifts over an extended time have resulted in a gradual evolution from “sort of joking around” into the interaction becoming a non-joke. As evident in the next excerpt, seriousness can also be introduced by the recipient through “taking it seriously”, independently of the seriousness or otherwise of the instigator.

**Excerpt 19: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - being serious**

Phoebe:           Um **some people take it um seriously** and some people take it as a joke



Phoebe's comment here was in response to a question about how to tell the difference between an action that was *bullying* and one that was not. How "people take it" is a key defining feature, where *being serious* was often paired with the notion of 'taking it seriously'. This highlighted the role of receipt and the significance of interpretation. Consistent with the previous examples, the instigator's intent (*serious* or *joking*) was secondary to how an action was interpreted. Similar to Madison's comment in Excerpt 16 above, Phoebe proposed that impact is predicated on interpretation.

A problem associated with *being serious* or taking things seriously as features of *bullying* is that they can be features of other interactions as well, including 'fights', *arguments*, and *dramas*. These other member categories of interaction could be seen to sit alongside and sometimes overlap with *bullying* as belonging to a collection of hurtful or troublesome interactions. However, it was clear that participants did not position them as synonymous with *bullying*.

**Excerpt 20: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - friends don't bully**

Ravi: Usually friends fight not like (.) if it's your friends you fight but you don't bully each other

Ravi's statement summarises a major quality of peer interactions made salient by participants, one that plays a vital role in addressing the problem of interpretation for any interaction that is potentially categorisable as *bullying*. Relational context is crucial to whether participants defined an activity as *bullying* or another category, whether that was *playfighting*, *joking*, *dramas*, or *fights*. As such, *being serious* has links to negative impact, as 'taking things seriously' may be seen as interwoven with 'being (negatively) affected' by the interaction, as discussed earlier. Here, Lila teases out the implications for friends' activities being accountable as *joking*, compared with similar actions by people who are not known.

**Excerpt 21: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - if you don't know them it affects you more**

Lila: **When I post pictures and stuff like there're those people like my friends and they say 'oh that picture sucks' n stuff**  
Eddie: Do you have a Facebook account?  
Lila: Huh  
Eddie: Do you have Facebook  
Lila: No I have Google Plus  
Mike: Google Plu:us  
Eddie, Daria, Kiri: (laughing)

Lila: But you know that they're joking we do that all the time so it doesn't really matter  
Justin: Okay  
Lila: But then there are those people that actually say 'oh that picture sucks' but you don't actually know them and it kind of affects you even more

Lila's comment elaborates on the connections between 'being affected' or *being serious* and knowing or not knowing the other person, as part of a longer discussion on relational context as salient to experiencing a comment as *cyberbullying*. This foregrounds the notion that the recipient's relationship with the person who does the 'saying' makes a difference to its impact. Lila specifically connects friends with joking as an activity that involves a shared understanding. She proffers "that picture sucks" as an example of an online action potentially categorisable as *bullying*. However, the receipt depends on relational context, whether it is from a friend or a stranger. Not knowing the other person creates a greater degree of interactional trouble in terms of interpreting or discerning intent. This is a problem of cognitive attribution, associated with a recipient or observer being able to tell whether an activity has a quality of *being serious*' which I discuss in greater detail in 5.5.1. While participants identified that non-verbal and visual cues can assist in face-to-face interaction, the difficulty connected with 'telling if a person is being serious', or communicating *being serious*, is magnified online. See section 5.5 for more detailed discussion.

*Being serious* constituted an important feature for defining *bullying*. It sits at an opposite end of an experiential spectrum to *just for fun* or *joking*. However, as this analysis demonstrates, it is not solely related to *bullying*, and is complicated by interpretational problems.

#### **5.3.4 Keeping On Going**

*Keeping on going* appears primarily as a way of interpreting an activity as *being serious* rather than as a clear point of differentiating *bullying* from *not bullying*. The next two excerpts offer examples where this was made salient in participants' accounting for defining *bullying*.

#### **Excerpt 22: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01**

Aruna: If they've asked them to stop and the person keeps doing it

In this next excerpt, Kit summarises the discussion immediately preceding this extract.

**Excerpt 23: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01**

Justin: And then it turns it tur- something can be fun  
to start out with but then turns into a fight  
Aroha: Yes  
Justin: Yep. Okay, Kit  
Kit: **I think it'd be serious if like it kept on going  
on like if they kept on saying things to you  
that were bad**  
Justin: Yep  
Kit: **And they didn't just say one thing and then stop**

*Keeping on going* features here as an additional measure of *being serious* rather than as an independent feature for defining *bullying*. The tension associated with something *being serious* and potentially categorisable as *bullying* remained; however, *keeping on going* offers another way to differentiate *bullying* from *not bullying*.

*Keeping on going* also features as a negative response to being asked to stop.

**Excerpt 23: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 – friendly compared with bullying**

Kieran: You can sort of tell if someone's being bullied  
or not cos if they're **if it's just being  
friendly they'll probably say stuff back**  
Justin: yeah  
Kieran: and just say ... but **if it's bullying then  
they'll probably ask to stop it and if they keep  
doing it**  
Justin: ah okay. So other peop- the other person's  
responses might give [you]  
Kieran: [yeah]  
Justin: a clue. So if they're kind of like joking back  
Kieran: mm  
Justin: that kind of stuff it's not it's not the same  
deal  
Kieran: yes.  
Justin: Okay  
Chloe: Um **fighting's more of like like a one like a  
one-off** (indistinct) or **only happened for a  
couple of days** but bullying can be like **it can  
last for like a month** and it can cause like  
people to do real bad stuff to themselves  
Justin: mmhmm  
Chloe: (mumble)  
Justin: Yeah. So there's that idea that it's not just  
it's not just one thing and it's not something  
that it it's **keeps going**  
Chloe: yeah  
Justin: yeah  
Heather: Um most of the time like if it's a joke they'll  
just write the text or email once but then if

they like actually mean it then **they'll keep saying the same thing over and over again**  
Justin: Okay  
Heather: so that **you kind of get the message**

In this excerpt, *bullying* is distinguished from *fighting* through the sense of duration implied in *keeping on going* in the face of requests to stop or the absence of encouragement. This is evident where Chloe specifically identifies duration: “one-off” and “a couple of days” compared with “a month”. Heather elaborates on this with “saying the same thing over and over again”. As with other features discussed above, there are potential comparisons between *keeping on going* and the repetition factor in the conventional definition of bullying. However, repetition of a negative action was also not enough to warrant the categorisation *bullying* in this data. Heather's follow on comment makes it clear that *keeping on going* is an action that seeks the response that “you kind of get the message”. The receipt, and thereby also the interactional quality, remains primary in defining *bullying*.

This section has focused on participants' category work in the activity of defining *bullying* and the features they make salient for differentiating *bullying* and *not bullying*. The analysis has illuminated the distinctively interactional quality of these features in participants' co-constructed category work as materialised in the data excerpts. Having focused on the activity of defining *bullying* as a first step into examining participants' category work, the next two sections focus on two types of troubles that emerged in participants' sense-making activities and how they were negotiated: category troubles and interactional troubles.

## 5.4 Negotiating Category Troubles

### 5.4.1 Failed Cyberbullying

In this section, I focus on category troubles, that is, troubles that emerged from the shared understandings invoked in the category work involved in defining *bullying*. The first trouble emerged where an overly broad candidate definition for *bullying* is proffered but became problematic for differentiating between *bullying* and *not bullying*. Some uses of *bullying* in participants' accounts reflected its use in wider social discourses as a catch-all gloss for negative interactions. This presented challenges for participants categorising negative interactions where the features identified by others as crucial to legitimate categorisation as *bullying* were not met or were uncertain. This

distinct type of trouble demanded further category work from members to resolve, sometimes by participants concluding that the interaction could not be categorised as *bullying*, or by adding modifiers to the category. Participants' category work in these accounts demonstrates the limits of using *bullying* or *cyberbullying* as catch-all categories.

In the following excerpt, the proposal for resolving this trouble was to add a qualifier to the category already assigned. Prior to the beginning of this lengthy excerpt, Erik proffered the definition of *cyberbullying* as "badness online", which was elaborated by others in subsequent discussion using specific examples of actions or behaviour. Along with explicating an approach to dealing with category troubles, this excerpt again illustrates the co-constructedness of defining *bullying* as an interactional activity.

**Excerpt 24a: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 – failed cyberbullying**

Justin: So, as an example, if someone was swearing or calling names or something like that and the other person was kind of like 'eh whatever'

Eddie: Yeah cos

Justin: Then

Eddie: Um

Justin: **It doesn't count as cyberbully[ing?]**

Erik: [Well]

Eddie: [No no because you]

Erik: **[it counts as ] failed [cyber]bullying**  
(pointing to Eddie)  
(additional side talk)

Justin: Shhh

Erik: bullying (pointing to Eddie)

Eddie: **Yeah failed cyberbullying**

Justin: **Failed** okay.

Erik: **You got rejected**

Justin: **Failed cyberbullying**

Eddie: **You just got failed tryin' [t' bully]**

Justin: [So is] **an attempt**  
**but it didn't work**

Erik: Yeah

Eddie: Yeah

Noah: Yeash

Justin: Erik

Eddie: **Fail**

Daria: **Fail**

The specific trouble centres on the problem of receipt, which had emerged in analysis of accounts in previous iterations as primary to legitimate categorisation of an interaction as *bullying*. I introduce candidate activities of "swearing or calling names" to elaborate on Erik's proffer of "badness online" and query whether all "badness" is bullying by

invoking the factor of impact on the other person: “if the other person was like “eh whatever” ... it doesn't count as cyberbullying?”. Erik's reformulation “failed cyberbullying” offers one method for resolving this category trouble. His use of “fail” invoked a common internet meme that highlights falling short of a projected goal to bully (Dubs & Brad, 2012). Eddie's elaboration “you got failed tryin' t' bully” blended a more scholastic sense for failure ('being failed' on an assessment) with the meme.

In this second part of the excerpt, which immediately follows the end of the previous one, the category trouble develops to incorporate specific intent to be mean but is subsequently modified to downgrade the comment to *joking*.

#### Excerpt 24b: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01

Erik: Somebody write like done a comment on Facebook  
Justin: Yeap  
Erik: **and it's like something that's like mean or whatever then they do another comment after it and say like that they were joking?**  
Madison: Oh [yeah]  
Erik: **[Tha ]t means that they know they've just cyber cyberbullied you and they're like trying to stop it?**  
Eddie: Yeah  
Justin: Ohhh  
Erik: See  
Daria: It's like [.HHH bih bih]  
Eddie: [Noo ] (grabbing at tennis ball rolled towards Daria by Noah)  
Erik: **it's really watching your back because you know that person really gonna take it badly or**  
Eddie: Ahhh  
Justin: Are there ah I I I'm interested in that idea are there times when (1.0) are there times when it could actually be just joking or playing around?  
Erik, Noah, Eddie: Yeah  
Noah: I (indistinct)  
(off camera – Mike? Derek?): When people say jokes most of them  
Eddie: **Most people most people know me and if I said something bad they'd probably know it's a joke**  
Erik: Yeah coz

As demonstrated in this excerpt, inferring the meaning of comments such as “just joking” was highly problematic. Erik proposes a situation where an interlocutor may seek to clarify that a comment that is “joking” arising from concern about the implications if it were interpreted as “mean”. While it includes some orientation to intent, Erik's comment “something that's like mean or whatever” was sufficiently vague

to allow that the action may have been inadvertent but that negative impact remains central. The addition “and they're trying to stop it” continued to promote the emphasis on impact over intent. An action (in this case, a comment) may be intended as mean, however *joking* may be used if the instigator were concerned about getting in trouble and therefore trying to soften the impact. Alternatively, the potential for negative impact may be recognised only after the comment was made. In both cases, a follow up comment that one was *joking* may be used as a kind of apology, in case the other person is hurt or offended. Erik then highlights the importance of vigilance where there is the risk that specific people may interpret comments negatively. This suggested that the onus is on the instigator to protect against misinterpretation of their actions, regardless of intent. Eddie invokes relational context to untangle the problems associated with discerning intent, suggesting that “most people (who) know me” understand that comments she makes, even bad ones, are jokes. As previously reflected in the discussion in 5.2.5 and 5.3.3, her comment relied on others’ familiarity with her usual interactional style to interpret her comments. I discuss this further in section 5.4.2 on *joking*, which constitutes another type of category trouble.

The contradictory category of *failed cyberbullying* highlights a major trouble connected with the focus on actions or behaviour rather than interaction. It illustrates the clash between the focus on actions alone in the conventional definition of bullying and features of interaction invoked by participants to define *bullying*. As the excerpt illustrates, it is not sustainable to interpret activity in isolation from its relational and interactional context. How it affects the other person is more salient and useful in making sense of the interaction. While participants oriented to intent, the distinguishing feature for an interaction to be categorisable as *bullying* remained negative impact (actual or potential) on the other person. It also illustrated how categories and the activities they accounted for remained dynamic and open to dispute.

#### **5.4.2 Joking**

*Joking* is consistently positioned as *not bullying* and connected with the category 'just for fun'. In a manner similar to *bullying*, the trouble that emerges in relation to *joking* is grounded in interaction. *Joking* relies on the receipt as much as it does the initiation action, a quality that it may be seen to share with teasing (which I discuss later in 5.4.4).

**Excerpt 25: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - not *bullying* if no-one's getting hurt**

Justin: Just a minute just a minute (.) so something's  
joking then is it still cyberbullying?  
Erik, Noah: [No:o no ]  
Eddie: **[Well no because the other] person would know  
it's a [joke]**  
Natalie: **[They] don't actually mean it**  
[(simultaneous talk - indistinct)]  
Justin: **[so if they don't mean it and if most] people  
know it's a joke then it doesn't count as  
cyberbullying,**  
Natalie: **No cos**  
Justin: Okay so  
Kiri: Oh wait  
Madison: **If no-one's getting hurt then it's not really  
cyberbullying**

In this excerpt, the interplay between instigator intent and recipient impact emerged in the negotiation over “joking” as an opposite to *being serious* or “meaning it”. Eddie proposes that “the other person would know” when something is *joking*, which positions the trouble in interpretation (see detailed discussion in section 5.5). Natalie proffers “they don’t actually mean it” as a defining feature of *joking* that differentiates it from *cyberbullying*, which suggests intent. However, Madison reorients to impact as the crucial feature that distinguishes *bullying* from *joking*: “if no-one's getting hurt then it's not really cyberbullying”. However, the parallel orientations to intent and impact intertwine to support the proffered suggestion that when an activity is *joking* then it is not *bullying*.

However, *joking* may itself be a source of trouble, as illustrated in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 26: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - if another person sees it they might think fighting**

Edwin: Oh um just to add in on Ravi like  
Justin: Yep  
Edwin: **some people say it being as a joke and then  
they'll say it back as a joke**  
Justin: Yep  
Edwin: **but then if it's like a group chat and another  
person see it they might think it's a fight**  
Justin: .hh  
Edwin: **but then the two people were actually in it they  
are just talk as a joke**  
Justin: Yeah

Edwin offers a sample situation similar to Toby's playfighting example above (Section 5.2.5, Excerpt 8). The category trouble occurs where external parties observe the



interaction and misinterpret it. The next excerpt, in part a reproduction from Excerpt 16 above, also illustrates how *joking* can be mistaken for *being serious* by others, but also by the recipient.

**Excerpt 27: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - starting out as a joke but ending up serious**

Justin: So knowing the perso- knowing the other person  
and knowing how they usually talk is that is  
that makes th- makes a difference?  
Kieran: yeah  
Justin: Yep  
Aroha: And if there was like a group chat and um  
somebody like started beating (?) up on one  
person like but **they started it as a joke but  
everybody joined in as like a serious thing**  
Jo: Mmyeah  
Justin: [Ohhhh] okay  
Aroha: [Yeah]  
Justin: So it can be all fun and games until  
Aroha: Til  
Justin: Someone gets [hurt]  
Aroha: [Yeah]  
Justin: Kind of thing  
Aroha: Or they take it the wrong way and they get hurt  
and they reply something else and then it's like  
the fight  
Justin: And then it turns it tur- something can be fun  
to start out with but then turns into a fight  
Aroha: Yes

Starting to beat up on a person in a group chat as a joke has some parallels with the discussion above on playfighting and 'just for fun'. Aroha's account does not include whether the intended recipient responded to it as a joke or not. Later in the excerpt, Aroha elaborates on this trouble to identify that at times the recipient may "take it the wrong way and they get hurt". Here, the trouble refocused on the receipt, which normally constitutes the key defining factor for categorising an interaction as *bullying*. "Taking the wrong way" implied misunderstanding, which is a related but distinct type of trouble of interaction. In interactional terms, the instigator is responsible for repair if the response indicates a mishearing or non-alignment, such as "taking it the wrong way". This is similarly evident in section 5.4.1, where Erik suggests that the instigator is responsible for the receipt and for proffering a repair. Significantly in Aroha's account above, when others joined in and shaped the interaction away from *joking* and into "a serious thing", independently of any inferred motivation of the instigator. Such motivation or intent is often difficult to ascertain, as in the following excerpt.

### Excerpt 28: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - you can't know

Justin: So keeping on going is uh is an important thing as well how do you, yuh ah uh **you can say jus' just joking or just kidding how do you know if someone means it**

Kit: **You can't**

Aroha: **You can't really. [Only if you know] the person**

Kit: [indistinct]

Jo: [Yeah]

Kieran: [Yeah]

Chloe: **[Also] if if you're on like**

Justin: Yeah

Chloe: **something where you can like like look at them (looking towards Aroha & group in corner, hand gesture moving back and forth) and like have like a one-on-one conversation ((turns to look towards Justin))**

Aroha, others: **Yeah [indistinct ]**

Chloe: **[and you can tell by like] their expressions**

Justin: Yep

Chloe: **but other than that unless they use like emojis and stuff**

Several: **Oh yeah**

Justin: Yeah

Chloe: **You can't really tell**

Many accounts oriented to the additional difficulty in interpreting whether someone is “just joking” or “just kidding” in online interactions. The shared account in the above excerpt orients to the limitations of text-based interactions where nonverbal aspects of interaction are inaccessible and the use of “emojis” and punctuation work as proxies.<sup>14</sup> However, as Chloe suggests, this relies on people inserting them where needed and in their absence “you can't really tell”. One solution Chloe references is the use of video chat, where facial expressions and tone of voice become available. The constraints on non-verbal aspects of interaction raise the stakes for the recipient being able to tell, and leaves interlocutors with the challenge of how to convey these aspects of interaction in the absence of real-time visual cues. Similarly, in the following excerpt, Phoebe connects the practice of sending emojis and punctuation as a means of differentiating between “a joke” and “not a joke” specifically in the context of social media.

### Excerpt 29: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 – emojis and exclamation marks

Justin: Yeh so what's the difference, what wou- where the difference there like between taking it as a

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<sup>14</sup> Emojis are a type of graphic insert into text based chat to represent facial expressions, gestures and emotions. The generic term ‘emoticon’ (from which ‘emoji’ is derived) is blended from ‘emotion’ and ‘icon’.

joke and b- taking it seriously. What makes the difference

Phoebe: **Like sometimes you can send emojis to say if it's a joke or not?**

Justin: Yep

Phoebe: **and sometimes you can put exclamation marks? To make sure that it's not like a joke**

*Joking* requires differentiation from *being serious* or *bullying* because, much like *playfighting*, individual actions involved may be indistinguishable from actions implicated in *bullying*. It constitutes a category trouble as a result of this overlap and the complex interplay between intent and receipt, which in turn creates a reliance on localised interpretation to establish whether an interaction belongs to the category *joking* or one of the negative impact categories which may include *fighting* or *bullying*. As will become evident in discussion of *being sarcastic* and *teasing* as category troubles in 5.4.3 and 5.4.4, category troubles incorporate interactional troubles, which I discuss further in 5.5.

### **5.4.3 Being Sarcastic**

*Being sarcastic* raises another category trouble associated with meaning and interpretation. It was most prominent in accounts from School 2, but was present in accounts from the other schools. Like 'joking,' it appears in participants' accounts as different from *bullying*.

The dictionary definition of sarcasm specifies elements of contempt and scorn, attributes that are not universally consistent with its deployment as a member category in participants' accounts. Whether this is a naïve or incorrect understanding from an adult perspective is immaterial. It reveals ways that a familiar term acquires specific meanings and implications for members in interaction that cannot be assumed from a dictionary definition. A distinguishing feature of sarcasm from the broader cultural discourse is that the formulation of contempt or scorn is usually couched in an indirect rather than direct fashion.

Andi introduces “the sarcasm thing” as an explication of *mocking*:

#### **Excerpt 30: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - just like fun**

Andi: sometimes **mocking can be just (..) like (..) fun, like when you do the sarcasm thing**

The curious aspect from a dictionary definition perspective was the connection between *mocking* and *being sarcastic* with the predicate “just like fun”. Sarcasm is more conventionally associated with negative interactions, and an adult-centric analysis may lead to questions over whether this excerpt suggested children were becoming more aggressive and callous in their interactions, if *being sarcastic* were equated with 'fun'. However, examination of the category work uncovered multiple meanings associated with *being sarcastic* as a member category. *Being sarcastic* is potentially synonymous with *joking* or playful verbal interaction. In the next excerpt, Kiri proffers *being sarcastic* as another means for differentiating between *bullying* and *not bullying*.

**Excerpt 31: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 – *being sarcastic* is a way to tell**

Justin: Lots of people were talking about things that people do:o that they think is cyberbullying how do you, like, something that people use to define is like **how you tell the difference whether some- something is cyberbullying or not cyberbullying**

Erik: Ooo (raises hand)  
((several hands go up))

Eddie: Uhh (1.5)

Erik: I got (1.0)

Eddie: Tztzhtztzhtzh

Kiri: **They can say in be like sarcastic, sarcastically?**

Kiri's proposal appeared consistent with Andi's formulation as not *being serious*. *Being sarcastic* differentiates an action or interaction from *cyberbullying*. In the next excerpt, *being sarcastic* featured as a strategic response to deflect or diminish the potential for an action to be categorised as *bullying*.

**Excerpt 32: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - it doesn't mean as much**

Edwin: **cos saying it and then like to say 'I'm being sarcastic' it doesn't mean as much**

Justin: Yeah

(someone): No?

Justin: Okay so it's not a [that's ]

Edwin: [because it sounds like]  
**you're saying that tuh get away with it and you know not tell on them and stuff**

(someone): Yep

Justin: yep

Kit: **yeah but then it wouldn't hurt the person as much if they yeah like (1.0) thought that**

Edwin and Kit claimed *being sarcastic* as an effective deflection strategy for different reasons. Edwin proposed that saying “I’m being sarcastic” could be used to create plausible deniability to actions that could warrant ‘telling on’ if they were hurtful. Whether this is connected with an initial action of *being serious* is not clear, however the effect invoked by Edwin suggests that *being sarcastic* could be used where someone was *being serious* in order to avoid the consequences of being ‘told on’. In contrast, Kit put forward a benign meaning to *being sarcastic*, suggesting it is akin to *joking*. If *being sarcastic* is the same as *joking* or fun between friends, and not serious, then logically it would not include negative impact; that is, the other person would not be hurt. Both Edwin and Kit orient to an implicit obligation on the recipient to respond to *being sarcastic* as equivalent to ‘not being serious’. Edwin identifies a similar kind of action as described by Erik in section 5.4.1; that the risk of an interaction being categorised as *bullying* is serious enough to require deflection to avoid being ‘told on’, as well as the responsibility of the instigator to repair.

The above excerpt illustrates this ambiguity in the interaction between Edwin and Kit. Kit’s assertion that *being sarcastic* should “not hurt as much” elided more serious (and arguably, cruel) uses of sarcasm. Edwin’s proposal undermined this claim, and highlighted the ambiguity inherent in *being sarcastic*. He identifies a tension between *being sarcastic* as joking between friends and more serious uses of the phrase that convey contempt through humour at the other person’s expense. Someone may make contemptuous and cruel comments, and then proffer the token ‘just joking’ to avoid the consequences of being interpreted as *being serious*. This ambiguity contributes to *being sarcastic* as a troublesome category. It may be deployed to differentiate activities from *bullying*, to deflect potential accusations, or to categorise interactions that may also be legitimately categorisable as *bullying*.

In the next excerpt, Kieran offers a comparable account for the problem with discerning seriousness in the context of *being sarcastic*.

**Excerpt 33: CaSM\_2\_PR\_01 - the problem with “just kidding”**

Kieran: I'm really obvious with my sarcasm but some other people aren't? They're like (0.5) they'll say just they'll (.) not just on Facebook n stuff but **they'll say in real life they'll say 'oh can I have a lolly?' and you'll go 'no?' s bought them and they'll say 'oh just kidding' s not really (...)** [doing that at all]

Justin: [ohh okay]  
 Kieran: though they can say they can just be actual m-  
 (.) actually mean it? say it or post it and then  
 they'll s and then they'll say why would you say  
 that just kidding and apparently that makes it  
 all better?

Kieran's example explicates the indirect display of contempt common to *being sarcastic* in its formal definition and its situated uses in participants' accounts. He locates the category trouble in subtle uses of sarcasm, where indirect contempt may be displayed through superficially innocent requests or comments. The sarcasm is generated in the making of an unreasonable request, which attracts a 'no' response. The third turn completes the contemptuous interaction with "just kidding" as an apparent deflection of the refusal, even though Kieran observes that in the interaction it was clear that they were "not really doing that at all" (that is, kidding) and "actually meant it". Kieran refutes the suggestion observable in Kit's proposition that someone saying they are *being sarcastic* means an interaction is less hurtful or "makes it all better". So again, the deciding factor is impact on the other.

The problems of interpretation and deficiencies of relying on cognitive attribution are evident in the category of *being sarcastic*. As noted with *joking*, *being sarcastic* is both a category trouble and an intersubjective trouble. There are recognised instances where *being sarcastic* is joking and fun between friends. Not explored in these accounts is a situation where one friend is being sarcastic and it is received by the other as hurtful and not fun. However, the multiple and contradictory meanings associated with *being sarcastic* demonstrate the usefulness of ambiguity. *Being sarcastic* and *joking* offer resources for plausibly denying intent to bully or be mean, and reveal how verbal actions can function simultaneously on multiple levels.

#### 5.4.4 Teasing

*Teasing* was not prominent as a member category in participants' accounts of peer interactions. This may reflect the trend to subsume *teasing* under *bullying*, as noted in Chapter 1. The conflation in the literature meant that its appearance in the data warranted attention to how *teasing* and *bullying* interacted as member categories.

As previously discussed in section 5.2.3 above, Jo made an explicit connection between the categories *mocking*, *teasing*, *joking* and *being sarcastic* (excerpt reproduced here for convenience).

