

**Workplace Bullying Through the
Eyes of Human Resource
Practitioners: A Bourdieusian
Analysis**

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Abstract

This thesis addresses an existing gap in the workplace bullying literature: how Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) construct, interpret and respond to workplace bullying. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual HRPs and a small focus group using two forms of data collection: HRPs' unprompted interpretations of a vignette depicting a bullying situation and HRPs' own experiential accounts of handling bullying claims. The HRPs were from private and public sector organisations, and all occupied roles that involved dealing with bullying claims. The interviews were analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis, and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice provided the framework for interpreting the multilevel individual, organisational and social factors influencing HRPs' bullying-related practice. The findings suggest that bullying is a complex and difficult issue for HRPs due to a combination of organisational pressure to protect managers, management-centric anti-bullying policies and the relative powerlessness of Human Resource Management and HRPs in organisations. HRPs applied a range of interpretive mechanisms that served to attribute blame to the target and legitimise the manager's behaviour, even when the behaviour described met academic definitions of bullying. The way the HRPs constructed, interpreted and responded to bullying claims depended on whether the alleged bully was the target's peer or manager. The HRPs consistently constructed peer-to-peer claims as interpersonal conflict and manager-to-employee claims as the target's reaction to performance-management practices. The HRPs' construct of 'genuine bullying' appeared to comprise four essential criteria: *intentional* and *person-related* behaviour between peers, which has *significant negative impact* on a *trustworthy* target. These findings have significant implications for research and practice. Firstly, HRPs' construct of 'genuine bullying' is fundamentally different to academic and organisational definitions of bullying. Secondly, as a result of these constructs and interpretive mechanisms it appears very unlikely that any management behaviour in manager-to-employee claims would be constructed as bullying by HRPs.

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Declaration

Doctor of Philosophy; Human Resource Management and Marketing, Portsmouth Business School.

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Description
ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
BP	Business Partner
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
DA	Discourse Analysis
DPDA	Discursive Psychology Discourse Analysis
FG	Focus Group
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRP	Human Resource Practitioner
LIPT	Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror
NAQ	Negative Acts Questionnaire
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
OCM	Operational Classification Method
PM	Personnel Management

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Dissemination

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my close friend, Lesley, whose experiences further convinced me of the importance of researching the phenomenon of workplace bullying.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is bullying through the eyes of Human Resource practitioners (HRPs), and how does this influence their response to employees' claims of bullying? HRPs have a critical role in identifying, preventing and resolving bullying in organisations and are the organisational representatives most likely to be involved in handling bullying claims (Ferris, 2004; 2009; Lewis & Rayner, 2003; Salin, 2009). Knowledge of how HRPs might perceive and interpret such claims is likely to provide a greater understanding of when and how they might intervene or take action against bullying (Salin, in press). Yet, despite the importance of their role, very little is known regarding how HRPs interpret and respond to bullying (Salin, 2008). The research presented in this thesis is, therefore, exploratory and primarily inductive in nature, and was motivated by a desire to address this gap. It therefore contributes by providing knowledge on HRPs' interpretations and responses to bullying claims at work. To position the research, this introduction will explain and justify the focus of the thesis, and introduce the theoretical and methodological framework and the context within which the study takes place.

1.1 The Rationale for the Thesis

Three related problems associated with bullying provided the rationale for the focus of this thesis. As Chapter 2 will establish, there is a significant body of academic research on the phenomenon, which has greatly contributed to our understanding of the individual, organisational and social factors associated with bullying. However, notwithstanding this knowledge, bullying remains a prevalent issue within organisations. The impacts on employees are wide-reaching and significant (e.g., Einarsen & Gemzoe, 2003), as is the financial cost to organisations (Giga, Hoel and Lewis, 2008). Therefore, questions as to why bullying continues to occur and how it may be reduced or eliminated remain important for academics and practitioners alike. In the UK, the cultural context for this thesis, the number of employees self-reporting the subjective experience of 'being bullied' appears to be increasing (UNISON, 2009). Hence, despite this corpus of knowledge, the subjective experience of bullying does not appear to be diminishing, suggesting that there may be other factors that are perpetuating, or failing to address the prevalence of bullying.

One such factor may be the response of HRPs to bullying claims. Given the predominance of HRPs' involvement in bullying claims, the gap in our understanding of how they might define, interpret and respond to employees' claims becomes particularly important, especially as the response from HRPs appears crucial in determining how targets cope with their bullying experience (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010). This leads to the second problem: current research suggests that employees perceive the actions taken by HRPs in response to bullying as neither positive nor effective. Whether through questionnaires or interviews, targets frequently report that they are disbelieved or deemed culpable by colleagues and organisational representatives, typically HRPs and management (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003).

For example, targets perceive that managers and HRPs respond inconsistently across claims and in regard to policy (Ferris, 2004; Sheehan, Barker, & McCarthy, 2004), deny that the problems exist (Einarsen, Matthiesen & Hauge, 2008; Ferris, 2009), fail to take action (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), blame it on a 'personality clash' (Keashly, 2001), accuse them of being 'over-sensitive' (Lee, 2000; Vickers, 2006), or 'blame' the target for the situation (Hutchinson, Vickers, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2009). Similar findings from targets are reported in the related literatures on sexual harassment (e.g., Collinson & Collinson, 1996; Vance, Ensher, Hendricks & Harris, 2004), incivility and mistreatment (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Olsen-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008) and whistleblowing (Rehg, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008). Harlos (2001) describes such responses to targets as 'deaf-ear syndrome', suggesting that it serves to exacerbate the detrimental impact of experiencing negative behaviour at work. Thus, the responses from HRPs can be perceived as further bullying, thereby exacerbating the impact on the target (e.g., D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2003; Rayner, 2005).