**Excerpt 34: CaSM\_2\_PR\_04 - 'mocking' and teasing**

Justin: What do you what do you understand by mocking?  
Like how would you define it for someone.  
Jo: **like define the word mock?** Or  
Justin: Yep  
Jo: **Someone being teased kind of about something they could have done in the past, or yeah.**  
Justin: Mhmm  
Jo: Or sometimes like people with disabilities would get mocked. Yeah  
Justin: Is it always mean or is it sometimes joking or,  
Jo: Yeah it is sometimes **it's sometimes sarcastic or sometimes joking** but **normally mockery I think is kind of true it's more true mockery than sarcastic mockery**  
Justin: Ah okay so by true you mean they're being serious?  
Jo: **Yeah. Serious mockery.**

Jo explicates the difficulty faced by an external party in differentiating between playful and serious interactions. *Teasing* appears here as an undifferentiated category comparable with *mocking*, which Jo goes on to clarify as encompassing similar category ambiguities as *being sarcastic*. Jo orients to the potential for *teasing* to be playful or hurtful. In sociolinguistic and interactional analysis literature, the term *teasing* is recognised as applicable to a substantially diverse range of social practices (Drew, 1987; Harwood & Copfer, 2014; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Mills & Babrow, 2003). Mills and Babrow (2003) specifically address the tension between playful and hurtful uses of teasing and its role in enacting social influence.

At Jo's school (School 2), there was an anti-bullying initiative underway with the class concurrent with the fieldwork activities for this study. The initiative included an anonymous survey given to all students with the following descriptions of bullying and teasing:

*"Teasing is to **make fun of** a person in an **unkind or annoying** way.*

*Bullying is any form of behaviour **intended to hurt a person**, physically or emotionally."*

*(School 2 school survey form)*

This supplied definition focuses only on its negative embodiments, but interestingly does make a differentiation of degree between teasing and bullying. Teasing is “unkind or annoying” while ‘bullying’ is “intended to hurt”. It does not acknowledge the ambiguous or playful aspects to teasing reflected in the literature and in participants' accounts. This contrast raises an important question about the usefulness of simple definitions in situations where the target audience orients strongly to ambiguity and complexity in the interactions signified by the terms used. Simple classifications may have appeal, but risk falling over where they gloss this degree of complexity.

Participants oriented to *teasing* as a category trouble connected with potentially hurtful or harmful interactions, as had emerged in the relation to *mocking* in section 5.2.3. The next excerpt is a continuation of Excerpt 34 above. Jo's use of *teasing* occurs in response to the specific question about connections with *bullying*, and focuses more on the serious and negative aspects.

**Excerpt 35: CaSM\_2\_PR\_04 - ‘mocking’, teasing and *bullying***

- Justin: So how does that uhh **how does that connect with the idea umm the ideas . ideas about bullying and stuff like that**
- Jo: **Well like cos hhhh fff umm they like getting teased or something that's been and gone and they're bringing it back into the conversation which is kinda like ffff y'know like it's you don't have you don't need to there's no need to bring it back coz it's already been settled or something? So .. hhhh yeah**
- Justin: Mmkay. So mocking is usually from from what you've seen mocking is usually something from the past that someone else is like 'hey let's go over this again' hhehehh
- Jo: **Or, or like if it's if something if someone said something wrong like if they misplaced their words sometimes people would be like 'oh haha you said lehlehleh' .hhh yeah. But they would just laugh at them normally hehhh**

Here Jo makes explicit a connection between the categories *teasing* and *bullying*. While children creatively reproduce the wider cultures around them, they are also influenced by them and not immune to adult meanings and concerns (Corsaro, 2009). The discussion on *mocking* flows easily until I introduce the category *bullying*. Following this, Jo's talk becomes more hesitant and unsure. The increases in her hesitations, “y'know,”



“like” and breath noises suggest it is more complicated to categorise even *serious* or “true mocking” as *bullying*. The degree to which such a categorisation is problematic suggests that *bullying* as a category is troublesome. Reasons for this are not self-evident in the data, however there is a norm that *bullying* requires involvement of adults, often in the form of parents and teachers. Involvement of adults may be problematic due to the risk of misinterpretation, as I discuss in section 5.5.2. However, as Jo comments in the excerpt below, misinterpretation can happen by interlocutors as well, including not recognising how serious something is until they get others involved:

**Excerpt 36: CaSM\_2\_PR\_04 - needing help to recognise when it's serious**

- Jo: in some ways but **people don't really take it seriously**. They just like oh **we'll get over this so we don't need to tell anyone** or we don't need to (...) or **they will just delete whatever's happened so that no one will find out**
- Justin: Mmkay. So, so if it's treated (.) if it's treated as something that's bullying it's more serious? And needs (..) would it be fair to say like that bullying is something that needs somebody else's help to deal with?
- Jo: Sometimes. **Sometimes you just need the extra like push kind of to realise that it is actually serious coz sometimes if you're part of it you won't really realise** that like or if you're the person **if you're like a bystander you're not going to realise that the other person is getting hurt or anything**
- Justin: Mmm
- Jo: **and the person getting hurt could just (..) could be (.) shy heheh wouldn't wanna like cause a fuss.**

In this excerpt, Jo orients to minimising impact or underinterpreting an action as something that a recipient or observer may do. She considers several grounds for underinterpreting interactions, including “needing an extra push to realise” and “not wanting to cause a fuss”. Anti-bullying campaigns exhort children to tell an adult if they are being bullied so that the adult can intervene. As noted in Chapter 1, some studies have identified that children have concerns that adults may overreact to disclosures of bullying and online bullying. Overreacting by others making things worse emerged in Melissa's account of others intervening in a situation she had categorised as *bullying* (see section 5.5.2, Excerpt 41). However, category troubles connected with observation

and interpretation can happen between peers as well as between children and adults: “it’s hard to tell sometimes”. Jo presents an alternative rationale in favour of seeking outside help as “sometimes you just need the extra like push ... to realise that it is actually serious”. *Teasing* may seem innocuous even to the interlocutors, however there may also be valid reasons to re-evaluate and re-categorise the interaction.

Each of the category troubles discussed in this section (5.4) is intertwined with interactional troubles associated with interpreting activities and interactions. Legitimate categorisation of peer interactions in participants' accounts revolves around the degree of shared understanding in the interaction established by relational context. Between friends, there is a high degree of shared understanding or intimacy to inform greater subtlety and playfulness in interactions. Between others, there is less shared understanding and higher risks of misunderstanding. In the next section, I focus on participants' category work negotiating the interactional troubles of 'being able to tell,' misunderstanding, and facelessness.

## 5.5 Negotiating Interactional Troubles

### 5.5.1 Being Able To Tell

'Being able to tell' highlights problems differentiating between activities that may be legitimately categorised as *bullying* and those that were not. This was a problem that arose from my initial analysis of participants' peer interviews. Despite the relative scarcity of accounts explicitly positioned as being bullied online, there were many instances across the data set of experiences that participants identified as hurtful, harmful, or troublesome. Thus they were potentially categorisable as *bullying* but not actually categorised as such by participants. There were several interactional strategies identified by participants as methods for dealing with this as a trouble of interpreting. In Andi's comment below, 'being able to tell' is something that involves knowing the people involved and their usual way of interacting.

#### Excerpt 37: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - you can kinda tell

Justin: How can you tell?  
Andi: Yeah, well, I think you can, well like **with friends, like close friends, you can tell when they're joking and stuff**. But, yeah you can **kinda tell when someone doesn't like you** heh  
Justin: So it really comes, really comes down to knowing people? Okay ...

Andi:                   And having that experience

Andi positions 'you can tell' as a general interactional skill as well as referring to experience and knowledge of specific people. Interestingly, outright hostility was characterised as minimally ambiguous: 'you can kinda tell when someone doesn't like you'. However, *joking* required greater specific knowledge, as was implied in only being able to tell 'with close friends' when they are joking. This fits with Mills and Babrow's (2003) analysis of playful teasing, understood as invitations to play that promote and deepen positive relational bonds. Andi's formulation suggested that, from an interpretive perspective, *joking* requires an existing friendship for this to work.

Where *being able to tell* featured in accounts specifically of social media, a range of online interactional strategies or cues were identified by participants for 'being able to tell' whether someone was *being serious* or *joking*. These strategies included use of emojis, punctuation, and "how they write" (Melissa). Participants described these features as additional interactional resources, made necessary by the constraints of the online setting. Participants described nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expression, and other gestures, as being unavailable in the context of online interaction. This lack of availability created extra interactional demands on interlocutors, requiring use of these additional graphic resources. While screen representations for nonverbal components of interaction are an established aspect of online communication, mapping these to a person's intent and genuineness was recognised as complicated and tenuous at best. Trust developed through existing relationships, which were most often in-person relationships, provided the basis for interpreting actions. These conventions for online communication appear as an exercise in trust that the conventions will be followed in good faith. These nonverbal aspects were treated as modifying comments that may have been considered hurtful if the intent was serious rather than joking. The implied limits to this are that insincere comments remain possible by any party, although in line with Andi's suggestion above, trust may be assumed to be greater between friends.

In the next excerpt, Kieran proposes an interactional solution to the interactional trouble of 'being able to tell' whether something is *bullying* or not.

### Excerpt 38: CaSM\_2\_PR\_01 – they'll say stuff back or ask to stop it

Kieran: You can sort of tell if someone's being bullied or not cos if they're **if it's just being friendly they'll probably say stuff back**

Justin: yeah

Kieran: and just say ... but **if it's bullying then they'll probably ask to stop it and if they keep doing it**

Justin: ah okay. So other peop- the other person's responses might give [you]

Kieran: [yeah]

Justin: a clue.

This solution returns our focus to the primacy of receipt. Kieran proposes that a friendly exchange can be observed by the recipient “saying stuff back” in the interaction. By contrast, an interaction that is legitimately categorisable as *bullying* would be marked by a very different response. This excerpt offers another example of the practical conversation analytic orientation evident at many points across the data set. How a verbal action may have been intended can only be inferred from the response and subsequent alignment or repair after the interlocutor has responded (Sacks et al., 1974). So, in Kieran’s example, the interpretive clues to do *being able to tell* appear when a person “asks them to stop” or “says stuff back”.

A third aspect to 'being able to tell' emerged in claims made by participants of themselves that others would *be able to tell*. The next excerpt is a segment of the longer excerpt discussed in section 5.4.1 (reproduced here for convenience) where Eddie orients explicitly to the role of intersubjectivity ('knowing') as the basis for 'being able to tell'.

### Excerpt 39: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - most people know me

Eddie: Most people **most people know me** and if I said something bad **they'd probably know it's a joke**

Eddie's assertion relies on a similar notion of familiarity as appears in Andi’s Excerpt 37 above. However, in this instance, Eddie makes the claim how others who know her should interpret her actions, and in doing so shifts the responsibility for misinterpreting to the recipient. This claim included a curious reflexive intersubjective proposition: she proposes to know that others understand her interactions in a particular way because of her self-perception.

'Being able to tell' represents a vague interactional trouble connected with understanding and interpreting actions in the context of interactions. The point at which this trouble becomes more specific and magnified is in instances of misinterpreting.

### 5.5.2 Misinterpreting

Misinterpreting constituted a significant interactional trouble in participants' accounts. As mentioned throughout section 5.4, this has connections with *joking*, *being sarcastic*, and *teasing*; which all contribute to times interactions can go wrong. Misinterpreting can be done by the people involved in an interaction and by external observers, both peers and adults.

Chances of misunderstanding were raised significantly should raw evidence of interactions, particularly between friends, be exposed to adult view.

#### Excerpt 40: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 – bad influence

Aroha: Like kind of like what Chloe said with like the language if they see, if **like my p-parents saw or like any parents saw the language that friends use they'd think that like my friends (1.0) changed me for the like (...) the worse?**  
**And**

Justin: [Yeah ]  
(indistinct): [Bad influence]

Aroha: **Yeah bad influence**

Justin: Yeah, so it's bad influence

Aroha: **And like not even just like swearing but like they'd think maybe they're being mean to somebody that's not**

Aroha and others claim that parents would definitely misunderstand how she and her friends talk with each other and mistake this for *bullying*, or at the very least would consider that they were a “bad influence” on each other. This trouble can be seen as implied in other aspects of trouble connected with interactions potentially categorisable as *bullying*, where misunderstanding represents a major concern. Interactional approaches to dealing with these problems can also be fraught, such as the tenuous use of *just joking* or *just kidding*, which may not be received as an effective apology in the event of someone experiencing an action as mean or hurtful (as previously presented in Excerpts 32 and 33).

Parents and other adults are positioned as very likely to misunderstand or misinterpret interactions between children. This can also be seen in discussions of *playfighting* and *screwing around* in section 5.2.5, which were identified as interactions that could be seen as *bullying* by someone else, but which “we” know are not courtesy of the established context created by *friend*. In the next excerpt, Aroha discusses interactions between herself and her friends that she would not want her parents (‘they’) to see.

**Excerpt 41: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 – they’re too old**

Aroha: Or **like the language I use towards my friends that they wouldn't get? because they're too old?**  
(others smiling in recognition, side chat between Jo and Blossom prompted by comment)  
Justin: Okay so there's stuff that you ... there's uhh there's ways that you talk with your friends  
Aroha: Yeah  
Justin: And language that you use  
Aroha: **Like (indistinct) me swearing at them that's**  
Edwin: **As a joke.**  
Aroha: **Yeah as a joke**  
Justin: Oh okay hehhh So language and swearing and is it like things that your parents might think would be bad things to call people?  
Aroha: Uhhh **well it's just**  
Justin: Or is just  
Aroha: **something that me and my friends would get like**  
Justin: Okay

This excerpt highlights how age features as an omnirelevant category of specific salience to misinterpreting. An omnirelevant category is one that has a quality of “anytime invocability” (Hester & Hester, 2012). Excerpts 40 and 41 offer instances where age was able to be invoked to make sense of participants-as-children's interactions on social media. Age is invoked at specific points to make sense of parents or adults misinterpreting how friends speak with each other, or things they might do online that have one meaning between friends but may be interpreted differently by adults, “that they wouldn't get because they're too old”. Swearing is part of a larger category set of “the language that friends use” that are understood as *joking*, but potentially misinterpreted by parents-as-adults. I discuss the unexpected salience of *friend* as a person category in greater depth in Chapter 6. It is important to note that *friend* is contrasted with *parents*, the latter potentially representing any adults and who would not 'get' the way that friends interact with each other.

A related dimension of this trouble was connected with potential or actual responses of others where an interaction is categorised as *bullying*. This excerpt is a continuation of the excerpt discussed above in section 5.3.1, where Melissa accounts for an experience of *mocking*, a category which she had equated with *bullying* earlier in the interview. In this excerpt, misinterpreting appears in Melissa's description of unhelpful responses from family and friends to 'this person ... being mean'.

**Excerpt 42: CaSM\_1\_PR\_01 - other people making it worse**

Melissa:       And then (.) people they could read it like came  
                  in **like family and friends they made it worse**  
                  **and there were threatening people threatening me or**  
                  **.HH threatening him (...) and my family**

She speaks quite softly at this point, almost a whisper. The interview took place in the home class room and the teacher had remained present at a distance. Melissa's manner in this interaction is more subdued, compared with her interactions with peers, as observable in the peer interview data. A common expectation of adults is that they will respond with some kind of action when they become aware of bullying (Compton, Campbell, & Mergler, 2014; Frisé, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008), and that adult responses may be experienced as out of proportion with the event (Mishna et al., 2009). Melissa's reduced speaking volume in what appeared to be avoiding being overheard by the teacher contributed to her account of others misinterpreting what she may want them to do to help. Melissa was repositioned as an onlooker to retribution that she experienced as "making it worse". Such misinterpretation of what might be helpful may mean that categorising an action as *bullying* is experienced as undesirable, even where it may be apt by any definition. It demonstrates how misinterpreting is significant in terms of response, especially where responses are experienced as out of proportion with the trouble in question.

Another aspect of misinterpreting may emerge when negative impact is underinterpreted rather than overinterpreted, as discussed in section 5.4.4. In this excerpt (reproduced here for convenience), Jo orients to the potential for recipients to minimise the actions or their impact, and for observers to underinterpret interactional cues.

#### Excerpt 43 CaSM\_2\_PR\_04 - sometimes you won't realise that it's serious

Jo: Sometimes. Sometimes you just need the extra like push kind of to realise that it is actually serious coz sometimes if you're part of it you won't really realise that like or if you're the person if you're like a bystander you're not going to realise that the other person is getting hurt or anything

Here Jo orients to two challenges for misinterpreting. If a person is “part of it” then it may be difficult to realise that “it is actually serious”. Equally an observer may fail to recognise that the other person is getting hurt. This suggests another variation of interactional trouble of misinterpreting or misunderstanding.

Closely connected with *joking*, *being sarcastic* and *being able to tell*, misinterpreting is an interactional trouble that highlights problems created by a focus on cognitive attributions, particularly where the emphasis is on interpreting intentions or motivations. Interpreting actions is still a trouble even when focusing on observable elements of interaction. As such, it provides further evidence that the focus on activity is necessary but not sufficient for categorising an action as *bullying*.

### 5.5.3 Facelessness

Facelessness appears as a specific type of interactional trouble created by the constraints of the social media setting. As I highlighted in Chapter 2, the notion of anonymity in connection with online bullying is no longer straightforward. Many participants in this study identified that the people they socialise with online are known to them. The problem, from an interactional perspective, is not the other person being anonymous, but is instead the lack of non-verbal communication, especially where interactions are limited to text. As such, I propose that the interactional trouble identified is not anonymity but facelessness. As discussed in Chapter 4, participants socialised online with friends and knew the people they chatted with online. However, as evident in the excerpts below, not being able to see a person’s facial expressions was a barrier to interpreting, even when the interlocutor was known or was a friend.

In this partly reproduced and extended excerpt, Andi identifies the interactional problem associated with online interactions



#### Excerpt 44: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - you can't see their facial expressions

Justin: How can you tell?  
Andi: Yeah, well, I think you can, well like with friends, like close friends, you can tell when they're joking and stuff. But, yeah you can kinda tell when someone doesn't like you heh  
Justin: So it really comes, really comes down to knowing people? Okay ...  
Andi: And having that experience  
Toby: (indistinct)  
Justin: Mmmhmm ... **Would you say that's harder online?**  
Andi: **Yeah because you can't tell you can't listen to their voice, like can't see their facial expressions**

As discussed in section 5.5.1, Andi positions knowing the other person and familiarity with their usual interactional style as a key resource for interpreting an interaction. In the additional lines included here, Andi draws out another feature that is often connected with the notion of anonymity in online interaction: that it interpreting is harder because “you can't listen to their voice ... can't see their facial expressions”. The lack of access to facial expressions affects interactions with known people as well as unknown people. Telling whether someone is *joking* or *being serious* online is constructed as more complicated because nonverbal and gestural feedback may be missing. This aligns strongly with the literature on the phenomenon of deindividuation in relation to computer-mediated communication (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2014; Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Woong Yun & Park, 2011). As discussed in section 5.5.1, the convention of using emojis and punctuation to incorporate some additional interpretive resources has partly addressed this problem. However, this still relies on interlocutors including them in comments and represents only a partial solution.

Not being co-present (face-to-face) creates interactional affordances as well as constraints. In another segment of the group analysis discussion from School 2, Jo proposes that communicating online can be easier for “taking things back” because “you can say woops, typo”. Similarly, facelessness could make it easier to be unkind, ‘mean’, or hurtful as a result of removing the felt constraints associated with being face-to-face a person. This notion emerged in some form in each of the group analysis discussions, where participants collectively oriented to the notion that people “say things online that they would not say to someone’s face”. The faceless quality of the interaction therefore creates another layer of ‘plausible deniability’ for *being serious* or *bullying*. Anonymity

remains a significant feature of some social media and is frequently the focus for discussions of deindividuation and cyberbullying. However, the interactional troubles connected with 'facelessness' occur between identified people as well. In this way, I argue that faceless captures this interactional troubles of online interactions more precisely than anonymity.

## 5.6 Action Alone Is Not Enough

### 5.6.1 *Bullying* and Other Activity Categories

The analysis presented in this chapter raises some important questions about what the term *bullying* obscures in the context of understanding children's interactions. It poses an important challenge to the trend to categorise any negative interactions as *bullying* and its suitability as a generic category. What became clear was that participants' methods for approaching the activity of defining *bullying* started with an abundance of activity categories that are *not bullying*. This revealed a complex range of resources available to participants substantially broader than the single category *bullying*.

While these categories could be a collection of *not bullying*, the categories invoked in participants' accounts incorporated sufficiently diverse features that this would effectively establish another gloss. Some categories drew on features of play and fun. Some were more clearly negative; however, they were still not categorised as *bullying* on various grounds. For both the *just for fun* and *being serious* collections, the activities or behaviours are potentially categorisable as *bullying*, however as became evident through the analysis, there were other salient features that meant the action was not legitimately categorisable as *bullying* for participants. Paying attention to ways that participants differentiated these categories from *bullying* offers some insight into the features of interactions upon which their interpretation depends, and how these methods of differentiating are themselves constructed collaboratively.

The collection 'just for fun' was comparatively easy to distinguish from *bullying*. Although activities like *playfighting* or *screwing around* may be mistaken for *bullying* when abstracted from their context, participants accounted for these activities having clear features that allowed them to be categorised as something other than *bullying*. As can be seen in Toby's example in section 5.2.5 (Excerpt 8), any activity may seem like *bullying* but not be legitimately categorised as *bullying*, because it is just for fun and all parties understand the activity as play. In section 5.2.3 (Excerpt 4), Wendy uses *mocking*

to account for self-directed humour. The manufactured example in section 5.2.2 (Excerpt 2) demonstrated how *snobbing* may be a response to contextual factors. These factors create meanings for the interactions that separate them from *bullying*. Such an observation would be obscured by a simplistic focus on the activity alone.

The collection *being serious* presented different analytic and interpretive challenges. There was less clarity over how categories in this collection may be differentiated from *bullying*. As discussed in section 5.3.3, reasons for this difficulty became apparent in the discussion of *being serious* as an aspect of *bullying* however they were not co-extensive. It may be that *bullying* is more appropriately constituted as another category set connected with but distinct from *being serious*. However, it is important to examine the category *bullying* in more detail, as well as the methods these groups of participants used for co-constructing definitions of it. As became evident through this analysis, these categories and the activities for which they accounted were dynamic and open to dispute.

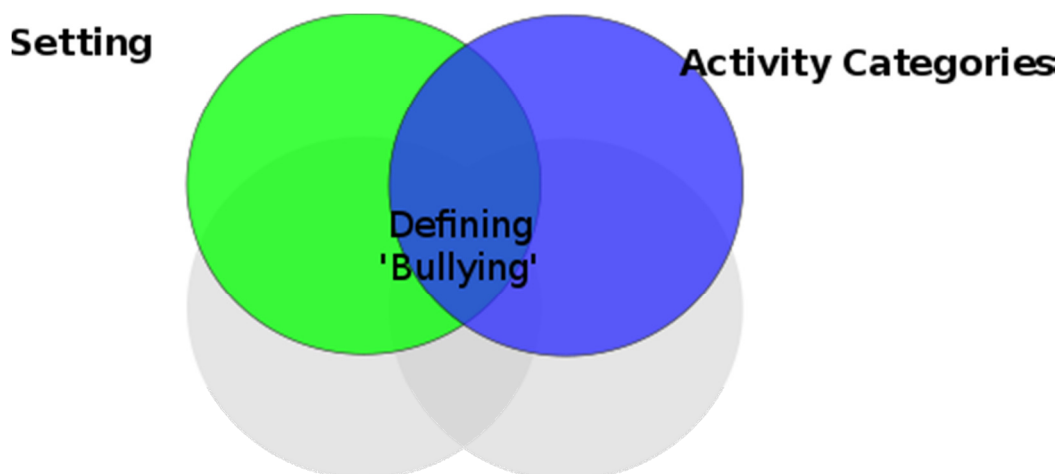
In relation to both of these collections, participants clearly oriented to how these collections of activities are hearable as potentially belonging to the category “bullying”. This hearability formed the key issue for the two types of troubles discussed in sections 5.4 and 5.5. The way in which the category and interactional troubles are managed illuminate key features of categories that influenced how activities could be categorised in the context of defining bullying and addresses the problem of warrant, of whose categorisation takes precedence. This demonstrates the category relevance of bullying, even where the category was being rejected. Category relevance is one of the rules of application that identify categorisation devices, being “a collection plus rules of application” (Sacks, 1972). As such, the analysis in this chapter suggests that bullying appears as a categorisation device, along with and overlapping the other collections of *just for fun* and *being serious*.

### **5.6.2 Activity Categories and Relational Context**

A key insight to emerge from this chapter's focus on activity categories is that action alone is not enough to categorise an interaction as *bullying*. Paying attention to action is necessary, but not sufficient in itself to complete the activity of categorising. This raises important questions about relying on external observation to identify *bullying*, especially where it relies on lists of behaviours. Jo's account in section 5.4.4 (Excerpt 44)

provides one example in relation to *mocking*, where 'true' mockery counts as *serious*, but it is also possible for *mocking* to be *joking*. In section 5.2.5 (Excerpt 8), Cam and Toby translated *playfighting* from the 'rough and tumble' play of the playground into the online game setting, to categorise the in-game banter that may in other circumstances be potentially categorisable as *bullying*. Such examples illustrate the problems involved in categorising interactions as *bullying* with a focus on the activity in isolation.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the setting of interactions brings into focus the contextual affordances and constraints that influence activities and interactions. Activity categories constitute another lens in the interactional model for defining *bullying* (Fig 5.1) that emerged in participants' accounts. Each of the lenses depicted draws aspects of interaction into focus. Combined, they offer a means to see past the gloss created by *bullying* to investigate not only the multiple interactions it obscures, but also the methods children have for categorising and making sense of these interactions.



**Figure 5.1** An interactional model for defining *bullying* – activity categories.

As the analysis in this chapter shows, children categorise activities that may be considered aggressive or negative using a wide variety of terms. Each of these terms has distinctive characteristics that may be common across peer groups or school communities, and may also have specific uses within local situated practice. Mainstream bullying discourses tend to have a limited focus on *bullying* as a generic category for negative acts. By contrast, activity categories in participants' accounts were much more nuanced, including *arguing*, *fights*, *snobbing*, *mocking*, *playfighting*, *being sarcastic*, *being mean*, *being serious* and *dramas*. The in-depth analysis of participants' category work

highlighted how many of these activities may also be potentially categorisable as *bullying*. Importantly, however, this potential did not mean that they were automatically equated with *bullying*. As noted at numerous points throughout this chapter, the activity is necessary but not sufficient to make sense of an interaction as *bullying*. In this respect, participants' category work is demonstrated to be far from simplistic. As is also demonstrated in the data excerpts, the category work itself is co-constructed in interaction. This shows the role of interaction for sense-making activities, as well as for understanding *bullying* in the context of interaction.

Negotiating the interactional troubles associated with interpreting, especially misinterpreting, is a crucial aspect of defining *bullying* that this interactional model is well positioned to articulate. Participants oriented to this as an interactional problem, both for peer interactions and for external observation, especially when this was misinterpretation by a parent or other adult.

The focus in this chapter on activity categories is valuable for developing an understanding of how these categories are deployed in participants' sense-making activities connected with defining *bullying*. It demonstrates that children-as-members engage in category work focused on activities, that 'activity' is a locus of categorisation, and that activity categories are salient to defining *bullying*. One of the outcomes of this analysis of activity categories is the emergence of the relational context of these activities as also being strongly salient to categorising an interaction as *bullying* or *not bullying*. As can be seen in the discussion above, relational categories were integral to defining *bullying*. Categorising the interaction frequently turned on 'if I knew them or not' or if the person was a *friend*. These categories incorporated orientations to intersubjectivity based in familiarity with interaction patterns. Comments by 'random people' were more readily definable as *bullying* as a result of a lesser degree of familiarity or relation ("you don't know what they mean"), in contrast with the claims to transparency ("knowing what friends mean"). I will discuss this in greater detail in chapter 6, where I shift the focus to the relational context, the specific person category of *friend*, and its role in defining *bullying*.

## 5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed participants' accounts of defining *bullying* with a focus on activity categories. This analysis covers the activity categories used by children that may

be obscured when *bullying* glosses any negative activity, including *snobbing*, *mocking*, *dramas* and activities that are *just for fun*. It also investigated types of category work in participants' accounts associated specifically with defining *bullying*, and negotiating category and interactional troubles that arose in the context of this category work.

Paying attention to activity categories yielded a substantially illuminating analysis of the category work connected with defining *bullying*. The inference rich and representative qualities of cyberbullying as a type of activity that may be applied to many individual actions suggested it may be valuable to consider categorisation practices in relation to activities as well as persons. By putting activity categories at the centre, this analysis illuminated how activities are a locus of categorisation themselves, and how such an analysis may illuminate how activities are categorised, including the potential to understand designations such as bullying as categorisation devices. This previously unexplored direction for categorisation analysis offers a means to investigate the complex interrelationship between activities and persons in categorisation and extend our understanding of the second hearer's maxim and notions of category-bound activities, category features, and predicates from another perspective.

This analysis has demonstrated that use of the gloss *bullying* oversimplifies a highly complex and overlapping collections of activity categories, as articulated by the participants in this data set. In addition, it obscures the interactional features used to differentiate between activities that may be *bullying* and those that are not. This illustrates the problems created when children's approaches to constructing these categories are marginalised in adult constructions of bullying. In the next chapter, I focus on the third and fourth lenses in the emergent interactional model for defining *bullying*. The analysis shifts to person categories, which is the conventional focus for membership categorisation analysis, and specifically the person category of *friend*.

## Chapter 6

# 'Friends Don't Bully' – Relational Categories and Social and Interactional Resources

### 6.1 Introduction

*"Mutual givers and receivers are friends for longest, if the friendship is going to work at all." – Havamal 41  
The Poetic Edda (Larrington, 1996)*

In this chapter, I shift the analytic focus from activity categories to person categories, and specifically the category *friend*. Friendship implies affection, care, trust and mutuality within an ongoing, strong, and generally equal relationship, often buried in assumptions or unwritten rules. Friends and socialising with friends were the main reasons that participants in this study were interested in social media, as discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, what emerged from the analysis was that the focus on activity was necessary but not sufficient on its own to categorise an activity as *bullying*.

Relational context was positioned by participants as equally important as the activity itself, and was a significant influence on how an activity could be interpreted either by the interlocutors or by observers. While there were other types of people mentioned by participants in the data set, *friend* as a member category was specifically salient to the activity of defining *bullying*. Whether a person was a friend or not made a difference to how participants made sense of their experiences.

In this chapter, I therefore focus on *friend* as the member category most strongly salient to defining *bullying* in participants' accounts, and use this focus for fine-grained analysis using membership categorisation analysis. The analysis in this chapter sits within the 'map' of knowledges built through the analysis of setting and activity categories across the data set discussed in the preceding chapters. As with the category work analysed in chapter 5, the focus is on *member* categories made salient by participants in the process of defining *bullying* and differentiating it from other troublesome interactions. Similarly, many of the excerpts are taken from the group analysis discussions.

The chapter is made up of two main sections. In the first main section, I focus on the role of *friend* in typical accounts from the data set to examine how this member category is

deployed by participants. *friend* appears as an interpretive resource and in participants' orientations to relational and moral orders through the notion of standardised relational pair. The analysis teases out the complex interaction between activity categories and person categories within membership categorisation analysis. This section focuses on relational categories as the third lens of the interactional model and explores the social norm that 'friends don't bully'.

In the second main section of the chapter, I undertake a finer grained analysis to an apparently 'deviant case'. This is an extended analysis of a single excerpt where a participant proposes that "you can get cyberbullied by your friends". This excerpt presented a challenge to the broader consensus that the person category *friend* was incompatible with the activity category *bullying*. The detailed analysis teases out the insights discussed in the first part of this chapter and extends the interactional model with a fourth lens through examination of *bullying* as a social and interactional resource.

### **6.1.1 Defamiliarising The Familiar and Membership Categorisation Analysis**

"Defamiliarising" is an artistic technique aimed at enhancing perception of ordinary things through rendering the familiar strange (Crawford, 1984). Applied in the theoretical and analytic context, it may be a fruitful analogy for disrupting the assumptions that arise from treating concepts and definitions as axiomatic. As demonstrated through Chapter 5, the attention to member categorisation offers a way to defamiliarise the concepts and meanings we take for granted and treat as self-evident. Membership categorisation analysis demands that the analyst treats familiar elements within the data as unfamiliar. As an ethnomethodological approach, it reorients analytic focus onto categorisation as situated and constitutive practices that forms one part of "our ensemble of cultural, knowledge-based sense-making activities, routinely deployed in ordinary life" (Watson, 2015, p. 47). Analysis of category work relies on explicating the social knowledge invoked and oriented to in members' use of categories in ordinary talk. It requires the analyst to make inferences about member categories and specific meanings in the context of the interaction (Evaldsson, 2007; Lepper, 2000). Where there are specific meanings associated with the cultural context, the analyst "necessarily draws on extracontextual interpretative resources to explicate the sense-making orientations of the participants" (Evaldsson, 2007, p. 383).



As I outlined in Chapter 3, this chapter focuses on the more established focus for membership categorisation analysis, that of person categories. There were surprisingly few person categories that appeared as salient in participants' accounting for *bullying*. As noted in 5.6.2, the category 'bully' was notable for its absence across the data set. From an analytic perspective, it is also vital to examine the inferential and representative work being done by a category (Hester, 2000; Sacks, 1995). The primary work of person categories in participants' accounts was associated with relational context for defining *bullying*. This may be seen as a thread running through the analysis of activity categories in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the interaction between categorising activities and categorising persons. The person categories to emerge from the analysis were relational categories, specifically *friend*. Just as happens with *bullying*, the word friend is also prone to assumptions from an adult perspective about its meaning. This may include personal associations or values or assumptions of what the concept of *friend* means for children. Having teased out the threads of the activity category *bullying* and traced among them the significance of *friend* as an indicator of relational context, it is important to do the same with *friend* as a category. Rather than assuming adult-centric inferences, I have focused on knowledges invoked by participants in their accounts. This creates the analytic space to examine the workings of *friend* as a member category salient to *bullying*, in line with social knowledge derived from specific and situated local contexts.

## 6.2 The Role of *Friend* in Accounting for Bullying

### 6.2.1 Why *Friend*?

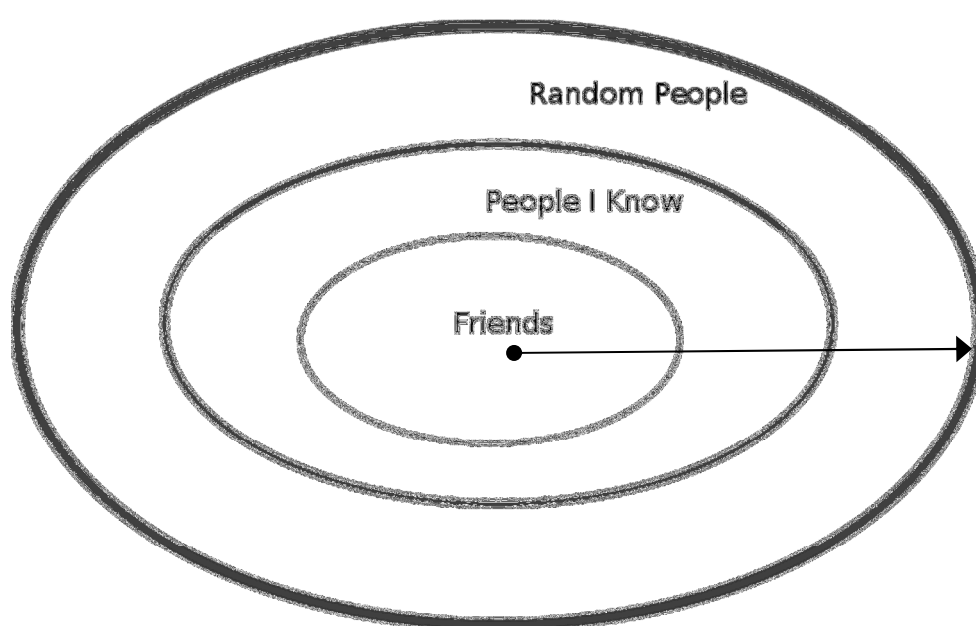
The focus on *friend* was unexpected as a focus for defining *bullying*. However, as the analysis in this chapter illustrates, its appearance was also very logical. As discussed in Chapter 4, socialising with friends emerged as the primary reason that participants invoked for using social media, and also complications associated with number of contacts compared with genuine friendships. Participants grappled with the distinction between *friends* and contacts on social media. Among the questions written by participants for use in peer interviews at School 2 was “are your friends on social media true friends?” This question points to a category problem created by the use of *friend* as a term for network contacts on some social networking sites, most notably Facebook. All contacts are designated *friends*, regardless of the actual type of connection between the people concerned. This emerged in section 4.3.4, conspicuously in Excerpt 37 where

Tamati accounted for having lots of friends on Facebook but not sharing anything with them. Through analysis of participants' categorisation of activities in Chapter 5, *friends* emerged as a key interpretive resource invoked by participants in context of defining an activity as *bullying* or *not bullying*, and for negotiating interactional troubles. The category *friend* was consistently positioned throughout the data set as interactionally relevant for the purposes of determining whether an event could or should be designated as *bullying*. *Friend* was also salient to categorising *joking*, identifying *being serious*, and 'for being able to tell' the difference between these things and *bullying*. While other person categories that appear in the data have some connection with relational context, it became evident through this analysis that *friend* indexed specific shared understandings and normative power. As such, *friend* fits Sacks' notion of the membership categorisation device (Sacks, 1989), in terms of its inference-richness and representativeness.

In this section of the chapter, I analyse typical cases where participants invoke *friend* in the context of defining *bullying*. Many of the excerpts in this section come from the group analysis discussions, for similar reasons as Chapter 5, and several excerpts from Chapter 5 are reanalysed here. These discussions revealed aspects of the social, moral, and interactional orders salient to defining *bullying*. Orders in an ethnomethodological sense refers to the organised, "locally accomplished and situated character" of social phenomena (Hester & Francis, 2000, p. 1). A key project in Garfinkel's (1967) work was to reveal the orderliness in everyday interactions, hence the adoption of the term in plural form - 'orders' - to indicate these as local and situated productions. The accounts that emerged in these discussions explicated categories of persons with distinctively relational features that were significant for categorising activities. As I demonstrate in this chapter, person categorisation was interwoven with activity categorisation. Thus, it was useful to reanalyse several of these excerpts with the focus on person categories, having earlier analysed the activity categorisation. The salience of relational context for defining *bullying* (itself an activity category) that emerged from the analysis of activity categorisation prompted this examination of the interaction between person categorisation and activity categorisation. In this chapter, the analytic focus is on the person categories. The analysis in this section also establishes a 'ground' of the social-knowledge-in-action from the data set for the finer grained analysis of an apparently deviant case in section 6.3.

### 6.2.2 “If They Were My Friend or Not”: Relational Context as Interpretive Resource

Relational context emerged as a central interpretive resource in participants' accounts of defining *bullying*. As became evident through the analysis in Chapter 5, focus on action was necessary but not sufficient to categorise an activity as *bullying*. Just as it was important to understand the social setting in which the interactions occurred, participants positioned the relational setting as pivotal to understanding and categorising an interaction. In the case of *bullying*, the person categories to which participants oriented as most salient for categorising the activity were *people I know*, *friends* as a more specific category, and 'random people'. I have represented these diagrammatically as concentric circles in Figure 6.1, below.



**Figure 6.1** Relational context, social distance and categories of ‘known-ness’.

The circles in the above figure organise the salient relational categories to which participants oriented organised along an axis of relative social distance. The outer two circles identified a categorial difference based on 'known-ness'. The member category *people I know* was strongly salient to participants' accounting for the capacity to interpret a person's actions. The categorial distinctions of *known-ness* capture the social proximity or distance that influenced how participants accounted for relational context as a central interpretive resource in the context of defining *bullying*. As will become evident in the discussion below, there were degrees of *known-ness* between the inner circles, where participants oriented to how well people knew each other. The significance of *known-ness*, or familiarity with a person's usual manner, is that it was

positioned as the primary solution to the intersubjective problem of 'being able to tell' whether someone was *being serious* or *joking*. In this regard, the problem of 'being able to tell' was not only intersubjective but also epistemic. As is evident in the excerpts below, knowing the other person orients to having access to relevant epistemic terrain about their usual personal style (Heritage, 2012). In the case of this data set, the salient terrain included a person's usual manner of displaying *joking* or *being serious*.

The influence of *known-ness* was most evident in negotiating the categorial and interactional troubles discussed in sections 5.4 and 5.5. The following two excerpts illustrate instances where 'knowing the person' was invoked by participants to account for the way actions were interpreted. The next excerpt is a segment of a longer excerpt discussed previously in section 5.4.2 in relation to *joking*.

**Excerpt 1: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - you can't know**

Justin:           So keeping on going is uh is an important thing  
                      as well how do you, yuh ah uh **you can say jus'**  
                      **just joking or just kidding how do you know if**  
                      **someone means it**  
Kit:                **You can't**  
Aroha:            **You can't really. Only if you know the person**

The shared account under co-construction here orients to a general intersubjective problem. Participants typically oriented to the impossibility of 'mind reading' to know whether the other person 'means it' as serious or joking, as evident in the above excerpt. However, Aroha invokes the notion of knowing the person as a qualifying factor that may offer some resolution. The vital component of 'knowing the person' introduces a social relational context for resolution of the intersubjective and epistemic problem of 'being able to tell'. Participants oriented to the notion that it is easier to interpret another person's actions if you know them compared with being 'some random person' (that is, unknown). The next excerpt also appeared in Chapter 5, in the context of problems of interpretation and 'being able to tell'. In this segment, Eddie captures the dilemma and proposes a solution.

**Excerpt 2: CaSM\_3\_GA\_01 - most people know me**

Eddie:            Most people **most people know me** and **if I said**  
                      **something bad they'd probably know** it's a **joke**

Eddie argues that because “most people know” her, their familiarity with her should result in them having the knowledge to interpret “something bad” as how Eddie does *joking*. As such, people who know her are assumed to have access to that (epistemic) knowledge and make the correct (intersubjective) interpretation. Where she is socially proximate to “most people who know me”, then that *knowing* affords them access to the relevant epistemic territory of Eddie’s usual manner. Conversely, if the other person is not in the category of *people I know* then the problems are exacerbated, because the relational context falls outside of the epistemic terrain to which interlocutors have access. Further, in cases of ‘not knowing’, an action is more likely to be interpreted as *being serious* or *bullying*, as illustrated in the following two excerpts.

**Excerpt 3: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - if you don't know them you would probably think it was being serious**

Kieran: **If you know them from school or something then you'd be able to tell if they were joking**  
 Justin: mmhmm  
 Aroha: [yeah coz]  
 Kieran: **[But if you] had [no idea] who they are**  
 Aroha: **[friends]**  
 Kieran: **like someone from another school you'd probably think**  
 Justin: Yep  
 (off camera side conversation - indistinct)  
 Kieran: **it was being serious**

Kieran emphasises the salience of *known-ness* for interpreting between *joking* and *being serious* (as discussed in section 5.3.3) by contrasting “if you know them from school or something” with “if you had no idea who they are”. The relational context is founded on the basis of familiarity, and there is a distinct line between others who are ‘known’ and those who are not. In terms of the diagram above (Figure 6.1), traversing the boundary from less to more *known-ness*, from ‘random people’ to *people I know*, implies experience and familiarity to categorise another person’s activities more accurately. However, “if you had no idea who they are” then there is no context of shared practices or epistemic territories, so it is more likely that something that appears to be serious would be interpreted as such, and consequently would be more likely to be categorisable as *bullying*.

An interpretive problem emerges when *known-ness* does not go far enough to demonstrate the distinctive features of *friend* as a relational category. Use of the category *friend* was ambiguous at times across the data set, and indexed that a set of

categories was implicated within *people I know*. The differentiation of *friend* specifically as a subset of *people I know* was not always as clear as it was for *known-ness* between *people I know* and 'random people'. In the next excerpt (previously discussed in section 5.5.1), Andi and I orient to *known-ness* in terms of 'experience' of people for resolving the intersubjective and epistemic problem. However, she also proffers *friend* as a distinctive category.

**Excerpt 4: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - with friends you can tell**

Andi:           Yeah, well, **I think you can, well like with friends, like close friends, you can tell when they're joking and stuff. But, yeah you can kinda tell when someone doesn't like you heh**

Justin:         So it really comes, **really comes down to knowing people?** Okay ...

Andi:           **And having that experience**

Andi invokes *friends* and specifically “close friends” as a distinctive subset of people with whom it is possible to tell when they are joking. While this account follows a similar pattern to the previous excerpt as an account of *known-ness*, the category *friend* stands out as the point of contrast to someone who 'doesn't like you'. Her formulation “with friends, like close friends” indexed what might be considered a core definition of *friend*, particularly with her emphasis on *close* friends. Andi explicitly orients to the category *friend* as salient to being able to tell when a friend is joking. The subsequent orientation to “having that experience” was more closely linked to being able to tell “when someone doesn't like you” as a general quality of interpreting the activities of others, regardless of the relational context.

The next excerpt, where Toby and Cam account for relational context as salient for differentiating between *bullying* and *not bullying*, also features *friend* as a member category.

**Excerpt 5: CaSM\_1\_GA\_01 - people I know, friends, and random people**

Justin:         **How would you tell the difference between someone bullying and something that's not bullying,**

Cam:           Uhh

Toby:           **If they were my friend or not?**

Cam:           If

Justin:         What's that?

Toby:           **If I knew them or not**

Justin:         If you knew them or not

Cam:           Yeah [um if ]

Justin: [So some]one, someone who knows you:u:u  
 (..) [Isn't going to bully you?]  
 Cam: [You could (...) ]  
 Toby: Like  
 Cam: Yeah you could just  
 Toby: Like you heh ((nodding towards Cam))  
 Cam: And if like me and him ((pointing to Toby)), if  
 we were playing the same game  
 Justin: Yep.  
 Cam: and we were like like doing funny stuff like  
 we'll bully each other but just for fun  
 Justin: Oh okay.  
 Cam: and we'll think that's not bullying? And then  
 bullying is like some random person just comes  
 and says [something ]  
 Brad: [And says you're a ] beeeep

Toby modifies his initial category of *friend* to the more generic “if I knew them or not”, orienting to *known-ness* as the salient interpretive notion. I then orient to the repaired categorisation and to the ambiguity, although I shift the emphasis from Toby's focus on his *knowing* “if I knew them or not”, being his interpretive resources in relation to the other person, onto the other person's *knowing*, “someone who knows you”, referencing the social obligation not to bully people who you know and presumably like. The intertwining between *known-ness* and re-introduction of *friend* as the more salient category occurs with Toby's proffer “like you” and nodding towards Cam. Toby and Cam were friends as well as classmates. Cam's account explicating relational context as a vital interpretive resource in the case of *bullying* may be seen to reorient to Toby's initial category proffer of *friend* through invoking “me and him” as the focus of the account. While Toby's initial proffer of *friend* is made ambiguous by his post-modification to “if I knew them or not”, the shared account that is co-constructed over subsequent turns orients to a specific context of friendship. This specific relational context invoked through Cam's use of his friendship with Toby is one where together they will think that activities that could be categorised as *bullying* are *not bullying*. This excerpt precedes the excerpt analysed in section 5.2.5 (Excerpt 8) where participants elaborated on the themes of *friend* and ‘known-ness’ to describe such activities as *playfighting* or *screwing around*. As such, the category *friend* can invoke more than simply acquaintance or familiarity. In the next section, I discuss relational and moral orders invoked by the member category *friend* that reveal specific meanings beyond the general category of *people I know*.

### 6.2.3 How Friends Talk to Each Other: Relational and Moral Orders

The fuzzy boundaries between *people I know* and *friend* in participants' accounts of defining *bullying* may be clarified through examination of relational and moral orders implicated by *friend*. While there may be instances where *friend* indexes *people I know* in this data set, this is a recognised feature of younger children's talk, where it reflects a distinct stage of social development (Parke & Gauvin, 2009). In the data for this study, there is evidence of participants orienting to *friend* as a category that invokes a higher degree of relational intimacy. In the next excerpt, Aroha's use of *friend* invokes a specific in-group context for *known-ness*.

#### Excerpt 6: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - ways you talk with friends

Aroha: Or like the language I use towards **my friends** that **they wouldn't get?** because **they're too old?**  
(others smiling in recognition, side chat between Jo and Blossom prompted by comment)

Justin: Okay so there's stuff that you (...) there's uhh **there's ways that you talk with your friends**

Aroha: Yeah

Justin: And language that you use, [that you think]

Aroha: [Like (indistinct)] **me swearing at them that's**

Edwin: **As a joke.**

Aroha: **Yeah as a joke**

Justin: Oh okay hehhh so language and swearing and is it like things that your parents might think would be bad things to call people?

Aroha: Uhhh **well it's just**

Justin: Or is just

Aroha: **something that me and my friends would get** like

Justin: Okay

Aroha: **Like they wouldn't get**

Chloe: **Like other peop- like**

Aroha: Yeah

Chloe: **If you post a link or something, you don't know they'd get it**  
(lots of indistinct)

(someone): Nah

Chloe: Or **maybe some people would get it**

Aroha: They'd be like  
(more indistinct)

Kit: [Loser!]

Aroha: **[watch] your language!**  
(laughter)

Justin: Hhhehhh ahh okay

A smaller segment of the above excerpt appeared section 5.5.2 with a focus on how adults may misinterpret interactions between friends. As emerged through this co-constructed account, Aroha repeats “me and my friends” to suggest an in-group



relational and moral order that may include “swearing” that outsiders, and particularly *parents*, “wouldn’t get”. She suggests that other people “would be like ... watch your language!” Edwin explicates that these practices are understood between members “as a joke”, one which outsiders would not have the interpretive resources to categorise accurately. What emerged were accounts of interactions between friends could incorporate adult-proscribed activities such as swearing at people, which had also been associated with *bullying* elsewhere in this discussion, but were not *bullying* because *friends* understood them as *joking*. Interactions similar to those described by participants, including *playfighting*, *teasing*, and swearing between friends, have previously been identified as having distinctive in-group functions, including displaying and increasing intimacy through playfulness (Daly, Holmes, Newton, & Stubbe, 2004; Mills & Babrow, 2003). The notion of jocular abuse incorporates practices of ritual insults, mockery and ridicule where the playful element prompts laughter, which in turn breaks any tension arising from the verbal aggression (Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2012). It is also a feature of group cohesion and signals in-group status, as noted in the previous section. One of the risks noted by Evaldsson (2007) is that there is an inherent danger of the lines between playful and real aggression becoming blurred.

The notion of perceived “bad influence” invoked in the next excerpt, previously analysed in section 5.5.2, explicates the risks associated with misinterpreting by parents, in the event of external observation where the observers are not privy to the relationship between the interlocutors and its implicit interactional obligations.

**Excerpt 7: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - maybe they're being mean but it's not**

Aroha: Like kind of like what Chloe said with like the language if they see, if like my p-parents saw or like any parents **saw the language that friends use they'd think that like my friends** (1.0) changed me for the like (...) the worse?  
And

Justin: [Yeah ]

(indistinct): [Bad influence]

Aroha: Yeah bad influence

Justin: Yeah, so it's bad influence

Aroha: And like not even just like swearing but like **they'd think maybe they're being mean to somebody that's not**

The significance for this part of the analysis is the category work being done by “my friends”, as also appears in the previous excerpt. Here, to see *friend* as a gloss for *people I*

*know* is insufficient. *Friend* invokes mutual moral obligations between friends to do and receive activities such as swearing “as a joke”. *Friend* also implied familiarity and goodwill, such that events potentially categorisable as *bullying* are not “meant” seriously nor “taken” seriously. As such, they constitute expressions of relational intimacy, where verbal activities that may normally be interpreted as abusive can be experienced as friendly (Mills & Babrow, 2003). Aroha orients specifically to this interactional effect in the above excerpts. This intertwines with the threads in Chapter 5 where activities may be experienced as 'just for fun' and not *bullying* depending on the relational context. Shared practices establish that friends can joke, tease and say things to each other that may in other settings be construed as mean or aggressive but are understood to be playing or in fun rather than serious (see particularly sections 5.2.5, 5.4.2, and 5.5.1). As such, the membership categorisation analysis concept of standardised relational pair offers a means to analyse the workings of the moral duties and obligations of *friends* which are not connected with *people I know*.

Standardised relational pairs are pairs of member categories where the relationship between them implies social and moral duties and obligations (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2007, 2015; Sacks, 1972, 1995; Stokoe, 2012). Sacks' detailed analysis of a child's story demonstrates how standardised relational pairs imply these duties and obligations within accounts of activities (Sacks, 2014). Similar pairs, including neighbour-neighbour and doctor-patient, can be identified where there are social and moral actions incorporated in the social knowledge invoked by the relational context. *Friend-friend* constitutes a symmetrical standardised relational pair and not solely as a consequence of representing a relationship between similar aged peers. Some standardised relational pairs involving children can be understood as hierarchical, or asymmetrical (Hester & Hester, 2012, p. 5), arising from the social difference created by generation, including parent-child, teacher-student, or by exertion of social power, such as bully-victim. The asymmetry points to interactional and social power differences between the member categories of the pair, which may be structural or transitory, and which are expressed moment-by-moment in interaction. Between friends, social difference is not produced through generation, and social power is assumed to be shared equally. Such power symmetry may be enacted through mutual teasing, as exemplified in the next excerpt. Edwin elaborates on an earlier proposal from Ravi that a person's response to someone being serious can depend on the recipient's personality and “I just laugh it off”.

### Excerpt 8: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 - joking response to a joke

Edwin: Oh um just to add in on Ravi like  
Justin: Yep  
Edwin: **some people say it being as a joke and then they'll say it back as a joke**  
Justin: Yep  
Edwin: but then if it's like a group chat and **another person see it they might think it's a fight**  
Justin: .hh  
Edwin: but then **the two people were actually in it they are just talk as a joke**  
Justin: Yeah  
Kieran: You can sort of tell if someone's being bullied or not cos if they're if **it's just being friendly they'll probably say stuff back**  
Justin: yeah  
Kieran: and just say ... but if it's bullying then they'll probably ask to stop it and if they keep doing it

In this excerpt, previously discussed in section 5.4.2, Edwin expands on a proposal from Ravi that it is possible to treat something as *joking*, even if the other person was *being serious*. This attributes agentive power to the recipient to choose how to respond, rather than the response being determined by the interpreted intent of the instigator. Edwin's expansion describes joking that can be misinterpreted by a third party observer in a group chat. Kieran proffers “being friendly” as the key to interpretation through observation whether the joking is mutual, which implicitly orients to qualities of the *friend* standardised relational pair, in that friendly activity is recognisable through playful mutuality.