Why might HRPs' responses be so disparate to the targets' perceptions of the bullying situation, as these research findings suggest? Does this published research suggest that HRPs' perception of bullying does not correspond with that of employees? Herein lies the third problem: although Salin's (2008, 2009) recent work, discussed in Chapter 2, has explored the actions HRPs might take in cases of bullying, there is no published research that examines what constitutes bullying in the eyes of HRPs and what might determine or explain their actions. Therefore, the questions examined within this thesis will contribute to

developing our understanding of these two points: how HRPs construct bullying and what factors influence how and when they respond.

At this stage it is appropriate to summarise the findings of an earlier study that sought to examine how HRPs construct and interpret bullying, and which motivated the inception of this thesis (Harrington, 2005).

1.2 A Prologue to this Thesis

Whilst I was studying for my MSc Occupational Psychology (2003-2005), my current job included developing, delivering and evaluating workplace bullying and harassment intervention programmes within organisations. The diverse subjective interpretations of bullying, and the range of attitudes and responses towards the phenomenon intrigued me. This practitioner experience paralleled the empirical research I was reading for my MSc dissertation from Andy Liefoghe and colleagues¹; namely, that employees do not appear to have a consistent view of what constitutes bullying, and that certain organisational practices can be perceived as bullying (e.g., Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001). Moreover, within the bullying literature, research suggested that the responses from HRPs can be inconsistent with bullying policy, resulting in the normalisation of such behaviours, and, hence, further isolation and victimisation for the target (Ferris, 2004; Nelson & Lambert, 2001). This research and my practitioner experience informed the research questions for my MSc dissertation. My growing appreciation of the subjective and socially constructed nature of bullying significantly influenced my methodological approach to my MSc dissertation and this thesis.

In summary, for my MSc dissertation, I conducted a qualitative, interview-based study with a sample of HRPs and non-managerial employees, to examine how HRPs interpreted situations of workplace bullying in comparison to employees. Six vignettes of “difficult interpersonal situations” were constructed by manipulating the academic definitional characteristics of bullying; that is, frequency, duration, escalation, power imbalance, negative behaviours, impact and intentionality. The vignettes were presented as “difficult interpersonal situations,” to avoid priming thoughts of bullying. Participants were asked to

¹ Andy Liefoghe was my supervisor for my MSc Dissertation.

“think aloud” and verbalise any thoughts that emerged as they read the vignettes. Prompt questions further explored areas such as perceived intent, impact and cause. After all six vignettes, participants who had not verbalised the label of ‘bullying’ were asked if they had considered the vignettes to be ‘bullying’ at any point, and, if so, whether there was a reason why they had not labelled the situation as such.

Briefly, the findings suggested that HRPs are very reticent to label behaviour as ‘bullying’, even when the behaviours are severe. Instead, they typically described the behaviour as ‘management style’; thus, interpreting the vignettes within a management framework. Bullying behaviour was passively condoned as a legitimate way to ‘achieve targets’ and to ‘manage poorly performing employees out of the organisation’. Formally investigating claims of bullying was resisted, predominantly because of the risk to the organisation of adverse internal and external publicity of ‘bullying’. In contrast, the non-managerial employee participants were much more likely to label the situations as bullying and use more emotive language to describe the vignettes, compared to the HRPs’ organisationally sanitised language. Whilst this study indicated HRPs’ reticence to *label* bullying behaviours, a reluctance that was not found for employees, the data did not permit an examination of what constitutes actual bullying in the eyes of HRPs.

Thus, this thesis was inspired and motivated by the findings from the MSc dissertation: how do HRPs construct bullying and why might they interpret situations of bullying within a framework of management style, particularly when all the behaviours presented in the vignettes were those described in a typical organisational anti-bullying policy? In other words, I was partly motivated by seeking an *explanation* for the findings from my MSc dissertation. Therefore, the research presented within this thesis aims to contribute to the corpus of bullying knowledge in three ways: by providing an understanding of how HRPs construct and interpret bullying; how and when HRPs might respond to bullying claims; and, therefore, how organisations might more effectively identify, prevent and reduce bullying at work. Whilst Chapter 4 will provide a detailed examination of the methodology, the next section will introduce the theoretical and methodological framework within which the research was conducted to provide the context for this thesis.

1.3 Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions

Two main factors influenced the empirical design and methodology in this thesis. Very little is known about how HRPs might construct, interpret and responds to bullying. Hence, an exploratory, qualitative and predominantly inductive design was deemed appropriate. Secondly, supported by the research findings discussed in the previous section, the approach taken in this thesis is that organisational reality is socially constructed through language; that is, ‘reality’ is both socially and discursively mediated (Hammersley, 2008). However, more specifically, this thesis adopts a critical realist approach to social construction, as Chapter 4 will elucidate. In doing so, it is assumed that, whilst multiple socially and discursively mediated ‘realities’ might exist, there is an enduring and structured social world. Objects, institutions and social practices have permanence outside of individuals’ perceptions of them (Fairclough, 2005). Within this thesis, bullying, and how HRPs respond to it, is considered as one such social practice occurring in organisations: thus, its meaning is socially constructed. In other words, ‘bullying’ means different things to different people, and language is central to this process. Thus, as will be positioned in Chapter 4, a constructionist approach and a language-focused method of analysis are appropriate.

Within this thesis, language is viewed as the mechanism through which individuals make sense of their workplace and the means for creating and maintaining the power relations within organisations (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a). Meaning and practice are continually negotiated, legitimised, sustained or resisted discursively, with more powerful organisational members determining the practices, language and world-view of their organisation (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Marshak & Grant, 2008). Thus, particularly through the use of metaphors, discourse can be a strategic resource for organisational members to exert their dominant view over others (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000). Furthermore, discourse does not function simply to describe events; it is performative (Spicer, Alvesson, & Karreman, 2009). It creates the ‘reality’ in which individuals orient their actions, which can only be fully understood by reference to its constitutive discourses, which are located in their “historical and social context” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4). Thus, language is both the mechanism by which individuals interpret and respond to social structures and practices, and the means by which analysis may examine their meaning to individuals (Willig, 1999). Hence, the analysis of the data within this thesis requires a methodology that reflects the importance and social function of language. In Chapter 4, Critical Discourse Analysis

(CDA) will be positioned as an appropriate methodology for both the epistemological and ontological assumptions of critical realism, and for examining the socially constructed nature of bullying in the eyes of HRPs.