The example co-constructed between Ravi, Edwin and Kieran teased out a neat point of interactional analysis within the category work. Pointing out the risks of interpretation without regard for context, they constructed a means for differentiating between *bullying* and *joking* through observation of the recipient response and the ensuing interaction, not simply on the instigator's actions (as discussed in Chapter 5). The use of insults as friendly greetings and game-playing banter appears in a number of places across the data set. It highlighted the role of playfulness in interactions as an indicator of positive relationship, and also highlighted that playfulness can extend to jocular abuse. However, as was evident in other excerpts, interactions that start as ‘joking between friends’ may turn into *being serious* or ‘fights’ and be experienced as hurtful. Participants oriented to the potential for interactions to play out differently where the ‘meaning’ of activities potentially categorisable as *bullying* was ambiguous.

Focusing on *friend* as belonging to a standardised relational pair reveals another analytic layer to the category work in action in these accounts. To be included in a *friend-friend* standardised relational pair implies a mutual relational context and understanding of how to interpret interactions. Being a *friend* carries an obligation to not mean things seriously and to not take things seriously, as suggested in the analysis in Chapter 5 and interpreting *joking* or *being serious*. While this can break down, being friends is predicated on ongoing intersubjective *known-ness*, which influences the reception of verbal and physical actions. Being *friends* also influences the expected interpretation and consequently the meaning of activities, as suggested by Eddie in Excerpt 2. In this regard, *friend* constitutes a specific kind of relational context for categorising activities as *bullying* or *not bullying*. The moral obligations inherent in the standardised relational pair illuminated further the complex interaction between person categories and activity categories. The analysis of activity as a locus of categorisation in Chapter 5 presented a challenge to the category-predicate hierarchy in the membership categorisation analytic notion of category-bound activities as based on the primacy of person categories.

#### **6.2.4 “Friends Fight but They Don't Bully”: Categories, Features and Predicates**

A key idea in membership categorisation analysis is the interaction between categories and predicates, or features ascribed to them. While there have been a range of terms used, including category-bound activities, predicates, and features (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015; Sacks, 2014; Stokoe, 2012), the significance for analysis is that categories have features deployed by interlocutors in the context of category work. The analytic interest in identity and persons doing the social actions has led to a primacy for person categories in membership categorisation analysis. This is most evident in the formulation ‘category-bound activity’, where activities take a secondary position and supporting role to the focus on person categories. This has inadvertently obscured category work connected with activities. This is especially so for the analytic notion of the category-bound activity, where activities are treated by members as ‘naturally’ related to a category in a taken-for-granted way (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015; Sacks, 2014). While other terminology, as described above, has been less specific, the analytic focus for category work generally remains on person categories, to which predicates are somehow connected. Revealing activity as a locus of categorisation through the analysis in Chapter 5 posed a challenge to this primacy and suggested a more complex interaction between persons and activities as intertwined categories and features.

Where *friend* is deployed in participants' accounts to categorise an activity as *bullying* disrupted the impression that the category-activity link was unidirectional.

In this excerpt (also discussed in section 5.3.3), Ravi explicates a notion invoked in varying degrees of explicitness across the data set: that the person category *friend* is strongly salient to categorising an activity as *bullying* or *not bullying*.

**Excerpt 9: CaSM\_2\_GA\_01 – friends don't bully**

Ravi:                    Usually **friends fight** not like (.) **if it's your friends you fight but you don't bully each other**

As emerged from the analysis in Chapter 5 and in this chapter, normally friends are involved in activities that are *not bullying* rather than *bullying*, on the basis of the activities being *just for fun* or *joking*. In this excerpt, Ravi orients to the potential for friends to be involved in hurtful or troublesome activities with *friends*, even though this goes against the normative expectations associated with *friend*. Whilst these activities may be potentially categorised as *bullying* were circumstances different, the relational context of *friends* mitigates this. As seen in this excerpt, even though *friends* may *fight* and that could be hurtful, *bullying* was different and not what *friends* do. Here Ravi also orients to power asymmetry implicit in *bullying*. As discussed in section 6.2.3, friend-friend is a symmetrical standardised relational pair with the implication of equal power between friends. This contrasts with the unequal power implicated in the category *bullying*. "Usually friends fight" indexes the symmetrical standardised relationship pair *friend-friend*, which is also implicit in the notion of *fighting* understood as occurring between evenly matched opponents.

In contrast with the ambiguity in Toby's account in 6.2.2, Ravi orients specifically to *friend* as the predicate to categorising an activity as *bullying*, rather than *known-ness*. Further, this category work invokes hurtful rather than playful interactions. Friends may fight or be involved in dramas with each other; however, these remain distinguished from *bullying*. This illuminated a fundamental feature of *bullying* as an activity category in participants' accounts: that it is not done by *friends*.

Disarticulating the notion of category-bound or category-tied activities expands the analytic field by de-centring person categories in categorisation analysis. This offers a rich direction to examine how activities are categorised in the context of members'

sense-making activities. It is feasible to examine the interaction between *friend* and *bullying* as orienting to a person-focused category-bound activity. Ravi's account clearly positioned *bullying* as negatively associated with the category *friend* and that it may be taken-for-granted that 'friends don't bully'. However, for this study it was activity categories that emerged as a central focus for defining *bullying*, as discussed in Chapter 5. Person categories were positioned in participants' accounts as interpretive resources for categorising and making sense of actions, and appeared as predicates to the activity categories. From an analytic perspective, it may be more useful to use terms such as category features or predicates to reconsider and extend the focus of analysis of category work beyond the primacy of person categories. With the focus on activities and interaction, *bullying* is at once simplified and complicated by the relational category *friend*, and thus the person doing the activity becomes a salient feature of the activity.

In the above excerpt, categorising an activity as *bullying* is not solely an intersubjective and epistemic problem associated with *being able to tell* whether the other person is *being serious* or *joking*. This account orients to the potential for *friends* to do hurtful things to each other, even though it may contravene normative expectations on friends to not do so. However, as was also evident in Chapter 5, this does not enable these activities to be categorised as *bullying*. Ravi's proposition remains consistent with the typical notion that negative impact is necessary, but not sufficient, to define or categorise an activity as *bullying*, as discussed in 5.3.2. The potential interpretation of activities as *bullying* is moderated by *friend*. Where a person is categorised as a *friend*, then an activity is not categorisable as *bullying*. In this regard, the 'person' becomes the predicate to the activity categorisation. Disarticulating the notion of category-bound activity and de-centring the person category expands the analytic field and creates substantial potential to analyse the complex and dynamic interactions between person categories and activity categories, rather than assuming the primacy of person categories. This analytic shift made visible the complex and dynamic interactions between the categories *bullying* and *friend*, and revealed richer detail in analysis of the apparently 'deviant' case in section 6.3, as well as in analysis of typical cases across the data set.

### 6.2.5 Who Is This Person To Me? The Role of Relational Context for Defining Bullying

How do the features of *friend* as a member category contribute to the interactional model? Relational context was strongly salient as an interpretive resource for making sense of activities as *bullying* or *not bullying*, and specifically the relational categories of *people I know* and *friend* compared with 'random people'. For this reason, 'relational categories' forms another lens of the interactional model for defining *bullying*, as shown in Figure 6.2. I have called these 'relational' categories due to the significance of 'known-ness' and the specifically relational features of the person categories deployed by participants.

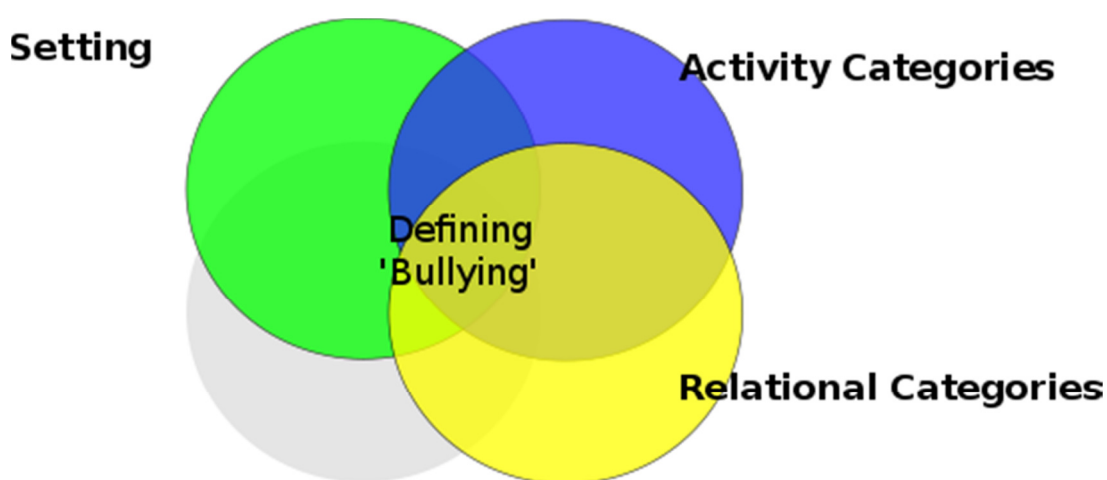


Figure 6.2 An interactional model for defining *bullying* – relational categories.

The intersubjective and epistemic problem of interpreting actions was partly, but not wholly, resolved through *known-ness*. Similarly, the problems of interpreting the fuzzy boundaries of activities are partly but not wholly resolved through *friend*. As discussed in Chapter 5, some activities may be characterised as varieties of play – *joking*, having fun, *screwing around*, and *playfighting*. This implies a mutual obligation on *friends* as instigator and recipient to interpret these activities as *joking* and not *being serious*. Such activities may include swearing or language likely to be confronting to parents and carry a high risk of being misunderstood (Aroha, excerpt in section 6.2.3). *Mocking* and *snobbing* may potentially occur between friends, although this similarly depends on the relational context of the interaction (5.2.2). The crucial point is that parties to the interaction participate in a shared understanding and moral obligation that the interaction is 'just for fun' and are peers in the sense of having equal power.

Relational context is integral to interpreting activities, and as such is a vital lens in the interactional model for defining *bullying*. *People I know* appeared as a general relational category and known-ness forms the basis for resolving the intersubjective and epistemic problems (knowing their usual manner). Importantly, access to the epistemic territory is a crucial factor for undertaking this category work and may not be explicit in the interaction such that an external observer (such as a parent, teacher or analyst) would be able to discern reliably the quality of the interaction. The risk for misinterpreting is high if only actions are observed and the significance of relational context is ignored or unknown.

In this respect, the category *friend* is highly salient to defining *bullying* for the purpose of categorising activities. The emergent rule or norm was that if a person is a friend, then the interaction *potentially* categorisable as *bullying*, because it was hurtful or troublesome, should not be categorised as *bullying*. As evident in the excerpts discussed above and in other chapters, *friends* could still do things that hurt to one another. This becomes further complicated in a context where the action of categorising an interaction as *bullying* may achieve other social actions beyond plain description, as evidenced in the finer grained analysis of an apparently deviant case in the second section of this chapter. In it, I present a detailed analysis of a co-constructed account of a past event between parties to that event where categorising an interaction as *bullying* is juxtaposed with the member category *friend*, thereby creating a category puzzle. A superficial review may suggest that this undermines the proposal that 'friends don't bully' is normative. However, the detailed analysis reveals how the interlocutors orient to this as a norm, and use both *friend* and *bullying* as resources to achieve social actions.

### **6.3 A Category Puzzle: “You Can Get Cyberbullied By Your Friends”**

#### **6.3.1 Introduction**

In this section, I engage in fine-grained analysis of an apparently deviant case in the data set. In this excerpt from a peer interview videorecording, a friend is accused of cyberbullying. This created a puzzle in two respects. Firstly, for me as an analyst given the apparent norm that was typical across the data set captured in Ravi's comment that “friends don't bully each other”. Secondly, it presents a device commonly referred to as a category/activity puzzle in membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1995; Stokoe, 2012). In this analysis I have called this a ‘category puzzle’ to avoid automatically subordinating activity categories to person categories and attend to the complex



interaction between these two types of categories. As became apparent in analysis of participants accounting for the category *friend* in relation to *bullying* seen in section 6.2, *friend* as a member category is typically negatively associated with *bullying*. The dissonance created when a friend is accused of bullying illuminates a set of relational and moral tensions within the talk-in-interaction itself, and for the category work connected with both *friend* and *bullying*. This offers insights into the complex co-construction of shared understandings by participants for making sense of their experiences in the context of interaction (as per Garfinkel, 1967; also Kidwell, 2013). As a post-event account, it also offers a glimpse into the sense-making activities of participants in discussion of interpersonal conflict and the interactional process of developing knowledges.

### **6.3.2 Background for the Excerpt**

The excerpt is taken from a peer interview at School 3, where Eddie and Daria are being interviewed by Lila and Madison. The teacher had grouped participants into friendship groups to facilitate comfortable small group work. Eddie and Daria were originally grouped with Melody (mentioned in this excerpt). However, the teacher rearranged the groups just prior to the video recording activity, and Melody was placed with a different group. The teacher commented at the time that the request came from some of the participants due to a falling out between some members of the original grouping; however, the individuals involved and the nature of the problem were not disclosed to me. According to the teacher, the problem that had prompted this request had resolved by the time of the recording, but she thought it better not to rearrange the groups again.

This excerpt occurs part way through the recording. In this excerpt, Daria and Eddie responded to questions about whether they feel they have been affected by social media, and whether they think it is safe. As discussed in section 3.4.4, the peer video interview activity gave participants substantial autonomy in the process, with no adults present. The only guiding request from me was to ‘interview each other on what it is like to be their age using social media’. Each group had a list of questions generated by class members during a previous fieldwork exercise; however, these had the status of a guide rather than being a strict interview schedule. The recording took place in a room separate from other classroom areas, where the groups could complete the recording activity relatively undisturbed.

One of the affordances created by video-recordings is capture of gesture, body posture and facial expressions as components of the interaction. As a result, the transcript and analysis incorporates some instances of nonverbal communication that appear salient to the interaction and analysis. Increasing use of video-recordings has enabled ethnomethodological analysis of gesture as an integral component of the interaction (e.g. Keevallik, 2013; Mondada, 2011). Daria and Eddie's close physical proximity on the couch and relaxed physical interactions displayed their ease in each other's company. Eddie presented as a forceful persona, supported by her physical size (she was one of the tallest people in the class), speech volume, and mannerisms. These were evident throughout the data set for School 3 as well as in this excerpt. Both Daria and Eddie use highly expressive hand and body gestures, as noted in places through the following transcript, in addition to verbal expression in the interaction. Names appearing in the text are pseudonyms, in line with the confidentiality agreements made with participants in the study from which the data excerpt has been taken.

As can be seen in the still below, Eddie and Daria were sitting on a small couch. Lila and Madison were sitting behind the camera. The camera remained static and focused on Eddie and Daria for the duration of the recording. Eddie and Daria identify each other elsewhere in the recording as close friends. The pattern of interaction between Eddie, Daria, Lila and Madison is casual and friendly, often lapsing into casual conversation in between orientations to the task of 'interviewing'. Their close physical proximity on the couch and relaxed physical interactions similarly displayed their ease in each other's company.

The story goes for a little over two minutes of talk. I have broken it and the analysis into two sections for convenience. However, the two segments flow unbroken from one to the next in the recording and thus can be seen to comprise a single story.



Figure 6.3 Representative still from the video recording CaSM\_3\_PI\_020.

### 6.3.3 Excerpt and Analysis

#### Excerpt 10a: CaSM\_3\_PI\_020 – “you can get cyberbullied by your friends” Part 1

1 Lila: Okay (.) umumumumumum where are we up to.  
2 Have you been affected by social media?  
3 Like (.) so (.) cyberbullied (2.3) badly?  
4 Daria: Um  
5 Lila: [Not badly?]  
6 Daria: [she she.....] ((head inclines sideways to-  
7 wards Eddie)) and her friend, I mean, yeah  
8 Eddie: Your friend as well.  
9 Daria: Our friend (.) well (.) yeah. [She and] Mel  
10 Lila: [Heheh ]  
11 Eddie: WE went through a rough patch in our rela-  
12 tionship. °Eww that sounds eww°  
13 Madison: (laughing) [Your relationship? ]  
14 Daria: [.hhh at the start of the year]  
15 or was it last year, was it,  
16 Eddie: I don't know.  
17 Madison: That sounds (indistinct)

18 Lila: Okay carry on girls. Sorry.

19 Eddie: We were just like we were just like † ohhh

20 I hate you bitch ((typing motions)) † n (.)

21 stuff like that

22 Lila: °Oh schnap°

23 Eddie: [°Oh schnap°]

24 Daria: [And then ] and then I was like by myself

25 and these two people like † \*beh

26 [nehnehnehneh ]

27 Madison: [Cyberbullying]

28 Daria: And I'm like .HHH HHH ((downturned mouth,

29 shrugging shoulders)) and then um they made

30 up before I um the night ended so

31 [um ]

32 Eddie: [And then an] hour later in an hour after

33 we did it we were like °I'm so sorry that

34 felt so bad°

35 Daria: Eneheh and they were like †oh I'm so sorry

36 [I'm so...]

37 Eddie: [No Melody didn't want to. Melody she was

38 just like eww and I was like °we have to we

39 have to that was horrib-° it was all Melody

40 it wasn't me.

41 Lila: (0.5) Well why were you doing it on your

42 account?

43 Eddie: (0.5) How do you know it was on my account

44 you stalker?

45 Lila: Heheheh because

46 Eddie: I wanted to swap over to her account. (.)

47 But she wouldn't let me. (.) °I'm sorry it

48 wasn't me. It was Melody.°

49 Daria: You guys. Even [the boys]

50 Lila: [Hehehehe]

51 Daria: were on your guys' side. And I was by my-

52 self. =

53 Eddie: =Yeah because boys are always on my side.

54 Coz I'm like ((tongue click))

55 Lila: Ohhh  
 56 Eddie: AHAHA [HAH]  
 57 Daria: [Now] we're all on each others'  
 58 [side, ]  
 59 Lila: [What happened] here,  
 60 Daria: We got each other's back  
 61 Eddie: AHHHHHHHH  
 62 Daria, Lila, Madison: (laughing)  
 63 Eddie: You little [bitch you ] slap hard  
 64 Lila: [Next question!]

Lila's question in lines 1-2 sets the scene for a focus on experience, where the question formulation "have you been affected" draws attention to personal and emotional impact in the context of using social media. Although "being affected" could include positive or negative experiences, Lila redesigns the question to offer "cyberbullied" as a specific type of "being affected" (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013). It is not immediately clear whether her further redesigns "badly" and "not badly" refer to "cyberbullied" or "being affected", although it is difficult to conceive how one might be bullied in a neutral or positive sense. However, this lack of clarity changes the valence of the candidate answer and expands the range of permitted responses (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013). Lila's hedging before "cyberbullying" (line 3) and extended pause before "badly"/"not badly" appears to orient to cyberbullying as a sensitive subject.

Daria's "um" makes a first response to Lila's question and allows her to set the focus of the ensuing discussion on a specific past event. While this does not fit "going first" in a strict sequential sense (Heritage & Raymond, 2005), it is a first response and establishes a degree of control over the following discussion. She then launches into telling a story, in which she implicitly accuses her friend Eddie, who is sitting next to her, of cyberbullying (line 6-7). Daria makes a claim over the epistemic terrain represented by the event by proffering it as a suitable response to a question about cyberbullying (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013). She authors this account as a breach of the rules of "being a friend" by categorising Eddie's actions as cyberbullying. In this, Daria also produces a claim for moral authority by making Eddie and Melody's social conduct accountable as a breach of the moral order (Drew, 1998; Evaldsson, 2007). This breach is intensified by constructing the narrative in an oppositional "them versus me" frame,

rendering Eddie and Melody's actions as a breach of the duties and obligations implicit in the standardised relational pair friend-friend.

The friend-friend standardised relational pair also appears as a resource for resisting the emerging account of the event as cyberbullying. Eddie's interjection, that "her friend" is "your friend as well" (line 7-8), attempts to reorient the narrative away from the opposition Daria sets up between herself on one side and Eddie and Melody on the other. Interestingly, Eddie does not start out disputing the indexed categorisation of this event as cyberbullying. However, she draws on "friend" to emphasise their ongoing relationship, shifting the "them versus me" to "us". Daria concedes the reframe and modifies her account to "our friend" (line 9), and restarts her narrative, this time using the absent friend's name. As becomes evident later in the excerpt, this delays but does not derail the unfolding co-construction of the event as cyberbullying.

Eddie interjects again to reframe the incident as "a rough patch in our relationship", accompanied by a sweeping arm gesture that creates a physically imposing effect along with seeking to define the narrative (line 11). This interruption suggests that Eddie remains oriented to the persisting moral problem that she remains implicitly accused of cyberbullying her friend. Eddie's recategorisation "a rough patch" may be seen as attempting to diminish or minimise the significance of the event for the longer term, even as it simultaneously orients to Daria's category work by disputing it. Eddie's choice of words create an unintentional comic moment by inappropriate indexing of romantic relationship rather than friendship, prompting Eddie's aside "ew that sounds ew" (lines 11-12). In this reframe Eddie continues to focus on friendship as a strategy to dispute the categorisation of the event as cyberbullying, suggesting that it conforms to a temporary falling out rather than the enduring victimisation indexed by cyberbullying. The "just" in Eddie's account contributes to the diminished significance of her and Melody's actions "we were just like ohh I hate you bitch n (.) stuff like that" accompanied by typing motions with her hands (line 19-21). At this point, Eddie's echo of Lila's "oh schnap" along with a downward gaze and subdued posture suggests regret.

Daria makes her self-categorisation as the negatively-impacted party explicit in lines 24-28, where she describes being "by myself and these two people were like" and "I'm like .HHH HHH". Invoking the experience of negative impact makes a claim to being more knowledgeable (K+) about the event for the purposes of categorising it as cyberbullying. This claim orients to her relative epistemic rights over knowing her own emotional



experience (Heritage, 2012; Sacks, 1995) and to the priority accorded to the recipient response, as observed in accounts of defining bullying from the broader data set. Daria displays her experience of the negative impact of this event using vocal and gesture combinations as syntactic elements (Keevallik, 2013), including “\*beneneneneneh” (line 25-26) and loud in and out breath combined with a downward-turned mouth in an exaggerated sad face (lines 26-27). Madison formulates Daria’s implicit category work with her interjection “cyberbullying” (line 27). Madison’s interjection demonstrates that Daria’s category work rendered this story hearable as cyberbullying, a formulation to which Daria at least acquiesces because she does not dispute it.

While not contesting that the event was hurtful for Daria, Eddie increasingly disputes Daria’s categorisation and the epistemic and moral authority claims that flow from it. Eddie has equivalent epistemic access to the past event because she was involved. Where her and Daria’s epistemic status are treated differently is in their relative rights (Heritage, 2012; Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011). As Heritage (2012) notes, possession of information on its own is not enough to be recognised as having a priority claim to epistemic authority. Eddie as an instigator is treated as less knowledgeable (K-) in light of the apparent rule that recipient response takes priority over instigator intent when determining if an action was bullying. Eddie’s interjection in line 8 emphasises the ongoing friendship between Daria, Melody, and herself to undermine the indexed categorisation of the event as cyberbullying, invoking the social norm that friends do not bully each other. Eddie’s subsequent challenges appear to claim epistemic authority based on the event having a negative impact on her as well, evident in her comment “that felt so bad” (line 33-34). She then progressively distances herself from responsibility, eventually denying involvement, upgrading her denial from “we were just like I hate you bitch and stuff like that” (line 19-21) to “Melody didn’t want to” (line 37) and “it was all Melody, it wasn’t me” (lines 39-40, also 47-48).

Lila’s challenge to Eddie’s attempted resistance at line 41 similarly orients to Daria’s epistemic and moral authority to accuse Eddie. Lila challenges Eddie’s pattern of increasing denial by asking why the “stuff like that” was coming from Eddie’s social media account if Eddie was not involved. This has the effect of supporting Daria’s authoring of the account as cyberbullying. Eddie attempts to deflect this with a counteraccusation “you stalker” to Lila. “Stalker” in relation to online activity implies illegitimate access to the epistemic terrain under discussion, along with negative

implicatures comparable to bullying. Eddie's categorisation of Lila appears to be an attempt to undermine Lila's orientation to Daria's authority. Eddie immediately returns to apologising to Daria while simultaneously disclaiming any responsibility for the event (lines 47-48).

Daria implicitly and then explicitly disputes Eddie's disclaimers of responsibility. Her implicit rejection can be seen in her exclamation "You guys. Even the boys were on your guys' side" (line 49-51), repositioning Eddie back into the instigator category with Melody and now also with "the boys" who had apparently joined in. This also upgrades Daria's characterisation of her social exclusion by extending the scope of the hurtful event. Eddie orients to this as a positive reflection on her popularity because "boys are always on my side" (line 53). Daria then re-appropriates "being on each other's side" to account for the resolution of the troublesome event, followed by a word play shifting the emphasis from "side" to "back" through the figure of speech "we got each other's back" (line 60). Daria emphasises the word "back" by slapping Eddie on the back in an exaggerated gesture. Eddie's reaction is equally exaggerated. Although it is not possible to evaluate how forceful the contact was from the recording, Eddie's vocal and gesture responses simulate a response to a forceful blow. The laughter responses by Lila, Madison, and Daria combined with Eddie's further comment in a normal voice suggests that Eddie's reaction was melodramatic rather than realistic and matches the volume of her laughter earlier at line 56. Daria's back slap creates a figurative and physical punctuation point in the excerpt (Keevallik, 2013).



**Excerpt 10b: “you can get cyberbullied by your friends” Part 2**

65 Madison: Do you think it's safe. (.) and why.  
66 Eddie: ((puts food in mouth)) Mmm-mmm ((shaking  
67 head and chewing)) Mmm-mmm  
68 Daria: Half half. Because you can get cyberbullied  
69 by your friends .hhh and  
70 Eddie: IT WASN'T CYBERBULLYING  
71 Daria: WELL SOMETHING LIKE THAT  
72 Eddie: IT WAS MELODY  
73 Daria: Melody bullulling bullying  
74 Lila: Bullulling  
75 Daria: [(laughing) ]  
76 Eddie: [I don't like being accused] of something I  
77 didn't do  
78 Daria: And then and then there's like the good  
79 side of being social to your friends  
80 Eddie: ((picks up paper butterfly from windowsill  
81 behind sofa))  
82 Lila: Ooh there's a butterfly  
83 Daria: ((slaps Eddie's hand)) †Ohhehehehehe† I  
84 just ripped it.  
85 Lila: Okay okay no Daria  
86 Eddie: Who's social bullying now  
87 Daria: The butterfly. Okay, next question.  
88 Lila: Oh you didn't even answer that  
89 Daria: Wh(h)at w(h)as th(h)e qu(h)est(h)ion,

Daria reasserts authority over the interaction by making the first substantive response to the next question. While Eddie's “mmm-mmm” is strictly the first response, she is unable to follow up with a verbal response due to having a mouthful of food. It is worth noting that there is no break in the talk between the beginning of this section of transcript and the end of the previous. Daria and Eddie remained oriented to the dispute, evident in their continued focus on the past event and whether it was cyberbullying. Lila's intervention to refocus on the task of interviewing with “next question” (line 64) did not produce a change of topic.

Daria's formulation of the category puzzle “you can get cyberbullied by your friends” makes explicit the category work that was implicit in her storytelling up to this point.