At this point, it is important to clarify the distinction between ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ within this thesis. As Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003, p. 1171) observe, “discourse is a tricky term, used in a variety of ways”, from the text of an interview used in analysis, to the grand, organising discourses, such as ‘capitalism’. Hence, because of the multiple uses, it can be difficult to understand what an author is referring to with the word ‘discourse’: “discourse sometimes comes close to standing for everything, and thus nothing” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b, p. 1128). Therefore, because of the central importance of language in this thesis, this clarification is required.

Throughout this document, ‘language’ is viewed as a social practice; a mechanism for interaction, and for creating, negotiating and contesting meaning (Brown & Coupland, 2005); whereas ‘discourse’ functions as a structuring and ordering force, which brings certain ‘realities’ into being because of the practices, including language, which it produces (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Hardy, 2001). For example, the discourse of ‘market managerialism’ (Parker, 2002) is introduced in Section 1.8.2, and it reflects the rise in capitalism and managerialism in organisations. This discourse has given rise to changes in organisational practices associated with work intensification and profit maximisation, such as target-focused performance-management, and is enacted through an associated language, such as ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘target-driven cultures’. Thus, within this thesis and particularly Chapters 5 and 6, ‘language’ will be used to reflect the dialogue and words used by the HRPs, ‘discourse’ will be used to reflect the broader systems of meaning that they draw upon within their language.

Thus far, this section has proposed that a social constructionist approach and CDA methodology are appropriate for examining the socially constructed nature of HRPs’ bullying constructions and related practices. Further, that CDA will allow the consideration of the broader social contexts in which HRPs’ practice is located, a point that will be returned to in Section 1.8. However, as will be established in Chapter 2, bullying appears to be a complex phenomenon, influenced by a plethora of individual, organisational and social

factors (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003). Moreover, the findings from Harrington (2005) highlighted the importance of the HRPs' language in legitimising and sanitising bullying behaviour as 'management style'. Thus, a theoretical framework was sought that would permit both the examination of multi-level factors on HRPs' constructs and practices in relation to bullying, and the role of language.

Furthermore, this thesis sought to address several calls within the bullying literature: the application of more qualitative methodology to further understand the subjectivity of bullying (e.g., Agervold, 2007; Parzefall & Salin, 2010); the adoption of interpretive and critical perspectives that would provide an exploration of the potential role that power in organisations might play in relation to bullying (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2003; 2010; Salin, 2003a); and the examination of bullying within its multiple individual, organisational and broader socio-historical contexts (Hoel & Beale, 2006). As will be established in the following sections, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (e.g., 1977, 2000, 2005) provides a unified framework for positioning HRPs' bullying-related practices within their socio-historical, organisational and professional contexts, and offers the means for examining the roles of power and language in determining HRPs' practices. Together, Bourdieu's theory, critical realism and CDA provide a holistic theoretical and analytical framework from which to examine the complex phenomenon of bullying through the eyes of HRPs.

Within this thesis, Bourdieu's theory will not simply be used as the framework for the analysis and interpretation of the data; it will also be used to examine and ask questions of the bullying and Human Resource Management (HRM) literatures reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Hence, this framework will be woven throughout the fabric of this thesis. Therefore, somewhat unconventionally, Bourdieu's theory and its relevance for this thesis will be critically discussed in this opening chapter, whilst Chapter 4 will subsequently provide the rationale for integrating Bourdieu, critical realism and CDA into a theoretically justified methodological approach. The next section begins by providing an overview of Bourdieu's theory and how it has been used within organisational research.

1.4 The Theory of Pierre Bourdieu: An Overview of Tools of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu developed his theory of practice over several decades, publishing over 30 books and 300 articles (e.g. 1977, 1984, 1991, 2000, 2005; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is a social theory that attempts to explain the factors that produce social knowledge and create social behaviour. His theory provides a framework for understanding the *relational* nature of social action at the individual, situational and broader socio-historical levels (Bourdieu, 1977). Initially developed as a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding societies as a whole (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), he latterly applied it to organisations (Bourdieu, 2005).

Dobbin (2008, p. 53) argues that a comprehensive application of Bourdieu's tools of practice is relevant for organisational research because it provides a multilevel framework for conducting research into complex and ambiguous organisational phenomena: "the whole of this theory is more than the sum of its parts". The power and usefulness of Bourdieu's tools of practice lie in their ability to provide a reflexive² "set of thinking tools for guiding empirical research" (Brubaker, 2004; Kasper, 2009; Swartz & Zolberg, 2004, p. 5). Whilst there is now established precedence for applying Bourdieu's theory to organisational research, the majority of studies have applied elements of his theory, rather than the unified framework that his tools of practice permit³ (e.g. Corsun & Costen, 2001; Everett & Jamal, 2004; Hallett, 2003; Maman, 2000; Mutch, 2003; Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998). Such selective use has been criticised for diminishing the empirical power of the theory's application to organisational research (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005; Swartz, 2008). Therefore, this thesis will utilise all the elements of Bourdieu's tools of practice to provide a holistic framework to examine the individual, organisational and social factors that might influence HRPs' interpretation and response to bullying. In doing so, this thesis provides a methodological contribution by extending the previous use of Bourdieu's theory, which is further examined in Section 4.2.

Together, Bourdieu's constructs provide the means to situate individuals within their organisational and socio-historical contexts, to examine "the layered, intersubjective, interdependent nature of social phenomena" (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005, p. 856). Thus, in

² Reflexivity is also a basic assumption in CDA, as Chapter 4 will examine.