Eddie's increasing denial of responsibility provides a basis for the confrontation (Evaldsson, 2007). This statement is observable as a category puzzle in the juxtaposition of "friends" and "cyberbullying", which should be morally mutually exclusive, and in the extreme response it elicits from Eddie. The shock value (Stokoe, 2012) provokes Eddie to respond with an equally explicit statement of the point of her dispute, which focuses on the categorisation of the event as "cyberbullying". Eddie is placed in the category of "cyberbully" according to the first viewer's maxim (Sacks 2014). If Eddie stands accused of the category-bound activity "cyberbullying", then as "the doer of the action" she is a bully. This clarifies the point of the dispute. Eddie does not dispute what Daria says happened, nor does she argue with Daria's account of how she was affected by the event. Her objection, as she comments in lines 76-77, is over being accused of something that she feels she did not do.

The competing claims to epistemic and moral authority illuminate the problems associated with evaluating relative epistemic and moral rights to account for an event where parties disagree. Both Daria and Eddie have access to the epistemic terrain of the event in question, so at that level they are both in a K+ position regarding the sequence of actions, which are not disputed. Where they differ is in relation to their experiences of the event, and this is the point where their relative claims to epistemic and moral authority are differentiated in this interaction. This presents an intriguing dilemma at the heart of the category work in this excerpt. How do the interlocutors orient to and assess the authority in the context of such a dispute? In this case, the intertwined epistemic primacy accorded to the hurt party and moral order implicit in the standardised relational pair of friends result in the interlocutors according greater authority to Daria's category work over Eddie's counter-arguments. Daria is in a K+ position regarding her experience of being hurt, and this epistemic primacy translates to a parallel moral authority to categorise the event as a result. This positioning effectively places Eddie in a K- position because she has less epistemic access to how hurtful her actions were to Daria. In this regard, it is not simply knowing the thing but having a specific relationship with the thing that establishes the greater authority and rights (Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

The moral tension introduced by Daria accusing Eddie of cyberbullying persists through the remainder of the account due to Daria's refusal to relinquish the categorisation. Eddie continues to dispute the categorisation of the past event as bullying and her

implicit categorisation as a bully. Eddie's post script statement "I don't like being accused of something I didn't do" (line 76-77) displays an orientation to the fact that she remains accused and that Daria's category work still stands and continues to be treated as authoritative. Eddie repeats her attempt to shift blame to Melody (line 72). Rather than conceding to Eddie's implicit request to be exonerated from the accusation, Daria mockingly re-frames the accusation as "Melody bullying", implicitly restating her refusal to relinquish her authority for categorising the event in question.

#### **6.3.4 The Friendship Ties That Bind Activities – A Social Project**

So what interactional work is the category "cyberbullying" doing in the context of this dispute? The analysis highlighted how Daria's category work deployed cultural knowledge associated with "cyberbullying" and the standardised relational pair of friend-friend to create a category puzzle and thereby achieve a series of social actions. These actions serve to accuse Eddie of breaching the moral obligations of friends and to claim relative epistemic rights over accounting for the event as a result of being the hurt recipient of Eddie and Melody's negative actions. What matters is that friends should not bully friends, and it is this moral authority that Daria invokes successfully (evidenced in Eddie's dramatic reaction to the overt accusation) through a series of actions that may be understood as a social project (Levinson, 2013).

One of the complications highlighted in this excerpt is that an event may have many epistemic terrains, as each person involved has their own experiences of it. In this context, having first-hand experience of an event in question is not enough to accord authority to one person's account over another's. Both Daria and Eddie were directly involved in the incident, so have comparable entitlements to talk about their experience and make assessments about the event. For the most part, they were in agreement that it was unpleasant. Daria experienced it as unpleasant at the time, while Eddie acknowledged that the consequences were unpleasant ("that was horrib-", line 39).

Daria's authority in this co-constructed account may be understood as a confluence of the epistemic and moral authority associated with relative epistemic rights. The relational context of being the hurt recipient is treated as providing specific access to the epistemic territory of an interaction by virtue of their experience of it. They are in a position to know the negative impact directly, and the epistemic priority accorded to the hurt recipient is evident in the ways that Lila, Madison, and Eddie all orient to Daria's

categorisation. This right in turn establishes an authority to categorise an activity as bullying. Similarly, she claims authority to declare that the estrangement is over and now “we’re all on each other’s side” (line 57-58). Daria gets to propose, refocus, retrieve and deliver an authoritative categorisation of the event in question even though it creates interactional and relational trouble.

*friend* is normally a symmetrical standardised relational pair; however, Daria introduces an asymmetry and consequent tension through the category puzzle. Friendship includes assumptions of a permanent or durable state of being, indexed in Eddie's formulation of the troublesome event in question as “a rough patch in our relationship”. It also appears as a resource for Eddie to resist or deny the implicit claim that she was 'doing bullying' and therefore accused of 'being a bully'. However, in Daria's specific construction of the category puzzle, *friend* becomes a contingent category that can be applied, withdrawn, and reinstated. This highlights both the moral tension and moral authority within Daria's accounting for the event at the heart of this excerpt.

Daria's category work may also be usefully analysed as Daria teasing Eddie as an expression of their friendship (Mills & Babrow, 2003). Yet, as discussed above, this teasing cloaked a serious purpose, to exert influence over Eddie's future actions. This subtle use of teasing as 'discipline' has been identified variously as “disciplinary humour” (Franzen & Aronsson, 2013) and “social control through invoking negative identities” (Drew, 1987). Categorisation of an event as *bullying* implies that someone was 'doing bullying' and therefore potentially 'a bully'. The relational and interactional work achieved by the categorisation and implied negative identity fits well with the notion of teasing as social control (Mills & Babrow, 2003). The significance for this element within the analysis is the capacity of teasing to create social and interactional influence. By invoking the authority of being the hurt party, Daria's account creates influence through invoking the censure that *bullying* would normally attract. The implications of Daria's categorisation in this excerpt were that she felt hurt by people she thought were her friends. This hurt had enough impact to cause teasing of Eddie about it, even though the event itself had been resolved. Furthermore, Daria sought to influence over Eddie's future behaviour and keep Eddie accountable. *Teasing* here is therefore also a social resource, offering Daria a face-saving way of raising a grievance.

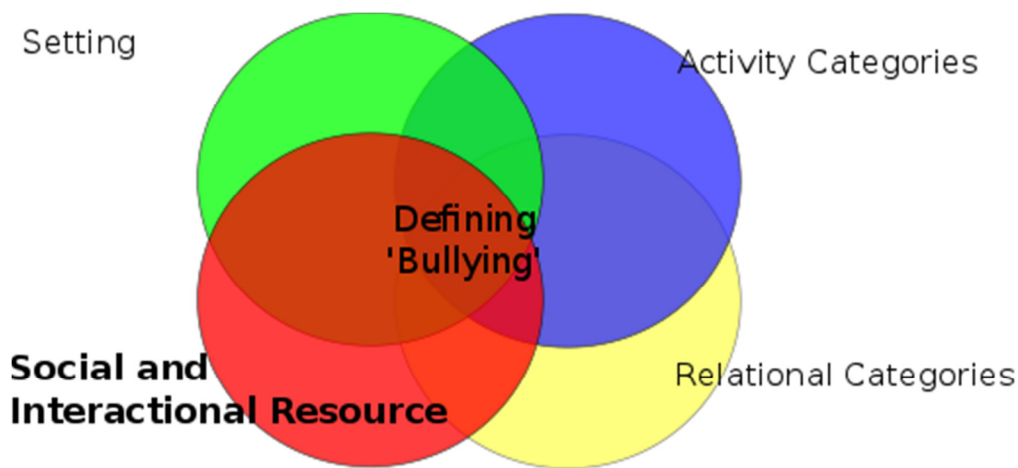
If the account were to be analysed as arguing or fighting then it would arguably be superficial as it would miss the impact of the categorisation, the tension involved in

accounting for the event as bullying, and the implications in this interaction. As illustrated in Svahn and Evaldsson (2011), subtle shifts in interpersonal power may be imperceptible without fine-grained analysis, while having profound interactional consequences. If the account were to be analysed as *bullying* by an adult observer and took Daria's category work at face value, then it would be equally superficial, glossing the categorisation work and missing its use as a social and interactional resource. Detailed analysis of the category work reveals how this account is ultimately consistent with 'friends don't bully'.

### 6.3.5 “Bullying” as a Social and Interactional Resource

Several studies have also documented how social control or influence is produced in children's peer interactions and friendships, notably in girls' friendships (Corsaro, 2009; Duncan & Owens, 2011; Goodwin, 2002a, 2002b; Karlsson & Evaldsson, 2011; Loyd, 2012; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011). Daria's storytelling and invoking of the category puzzle can be seen to make a moral claim to exert influence over Eddie's future actions. Daria does not have recourse to a structural authority to give instructions to direct Eddie's future actions (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). She does have access to the moral obligations inherent in the standardised relational pair friend-friend to create a more indirect form of social control, mediated here through accusation of wrongdoing. The tension created through the category puzzle and standardised relational pair adds moral weight to this project of influence. In this respect, Daria exploited the ties between the activity “bullying” and the person category “bully” to produce social influence in the context of a close friendship. In this respect, whether the event in question matches any definition of bullying is immaterial. Daria's category work deploys “bullying” not to provide an accurate description of the event but to pursue a project of influencing Eddie's future behaviour, to tie it closer to the moral obligation of “friends”.

What this analysis shows is the way in which category work in general and a loaded category such as *bullying* may be deployed as a social and interactional resource in pursuit of a social project. As such, this analysis revealed the fourth lens to the interactional model for defining *bullying* that emerged from participants' accounts (Figure 6.4).



**Figure 6.4** An interactional model for defining *bullying* – social and interactional resource.

The event recounted in Excerpt 10 would not fit the conventional definition of bullying criteria, and nor did it fit the children's working definitions appearing in the broader data set. It also appeared at odds with the social norm that friends do not bully friends. As such, it initially appeared to be a deviant case. However, this excerpt and analysis offers an insight into ways that “bullying” may be used to categorise activities regardless of whether they match an agreed definition. What it does illustrate is children's use of categorisation, epistemic, and moral authority in peer conversation to achieve social actions and projects that co-construct knowledges in interaction (Corsaro, 2009; Mayall, 2000) but are not limited by strict accuracy to definitions. This evidence also offers an insight into children's orientations to epistemic and moral authority in the context of categorisation, and management of epistemic priority to resolve competing claims over relative epistemic rights. The interlocutors in the above excerpt orient to the negative identity that 'being a bully' implies. This excerpt offers an insight into how categories may be deployed to achieve social influence independently of any perceived 'accuracy' as a description.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Just as settings shape interactions, so do relationships. In the first part of this chapter, I have examined how relational context matters for categorising activities through specific focus on the relational category of *friend*. This focus offered rich insights into the complex social and interactional context of 'real' everyday interactions where simple and formal definitions are inadequate to the task of categorising. The examination of the role of *friend* in the activity of defining *bullying* illuminated how person categories function as interpretive resources to establish the epistemic territory for the category

work. The closer focus on *friend* as a distinct subset of *people I know* teased out the specific moral and relational features of *friend* as a standardised relational pair, with implications for the interaction, person categories, and activity categories related to *bullying*. Together, these analytic insights help clarify how relational categories work as the third lens of the interactional model, which may be summed up in the interpretive question 'who is this person to me?'

In the second part of this chapter, the fine-grained analysis of an apparently deviant case teased out further insights into the complex and dynamic interactions between person categories and activity categories that is made possible by disarticulating the notion of the category-bound activity. In the extract analysed, a past event is accounted for as "you can be cyberbullied by your friends". This is a category puzzle; in apparent contravention of the social norm 'friends don't bully'. Analysis of this case illuminated how participants oriented to each other's category work as a potential breach of the rules of *friend*, in the context of a disputed categorisation in the context of teasing between friends. By examining the deployment of categories and claims to epistemic and interactional authority, the notions of 'category puzzle' and 'standardised relational pair' offered an insight into *bullying* as an activity category that could itself create social and interactional influence. Analysis of this extract demonstrated the fourth lens in the interactional model, in participants' orientations to *bullying* as a social and interactional resource.

In the next chapter, I apply the analysis from Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to an interactional re-imagining of *bullying* using the interactional model that has emerged from analysis of participants' accounts. The analysis and model inform a re-theorising of *bullying* from a child-centred and interactional perspective, in the context of children's sense-making activities and ordinary peer interaction.





## Chapter 7

### Theorising bullying - an interactional re-imagining

#### 7.1 Introduction

*"Essentially, all models are wrong, but some are useful." - (Box & Draper, 1987, p. 424)*

This chapter draws together the threads from the previous chapters to theorise *bullying* using the interactional model that emerged from this study. Investigation of children's interactions provided important opportunities for analysis of how they make sense of their experiences, and for re-theorising existing constructs that have been predicated on adult perspectives. A key component for theorising *bullying* in this study has been to place children's methods of defining *bullying* at the centre. This shift has demonstrated how meaning is co-constructed as an interactional practice in children's development of knowledges. It materialises children's sense-making activities and illuminates how *bullying* is not a fixed or static construct, but rather one that is constantly 'under construction' in interaction.

The focus on individual behaviour as the core of the trouble has meant that the interactional component of Olweus' early model has been overlooked. Whilst he did identify that bullies were not bullies in isolation - the potential whipping boy had to be present for the interaction to develop (Olweus, 1978) - this was lost in subsequent literature that focused on individuals, whether that was on their behaviour or personality traits. While some studies have retained or revived focus on the bully-victim dyad, it continues to appear more as a static relationship rather than a dynamic interaction (e.g. Fox, Jones, Stiff, & Sayers, 2014; Hafen, Laursen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 2013).

In this chapter, I return to more theoretical discussion to develop a child-centred standpoint theory for defining *bullying*, drawing on the analysis of the data for this study discussed in Chapters 4 - 6. In the first section, I summarise the critical review of the troubles with bullying, first from a theoretical perspective, and then also from the analysis of empirical data for this study. The second section explores the interactional model that emerged through the data analysis, comprising the four lenses of setting, activity categories, relational categories, and social and interactional resource. In the

third section, I examine the contribution of an interactional perspective to theorising *bullying* as an 'ordinary' interaction and how this in turn refines the focus on hurtful, harmful and troublesome interactions as the underlying points of concern. Together, the points discussed in these three sections make the case for eliminating unhelpful, stereotypical glosses, and taking an interactional perspective in order to compose a useful model for children's sense-making activities connected with the notion of *bullying*.

## **7.2 Troublesome Definitions and Troublesome Interactions**

### **7.3.1 The Trouble With *Bullying* from a Child-Centred Theoretical Perspective**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of bullying has a chequered history in the existing literature and popular discourses, most notably in that it has gradually taken over as the dominant term for any negative aggressive behaviour between children. This shift from its earlier precise use for a subset of aggressive behaviour has given rise to a number of problems. It introduces a range of theoretical and methodological problems connected with the conventional definition of bullying and the existing literature. The conventional definition continues to be treated as axiomatic, despite its inadequacy as a universal term to apply to aggressive behaviour. The critical review in Chapter 2 also illuminated the way children's definitions of bullying have been marginalised in favour of adult-generated constructs. This marginalisation represents an additional problem from both conceptual and methodological perspectives. Continuing to treat bullying as a simple phenomenon from an individual behaviour model with some concessions to environmental factors achieves little in terms of progress for the field. Studies that treat the conventional definition as axiomatic perpetuate this 'thin description' (Geertz, 1973) that results from the dominance of positivist-empiricist approaches in mainstream psychology. Greene (2006) commented that this has produced a literature more focused on child variables and an abstract notion of 'the child' than on children's lived experiences. There is a growing body of studies that have taken different approaches to investigating bullying, including child-centred approaches (Cowie, 2011; Guerin & Hennessy, 2002; Guerin, 2006; Jennifer & Cowie, 2012) and conversation analysis of social interactions (Osvaldsson, 2011; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Theobald & Danby, 2014). However, these have rarely been paid attention in the mainstream bullying literature.

Monks (2009) argues that theoretical development in bullying literature has worked towards an integration of individual and situational factors, but this has not resulted in a critical re-evaluation of the conventional definition. It has also not had substantial impact on dominant models forming the implicit or explicit foundations for bullying research. As discussed in Chapter 2, the dominant models focused on the individual are perpetuated through the axiomatic use of the conventional definition, reliance on standardised measures based these models, and a lack of critical engagement with theory. Socio-ecological models have made some inroads into establishing recognition of situational factors (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Espelage, 2014; Swearer & Doll, 2001), however the apparent lack of theoretical engagement common in many prevalence studies means that this has remained limited. Independently of these small shifts, *bullying* in the existing literature remains an adult-generated and adult-centred construction that offers relatively passive input from the people whose experience is at the centre of the phenomenon: children. Children's definitions of *bullying*, and their sense-making activities regarding it, are assumed to be inadequate or overinclusive. This may only be implicit in the literature, but the concern about overinclusivity combined with the deficit model of childhood have a detrimental effect when it comes to recognising the relevance of children's definitions. Their perspectives, accounts and knowledges are effectively trivialised and disregarded in studies that favour priming with an a priori definition (Campbell et al., 2012; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Such approaches ignore children's own definitions and reinforce the notion that they always require instruction.

There are two major problematic assumptions at the heart of the conventional definition of bullying: reification, and over-reliance on a single interpretive framework. In philosophical terms, the assumption underlying reification may be understood as a 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness', where social phenomena are elevated to a false substantiality (Watson, 2015). The notion that there is a stable, abstract, and reified thing called bullying glosses and imposes an artificial homogeneity over a complex field of troublesome interactions. This abstract thing bullying is theorised, and then assumed to be indicative of either the intent behind the behaviour, or of some essential characteristic of a person's identity that makes a person a bully, which may also be treated as a stable and permanent characteristic of their person.

From a theoretical perspective, over-reliance on a single dominant interpretive framework has limited the scope for analysis and theorising of bullying and associated interactions as complex social phenomena. This over-reliance has arisen from application of the category *bullying* in an essentialist and reductionist manner to increasingly broad types of aggressive interactions or conflict. Such application precludes investigation of the interactions at the centre of the concern, and overshadows related literatures on peer conflict (Krieken & Bühler-Niederberger, 2009; Kyratzis, 2004; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Maynard, 1985b; Smith et al., 1995; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005), teasing (Alberts, Kellar-Guenther, Corman, Kellar-Guenther, & Corman, 1996; Cicchirillo & Roberto, 2012; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2003; Franzen & Aronsson, 2013; Keltner et al., 2001; Miller, 1987; Mills & Babrow, 2003; Mills & Carwile, 2009; Pawluk, 1989; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002), and social combat (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Importantly, this creates significant problems for interventions aimed at addressing bullying and other hurtful or harmful interactions. Using bullying as an all-inclusive term for aggressive or conflictual actions proposes that all such interactions have the same implications. It obscures the diversity of activity and interpretation of the interactions themselves. The heterogeneity in the existing literature itself suggests that this implication is not supported. When bullying becomes the sole category instead of being a point within a field of interactions, it loses its specificity and does not offer a good fit to the phenomena it aims to describe and explain.

### **7.3.2 Re-Theorising *Bullying* from a Child-Centred Analysis of Empirical Data**

The conventional definition of bullying, as discussed in Chapter 2, specifies four factors required for aggressive behaviour to meet the threshold of bullying: negative acts, repetition, intention, and power imbalance. As materialised in the data for this study, participants' methods for defining *bullying* did not follow these four factors. Through the child-centred standpoint approach and analytic framework, what emerged from my analysis were a set of features of social interactions that were salient to defining *bullying*: setting, activity categories, relational categories, and social and interactional resource. These features, which appear as lenses in the interactional model I developed (Figure 7.1), illuminate a distinctively different approach to defining *bullying* in participants' accounts from the adult-centred conventional definition and models. The analysis adds an empirical dimension to the critique of the conventional definition of bullying and illustrates another respect in which it is not fit for purpose.

The apparent mismatch between the factors of the conventional definition and the lenses in the emergent model for defining *bullying* is not an issue of overinclusivity on the part of participants (and by extension, children generally), as discussed in Chapter 2. Rather, I argue that it represents a different approach to defining bullying, and one to which existing research has paid insufficient attention. As illuminated in Chapter 5 and 6, participants' processes of defining bullying involved judging an interaction against a clear set of criteria that were consistent throughout the data set: the social setting of the interaction, the negative impact of actions, the relational context of the interaction, and the interactions themselves as co-constructed between instigators and recipients. What is different from the conventional definition is the focus and emphasis of the criteria in use. It suggests that children's approaches to defining bullying engage different perspectives on the social knowledge of these categories than the conventional definition. In using a child-centred approach, the aim of this study is to propose that children are neither mistaken nor naïve in their definitions and categorising of interactions as *bullying* or *not bullying*. Their difference in approach does not make them wrong. Instead, it suggests that there is an important gap in existing adult and theoretical conceptualisation of 'bullying.'

The children's criteria to define *bullying* became clear through iterative analysis of the data, from initial coding and shared analysis with participants, to more detailed analysis of members' category work related to both activities and persons. It would be entirely feasible to impose the four factors from the conventional definition onto the categories and criteria in the data. However, this would erase the distinctive process of 'doing' the defining, as well as the criteria made salient by participants. Moreover, a significant aspect of the participants' accounts is the absence of the categories 'bully' and 'victim.' While they clearly exist as cultural categories and available as resources, they are notably absent in the majority of interactions forming the data for this study. Some of this may reflect the shift in values to avoid labelling children common in educational philosophy and pedagogical practice. It is more common for initiatives to refer to *bullying* instead of the label 'bully'. However, these initiatives are not the only source of children's knowledges and cannot necessarily be framed as the source of inhibition.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> An unrelated example of this stands out in Wendy's use of 'a handicap' in her account of an unwanted interaction online, discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1. This language would normally be positioned as offensive and counter to the values of the school environment and classroom. The teacher had a poster in the classroom with the question prompts "is it kind, is it true, is it necessary?" in the class and referred to it as a

A crucial insight to emerge from analysis of the data set for this study is that children do not categorise all conflict as *bullying* and do not consider that any and all conflict should be categorised as 'bullying.' This is highly significant in relation to discussions of bullying and the design of interventions. While bullying continues to dominate the broader social discussions of concerns about children and aggression, participants themselves invoked a complex array of activity categories and practical reasoning to make sense of their experiences. This suggests that the intensive focus on bullying in research and popular discourses is impoverished, or "thin" (Geertz, 1973), and inadequate for theorising. As discussed in Chapter 2, some studies have identified the conceptual problems with using only the term bullying, especially in the online context. Research and popular discourses have become starved for terminology for investigating and describing conflictual interactions, courtesy of the reductionist focus on bullying that is simultaneously overly expansive in its application. While some theoretical discussions have proposed the additional terms 'electronic aggression' and 'cyberaggression', as discussed in section 2.3.2, this still falls short of recognising the field of interactions within which the participants in this study situated *bullying*. This much broader field included interactions that were not hurtful or harmful but could be misinterpreted by external observers. Participants included *joking, kidding, and playfighting* as well as activities that were *being serious* but were still not legitimately categorisable as *bullying*, within this field. A common thread to the activities made salient by participants in this context was that they were somehow troublesome, either through being hurtful or through problems associated with interpreting. Existing bullying literature is yet to address this, and it represents a significant gap in communication between anti-bullying initiatives that intend to reduce hurtful or harmful interactions and children who do not categorise all hurtful or harmful interactions as bullying.

The injunctions attached to bullying - that it is a serious event and requires adult intervention - may be counterproductive to promoting children to seek help when they feel hurt or troubled. The limited categories on offer may instead have the opposite effect, contributing instead to children's resistance to use the term for all but the most serious or harmful interactions. Bullying is an emotive term, and in these data it is clear that children do not categorise all unpleasant, unwanted or hurtful interactions as

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guide for comments on the class blog. However, in a peer-only context this deployment of a derogatory identity category remains 'sayable'.

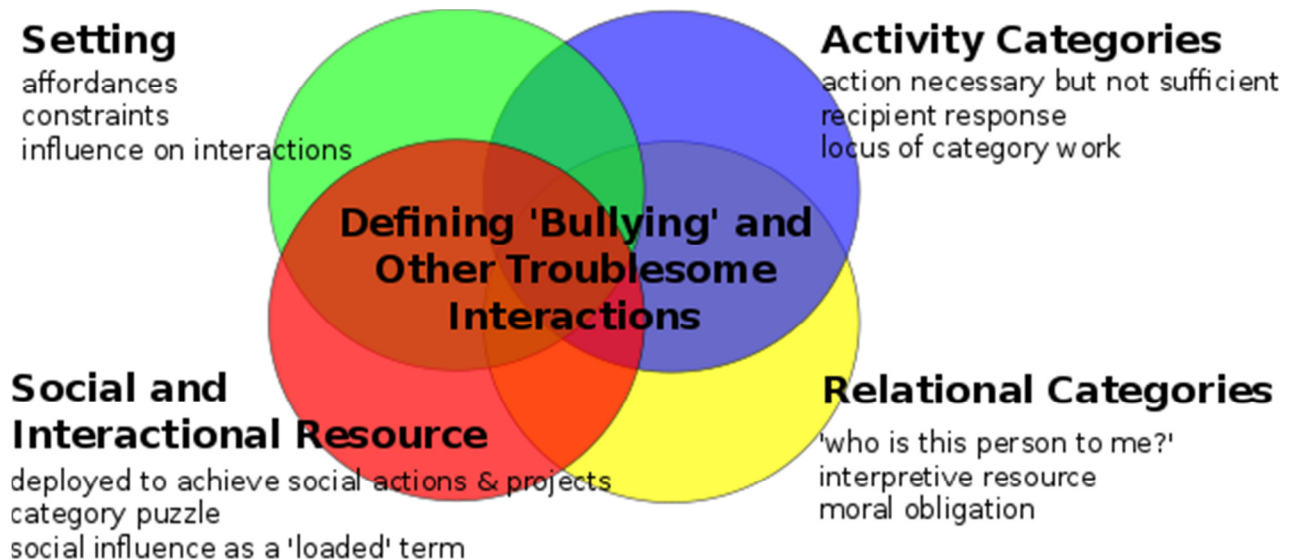
*bullying*. There was a rich fabric of categories for conflictual interactions in participants' accounts, including *snobbing*, *mocking*, *dramas*, *fighting* and *arguments*, among others. There are additional categories of *playfighting* and *screwing around* that may have superficial similarity to activities that could be categorised as bullying, but are understood as playful. Analysis of these categories in the group discussions clarified that *joking* and play, including various manifestations of 'jocular abuse', were important expressions of friendship, a dynamic consistent with Mills and Babrow's (2003) analysis of teasing, whereby such activity signalled an intimate relationship whether that be friendship or romantic intimacy. By contrast, the impoverished vocabulary in the bullying literature and in interventions creates problems. There is a prescriptive element to the adult-centric conventional definition. It is decontextualized, and, like all 'one size fits all' models, does not take account of local exigencies and complexities. This is a direct contrast to the interactional model for defining *bullying* that emerged from participants' accounts, where social, relational, and interactional context were central and unavoidable. The interactional model for defining *bullying* reveals the interpretive lenses by which participants determined what "it depends" on for an activity to be *bullying*.

### **7.3 Modelling Sense-Making: Making Sense of Children's Sense-Making**

#### **7.3.1 Four Interpretive Lenses**

In this section, I draw together the four lenses of the interactional model I developed from my analysis of the data for this study. The model illustrates how children's accounts of defining *bullying* are orderly, sophisticated and complex. This model demonstrates significant differences in the way participants made sense of troublesome interactions as an interactional concern, in contrast with the adult-centred definitions and models that focus predominantly on behaviour or personality. It accounts for the methods used to do the activity of defining *bullying* used by the child participants in this study. In this section, I draw together the key features of the interactional model developed from participants' sense-making activities in their talk about using social media and bullying. One of the key values in a theory or model is explanatory power, its capacity to explain the phenomenon it relates to effectively. As suggested in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it could be said that all models are wrong, because they are not the thing or phenomenon itself (Box & Draper 1987). The value of a model comes in its usefulness, that is, its explanatory power. Through the critical review in this study, I

argue that the conventional definition and the dominant models of bullying are inadequate for explaining how children make sense of *bullying*. Here, I draw together the lenses of the interactive model that emerged as salient to defining *bullying* from the accounts of participants in this study (Figure 7.1).



**Figure 7.1** An interactional model for defining *bullying* and other troublesome interactions.

The four lenses - setting, activity categories, relational categories, and social and interactional resource - emerged from participant accounts through application of the grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis using the T-shaped analytic framework. This layered model materialises the shared understandings the children used for these sense-making activities. It is distinctively different from existing models, in that it focusses on the qualities of interaction and interpretation, and starts from children's sense-making activities about their own experiences. This model offers an insight into how children approach defining *bullying*, in the context of interpreting their interactions. Together, these lenses offer a distinctive and useful model that has the needed explanatory power to enable understanding of the order within children's methods for making sense of their experiences of *bullying*.

### **Setting**

Setting, the first lens for this model, situates the troublesome interaction in its local context. It draws attention to the localised affordances and constraints on interactions as they are occurring. In a broader sense, setting may also be understood to include social and cultural norms belonging to the immediate community and to the wider context, as well as to the physical or technological features of the environment. This



emerged as a key interpretive lens in participants' accounting for their interactions on and with social media in general, but also specifically in relation to managing troubles. In the context of defining bullying, the setting was made relevant by participants at a number of points and in a number of ways.

People of this age are routinely claiming social spaces on social media. It is part of their social landscape, and in some important ways has 'always been there' for them. As such, it has an aspect of familiarity alongside other physical social settings. All of these spaces also intertwine with the adult world, in parallel with the normative social development for 10-13 year olds as they shift between the life stages of childhood and adolescence in this culture. The 'tool or weapon' metaphor that emerged from the data suggests a sophisticated perspective on social media as communication technology. It is neither intrinsically good nor bad, and the positives and negatives arise from the way people use it. A further critical point to which participants oriented was the importance of experiential learning. Learning to interact effectively in any setting requires practice in that setting, and this may be reflected in participants' accounting for parents' lack of skill and knowledge, as well as being the rationale that people their age should be able to use social media. Tellingly, such accounts focused on the social skills needed to manage troubles online, rather than acquiring technological nous. Learning to manage was positioned as an important social skill for being ready to deal with troubles as teenagers and adults.

One of the more intriguing physical characteristics of social media as a setting to emerge from this data set is something I have called 'facelessness'. As discussed in section 2.2.3, it is common in the cyberbullying literature to refer to anonymity. While it is certainly true that nicknames or user names have been a common feature of online communication since its inception, this only captures part of the interactional constraint of the social media setting. For participants in this study, it was in fact most common for them to know their social media contacts in person, even if they are using a nickname for the social media platform in question, as discussed in Chapter 4. In other words, in most cases, these interactions were not anonymous. This challenges some of the assumptions made by adults about children's interactions online, especially in relation to online bullying. The more interesting aspect oriented to in participants' accounts was the interactional challenge of not being able to see the other person's face or hear their tone of voice, as discussed in detail in 5.5.3. This was positioned by participants as

highly relevant to the trouble of interpreting online interactions, especially where facial expression, tone of voice and other non-verbal elements of interaction were unavailable. Anonymity remains a salient feature in relation to some platforms and online interactions, however 'facelessness' focuses more precisely on the interactional problems arising from not being co-present.

Another important point to emerge from the data was that the characteristics of the social media setting were not solely framed as interactionally problematic. One advantage to communicating by social media described by participants was being able to edit comments prior to posting them. It was valuable to be able to read over and think about a comment before making it, where it was harder to 'take back' something said in person. This was especially so if the speaker thought that there was potential for it to be misinterpreted. Another affordance created by the mediated setting was the capacity to blame the technology if the speaker regretted a comment or was received badly, also discussed in section 5.5.3. This included attribution to typographical errors ("oops typo") or to automatic correction features that may often insert a word different from the one the speaker had thought they had spelled out. These appeared in participants' accounts as repair resources and a benefit of the social media setting, to the point of wishing there were a comparably effective means to 'take it back' in in-person interactions.

### **Activity Categories**

While bullying is clearly an action, it is commonly framed as behaviour in an essentialist sense in the existing literature, where, as discussed in section 7.2.1, it is reified and more often conceptualised as a thing rather than as an interaction. It is uncommon for bullying to be analysed as an interaction. Grounded theory analysis encourages a focus on actions, processes and sequences, using gerunds (the "-ing" form of verbs) to attend to peoples actions within the experiences (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 120–1). This analytic approach highlighted the pivotal role of activities in participants' accounts of making sense of their experiences of using social media. It uncovered a sophisticated array of activity categories used by participants to categorise interactions that had some association with *bullying*, either as activities that could be misinterpreted, or that were potentially hurtful but distinguished from *bullying* in some other way. The focus on activity categories as a 'lens' encourages the analyst to look beneath the surface of

*bullying* as a gloss for aggressive or hurtful interactions between peers, and instead to investigate how children actually categorise their interactions.

Of equal importance, the notion that action is necessary but not sufficient to define *bullying* became clearly evident in the analysis of participants' accounting for their experiences of using social media. In the model emerging from participants' sense-making, activity or actions are framed as interactions involving initiation and receipt. In this regard, participants displayed some analytic activities that can be seen as lay or practical conversation analysis. The factors of an interaction positioned as salient to making sense of an interaction attend to the initiation; however, most often it was the receipt or response that determined the interpretation of the interaction. Whether an interaction could be legitimately categorised as bullying depended on whether the other person was hurt. It was not enough to look at the initiating behaviour alone, because bullying sits within a field of candidate categories for interactions that may be considered aggressive. Along with revealing activities as a locus of member categorisation themselves, the analysis in Chapter 5 drew out the salience of interactional features for invoking *bullying* as an activity category.

### **Relational Categories**

Identifying activities as aggressive or 'bad' was not enough to legitimise or justify categorising an interaction as *bullying*, although it was a starting point. Relational context and relational categories were absolutely integral to categorising an interaction as *bullying* or *not bullying* in these accounts. The accounts were saturated with such categories. *friends*, 'random people', 'creepy people', *people I know*, 'someone from another school', 'parents' - most interactions were presented as being interpreted through the lens of 'who is this person to me?' This constituted a key interpretive lens for categorising interactions and events, dealing with intersubjective problems, and viewing activity as interaction. 'Who is this person to me?' mediates the receipt of an interaction in the sense of forming an interactional and interpretive link. One person who is a friend 'doing' name-calling in a given setting can be received as playful and 'how we talk to each other', whereas another person who is a 'random person' or 'someone I don't know' is more likely to be interpreted as hostile or hurtful, and more likely to be legitimately categorised as *bullying*. Importantly, however, such interactions with a 'random person' or 'someone I don't know' may also be experienced as annoying or inconsequential, and thus also categorised as *not bullying* and therefore be dismissed.

As discussed earlier, there are elements of these interactions that may be comparable to literature on jocular abuse between friends and work colleagues. There are also connections with conversation analytic perspectives on teasing, discussed further below.

One of the important aspects of the normative idea that 'friends don't bully' is that belonging to the category *friend* is incompatible with 'hurting'. Friends are not supposed to hurt you. Friends may be aggressive to each other, in low level, playful, and superficially hostile ways. This represents a complex process of separating *bullying* from 'not bullying.' It is made even more complicated by the fact that friends might fight and be involved in *dramas*. Although these other categories of conflict could happen between friends and could include the other person being hurt, the relational and moral obligations associated with 'being a friend' made *bullying* something that friends did not do to friends.

### **Social and Interactional Resource**

This interactional model also opens the path to viewing *bullying* and normative constructs of *bullying* as social and interactional resources. This aspect emerged most clearly from the fine-grained analysis in section 6.3 of a category puzzle created in the context of accusing a friend of *cyberbullying*. The analysis illuminated how members deploy social categories and knowledges to achieve social actions and projects in interaction. *Bullying* as an activity category is a loaded term and implies extreme aggression and requirements for adult intervention. To categorise an event as bullying requires a set of responses, frequently including telling adults, which then creates further obligations to act on the part of adults. The power of the puzzle Daria creates in "you can get cyberbullied by your friends" materialises how *bullying* as a member category may be used as an interactional resource between peers to achieve the social action of accusing as part of a social project of influencing behaviour. In other words, Daria's puzzle invoked the social norm that 'friends don't bully' to pursue the social project of influencing her friend's future actions. The category work in the excerpt analysed in section 6.3 draws on the social knowledges connected with the term *bullying* to create both puzzle and influence.

This fourth lens creates an analytic framework for understanding the range of uses where *bullying* as a member category may be invoked, independently of any definition. *Bullying*, as with any member category, can appear as a social resource for interaction. In

this model, it becomes important to analyse how members (in this case children) use the category and to achieve what social actions. In the dispute between Eddie and Daria, *bullying* as a member category was being deployed for an interactional purpose other than identifying extreme, repetitive aggressive acts where there is a power imbalance. This aspect of *bullying*, where it is understood as a member category and sophisticated interactional resource, offers another counter-argument to the accusation that children are overinclusive or simplistic in their uses or definitions of bullying.

In focusing on the local achievement of social actions, this interactional model affords an opportunity to examine the fluidity in children's interactions and friendships (Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Corsaro, 1985, 2009; Goodwin, 1991, 2002b). Daria's use of *cyberbullying* in the context of recounting a past event shifted the power-in-interaction through her claim that the event was 'cyberbullying.' In this context, power is not a static structural dimension of the relationship - these two participants continued to claim friendship and this was not questioned in the excerpt. It raises a critique of an assumption of equal or symmetrical power in children's peer interactions. Relations between children are not automatically 'flat' or symmetrical (Hart, 1992, 2008). Similarly, friendships are not static and permanent, but are dynamic and continually being negotiated and renegotiated.

Together, these four lenses create a model immersed in participants' methods for making sense of their experiences, which offers a distinctively different perspective for analysing children's definitions of bullying and other actions. It highlights a dimension missing from existing models that participants positioned as central to understanding these experiences: namely, that *bullying* must be understood as an interaction and within interaction. Participants invoked qualities of interactions as the key points for defining *bullying*. Crucially, the shift from a cognitive attribution model to an interactional model affords an insight into ways that defining *bullying* is co-constructed in interaction as a dynamic, fluid and developing process. It also illuminates ways that cultural constructs are available in interaction as resources.

### **7.3.2 Sense-Making Activities and Co-Constructing Knowledges**

The data set for this study focused on participants' sense-making activities, with a specific focus on *bullying*. In their interactions, participants materialised their approaches to defining *bullying* as an interactional and co-constructed process.

Interaction is pivotal to understanding these sense-making activities in several respects. The key elements participants invoked in defining bullying highlighted interactional and co-constructed dimensions of the activities under consideration. This is evident in the orientations to the relational context as much as to the background social context.

Alongside illuminating the interactional elements that participants used for defining activities or interactions as *bullying* or *not bullying*, the data for this study materialised how sense-making activities themselves are co-constructed in interaction. The accounts in the data showed participants co-constructing definitions in the context of classroom interaction. This illuminates another important dimension of 'defining' and constructing knowledges as interactional activities, as discussed from a theoretical perspective in Chapter 2. This finding underscored the point made by Mayall (2000) that children are engaged in developing knowledges through individual and collaborative reflections on their experiences. Understandings invoked in accounting for experiences are themselves developed in interaction, in the context of events as they happen and, as in the data for this study, in post-event conversation. Social learning develops moment-by-moment in the context of experiences and in more formal learning activities in class discussions of social issues.

Interactions that participants correlated either by comparison or contrast with *bullying* were constituted in interaction through attention to receipt of the activity, whether that be as *being serious* or as *joking*. This presents a perspective on the activities being defined themselves as co-constructed. While beyond the scope for this study to analyse, this presents a significant insight into children's attention to how these experiences are situated within interaction, and that they must be understood and interpreted also within interaction. The notion of epistemic status, that people's thoughts, feelings and experiences are routinely treated as theirs to describe (Heritage, 2012), was a central feature of accounting for *bullying* in this study. This notion offers a useful link to connect this interactional model with child-centred standpoint theory to privilege children's knowledges for understanding and interpreting their experiences of these phenomena.

### **7.3.3 De-Reified Member Categories**

Analysing bullying and terms correlated with it by participants as member categories is a vital part of the shift in perspective to an interactional model. As I identified in Chapter 2 and in section 7.2.1, existing theories have relied on reifying bullying as a universal

construct existing independently from cultural specificities or interactional context. However, such an abstracted version of bullying fails to account for precisely the situated and interactional factors that were central to how participants made sense of *bullying* in the context of their experiences, and how they approached doing defining *bullying*. To separate the phenomenon or even the experience from the environmental, interactional and relational setting proved ineffective for doing defining bullying, as became evident in the analysis in section 5.4.1 on *failed cyberbullying*.

It is significant that the dimensions that participants invoked as part of that category work are different from the structure of the conventional definition of 'bullying.' To retrofit these dimensions to the adult-generated definition of bullying loses sight of its deployment by children as a member category, and devalues children's sense-making and knowledges. Applying bullying as an overlay to hurtful, harmful or troublesome interactions between children glosses a substantially diverse collection of member categories for activities, as discussed in Chapter 5. It ignores aspects of those activities rendered salient by members in the process of accounting for events potentially categorisable as *bullying*. Similarly, it ignores the social actions that can be achieved through category work, where categories are deployed as social and interactional resources, as discussed in Chapter 6.3. Whether or not children's uses are 'correct' according to adult-constructed definitions is not relevant here. It is the participants' approaches to defining *bullying* and other interactions and the lenses or qualities of the interactions they invoke to achieve this action of defining that are central. This is crucial to the way children will perceive and interact with adult interventions aimed at addressing bullying problems.

The interactional model which emerged from the analysis contributes to de-reifying bullying by shifting the focus onto ways the experience is situated and interpreted in interaction through the first three lenses, and by illuminating how the category is used as a resource in interactions through the fourth lens. The groundedness of both the model and the activity of defining bullying in the data of children's accounts resists abstraction and reification. The fact that the model itself focuses on lenses for a *process* of defining *bullying* rather than a candidate definition statement epitomises the deconstruction of the conventional definition of *bullying* from a child-centred standpoint.

## **7.4 An Ordinary Interaction – Re-Theorising *Bullying* in Interactional Context**

### **7.3.1 De-Centring the Conventional Definition**

The interactional model I have developed offers an opportunity to de-centre and deconstruct the conventional definition of bullying. This constitutes a useful critical move, repositioning the conventional definition as a partial and situated adult construction. Making this shift permits a focus on how children make sense of their experiences and interactions with their peers. Importantly, it enables their sense-making activities to take centre stage in developing an understanding of these experiences. The model shows the key elements of an interaction from the participants' perspective as lenses through which they interpret and make sense of interactions with their peers. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this approach is that children's knowledges and sense-making activities are treated as valid sources of knowledge where they have traditionally been dismissed or marginalised.

An abiding problem with models of bullying in the existing literature is that they are predicated on psychological models and cognitive attribution. This predication contains an implicit indicator of one of the driving dilemmas that sits behind the literature on bullying, as well as broader literatures on aggression, violence and crime: why do some people become violent and hurt others? The common response has been to look for factors that drive the behaviour, most often sought in terms of cognitive attributions such as intent, motivation or stress. Some models have sought biological or evolutionary attributions. However, they remain focused on 'why', rather than examining 'how.' By contrast, interactional analysis focuses on the 'how' of social actions in close analysis of their co-construction in interactions. This offers an opportunity to set the 'why' question aside, to focus on the everyday methods people use to achieve these actions.

De-centring the conventional definition to focus on interaction requires more than setting aside the definition itself. It also requires the same reorientation of focus towards interaction for existing psychological models, including the individual behaviour model, the personality trait model, and arguably also socio-ecological models. These commonly rely on cognitive attributions regarding motivation, intent and mental states to understand the behaviour of individuals and groups. The focus on interaction offers a very different perspective for analysis of events themselves and on methods of making sense of them, both in the moment and through analysis of post-event accounts, as in this study. Participants in this study oriented to problems with being able to tell



whether someone intended to be mean. They resolved these problems by focussing on the receipt of the actions, which had observable characteristics, by comparison with the initiating action where intent can only be inferred.

In summary, it became evident through analysis of the data set for this study that participants oriented to interactional factors for defining bullying. This is substantially different from existing models and constitutes a challenge to the dominance of those models. If we are to take seriously and respectfully children's participation in developing research knowledge about their lives, the automatic dominance of adult-generated models and axiomatic treatment of concepts and definitions arising from them must be de-centred to create space for the meanings children make of their own lives and experiences. Indeed, in order to redress the balance, children's sense-making activities need not only to be accommodated or conceded space. They need to be privileged.

### **7.3.2 *Bullying and Ordinary Interactions***

One of the persistent tensions in the existing literature is the characterisation of bullying as either abnormal or normative behaviour (Stassen Berger, 2007). This is far from a trivial concern. Bullying was characterised as an indicator for pathological behaviour (and potentially pathological personality traits) in Olweus' (1978) focus on highly aggressive and habitually cruel boys. Another characterisation of bullying is that it may be seen as normative, albeit undesirable, behaviour of individuals (Heinemann, 1969; Larsson, 2008; Smith & Brain, 2000) or groups (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006; Horton, 2011; Lorenz, 1963; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). A third characterisation incorporates a developmental perspective, suggesting that aggressive behaviour that may be normative and expected for a younger child becomes unacceptable and bullying when done by an older child (Stassen Berger, 2007; Tremblay, 2000). However, these models remain situated within the broader psychological frame.

One of the problems with this focus on abnormality and pathology is the tension between 'extreme' and 'ordinary' inherent in the expanded uses of bullying as a gloss. A focus on the extreme and pathological separates bullying from ordinary social interaction, and suggests that it sits outside of everyday interaction as an abnormal or disease state. This makes some sense when considering physical violence or abuse, as

these are generally lower incidence and high impact occurrences. However, such a focus is detrimental to developing an understanding of *bullying* within the broader context of everyday interactions between children. Many of the activities frequently identified in participants' accounts in this study either as *bullying* or as another kind of hurtful or troublesome activity included common and normative behaviour. Equally, some interactions experienced as *bullying* cannot be understood outside of "the organised artful practices of everyday life" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 11). This is consequential for everyday practices and more focused interventions aimed at supporting children to manage troublesome interactions safely.

Interactional approaches to investigating *bullying* offer another means to "thickening" descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and understanding of the diverse and sometimes problematic interactions currently gathered under the umbrella bullying. Interactional and granular analyses offer a means to illuminate the interactional practices that result in social exclusion and create the effect of indirect bullying. These practices are often described elsewhere as notoriously difficult to materialise for analysis (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006; Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & van der Meulen, 2011), as they are embedded in apparently imperceptible shifts in interaction. Fine-grained analysis of category work and sequence offers a robust analytic approach to investigating how "seemingly innocent actions embedded in ordinary everyday interactions" (Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011, p. 491) produce an event legitimately categorisable as *bullying*. These analytic approaches provide an established means to investigate ways that social actions that may constitute bullying are achieved at the micro-interaction level.

Accounting for bullying by participants in this study positioned it clearly within the context of ordinary interaction, as one of a field of interactions that may be at times hurtful or harmful and may also be playful or fun. Significantly, while *bullying* was treated as a special case within participants' sense making activities in some respects, it was not separated from other ordinary interactions. Repositioning *bullying* within a broader field of categories allows greater explication of the phenomenon, but also facilitates investigation of ambiguity in these interactions. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a range of concepts in the broader literature on aggression, conflict and social interaction. In this study, participants situated *bullying* within a comparable field of ordinary social interactions. Participants oriented to the ambiguity inherent in these

interactions as a key dimension of their sense-making activities. This constitutes an important aspect for an interactional re-theorising of bullying.

Ambiguity regularly features in analysis of types of interaction that have connections with bullying, including conflict, teasing and jocular abuse. Mills and Babrow's (2003) analysis of teasing presents it as a complex set of practices, including as a strategy for social influence through which multiple influence goals may be managed. Within a twofold structure of juxtaposed play and challenge, teases are "an ambiguous act because the spirit of play contradicts the seriousness of challenging another's beliefs, values, or goals" (Mills & Babrow, 2003, p. 281). As discussed in sections 6.3 and 7.3.1, Daria challenges Eddie's values and the moral action embodied in her actions during the past event under discussion in their interview. The category puzzle of 'being bullied' by your *friends* accuses Eddie of an action that friends do not do to each other. The play element of teasing mitigates the seriousness of Daria's challenge in categorising the past event as *cyberbullying*. As Mills & Babrow observe, "one does not ordinarily invite disliked others to play. To invite play is to invite a positive relationship or deepen an existing positive bond." (2003, p. 282) However, the challenge element remains. As shown in Chapter 6, Daria is clear that she was affected by Eddie's behaviour and was ostracised from support - 'even the boys were on your guys' side'. This emerged in other accounts of sense-making in the data set, where 'taking it as a joke' and 'meaning it as a joke' invoke this element of interactional play between friends but could equally be problematic, as discussed in Chapter 5.

One of the activities presented by participants in their accounts was 'things my parents wouldn't be happy with,' which were subsequently described as swearing or using bad language between friends. The substantial literature on jocular abuse as an interactional practice may offer additional insights to the broader social context for these practices by children (Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2012; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2010; Parkin, 1980). As noted elsewhere, children participate in the broader culture and creatively reproduce it, and so investigations of jocular abuse as solidarity signals between adults in work and social settings (e.g. Daly et al., 2004) may offer insights into practices such as *mocking*, *snobbing* and calling names between children. This may be especially salient in the context of multiplayer game play where banter between players or teams is commonly practiced, as described in numerous instances across the data set for this study (see sections 5.2.5, 5.3.1, and 6.2.2). *mocking* or name-calling as joking between

peers may serve a number of interactional purposes, including diffusing or preventing physical aggression through provoking laughter as a tension breaker (Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2012). Of course, as with teases, this does not prevent the recipient from taking it seriously and answering back seriously, or from being hurt.

The focus on member categories for activities and for persons enabled the analysis for this study to tease out the normative aspects of the category work observable in both the typical cases and in the excerpt “you can get cyberbullied by your friends”. The notion of teases and jocular abuse as interactional practices within everyday interactions illustrate the complexity of these interactions. Treating them as ordinary renders them available to ethnomethodological category and sequential analysis. Attending to categorisation practices supports the focus on members' (that is, children's) approach to making sense of their experiences. It demands attending to the shared understandings they invoke in their category work, instead of imposing a predetermined adult or researcher definition and model. The value of the interactional model lies in illuminating the fluid, dynamic, and developing qualities of interactions that may be potentially categorisable as *bullying*, and how these are materialised in interaction. It offers a means to recognise that interactions develop through turns, much as children are themselves developing in social and emotional learning at a more macro level.

### **7.3.3 Hurtful, Harmful, and Troublesome**

One of the most consistent threads throughout the existing literature on bullying and participants' accounts in the data for this study is the concern over interactions that are hurtful or harmful. As discussed in Chapter 2, the conventional definition originated in a study focused on extreme and potentially abnormal behaviour or personality. The subsequent expansion of the term and definition of bullying beyond this narrow focus reflects a genuine concern for interactions that create hurt or harm. There is increasing conflation of unpleasant or unwanted behaviour or interactions into the category *bullying* - whether that is the formal, reified category or the term as it is used in popular discourses. Caught up within it are interactions that are in some way troublesome to the interlocutors themselves or, in the case of misinterpreted interactions, troublesome to external observers.

A field of terms emerged from the data for this study, and as discussed in section 7.4.2, a comparable field of terms is present within the broader literature. This presents a crucial pair of questions: Why not use these? Why focus so intensively on the term *bullying*? It may be possible to go some way towards answering these questions from the concerns implicit in the literature. Bullying is frequently presented in extreme terms. It is presented as a descriptor for behaviour that creates the *most* harm, that causes the *most* problems, and that provokes the *most* concern. Viewed from this perspective, the focus on bullying and diminished use of other terms for fraught interactions between children has some logic. It assists in prioritising interventions and working towards prevention. However, when *bullying* is treated as the entire category, rather than as a part or subset within the broader field of aggressive behaviour, the interventions become unfocused and their impact potentially becomes diminished as a result.

It is evident from participants' accounts materialised in the data set for this study that how children make sense of their experiences is a crucial component for retheorising bullying. It is neither behaviour nor persons that are the key factors within the model to emerge from their accounts. This model is focused on dimensions of bullying as a kind of interaction within a broader field of interactions with peers. This broader field was not characterised solely as negative or aggressive interactions, and included playful interactions that had the potential to be misinterpreted or turn sour.

Bullying as a term in the wider social context has expanded well beyond its originating remit. It is used increasingly for a wide array of behaviour from ambiguous teasing through to extreme instances of harassment and abuse. This poor differentiation creates a number of problems, notably the tendency for interventions not to match the qualities or severity of the problem. In addition to this, bullying as an umbrella term is inadequate for focusing on what is arguably the fundamental concern: helping children manage any interaction that causes hurt or harm, or they experience as somehow troublesome. In this light, my proposal for theorising *bullying* incorporates a critical focus on these underlying concerns. This focus on the problem of negative impact of actions may be more useful than the term *bullying*. The focus on interactions and the four lenses of the interactional model - setting, activity categories, relational categories, social and interactional resource - do not produce a neat and simple definition. This interactional model offers tools for analysing and interpreting situated interactions, and for understanding the process through which children make sense of their experiences. It

places children's knowledges at the centre of theorising *bullying* and other troublesome interactions. The knowledges that children themselves co-construct out of their experiences are pivotal to understanding these complex and dynamic social phenomena.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter re-theorises bullying through an interactional model that emerges from participants' sense-making activities of their experiences of social media and bullying. This model re-positions bullying within a broader field of everyday interactions instead of glossing these under a single umbrella term. The analysis which has informed the model demonstrates how children's methods of making sense of *bullying* are orderly, sophisticated, and attend to the situated detail of interaction. Importantly, it serves to refute the notion that children's knowledges are overinclusive or simplistic. The emergent model illuminates a set of interpretive lenses that participants used in accounting for activities that could be potentially categorisable as *bullying*, or that could be misinterpreted as *bullying* when they are not. This model emphasises the significance of setting to making sense of the interaction, including understanding the affordances and constraints created by different settings. It proposes that activity categories are important, but looking at action alone is not enough to interpret an interaction. Relational context is a crucial aspect for these sense-making activities, especially where there is potential for ambiguity or misinterpretation. A further significant contribution made by this interactional model is in understanding member categories as resources available to achieve social actions and projects in interaction.