³ See Emirbayer & Johnson (2008) and Vaughan (1996) for exceptions.

relation to this thesis, the following examination of Bourdieu's theory aims to establish how the application of his unified framework will provide the means for exploring the individual, interpersonal, organisational and social factors that may be influencing an HRP's practice in relation to bullying, itself a complex and ambiguous organisational phenomenon.

Throughout his works, Bourdieu uses the analogy of a 'game' to articulate the link between the 'tools' of his theory of practice: the *field* is the arena in which a 'game' takes place between its players, a game which comprises *social practices*. An individual's power, or *capital*, is both a weapon to use to their advantage in the game and a stake to be won. The amount and type of capital an individual has determines their *position* in the field and, as Section 1.7 will explain, individuals can use this capital to 'negotiate' their position in an active process called *position-taking* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Individuals' internal dispositions, or *habitus*, enable the players to understand the taken-for-granted rules of that field's game, its *doxa*, and how to play this game more or less effectively (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). *Language*, and its use, determines whose view of the field's rules dominates; the more capital a person, or group has, the more their version of doxa becomes taken-for-granted. In that way, more powerful members of the field will determine its structure and rules, its accepted way of doing things and its associated language. Hence, more powerful players, predominantly through their language, determine the way that less powerful members see the field and behave in it: Bourdieu (1991) calls this dominance through language, *symbolic violence*.

As we progress through this thesis, this analogy of a 'game' will emerge in academic and practitioner texts, and in HRPs' and employees' language (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008). This suggests that the 'game' is a useful and effective metaphor for describing organisations; it makes sense theoretically, and practically for managers and employees. To elucidate Bourdieu's use of this analogy, and how his tools of practice might be usefully applied to this thesis, each will be considered in turn. We begin by examining capital and fields in more detail, because of the importance of capital in determining who controls the field and the world-view of other players.

1.5 The Nature of Capital and Structure of Fields

Bourdieu (e.g., 1977; 1984; 2005) conceived society as a system of relatively autonomous but interlocking fields, each with its own rules, social practices and forms of capital, e.g. family, education, religion, professions, and organisations. Fields, and the social structures within them, such as schools or organisations, have permanence and *objectivity*; they are durable and robust across time. They are ‘social facts’ that exist independently of behaviour or people’s perceptions of them because, as Section 1.6 will explain, they become incorporated into habitus (e.g., Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Each individual is likely to belong to multiple fields and, at times, membership to more than one field might be shaping their practice. For example, an HRP is a member of both the HRM professional field and their specific organisational field. In turn, both of these fields are embedded with the broader national cultural fields, represented in Figure 1. Within this thesis, both the organisation and the HRM profession become the fields in particular focus.

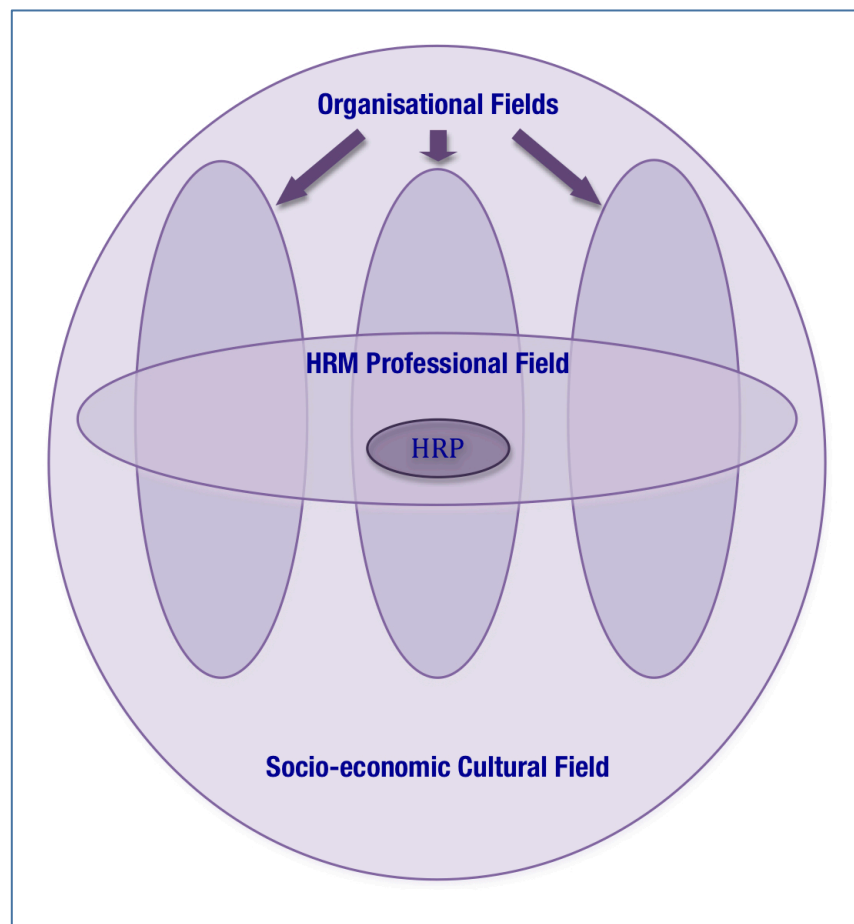


Figure 1: The HRP within their Cultural, Organisational and Professional Fields

A field is a social space structured and organised around specific types of capital (Swartz, 1997); it comprises a group of people competing for the same material resources, the stake, such as respect, promotions and high salaries. Underlying this is Bourdieu's (1991) assumption that self-interest drives behaviour. That is, social practice is shaped by individuals' anticipation that certain actions will contribute to satisfying their interests. Bourdieu (1990) argues that this is predominantly outside of conscious reflection because an individual's habitus, or predispositions, will draw them to fields that have congruent 'rules and rewards'. In other words, members of an organisation typically understand and accept that field's rules, and perceive its rewards as valuable and desirable. Thus, the field is a site of constant struggle and conflict as players seek to maximise their relative position and capital (DiMaggio, 1979), and behaviour becomes "organized around that competition" (Dobbin, 2008, p. 55).

However, in order for capital to function as both an advantage-maker and a reward, it must be recognised and legitimised as valuable by the field. In an organisation, this might be the success of high sales figures, the authority of a management position, or an HRP's knowledge of employment law for example. Furthermore, the boundary of a field is defined by the limits of efficacy and value of the legitimised forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, when a high performing sales person leaves the office and plays a game of football for a local league, the capital accorded through their sales record is neither recognised nor valued within this sporting field. Hence, capital is field dependent.

Bourdieu defines several forms of capital, the value of which will depend on the nature of the field:

- *Economic capital*: money, or assets that have monetary value. Bourdieu (1986, p. 252) proposed that, because of the dominance of economic discourses in society, as discussed in Section 1.8.2, "economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital", which are "transformed, disguised forms of economic capital." Thus, 'money' underpins all forms of capital. This transformation is achieved through a process of *euphemization*, which is discussed in Section 1.7.

- *Cultural capital*: this predominantly comprises of ‘cultural artefacts’ deemed valuable by the society in which the individual lives, such as educational qualifications and knowledge, verbal acuity, aesthetic preferences and tastes.
- *Social capital*: this is determined by the nature and quantity of an individuals’ social connections and networks, which are formed because they are of value to the individual’s self-interest. That is, they may lead to benefits for the individual.
- *Symbolic capital*: this is any form of capital that is legitimised as valuable by the field; the ‘rules of the game’ determine its value. Bourdieu (1977) argues that this legitimisation serves to make this the most powerful form of capital because it is the ultimate basis of power in a field. Within an organisation economic success (economic capital), professional affiliations (cultural capital) and senior management networking (social capital) are likely to be legitimised as symbolic capital, because they yield results for individuals over others. It is this form of capital that is used in symbolic violence (Section 1.7).

Furthermore, within each field there is also a *field of power*, determined by those members of the field who possess the greatest amount symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1996). Within an organisation, this is most likely to be the senior management team, or Board (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008), because the members have the legitimate power, acquired as a result of their symbolic power, to determine the rules of the game, the doxa, for the rest of the field.

Doxa comprises shared knowledge of the values, practices and associated language of the field. Through this shared, consensual *doxic* knowledge, members of the field understand the rules of the game and their relative position within it (see Figure 2). This relative position provides the individual with a “sense of limits”, jointly determined by habitus, their amount and type of capital, and doxa (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). In other words, together, these serve to constrain the ways in which an individual can perceive and respond to the social world: limits are set for individuals’ perceptual and action repertoires⁴. This is because, through the dispositions of habitus, further examined in the next section, individuals adjust to the doxa of the field; their goals become directed towards acquiring the valued resources of the field;

⁴ There are parallels between Bourdieu’s view of the taken-for-granted nature of doxa, and both Berger and Luckman’s (1966) argument that behaviour is shaped and constrained by taken-for-granted patterns of organising in the social world, and Geertz’s (1993) view that the cultural rules and resources within institutions enable individuals to structure their behavior and interpret the actions of others.

their actions to achieve these become spontaneous; and actions that are incompatible with these goals become “excluded as unthinkable” (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p. 32)⁵. For an organisation, doxic knowledge is more than organisational policy and process; it is, for example, a taken-for granted understanding the ‘rules of engagement’ between managers and employees, an acceptance of organisational hierarchy, and an ability to use the organisation’s language, its ‘management speak’ or ‘jargon’. That is, it is ‘the way we do things here’. Language, its power and role in symbolic violence will be considered in Section 1.7. First, to fully understand an individual’s behaviour in an organisation from a Bourdieusian perspective we need to consider another of his tools of practice: habitus.

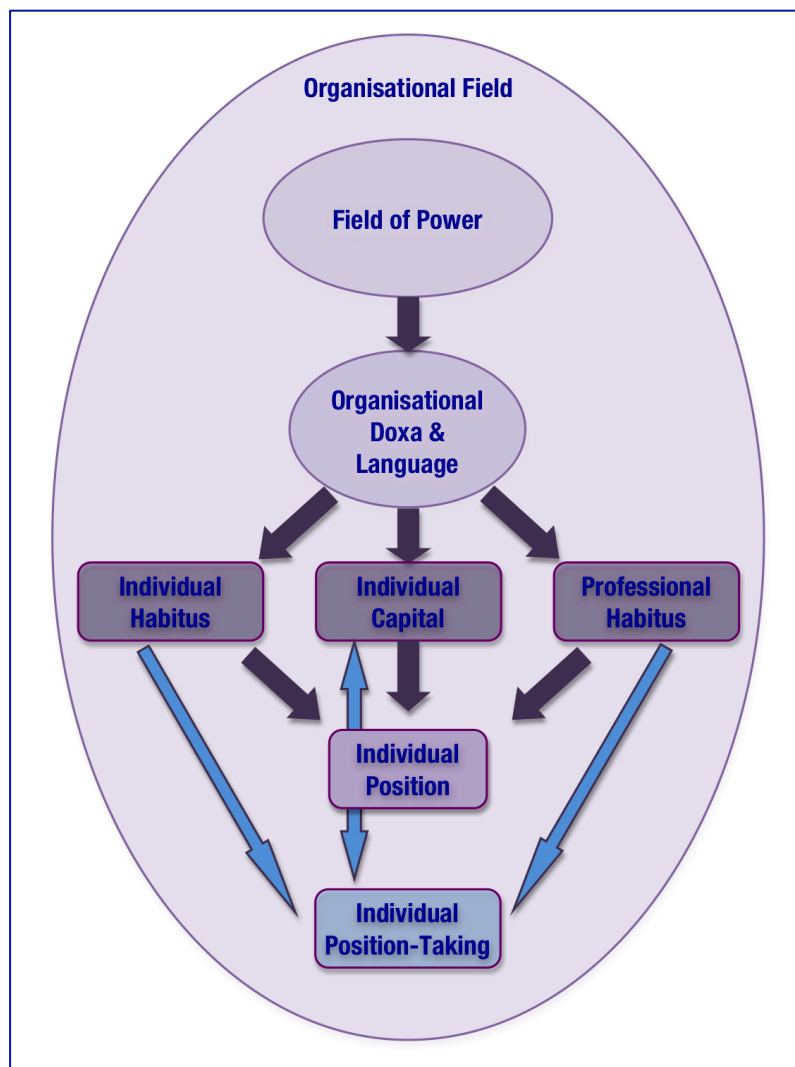


Figure 2: The Factors Influencing an HRP's Position in the Organisational Field

⁵ There are parallels here with the work of Giddens (1984), who argued that the structure of institutional fields constrains the range of options that an individual will consider, making only certain actions possible in any given situation.