In the next chapter, I take these theoretical and analytic points and discuss their implications and applications for a range of settings where adults have interest and concern for children's peer interactions. This includes educational and clinical settings, as well as in the broader culture and for families. I review the limitations and strengths of this study, and indicate directions for future work arising from various aspects of the study's design and findings.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions and Future Work

*"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." — Eleanor Roosevelt, This is My Story*

#### 8.1 Introduction

In the young adult novel *The Bully Chip*, author Glenn Wood (2013) explores the problem of what makes people start doing mean things to others, a common philosophical dilemma similarly explored in other literature where bullying features as a plot element. The culprit in the novel is a computer chip implanted in children's brains to turn them into bullies, which is controlled by the novel's villain mastermind. Once the villain is defeated and the chips removed, the 'bullies' return to 'normal' and apologise to the heroes. This presents a different literary formulation of bullying compared with *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) or *Mean Girls* (2004), and explores the notion that there may be more to bullying than individual personality or cliques. Rather than wondering why there might be *types* of people who do these things, Wood asks what might happen that means people *do* these things. In *The Bully Chip*, the 'bullies' are ordinary children, even if their actions are being controlled by an evil mastermind. Another metatheme in the story is that adults can be a bit clueless about children's interactions with each other, can be duped into misinterpreting and as a result the innocent can be accused of bullying and end up in trouble. The themes in this novel reflect the notions and concerns that inspired and emerged from this study, including ways that children make sense of *bullying* and other troublesome interactions, the problems created when adults ignore children's knowledges about their experiences, and the troubles created by misinterpreting interactions.

This thesis focuses on the trouble with *bullying* as one of sense-making and definitions. As emerged in the theoretical critique and findings of this study, *bullying* is a dynamic concept in practice and not as static as the tenacious conventional definition suggests. However, critical and qualitative approaches have had minimal impact in empirical quantitative research, despite repeated calls for improved dialogue between qualitative and quantitative research (Smith & Brain, 2000; Thornberg, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 2, the growing body of research into online bullying has highlighted how setting is more than a bare stage for children's social interactions. Similarly, the differences

between children's methods of defining *bullying* and the conventional definition challenge the prevailing assumption that the phenomenon in children's cultures matches how it is conceived of in adults' formulations. *Bullying* may be used by children to mean many different practices that are not captured in the conventional definition, and equally there may be activities glossed as bullying that children do not categorise as such. As a result, these are being missed in both research and the interventions using this research as their evidence base (with arguably greater consequences).

In this chapter I summarise the approach, findings and discussion of this thesis. I discuss how these have met the research objectives and answered the research questions. I address the strengths and limitations of the study design and analysis. Finally, I consider the implications of the findings, particularly for practical applications, and directions for further work based on the theoretical, methodological, analytic and practical implications of this study.

## **8.2 Summary of the Study**

In this thesis I have investigated how children make sense of *bullying* in the context of their experiences of using social media, to re-theorise *bullying* from a child-centred standpoint. This study has involved generating and analysing empirical data using a 'bottom up' approach to theory. My approach has placed children's knowledges at the centre as a critical response to the marginalisation of children's knowledges in the dominant models and definition of bullying in the existing literature. This approach addressed the aim of the thesis, which was to investigate children's sense-making activities about social media and bullying using a child-centred approach. In this section, I discuss how I have addressed the research objectives and questions, to provide a summary of the thesis.

The first objective was to critically review existing models and definitions of childhood bullying and specifically online bullying or cyberbullying in order to answer the following questions: what definitions and models of bullying are used in the existing literature, and how have these been applied to investigating children's use of social media and online bullying? The critical review of the existing literature on online bullying and in-person bullying between children in Chapters 1 and 2 addressed this objective. After reviewing the general background of research into bullying and children's use of social media in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 focused on a theoretical review,



starting with the historical context for the dominant models and definition of bullying. This review uncovered how the definition of bullying commonly used in the literature, and as the basis for interventions, is predicated on adult assumptions. The definition formulated in Dan Olweus' work, that bullying is defined by the four elements of negative acts, repetition, intention, and power imbalance, proved sufficiently ubiquitous that it could be considered the 'conventional' definition of bullying. This focus on the definition offered a useful frame for the review and the thesis as a whole, as it exemplified how the dominant models were treated as axiomatic across the bullying literature. Examination and critique of the conventional definition illuminated a series of omissions that undermined its assumed universality. While the personality trait model in which it had been originally developed has fallen out of use, the definition has persisted through behavioural models, social ecological models, and prevalence investigations because of a lack of engagement with theory. Initially, the new phenomenon of online bullying, also called *cyberbullying*, was assumed to be identical to in-person bullying, with little attention to distinctive characteristics of the setting. However, subsequent investigations have challenged the simplistic application of the conventional definition to online bullying, due to the characteristics of the setting. The growing body of literature focused on online bullying has raised further challenges to the use of *cyberbullying* as a catch-all term for online aggression.

In addition, this review served to highlight the marginalisation of children's knowledges in the bullying literature, especially for developing theory and definitions. A gap arising from this marginalisation was identified in the existing literature, indicating the need for a child-centred investigation. I discussed how the specific practice of priming established a methodological rejection of children's knowledges of bullying through imposing the adult-centric conventional definition. This dimension of the critical review identified key points for development of a child-centred standpoint theory, including theoretical and ethical dimensions, research design and analytic framework that would serve to place children's knowledges at the centre of the study. These points contributed to meeting the second main objective of the study, which was to develop fieldwork and analytic frameworks in line with the design principles required for a child-centred approach. These theoretical considerations made it possible to answer the associated research questions in the process of designing the research. The research questions were: what methodological principles are required to design a child-centred investigation; what research design and analytic frameworks are best suited to

generating and analysing data for this type of investigation; what are the right kinds of data to investigate how children make sense of experiences on social media commonly called bullying, either by adults or by children themselves; and, what is the object of analysis?

The resulting research design was an exploratory, iterative and flexible design embedded in participants' regular and familiar classroom activities. The T-shaped analytic framework I developed for this study drew enabled both cross-sectional and in-depth analysis of the recordings of fieldwork activities that comprised the data set. The combination of constructivist grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis proved to be effective analytic structures within this overall framework to focus the analysis on participants' co-constructions of knowledges. Video and audio recording of the fieldwork activities offered a means to 'materialise' the 'virtual' phenomenon of children's experiences of using social media, and how they made sense of *bullying* within those experiences. The multiple types of data produced through these recordings resulted in a rich, multimodal, intertextual snapshot through which the emergent object of analysis, being that of children's methods for defining *bullying* within these accounts, was similarly materialised.

The third research objective was to re-theorise bullying from children's sense-making activities about using social media and defining bullying. The associated research questions were: what could a child-centred model/retheorisation of bullying and other troublesome interactions be like; how do children make sense of online bullying; and, what implications does this have for how adults deal with children's peer interactions and bullying problems?

An interactional model for the activity of defining *bullying* emerged from the analysis of how participants talked about *bullying* within their accounts of using social media. This model created a structure for an interactional reimagining of *bullying* from a child-centred standpoint. The emphasis on process in the grounded theory analysis permitted an attention to interaction that fitted well with features within participants' accounts. This model, comprising four interpretive lenses (setting, activity categories, relational categories, and social and interactional resource) emerged from participants' accounts as an interpretive context for categorising and thereby defining interactions. One of the key insights to emerge from this model is that the focus on action is necessary, but not sufficient, to define or interpret an interaction as *bullying*. Within participants' accounts

there was an emphasis on the situated qualities of the interaction that were necessary to adequately define *bullying*. Analysis of the activity categories associated with *bullying* also revealed category and interactional 'troubles' that demonstrated the inadequacy of attending to the action of an instigator alone. In contrast with the conventional models of bullying that focus on aggressive behaviour of an instigator, in my data the response of the recipient and negative impact emerged as more salient to categorising an interaction as *bullying*.

This study presents a different approach to investigating children's experiences of *bullying* by focusing on how *bullying* is defined, and privileging the qualities that children themselves make central to defining *bullying*. It has also demonstrated the utility and possibility of doing child-centred research and analysis using a modified standpoint theoretical approach. The findings have borne out the theoretical critique regarding the inadequacy of the conventional definition of *bullying*. The analysis revealed an interactional model in participants' accounts of *bullying* in the context of using social media. As noted in Chapter 7, this model thus re-positions *bullying* within a broader field of everyday interactions instead of glossing them and demonstrates how children's methods of making sense of *bullying* are orderly, sophisticated, and attend to situated detail of interaction.

### **8.3 Value of the Study**

#### **8.3.1 Strengths**

This study tackled the under-explored dimension of children's methods of defining *bullying* to consider how and why there is a mismatch between this and the conventional definition of bullying. It remains uncommon in bullying research to take a 'bottom up' approach to this question. The conventional definition remains taken for granted in many studies, and it remains common to assume that children *as children* are naïve and require instruction and correction from adults. A particular strength of this study is that it presents an empirical investigation of children's methods of defining *bullying* and a robust design for fieldwork and analysis of the data. The findings revealed a different model for theorising *bullying* grounded in children's knowledges. This study has thus addressed a number of the pitfalls and gaps created by assumptions routinely made in the existing literature.

For this study I developed an integrative methodological approach for undertaking a child-centred investigation. As discussed in Chapter 3, research methodologies are routinely adapted for undertaking research with children. The key adaptation for this study was to develop a fieldwork design and analytic framework that would support the theoretical and ethical aims for a child-centred standpoint theory, as I outlined in section 2.4. A central aim was to acknowledge that children deserve to have their experiences researched and theorised respectfully. A crucial part of this study has been to take seriously Virginia Morrow's (1996) challenge to develop research strategies that are fair and respectful to the subjects of the research. I have sought to extend this fair and respectful approach into the processes of analysis and re-theorising the phenomena at the centre of this study.

A notable strength of this study lies in the modified standpoint approach I developed as an ethical stance for undertaking a child-centred investigation and analysis. One of the major theoretical problems I encountered was how to deal fairly and respectfully with experience to which I as the researcher do not have direct access. Standpoint theory traditions, including feminist and other critical theories that I discussed in Chapter 2, most often draw on the first person perspective of the marginalised to critique of the dominant perspective from below. However, for this project, I as the researcher was a non-member of the social group at the heart of the study and therefore could not make inferences about experiences, meanings and interpretations. There are dangers associated with adults theorising children's experiences from a basis of assumption or nostalgia about remembered childhoods (Lahman, 2008). Such nostalgia can create false impressions or false comparability between remembered childhoods and experiences of children in the present. The focus in this study on social media as a setting avoided some of this danger, because social media had not been invented when I was the age of the participants. The resulting challenge was to develop a theoretical and methodological framework that placed children's experiences at the centre, for which standpoint theory was very well suited. However, given that I could not rely on being a 'member', the framework for the study needed to establish a process for modifying standpoint theory to avoid assumptions and instead privilege the insights, knowledges, and interpretations from participants as the 'subject matter experts'. Using standpoint theory as a set of guiding theoretical and ethical principles for the study design enabled this study to privilege children's knowledges in the approach to fieldwork activities, in the use of

analytic approaches that prioritised participant meanings over analyst assumptions or inferences, and by developing a theoretical model grounded in the empirical data.

The iterative and flexible fieldwork design was validated as a useful approach for this investigation. The iterative element enabled the fieldwork activities to be developed and refined between host schools. It also meant that School 1 functioned as a pilot site for the fieldwork approach. This was most evident in the development of the peer video interview activity, as described in section 3.5.3. This activity was a routine component of classroom activities at School 1 and proved an exceptionally rich source of data, offering an 'adult free' interactional space where participants could discuss their experiences and simultaneously exercise control over the recording process and product. The design incorporated fieldwork activities that had genuine learning outcomes for participants, and used a version of informant checking to involve participants in extending the analysis, as discussed in section 3.5.4. The fieldwork design and activities drew on principles from participatory research, while remaining mindful that there are limitations to participation in the context of researcher-initiated and led research. The design of the participatory fieldwork activities incorporated participants' knowledges and insights as a result of the adapted informant checking activity, where participants were engaged not only in review but extension of the initial analysis I had undertaken. This structure offered a way to place their knowledges at the centre, in the context of a familiar activity that was within their current skills. This as an overall approach avoided problems associated with needing to teach specific skills, or rely on an existing sub-group of more academically adept children in an extension class as co-researchers (e.g. Kellett et al., 2004).

The fieldwork for this study, including creating classroom input materials, was done by me over 12 months and was a comparatively intensive and time-consuming process. This yielded substantial benefits in relationship building with schools and participants. Alongside these benefits it is important to recognise that this creates limitations to the methods, and demands on the researcher. I drew on previous professional experience and consulted with education professionals experienced in designing activities with children and young people to create the input activities and develop approaches to facilitating the group discussion. The fieldwork design, which evolved over the three iterations, generated a rich multimodal data set. The analysis presented in this thesis focuses on one key thread within the fabric of the data set. There exist substantial

opportunities for further analysis of the peer interactions and the classroom interactions recorded.

In this study, I used multiple data points and data generation methods that offered broader participation in fieldwork activities for participants of varying levels of literacy, academic ability, and comfort in disclosing personal reflections, narratives, and opinions. The qualities of interaction observable in the different data types suggested that this offered a range of discussion settings where participants were able to feel comfortable talking. This observation was further supported by explicit comments in feedback from participants. As I discussed in section 4.2.1, these multiple types of data generated in diverse interactional settings established a method of triangulation within and between iterations of the fieldwork and analysis (Denzin, 2012).

The multiple qualitative methods in the T-shaped analytic framework I developed for this study established a robust and rigorous approach to analysing empirical data that supported the child-centred standpoint approach. The common principles in constructivist grounded theory and membership categorisation analysis created a synergistic framework for undertaking cross-sectional and in-depth analyses of the data set. This study utilised informed constructivist grounded theory as a robust cross-sectional analysis for defamiliarising everyday social phenomena. Among the specific advantages for this study, the focus on process in analysing data starts with the experiences of those most intimately acquainted with the experience, and the setting requires the analyst to be alert to and set aside their assumptions about participant experiences and meaning. In this study, membership categorisation analysis offered a means to analyse the data in a more detailed and granular way, and a means to attend to category work as a significant aspect of participants developing knowledges in interaction. Membership categorisation analysis shifts the analytic focus to interaction and how categories are deployed to achieve social actions and projects, invoke shared understandings, and develop social knowledge-in-interaction. The combined focus on process and member categories illuminated activity as a locus of categorisation, which is an unexplored direction for membership categorisation analysis. Drawing on the respective strengths of these two analytic approaches allowed for exploration of *bullying* within participants' processes of co-constructing knowledges.

Although the analysis relates specifically to this data set, the findings establish empirical support for the theoretical critique of the conventional definition. In this regard, the

insights made possible through the study design have broader relevance and generalisability by standing as an instance of how the conventional definition and adult-centric models of *bullying* have inadequate explanatory power to account for children's knowledges of these experiences.

### **8.3.2 Limitations**

The data for this study is a snapshot of situated experiences of three groups of 11-13 year olds at schools in Wellington, New Zealand. The data set was generated in specific places at specific times, and the analysis relates to these data. As such, it is a snapshot of a particular point in time, place, and cultural context. It also does not include ways that definitions or practices of bullying may develop as children move further into adolescence, and does not incorporate participant report of using all types of social media.

In this thesis, I have focused on definitions, children's knowledges, and the theoretical and methodological groundwork for research into bullying. The data is a step removed from the phenomenon of bullying between children in the context of their social media use. As discussed in section 3.2, the ethical and technological challenges that made direct observation problematic meant that this was not an observational study, nor does it present a descriptive analysis of narratives of bullying, however defined, as its primary focus. The data and analysis focuses on definitions as a sense-making activity and methods for categorising interactions in post-event accounts. As a result, this study shifts the focus to about ways that children make sense of these interactions in their experiences. It also demonstrated that children's methods for defining *bullying* are orderly and focused on interaction as the organising principle. As such, this study offered a more robust framework for positioning children's knowledges about their experiences at the centre, which would be more difficult in an observational study where adult assumptions remained unchallenged.

The types of social media discussed by participants did not include all possible platforms where social interaction may occur. Notably absent in the data were online 'free-for-all' forums commonly associated with anonymously posted abusive interactions, such as Reddit and 4chan. It remains unclear whether this reflects that this group of participants were not using such forums, or whether they did not orient to them as belonging to the category of social media. However, it is arguable that the range of social media discussed

by participants constitutes a comprehensive list, particularly for children of this age group, even if it is not exhaustive.

As a consequence, there are some questions about interactions potentially categorisable as *bullying* that this study is unable to answer. Firstly, participants rarely oriented to physical interactions, although playfighting was offered as an example. The focus of the study on social media may have had some priming effect in drawing focus to verbal, social, and relational interactions. However, it is possible to answer questions about ways that children make sense of their experiences of interactions that they or others may consider *bullying*. Although the focus for the study was bullying and social media, participants' accounts incorporated in-person bullying as well. This is consistent with findings from other studies of children's and adolescents' online socialising, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Consequently, the intertwining of children's socialising between these two settings features in the data for this study where it was made relevant by participants. Further investigation of children's sense-making activities about physical bullying would be valuable to compare with the findings from this study, and particularly the aspects of the interactional model.

The methodological problem of priming in bullying research with the conventional definition emerged as a specific concern for the design of this study. The solution I adopted was to avoid mention of bullying and check for meaning when it emerged spontaneously in the context of fieldwork activities. While this avoids some aspects of the concerns over priming, and specifically a concern that (children) participants may try to guess what the (adult) researcher wants to hear and provide a suitable response, children's cultures are not separate from the wider cultural setting. As such, children's methods of defining bullying are already influenced by adult perspectives through interaction with parents, the school setting, and mainstream media alongside local and situated sense-making in their interactions. Children's cultures are part of, not apart from, the broader cultural setting. It is neither possible nor desirable to isolate them completely, and so efforts to reduce priming or imposition of adult meanings will remain relative rather than absolute. As such, it is not possible to avoid 'priming' in all respects.

One of the challenges for any study focusing on moral judgement or reasoning is that these do not necessarily predict moral behaviour (Jennifer & Cowie, 2012; Parke & Gauvin, 2009; Wainryb et al., 2005). This study did not ask participants what they would do in response to a given moral dilemma, nor, as already noted, is the data direct



observation of interactions that participants might define as *bullying*. What the data materialises and makes available for analysis are children's sense-making activities associated with such interactions, comprising discussions in peer/peer interactions and classroom adult/children interactions. In this way, the analysis I present in this study avoids the problem of assuming direct equivalence of moral reasoning with moral behaviour, and focuses instead on the accomplishments of reasoning connected with social and moral problems in interaction.

#### **8.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Study**

This type of re-theorising has a number of important implications for contexts where bullying and children are a focus of concern. This includes health and education settings, as well as for parents and the broader community. The existing literature has established links between the experiences of children using social media, bullying, and their social and emotional wellbeing, mental health problems, and specifically suicide, as discussed in Chapter 1. These linkages make it vital to improve our understanding of how children make sense of their experiences of hurtful, harmful or troublesome interactions. As I have demonstrated through this study, understanding bullying from a child-centred standpoint has been missing from the literature, and children's approaches to defining *bullying* have been marginalised. In this section I discuss some of the implications of this study for theory and for interventions aimed at improving children's social and emotional wellbeing.

It is important to recognise that children's knowledges and social skills are fluid, dynamic, and always under development. While it is arguable that this is also the case for adults, 'development' is most commonly associated with children. This fluid, dynamic, and developing social knowledge should not be mistaken for inaccuracy. What is illustrated effectively in the data for this study is that children may have a sophisticated and detailed taxonomy of interactions that sit beneath the gloss of bullying. Recognising, acknowledging, and working with children's categories and terminology have the potential to inform stronger and more effectively focused social learning initiatives associated with hurtful or harmful interactions. In addition, making a shift to focus on the underlying concerns of hurtful, harmful, problematic, troublesome, unwanted, or unpleasant interactions, instead of bullying, has the benefit of avoiding glosses that may be misunderstood by the group concerned. This highlights a major

issue where initiatives designed to address bullying may be ineffective due to poor focus on the problem.

At a practical level, there are a range of social institutions that have a focus or interest in addressing bullying problems. In New Zealand, this includes government departments of education, health, and youth development. It also includes non-government organisations aimed at promoting online safety, such as Netsafe, and mental health, such as the Mental Health Foundation and the Werry Centre for Child Adolescent Mental Health. The most common institutional focus for initiatives aimed at children and bullying problems, however, are schools. The New Zealand Curriculum (Crown, 2007) includes student wellbeing in the health and physical education learning area as a core focus. The Wellbeing@School initiative offers schools a suite of resources for schools aimed at dealing with bullying problems (Boyd, 2011; "Wellbeing@School," n.d.), including specific links between the resources and the curriculum components of supporting students to develop skills in empathy and resilience (Wellbeing @ School, 2012). While acknowledging that bullying is just one type of aggressive behaviour, the existing guide for New Zealand schools on addressing bullying problems bases its definition of bullying in the conventional definition (Crown, 2014). Bullying problems have been identified as a barrier to learning achievement as well as attendance, both of which appear as predictors for future social and health problems (Campbell et al., 2012; Young-Jones, Fursa, Byrket, & Sly, 2014). In addition to the curriculum context, the notion of duty of care vested in schools adds further expectation that they address problems between children.

As has been noted by Rigby (2011), there is an ongoing problem with limited effectiveness of many anti-bullying programmes, especially in the longer term. In some situations, reasons for this have included resource problems connected with the time, energy and funding required for maintaining programmes as they were originally designed and validated (Menard & Grotper, 2013; Palmer & Raskauskas, 2010; Raynor & Wylie, 2012). An aspect of this limited effectiveness that has not been explored in these evaluations, however, is the approach to defining bullying used in these programmes. It is common that such programmes present a definition of bullying based on the conventional definition as part of teaching children 'what bullying is', with little regard for children's existing perspectives or knowledge, or children's cultures associated with bullying or other categories of problematic interactions. As this study

has illuminated, children may already have complex and orderly working definitions of bullying, and of other types of interactions that may be connected but that they distinguish from bullying for a variety of reasons. This ignorance of children's working definitions for bullying (and other terms for hurtful, harmful, or troublesome interactions) has the potential to undermine interventions that seek to simplify bullying to the individual behaviour model. This may reflect the mismatch between the conventional definition of bullying and children's experiences, as has been illuminated in this study. Children's methods of defining *bullying* and addressing the underlying concern for hurtful, harmful, and troublesome interactions should be used in 'anti-bullying' interventions to prevent poor effectiveness arising from marginalising children's definitions.

Additionally, some anti-bullying programmes, particularly older models, rely more on the personality model exemplified in Olweus' work and regularly present a caricatured portrait of 'the bully' (de Graaf, de Haas, Zaagsma, & Wijsen, 2015; Hazelden Foundation, 2015). The data for this study suggests this person category is resisted by children. Such stereotypes include 'the bully' as a coward and stupid or ignorant, or as intelligent and callous. The absence of the bully as a person category in this data set may be due to the relative rarity of a person fitting the model of the 'highly aggressive, habitually cruel' individual, which Olweus originally estimated at 3% of the population. While the intent may be to create a figure of ridicule and encourage the 'victim' to subvert the power imbalance, these stereotypes remain founded in the dominant model of bullying. The use of the person category 'bully' alongside the adult framing of bullying in such interventions may reduce their effectiveness, arising from children's resistance to categorise both people and activities with these loaded terms.

The limited effectiveness in existing intervention programmes may point to the more fundamental problem of using activities that may be common and ordinary in children's everyday interactions as a means of identifying bullying. Participants in this study resisted the notion that action alone is sufficient to identify bullying and therefore by implication resisted the notion that the person perpetuating the action defined as *bullying* is a 'bully', as would be suggested in the dominant models. The identity category 'bully' was most prominent by its absence in this data set, which is striking in light of the substantial focus of talk on *bullying* in the data. Therefore, it may be more effective for interventions to focus on outcomes of actions rather than the actions in isolation.

These offer points for consideration for teachers and schools and for helping professionals who work with children, their parents, and families. Parents as a group are often affected when their child is bullied, or if they are concerned that their child may be being bullied (Harcourt, Jasperse, & Green, 2014; Matsunaga, 2009). This re-theorising of *bullying* using an interactional model suggests a range of options for adults to re-examine their approach to understanding children's interactions, and how children identify and label problematic interactions. The focus on post-event accounts in this study offers a framework for clinical and mental health contexts where the 'interview' relies on such accounting practices for developing understanding of past events. Understanding children's sense-making activities of their lives and experiences is vital to understanding how they grasp at the meaning of events in their lives. Without this understanding, adults risk misinterpreting events and their significance for children. It is not enough to observe and evaluate them from an adult perspective. This investigation into children's accounts of social media and *bullying* illustrates the pitfalls of assuming that if two things appear similar or related then they are the same. Professionals need to attend to children's interpretations of events (how they make sense of them), rather than the description (or 'bare facts').

The implications for research revolve around the issues of specificity and sensitivity, and of the most appropriate focus for study. A recognised problem with diagnostic tests is that they require varying degrees of specificity, which carries a risk of false negatives, and sensitivity, which carries a risk of false positives. Using this as an analogy, it is easy to see how a restrictive approach to defining bullying has high specificity, yet may not include all hurtful, harmful, or troublesome interactions that constitute the underlying concern. Along the same lines, broadening the scope of bullying can be seen as having higher sensitivity and thus capturing more types of interactions. This then has the accompanying risk of categorising interactions as bullying that would not be considered thus by the parties involved. A recent study by Wint (2013) presents another approach that addresses the problem for investigating children's concerns about online interactions. Having concluded that bullying was problematic as a focus for her investigation, she reoriented the focus of study to what bothers children online. This offers a comparable example of the fruitful research findings possible when a study places children's experiences and knowledges at the centre. In this way, both Wint (2013) and this study demonstrate the need for child-centred standpoint approaches to privilege children's experiences and knowledges of their worlds.

Further exploration of the interactional model may offer a means to cut through this impasse. The lenses of the interactional model (setting, activity, relational context, and social and interactional resource) suggest an approach that avoids the excessive focus on one feature of an interaction. The model encourages developing an understanding based on all the features made salient by members, in this case children, and their expertise in their cultures and interactions. An interactional model, such as the one proposed in this study, may assist in effective identification of bullying interactions through a refined focus on the features of interactions used by participants in categorising an interaction as *bullying* or *not bullying*. The shift in focus from problematic individuals to problematic interactions similarly offers a means to avoid stigmatising person categories while addressing the sources of distress and harm. Future research should therefore make use of these findings in its structure and approach.

## **8.5 Directions for Future Work**

In this section, I discuss directions for further investigation arising from the theoretical implications of the interactional model, the methodological and ethical challenges posed by child-centred standpoint theory for engaging in research with children, further development of the fieldwork design and analytic framework, and future additional analyses of the data set.