1.6 The Role of Individual and Shared Habitus

An individual's habitus is a set of durable internal dispositions, or cognitive schemas, which operate at a pre-conscious level (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus gives rise to multiple taken-for-granted ways of perceiving the world and behaving within it, which are enduring across time and the range of fields to which an individual belongs (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This set of dispositions is the culmination of an individual's experiences and socialisation, from early childhood onwards, through school, social clubs, peer groups, university and work (Bourdieu, 1990). As a result of social interaction within these fields, individuals perceive and internalise social structures and practices; they develop internal representations of the social world that help them to understand it and behave within it. An individual's habitus is thus structured by the fields to which they belong; hence, knowledge of the field is necessary to understand the dynamics of habitus (Bourdieu, 1988; Laberge, 2010). For example, individuals build mental models of 'an organisation' and how to behave and speak accordingly within habitus; an HRP develops a representation of 'bullying' and how to respond to it. In this way, individuals internalise organisational doxa within their habitus, and in doing so, it structures the dispositions in habitus to meet these doxic requirements. Hence, whilst the building blocks of habitus are laid down in childhood, it continues to be modified and structured by ongoing social experience within the individual's multiple fields (Bourdieu, 1991).

However, whilst habitus generates multiple ways of perceiving and behaving in any given situation, it also *constrains* an individual's perceptions and practice, contributing to the 'set of limits' discussed in the previous section. This is because the internal dispositions of each individual's habitus are a result of their *specific* previous experience within a range of fields. Hence, habitus is "not only an empowering principle; it is also a principle of relative determinism, since it is always grounded by experience" (Scheuer, 2003, p. 173). In this way, habitus provides the mechanism for an individual to understand the field's doxa and to act accordingly *within the limits* set by both doxa and habitus. Habitus provides the individual with a "sense of one's place" in relation to the other field members (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 5); hence, an employee accepts the taken-for-granted dominance of the organisation's field of power.

However, for the game to function, *all* the players need to understand the rules. This consensus occurs as a result of *shared habitus*, created via “supra-individual dispositions capable of functioning in an orchestrated or, one could say, collective way” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 156). These collective dispositions result from individuals occupying homologous positions within a field and sharing similar socialisation experiences, such as comparable home environments, schooling and professional roles. A pertinent example for this thesis is the shared habitus of the HRM profession, which will be examined in Chapter 3. Through shared habitus, social practices become immediately understandable and predictable to similarly situated individuals, such as how an employee behaves compared to a manager, or, in relation to this thesis, how an HRP might respond to bullying. However, one consequence of shared habitus is that individuals become less critical and reflective of each others behaviour, and these consensual taken-for-granted practices become endowed with a sense of ‘objective commonsense’ negating the need for “close analysis of the nuances of another’s practice” Bourdieu (1977, p. 80)⁶. This unquestioned acceptance contributes to some practices becoming spontaneously ‘thinkable’ and, therefore, accessible, whilst others become ‘unthinkable’ and inaccessible (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008).

Therefore, because field structures and organisational doxa are incorporated into individual and shared habitus, there is typically concordance between habitus, field and doxa. The resulting practice is taken-for-granted and unquestioned. However, there are situations where the correspondence between the field and habitus is disrupted, and individuals experience *hysteresis*, which is comparable to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). For example, this might happen if an HRP moves to an organisation that is structurally different to those in which their shared habitus developed, such as moving from a public to private sector organisation. Hysteresis results in a period of more conscious reflection regarding the ‘fit’ between habitus and the field’s doxa. Whilst hysteresis can result in resistance and change if the gulf in this ‘fit’ is too large, predominantly this reflection will result in the individual automatically adapting their behaviour in line with the new field’s structure and doxa, because individuals’ interests drive their practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 2005). Hence, in considering both this and the previous section, the structure of the field, the relative position of its members and the legitimisation of capital are reproduced and perpetuated

⁶ A similar concept to shared habitus is found in the work of DiMaggio & Powell (1983), who argue that within an organisational field, which they delimited by the influence of its rules and resources, individuals develop a collective rationality from the mutual awareness of the common enterprise of the organisation.

predominantly unreflexively by the players. As the next section will now examine, language and symbolic violence play a key role in this process.

1.7 Symbolic Violence and the Role of Language

Symbolic violence is the process by which the powerful field members assert their voice and view of the world, by virtue of their legitimised symbolic capital and the control they have over the valued resources in the field; thus, maintaining the divisions between the dominant and dominated. Again, the Board of an organisation serves as an example; they have the power to control salaries and promotions, as do managers over employees further down the organisation. Furthermore, in accepting the organisation's doxa, recognising the value of these resources and, thus, pursuing their interests by striving to acquire them, Bourdieu argues that employees are actually complicit in perpetuating the power relations in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Hence, the unconscious dispositions of habitus, the taken-for-granted nature of doxa and symbolic power as legitimate, together serve to perpetuate the power relations and positions in a field via symbolic violence, to which language is central (Bourdieu, 1987).

Within habitus, each individual possesses a relative level of *linguistic capital*, which is a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). This linguistic habitus comprises both language proficiency and linguistic discourses; it is both how correctly language is spoken and how well an individual can use the field's discourses to achieve a purpose. Discourses are an integral part of the field's doxa, and individuals attempt to use this language to maximise their interests within a field. As will be explored in Section 1.8.2, 'market managerialism' (Parker, 2002) is one such discourse, where the focus is on profit maximisation and shareholder value, reflecting Bourdieu's focus on economic discourses and capital (Bourdieu, 2005). Such discourses serve to 'politicise' language, sustaining the power imbalances and rules of the field. Hence, language is a social practice that "makes the world" of the field, determining what is valued and what actions are thinkable and unthinkable (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. 13). In other words, it is a mastery of these discourses that enables powerful field members to assert their view and maintain their dominance over other field members.

However, Bourdieu (2001) argues that this process of symbolic violence is not transparent to less powerful field members, because of the taken-for-granted nature of symbolic capital and because of the process of *euphemization*, which serves to transform, sanction and censor certain forms of language (Bourdieu, 1977; 1991). It is the process through which the importance of economic capital is disguised by its transformation into other forms of capital (Section 1.5). These euphemized discourses become accepted as part of *doxa*, and members, depending on their linguistic capital, use them more or less effectively in pursuit of their interests. For example, in organisations these euphemisms are evident in managerial discourses such as ‘strategic planning’ and employees’ ‘core competencies’ (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005), and the requirement for employees to ‘develop a shared purpose’ and ‘raise their game’ (Ulrich et al., 2008), which implicitly serve to promote behaviour that realises economic benefit for the organisation. Symbolic violence is, therefore, exerted by dominant field members through legitimised linguistic competence, in the form of euphemisms. Its effectiveness requires the acceptance of the field’s forms symbolic power and euphemisms as legitimate by the dominated field members. However, one way in which dominated field members may use language to their benefit is via a process called position-taking.

Bourdieu conceptualises the field as both a ‘space of positions’ and a ‘space of position-taking’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As previously discussed, an individual’s position in a field is determined by their *habitus* and relative amount and type of capital. The ‘space of position-taking’ is structured by the *stances* that individuals take within the field. Typically, positions and stances are in equilibrium because of *habitus* and capital. However, through position-taking, individuals may *actively* use social practices and language, not typically associated with their position, to influence their actual position in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, HRPs may adopt a ‘business stance’ by developing a ‘business language’, based on economic principles of cost and return to convince managers of the ‘value’ of HRM. If, in doing so, the manager now perceives that the HRP has something to offer that will help the manager meet desired goals, the HRPs symbolic capital in the eyes of the manager will increase. This proposition will be explored by examining published research on HRPs’ role constructions in Chapter 3. Thus, the language of an organisation, and the discourses on which it is based, are crucial for creating and sustaining the power dynamics of an organisation, through the mechanisms of symbolic capital and violence.

Hence, Bourdieu's tools of practice provide a "unified and comprehensive analytic framework" for viewing the organisation as a site of struggle, where organisational members are competing to acquire scarce symbolic capital that will improve their position within the field (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p. 22). Acquisition of symbolic capital provides the means for organisational members to exert influence and their views on other members, through the process of symbolic violence. Powerful organisational members are able to determine the organisational discourses through which this process occurs. In applying Bourdieu's theory, this thesis will examine whether the social practice of an HRP, generally and in relation to bullying, might be shaped and constrained by, firstly, individual habitus and capital; secondly, the nature of the organisation and its doxa; thirdly, the shared habitus of the HRM profession; and finally, the broader social, economic and historical cultures within which the organisation and HRM is embedded. Thus, Bourdieu's framework provides the means to examine the individual, organisational, interpersonal, professional and social factors that may determine how an HRP constructs, interprets and responds to bullying. Whilst each of these potential influences will be examined in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3, the next section will turn to the professional and organisational fields of the HRPs who contributed to this thesis. This will provide the context for examining the bullying and HRM literatures in the subsequent chapters.

1.8 The Organisational and Professional Contexts of this Thesis

The research in this thesis was conducted with UK-based HRPs. The theoretical assumptions of this thesis are that HRM practice is socially constructed, influenced by the social structures, practices and discourses comprising the context in which HRM practice occurs. Therefore, it is important to consider the cultural circumstances of the practitioners who contributed to this research in terms of the influences of HRPs' professional context, and the broader socio-economic and organisational fields in which their practice is embedded.

Therefore, the next section will briefly introduce the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the UK professional body for HRPs, because it significantly influences the adoption of HRM theory in HRP practice in the UK and, hence, its publications will contribute to this thesis, particularly Chapter 3.

1.8.1 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The CIPD was originally established as the Welfare Workers Association in 1913 and has been through several re-formulations, paralleling the changes in focus and purpose from Personnel Management (PM) to HRM, discussed in Chapter 3. It finally achieved chartered status in 2000 (CIPD, 2008a). Its influence on HRM practice and the way in which HRPs think about their roles and profession in the UK is significant: it has over 130,000 members; its website has 300,000 visits per month; and it publishes a fortnightly magazine called *People Management* with a readership of 130,000 (People Management, 2010). CIPD provides multiple reports, based on commissioned research and surveys with its members, on the status of organisational life and HRM practice (e.g. CIPD, 2005a, 2010a). More importantly, it provides the professional standards for the training, qualification and practice of HRPs, which directly influences the content of CIPD-accredited HRM courses, the criteria by which practitioners are recruited and assessed, and the roles and practices of HRPs in organisations (Gilmore & Williams, 2007).

As Chapter 3 will examine, the CIPD influences HRPs in two further ways: firstly, it shapes the discourse and language used by HRPs to construct their roles and practice, including how HRPs manage the shared meaning of the value and purpose of their roles and what constitutes their capital (Sheehan, Cooper, Holland & De Ceiri, 2007; Wright, 2008). Secondly, the CIPD influences the nature of HRPs' shared professional habitus, and their construction of an 'HRM professional' (Pritchard, 2010). HRM's professionalisation project, the focus of Chapter 3, is communicated to HRPs via CIPD publications and training. Thus, in terms of the HRPs' professional context, the role of the CIPD is significant in determining the nature of their roles and practice.