The interactional model emerging from this study merits further investigation. It offers a distinctively different framework for researching and interpreting children's peer interactions. Its explanatory power is grounded in the accounts of the people whose experience it seeks to explain, and emerges from factors identified as key influences on differentiating the phenomenon of interest from related or confounding factors. This has potential applications in developing or refining approaches to interventions focused on bullying problems. Further, it suggests that it will be important to delve deeper to identify the interactional dynamic that is the more basic source of concern, whether that be unwanted, distressing, or hurtful interactions, rather than glossing multiple diverse types of interactions and meanings with the term *bullying*. It will be important to include within this the concern for misunderstandings, whether those are between children or by adults.

A further direction for study of the interactional model would be to explore how it may be transferable to the analysis and theorising of other interactions, other settings, and other age groups. As such, it may have wider applicability to explicate adult interactions and interactions between adults and children, including the adult-child classroom interactions materialised in the data for this study. In a similar way, there may be axiomatic assumptions operating in definitions of *bullying* in other settings that could benefit from similar critical investigation. In the case of workplace bullying, it may be instructive to explore how terminology has shifted from 'abuse' or 'harassment' to *bullying*, and what implicatures are brought with such a shift. As noted in Chapters 6 and 7, there are existing interactional studies on workplace interaction and jocular abuse that offer theoretical and methodological frameworks for transposing the critique and empirical investigation in this study on childhood bullying to other settings and populations.

The methodological and ethical challenges related to access and direct observation of interactions interpreted as bullying present another direction for further exploration. There would be potential to focus on interactions categorised as bullying by parties in the interaction, or in post-event conversation. A related focus of interest would be troublesome interactions where the categorisation is disputed, either between participants or by an external observer. Each of these has potential to illuminate further facets of the complex interactional space occupied by *bullying* and related categories. Some studies have captured 'in person' interactions, including private interactions, either incidentally or deliberately (Alton-Lee et al., 1993; Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Smith et al., 1995; Svahn & Ewaldsson, 2011). This is not as straightforward in the online setting, however, where confidentiality, privacy, informed consent, and access to data will require further ethical and practical deliberation.

The modified standpoint theory developed as an epistemological frame for this study offers a means to theorise collaborative work with children as participants in research. It presents a sustainable theoretical model to undertake fair and respectful research that recognises the rights and agency of children as participants. It clears theoretical space for incorporating and centring their report of their experiences into the academic sphere. This study represents one approach to applying such a stance. As such, it represents a beginning point for developing this as an approach to research with children.

The identification of activity as a locus of category work opens a new direction for extending membership categorisation analysis beyond person categories. The analytic focus on activities and activity categories offered unique insights into how participants accounted for *bullying* in their sense-making activities. These insights demonstrated the usefulness of exploring categorisation analysis beyond the bounds of its usual focus. Analysis of categorisation practices beyond person categories is currently rare in the field of membership categorisation analysis, and has thus far focused on objects and places (Schegloff, 1972; Smith, 2013). As such, this constitutes an unexplored development in the field (Smith, personal communication), one which opens a new direction for analysis of member category work associated with activities and the complex interactions between activities and persons.

The fieldwork for this study generated a substantial and rich multimodal data set incorporating diverse types of classroom interaction. There is significant potential for further analysis of the interactions captured in these recordings. This may include analysis of peer interviews that compares interviews where participants were in friendship groups with those in which they were not. This was identified as an interactional factor by a participant reflecting on the fieldwork activities. As identified in Chapters 3 and 4, there were also features observable in the recordings to suggest this may offer a fruitful direction for analysing how interlocutors orient to what is 'sayable' in different relational contexts. In addition, the data set includes instances of classroom interaction, including peer-focused small group work and adult-child group interaction, that has potential to add to interactional studies of classroom interaction in general and researcher-classroom interaction specifically.

There were a range of conversational features that may form the basis for further analysis using conversation analysis techniques focused on sequence. This could include expanding on the organisation of claims to authority as an intersection of epistemic, interactional and moral authority in authoring an account. For instance, there were multiple instances in the peer video interviews across the data set where participants employed mimicked sounds or sounds and gestures in place of words as a component of the interaction that would offer a useful focus for multimodal analysis.

## 8.6 Conclusion

As I have discussed through this thesis, bullying not only causes trouble, it is also a source of trouble. The trouble I have focused on is the way bullying as an aspect of children's experiences has been theorised and defined by adults. Children's knowledges have been routinely marginalised in this process and this represents a theoretical and ethical trouble. The dominant methodologies for researching bullying are similarly founded in this marginalisation. As a result, the existing accepted concept, models, and definition have everything to do with adult perceptions of the problem, and show little evidence of attention to children's knowledges based in experience of the problem. This study has presented one approach to redressing the balance and privileging children's knowledges for investigating how children make sense of *bullying* in accounting for using social media.

Hurtful, harmful and troublesome interactions between children remain legitimate concerns for researchers, educators, parents, and for children themselves. Nevertheless, established concepts like bullying are worthy of critical reappraisal using a variety of methodological and epistemological approaches, in particular to compare previous theories with current experiences. It is important to remember that social concepts are not concrete 'things', but dynamic, iterative practices reproduced in social interaction. As such, the concept of childhood bullying has a distinct and complex social history. Treating bullying as a singular, static phenomenon, and the conventional definition as universal, does a disservice to the practice of research and to those who are the focus of research. The dilemma remains that bullying is used axiomatically in academic and 'public domain' settings for a wider range of phenomena than the carefully delineated focus on highly aggressive boys at the heart of Olweus' study.

It may seem tempting to abandon the terms bullying and cyberbullying altogether. It is clear that the conventional definition of bullying should not be treated as axiomatic. Some of the proposed alternatives include expanding the range of terms for these troublesome interactions so that bullying or cyberbullying may be reserved again for the most extreme behaviour (Pyżalski, 2012; Smith et al., 2013). However, this does not overcome the problem that in the model emerging from this study, it was the negative impact on the recipient, rather than the severity of the action, that was a defining feature. Whilst such suggestions may offer useful ways forward, the suggested additional terms remain adult-centric and inattentive to terms used by children



themselves. Another direction would be to investigate what bothers children and young people in online interactions, rather than assuming that bullying or troublesome interactions between peers are the preeminent problem (Livingstone et al., 2013; Wint, 2013). These proposals may offer useful ways forward, but will rely on both developing a range of terms that explicate troublesome interactions rather than subsuming them under the bullying umbrella, and ensuring placement of children's knowledges and concerns at the centre.

There may not be a single solution to this trouble. Bullying is a powerful word. It has strong cultural currency for commanding attention and influencing the actions of others, as was evident in the data for this study. However, as demonstrated in the theoretical critique and empirical analysis in this study, bullying glosses a range of activities that may be considered in some way troublesome, either to the parties involved or to adult observers. The marginalisation of children's knowledges in the dominant models of bullying represents a major problem for our understanding of hurtful, harmful or troublesome interactions as phenomena, and children's concerns about their experiences of such interactions. The interpretive model that emerged from the knowledges of participants in this study reveals the focus on interaction as a crucial difference between how children 'do' defining *bullying* and the conventional definition. This model provides a key to understanding how children make sense of troublesome interactions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that children's methods of making sense of their experiences are predicated on a different interpretive model from the dominant adult-centric models. While this study focused specifically on the interactional context of using social media, participants themselves demonstrated how the interactional model offered a framework for interpreting interactions across settings. In order to remain relevant to the phenomenon of interest, research into childhood bullying cannot continue to marginalise children's knowledges. In this study, the participants and I have made a case on theoretical, methodological and empirical grounds for why a child-centred approach matters for investigating how children make sense of *bullying*, and how adult-instigated research can be achieved in a fair and respectful manner. Children are knowledgeable about their experiences, as demonstrated in this study of how children make sense of their experiences of social media and define *bullying*. As adults, we have not been very

good about asking children about what they mean by *bullying* or what they find troublesome, and then truly listening to the answers. We should do it more.

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Appendix A  
**Information Sheets and Consent Forms**

**School 1**

Sample parent information sheet and consent form

Sample participant information sheet and consent form

Sample additional consent form relating to peer interviews



## **Children using social websites study: Information Sheet for Parents**

**We invite your child to participate in this study.**

### **What is the study about?**

1. This study is being carried out by the University of Otago Wellington. The aims are (a) to investigate how children talk about their experience of using social media to interact with other children (such as blogs, games such as Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters, or Minecraft, or social networking like Facebook or Twitter) and (b) explore themes associated with these experiences as identified by children themselves.
2. We are seeking children aged 10-13 years (Years 7 and 8) to take part.

### **Who is doing the study?**

3. The principal researcher, Justin Canty, is a PhD candidate at University of Otago Wellington. He is a Registered Social Worker with a professional background in child adolescent mental health.

### **What are we asking your child to do?**

4. Justin will collaborate with your child's teacher on a series of class activities focused on children and social media. This will include some class and/or home work. Justin will study these pieces of work to look for themes in order to start understanding children's experiences of social media from their perspective. Your child does not need to be using a social media website themselves to participate.
5. Justin will do a feedback session to present these themes. This session will be video recorded to assist further study of the themes and participants' comments on them.
6. Justin will invite up to 6 children to participate in in-depth interviews. He will contact you to arrange a time and location convenient for you and your child if they are selected. Options for this include at school, at your home or at the university campus. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.
7. Your child's participation is voluntary; they do not have to take part in this study if they do not want to. If they do not take part or withdraw from the study, there will be no disadvantage to you or them. Your child may stop the recording or withdraw from this study at any stage without having to give a reason. Justin will work with your child's teacher and your child so they can still be part of the class activities if they choose not to participate in the research aspect of this project.

### **What will happen to my child's information?**

8. All information, (including audio and video recordings and interviews) will be treated as strictly confidential. They will be archived securely at the University of Otago, Wellington. They will be used only for professional presentation, education or research purposes.



9. Excerpts from your child’s information may be included in publications, presentations and conferences, or may be used for training purposes. Justin will change personal and place names and other identifying information to preserve privacy. Any material which could personally identify your child or you would only be used with your explicit consent.
10. Justin will make copies of participants’ class work – any originals will remain with your child. Interview audio recordings will be transcribed. You and your child will be offered a copy of the recording, the transcript or both.
11. Video recordings of feedback sessions will be viewed only by the researcher and supervisors. There are no plans to use these recordings in presentations or other publication.
12. Justin will treat your child’s information as personal and confidential. He will ask your child whether they want to share all or part of their information with you or someone else. If he believes there is something contained in it that you should know, he will discuss this with you and your child.
13. If your child mentions something during an interview that makes Justin worried for their safety, he has a responsibility to notify the most appropriate service to help them and you. This is covered under the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. If such a situation occurs, it will not affect your child’s participation in the study if you and they choose to stay involved.
14. If you give permission, Justin would like to include your child’s information in a permanent archive that may be used for future projects. It will remain confidential, stored securely at University of Otago Wellington and subject to the same confidentiality requirements as for the present study, including approval of a research ethics committee. You may ask for your child’s information to be removed from the archive at any time. This will not include video recordings of feedback sessions, which will be stored securely for a minimum of five years after the completion of this study and then destroyed.
15. If you decide that you do not want your child’s information to be included in the permanent archive, it will be stored securely for a minimum of five years after the completion of this study and then destroyed.

**Any questions?**

16. This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee.
17. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator ph (03) 479 8256. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.
18. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Justin or one of the other members of the research team at any time.

Researchers:

Justin Canty (principal researcher) Phone: 04 806 1494 Email: <a href="mailto:justin.canty@otago.ac.nz">justin.canty@otago.ac.nz</a>	Sunny Collings (Supervisor) Phone: 04 918 5560 Email: <a href="mailto:sunny.collings@otago.ac.nz">sunny.collings@otago.ac.nz</a>
Maria Stubbe (Supervisor) Phone: 04 806 1838 Email: <a href="mailto:maria.stubbe@otago.ac.nz">maria.stubbe@otago.ac.nz</a>	Denise Steers (Supervisor) Phone: 04 806 1495 Email: <a href="mailto:denise.steers@otago.ac.nz">denise.steers@otago.ac.nz</a>



**Children using social websites study:**

**Consent Form for Parents/Guardians**

- |  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I agree to my child taking part in this study. I have read the information or had the study explained to me. I understand the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to discuss this study and am satisfied with the answers I have been given.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that my child may withdraw at any time without disadvantage.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I agree that the researcher may use this material for research and educational purposes, including publications and presentations.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand that information about my child collected as part of this study is confidential, and that identifying information will be changed to preserve my and my child's privacy. I understand that no material which could identify my child will be used in any publications without my explicit consent. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand that all the information from this study will be stored securely at University of Otago Wellington.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree that my child's information may be included in a permanent archive for future research. Any new projects using my child's information will be approved by an ethics committee. I understand that this does not include the proposed video recorded session.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>If No, then I understand that my child's information will continue to be stored securely for five years following the conclusion of this study and then destroyed.</i>  |                          |                          |
| 6. I am willing to be contacted in the future by a member of the research team.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I understand that if the researcher identifies a concern for my child's safety, that he may need to notify an external agency. The researcher has discussed this with me and my child.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Who am I?

I'm Justin. I'm from the University of Otago Wellington.

Before I started this project, I worked at a place that helped kids and teenagers with their worries. I am interested in what kids themselves have to say about issues and stuff that happens in their lives.



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04 385 5541 (UOW Reception)  
Email: justin.canby@otago.ac.nz



## Children using Social Websites

Information for kids about the study



## ► What is this thing anyway?

I'm doing a study to find out about how kids use websites ("social media") to share things about themselves and to talk with other kids. This might be websites like blogs, games like Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters, and Minecraft, or social networks like Facebook and Twitter.



I think it's important to understand what these experiences are like for kids. I think it's important for adults to listen to kids to find out what it's like for them.

## How will this work?

I will work with your teacher to create a special topic looking at this for your class. There will be activities in class (and maybe some stuff to do outside of class too). Hopefully it will be interesting and fun!



## What will you be asked to do?

- Activities that your teacher and I plan
  - Give me a copy of your work
  - Be part of a feedback session
- I will study the work from everyone in the class and pick out some themes. I will come back to the class and ask you all what you think about them (especially if you think I got something right or didn't understand something properly). I will video record this session so I can watch it carefully.
- I will ask some kids to do interviews as well. I will talk with you and your parents if you are involved in this part of the study. These interviews will be recorded and copied out in writing.

## Important Stuff

- This is a voluntary study, which means it's up to you if you want to take part. It's okay if you don't want to.
- There is a form for you to sign and say that you want to take part, as well as one for your parent or guardian. They need to agree as well.
- It's okay to ask for help.
- It's okay to take a break or to change your mind and stop completely at any time.
- All information will be kept confidential. This is explained on the consent form and you can ask me questions about what this means too.
- Things you have said may be included in things I write or present to others. I will change names so that they cannot identify you.
- While we're talking, if you say something that makes Justin worried about your safety, we may need to tell someone about it.



Netiquette





**Children using social websites study:  
Consent Form for Child Participants**

	YES	NO
1. I agree to take part in this study. I been told about the study and I understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered in ways that make sense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, which means that I am choosing to do it. I understand that I do not have to do it if I don't want to. I understand that I can stop at any time and I don't have to give a reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that my personal information will be kept confidential. This means that only the researcher and his supervisors will see my name on the information for the study. I understand that the researcher will change any names when he writes or talks to other people about things I have said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree with my information being shared by the researcher with:  My parents  My teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree that the researcher may use things I have said in his study and use them to talk with other people about what he learned.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree with the researcher sharing parts of my video interview in presentations or teaching about this research. I understand that the video and audio will be changed so that my personal information (including name, place names, school, face) remains confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that if I say something that makes the researcher worried about my safety, he may need to tell someone about it. I understand that we will talk about this if it happens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Children using social media study:

# Additional Information and Consent Form for Child Participants and Parents/Guardians

This additional consent form relates to the video interviews that participants created with classmates who were also research participants. It is intended to be read alongside the existing consent forms already completed by participants and parents.

I would like to use extracts from these videos from time to time as part of presentations or teaching about this research. The images and spoken word will be edited using video and sound editing techniques so that detail such as faces, names, school uniform detail will be obscured and remain confidential. This was not included in the original consent form and so we need to ask you specifically about this.

This consent specifically excludes broadcast or publication of video or audio material in mainstream or online media. I would contact you again and ask for your special permission if I did ever want to use video or audio excerpts for this purpose.

If you want to ask anything, I will be very happy to talk with you about this extra request [justin.canty@otago.ac.nz](mailto:justin.canty@otago.ac.nz) ph: 806 1494

For Participants:

I agree with the researcher sharing parts of my video interview in presentations or teaching about this research. I understand that the video and audio will be changed so that my personal information (including name, place names, school, face) remains confidential.	YES	NO
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For Parents/Guardians:

I agree with the researcher sharing my child's video interview for academic presentations and teaching in de-identified form. I understand that video editing will be used to obscure any identifying details in the image or spoken word.	YES	NO
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **School 2 & 3**

Parent information sheet and consent form

Participant information sheet and consent form



## Children using social media study: Information Sheet for Parents

**Researchers:** Justin Canty (PhD student, Registered Social Worker), Prof Sunny Collings (Supervisor), Dr Maria Stubbe (Supervisor), Denise Steers (Supervisor)

**Dear Parent/Guardian,** Your child is invited to participate in this study because they are a Year 7 or 8 student at \_\_\_\_\_ School in \_\_\_\_\_'s class.

**What is the study about?** We know that social media is a new phenomenon in children's lives and we want to investigate how children talk about their experience of using social media to interact with other children (such as blogs, games such as Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters, or Minecraft, or social networking like Facebook or Twitter) and to explore themes associated with these experiences as identified by children themselves. We know that online social interaction is significant for children's wellbeing and we don't know a lot about children's perspectives on it.

**What is involved?** Justin will spend some time in the classroom and working with research participants to create video interviews with their classmates who are also involved in the study about their thoughts and experiences of social media. Your child does not need to be using a social media website themselves to participate. Justin will study these interviews to look for themes in order to start understanding children's experiences of social media from their perspective. He will do a feedback session to present these themes and involve participants in the analysis. This session will be video recorded to assist further analysis. Segments of these recordings will be transcribed to help analyse them.

Justin will invite up to 6 participants for focused interviews on topics that emerge from this material. This may occur at school if this is the most convenient time and location. Options for this may also include your home or the university campus. The interview may take approximately 20-30 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

**Data storage and confidentiality:** All personal information will be treated as strictly confidential. Recordings and transcripts will be archived securely at the University of Otago Wellington. Excerpts from video and audio recordings and transcripts will be de-identified before use in publications, presentations or teaching. Justin will ask your child whether they want to share all or part of their information with you or someone else. If he believes there is something contained in it that you should know, he will discuss this with you and your child.

**Benefits and risks of being in the study:** Your child will have an opportunity to think and talk about their ideas, thoughts and experiences of using social media to talk with other people their age. Their thoughts will contribute to academic study of children's experiences of social media from children's perspectives.

Justin is a Registered Social Worker with a professional background in child adolescent mental health and has a professional responsibility to notify regarding concerns for children's safety. This is covered under the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. If a concern emerges, he will talk with you and your child and notify the most appropriate service to help them and you. This would not affect your child's participation in the study if you and they choose to stay involved.

**Questions?** Thank you very much for considering giving your agreement to your child's participation in this study. If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact: Justin Canty [justin.canty@otago.ac.nz](mailto:justin.canty@otago.ac.nz) ph: 04 806 1494, Sunny Collings [sunny.collings@otago.ac.nz](mailto:sunny.collings@otago.ac.nz) ph: 04 918 5560, Maria Stubbe [maria.stubbe@otago.ac.nz](mailto:maria.stubbe@otago.ac.nz) ph: 04 806 1838, Denise Steers [denise.steers@otago.ac.nz](mailto:denise.steers@otago.ac.nz) ph: 04 806 1495.

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. Reference number 13/028. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator ph (03) 479 8256. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.





## Children using social media study: Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

	YES	NO
1. I agree to my child taking part in this study. I have read the information or had the study explained to me. I understand the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to discuss this study and am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that my child may withdraw at any time without disadvantage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I agree that the researcher may use this material for research and educational purposes, including publications and presentations. I understand that video and audio editing will be used to obscure any identifying details in the image or spoken word of recordings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that information about my child collected as part of this study is confidential, and that identifying information will be changed to preserve my and my child's privacy. I understand that no material which could identify my child will be used in any publications without my explicit consent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that all the information from this study will be stored securely at University of Otago Wellington.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree that my child's information may be included in a permanent archive for future research. Any new projects using my child's information will be approved by an ethics committee. I understand that this does not include the recording of the proposed group feedback session.  <i>If No, then I understand that my child's information will continue to be stored securely for five years following the conclusion of this study and then destroyed.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I am willing to be contacted in the future by a member of the research team.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I understand that if the researcher identifies a concern for my child's safety, that he may need to notify an external agency. The researcher has discussed this with me and my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Who am I?

I'm Justin. I'm from the University of Otago Wellington.

Before I started this project, I worked at a place that helped kids and teenagers with their worries. I am interested in what kids themselves have to say about issues and stuff that happens in their lives.



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## Children using Social Media

Information for kids about the study

## ► What is this thing anyway?

I'm doing a study to find out about how kids use social media to share things about themselves and to talk with other kids. This might be websites like blogs, games like Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters, and Minecraft, or social networks like Facebook and Twitter.



I think it's important to understand what these experiences are like for kids. I think it's important for adults to listen to kids to find out what it's like for them.

## How will this work?

I will work with your teacher to create a special topic looking at this for your class. There will be activities in class (and maybe some stuff to do outside of class too). Hopefully it will be interesting and fun!



## What will you be doing?

- Work together with me and your teacher come up with interesting questions about social media for people your age
- Create video interviews with other research participants in your class
- Be part of a feedback session

I will study the work from everyone in the class and pick out some themes. I will come back to the class and ask you all what you think about them (especially if you think I got something right or didn't understand something properly). I will video record this session so I can watch it carefully.

I will ask some kids to do interviews as well. I will talk with you and your parents if you are involved in this part of the study. These interviews will be recorded and copied out in writing.

## Important Stuff

- This is a voluntary study, which means it's up to you if you want to take part. It's okay if you don't want to.
- There is a form for you to sign and say that you want to take part, as well as one for your parent or guardian. They need to agree as well.
- It's okay to ask for help.
- It's okay to take a break or to change your mind and stop completely at any time.
- All information will be kept confidential. This is explained on the consent form and you can ask me questions about what this means too.
- Things you have said may be included in things I write or present to others. I will change names so that they cannot identify you.
- While we're talking, if you say something that makes Justin worried about your safety, we may need to tell someone about it.





## Children using social media study: Consent Form for Child Participants

	YES	NO
1. I agree to take part in this study. I been told about the study and I understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered in ways that make sense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, which means that I am choosing to do it. I understand that I do not have to do it if I don't want to. I understand that I can stop at any time and I don't have to give a reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that my personal information will be kept confidential. This means that only the researcher and his supervisors will see my name on the information for the study. I understand that the researcher will change any names when he writes or talks to other people about things I have said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree with my information being shared by the researcher with:  My parents  My teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree that the researcher may use things I have said in his study and use them to talk with other people about what he learned. I understand that video and audio recordings will be changed so that my personal information (including name, place names, school, face) remains confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that if I say something that makes the researcher worried about my safety, he may need to tell someone about it. I understand that we will talk about this if it happens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix B

### Description of Classroom Input Activities

Introductions:

Introduce myself and the study – wanting to find out your experiences of social media

Brainstorm:

What social media do you use?

What do you use it for?

Values walk:

A common 'icebreaker' activity used to explore opinions and perspectives on topics as a continuum rather than an 'either/or'. Participants are given a statement and place themselves along a line to represent their perspective on the statement between two 'poles' at either end of the space available.

Statements can be fun and lighthearted, such as 'chocolate ice cream is better than strawberry icecream' before introducing more serious questions. Time constraints within the class setting meant that there was less opportunity for 'fun' statements. The statements were organised on the basis of easy to difficult to answer and were based in themes that had emerged in the questions participants posed each other in the peer interviews of Iteration 1.

For the classroom activities for this study, the statements were:

1. I use social media all the time OR I never use it.
2. For me personally, I think social media is great OR I think it's bad/scary.
3. My parents know what I do on social media OR they know nothing about what I do on social media
4. I think social media is good for people our age OR I think it's bad/dangerous

When participants have chosen their position, invite people at various points to say what made them decide to stand where they did. Depending on the size of the group and time available, allow as many different 'points' as possible to speak.

The purpose of these activities was to stimulate discussion on the breadth of experiences and perspectives of social media among class members.

These sessions included a discussion starter activity where class members were asked to arrange themselves on a spectrum in response to a series of propositions about children and social media with a discussion following about why they had chosen to stand where they had, and audio-visual presentations using Prezi software as a support. These were not recorded aside from post-session notes.

## Appendix C

### Data Set and Transcription

#### Data set file name protocol for Children and Social Media

Each element is separated by underscore (\_) in the file names

- CaSM – Children & Social Media
  - Iteration Number (1, 2, 3)
  - Data Point –
    - PI (Peer Interview),
    - GA (Group Analysis),
    - PR (Participant-Researcher Interview),
    - O (other – including presentations, written material given to study by participants, ethnographic data, additional material)
  - Document Number (1 –)

## Transcription Convention

The transcription system uses a non-variable font to ensure accurate alignment of overlapped speech between lines of transcript (in this thesis, Courier New). It employs standard punctuation marks (comma, stop, question mark); however, in the system they mark intonation rather than syntax. Arrows are used for more extreme intonational contours and should be used sparingly. The system marks noticeable emphasis, volume shifts, and so on. A generally loud speaker should not be rendered in capitals throughout.

[ ]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech. They are aligned to mark the precise position of overlap as in the example below.
↑↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythms of speech. They are used for notable changes in pitch beyond those represented by stops, commas and question marks.
→	Side arrows are used to draw attention to features of talk that are relevant to the current analysis.
<u>Underlining</u>	indicates emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis and also indicates how heavy it is.
CAPITALS	mark speech that is hearably louder than surrounding speech. This is beyond the increase in volume that comes as a by-product of emphasis.
°↑I know it,°	'degree' signs enclose hearably quieter speech.
that's r*ight.	Asterisks precede a 'squeaky' vocal delivery.
(0.4)	Numbers in round brackets measure pauses in seconds (in this case, 4 tenths of a second). If they are not part of a particular speaker's talk they should be on a new line. If in doubt use a new line.
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
((stoccato))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g. about features of context or delivery, comments on nonverbal communication including body posture, facial expression and gestures.
she wa::nted	Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons, the more elongation.
hhh	Aspiration (out-breaths); proportionally as for colons.



.hhh	Inspiration (in-breaths); proportionally as for colons.
Yeh,	'Continuation' marker, speaker has not finished; marked by fall-rise or weak rising intonation, as when delivering a list.
y'know?	Question marks signal stronger, 'questioning' intonation, irrespective of grammar.
Yeh.	Full stops mark falling, stopping intonation ('final contour'), irrespective of grammar, and not necessarily followed by a pause.
bu-u-	hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound.
>he said<	'greater than' and 'lesser than' signs enclose speeded-up talk. Occasionally they are used the other way round for slower talk.
solid.= =We had	'Equals' signs mark the immediate 'latching' of successive talk, whether of one or more speakers, with no interval.
heh heh	Voiced laughter. Can have other symbols added, such as underlinings, pitch movement, extra aspiration, etc.
sto(h)p i(h)t	Laughter within speech is signalled by h's in round brackets.