However, this professional context is firmly embedded within the UK's socio-economic and organisational fields and, in turn, HRPs' bullying-related practice is located within their professional, organisational and cultural fields. As will be examined in Chapter 2, recent models for considering the potential antecedents for bullying have emphasised the importance of broader social factors, such as the changing context of work and employment relations, in addition to those at the individual and organisational levels (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel & Beale, 2006). Salin (2003a) argues that these social factors may, in part, enable, motivate and trigger bullying within organisations. Hence, within this thesis, it is

important to understand the changing nature of the HRPs' socio-economic, historical and organisational contexts.

1.8.2 HRPs' Social and Organisational Fields

The socio-economic nature of organisations, work, industrial relations and the employment contract has changed significantly over the past forty years (Cascio, 1995; Beale & Hoel, 2010; Hoel & Beale, 2006; Sennett, 2006). Advances in technology have given rise to an interdependent global economic market place, which has increased competition between and within organisations (Friedman, 2007; Godard, 2001). Organisational responses have included the de-layering of management hierarchies (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Martin, 2005), the reduction of employee headcount (Clair & Dufersne, 2004), and a focus of the role of the manager in managing employee performance (Hales, 2005). Careers are now more transient (Sennett, 2006); the expectation of a lifelong career with an organisation, characterised by mutual loyalty and commitment, is no longer a realistic expectation (CIPD, 2005a; Tsui & Wu, 2005). Instead, employment relationships are now predominantly transactional, based on an economic exchange: organisations offer paid work in return for short-term commitment and high performance from the employee (Roehling, Cavanaugh, Moynihan, & Boswell, 2000). As will be explored in Chapter 3, this has contributed to significant changes in the delivery of HRM (Keegan & Francis, 2010).

Underpinning these changes is the discourse of 'market managerialism' (e.g., Parker, 2002): that is, the rise of capitalism, managerialism and unitarism within organisations, and the associated focus on profit maximisation and labour exploitation to meet market demands (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Mueller & Carter, 2005). Such changes are seen as crucial within the industrial relations view of bullying. That is, the rise of market managerialism has coincided with an increase in management power and control, the demise of trade unions, and with it the collective voice of employees (Beale & Hoel, 2010; Hoel & Beale, 2006; Ironside & Seifert, 2003). The previously pluralist and collectivist nature of organisations prior to the 1980s, where the needs of the organisation were recognised as different to those of the employees, has been replaced by a more unitarist discourse, summarised as "what is good for the employee is good for the employer, and the other way around" (Boselie, Brewster & Paauwe, 2009, p. 462; Harley & Hardy, 2004). In the UK, these changes have

been paralleled by significant shifts in the political climate, particularly ‘Thatcherism’⁷, and a national decline of trade union membership, from 55% in 1980 to 27% in 2008 (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2009). Besides anti-unionism, this new political discourse has championed deregulation, privatisation and shareholder dominance (Mueller & Carter, 2005; Storey, 1993), resulting in organisations adopting “new labour practices to re-order their collective bargaining arrangements” (Hendry & Pettigrew, 1990, p. 19).

The dominance of the economic and managerialist discourses has resulted in a significant increase in ‘performance-management cultures’ in organisations, whereby the active management of employee performance against organisationally defined targets is seen as crucial for organisational success (Buchner, 2007; den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004). This has been intensified by the recent global economic crisis, which is evident in the UK media (e.g. Elliott, 2009; Mathiason, 2008), academic research (Viatilingam, 2009), and UK HRM publications (CIPD, 2010b; Phillips, 2008; Scott, 2008). The discourse surrounding this crisis is further strengthening employees’ sense of insecurity and sharpening the focus on employee performance and the unitarist message that it is in every employee’s interest to ‘pull together’ for the sake of organisational sustainability (CIPD, 2010b).

Concomitantly, the rise of market managerialism and the ‘performance culture’ appear to have resulted in decreased employee trust and organisational engagement; an increased emphasis on the shareholder, rather than multiple stakeholders; greater accountability and responsibility of line managers, and management control over employees; and intensified pressure and internal competition within organisations, creating anxiety, powerlessness and a potentially lower threshold for aggressive behaviour (Ironside & Seifert, 2003; Peyton, 2003; Pfeffer, 2005; 2007). Hoel and Salin (2003) have suggested that these changes may increase the risk of employees using more aggressive behaviours to improve their own status at the expense of their colleagues, whilst increasingly demanding targets may result in managers adopting more autocratic styles of management to meet these pressures (Kelly, 2005; Simpson and Cohen, 2004).

⁷ ‘Thatcherism’ is used to label the individualistic and capitalist political approach of Margaret Thatcher, who became UK Prime Minister in 1979.

Thus, these changes in the nature of organisations, work and the employment relationship may have resulted in situational contexts that create the potential antecedents for bullying (Hoel & Beale, 2006; Salin, 2003b). The excessive use of targets and performance management appears to create a vicious cycle: the emergence of oppressive blame cultures, perceived as organisational bullying by employees (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; O'Moore, Lynch, & Daeid, 2003), which can then lead to decreased performance and increased aggressive behaviour from employees, resulting in further performance management (Ferris, 2009). These assertions will be examined in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, the incorporation of the market managerialism discourse into organisational doxa is evident in the metaphors, or Bourdieu's euphemisms, in both practitioner and academic language (Ferraro, Pfeffer & Sutton, 2005; Kouzmin, Korac-Kakabadse, & Korac-Kakabadse, 1999). In line with the more unitarist approach in organisations, employees are expected to 'develop a shared purpose', to 'raise their game' and achieve 'stretch goals' in 'target driven' organisational cultures. This requires employees to 'do more for less' in order to be considered as 'valuable players', enabling organisations to 'stay one step ahead of the game' (e.g. Cascio, 2005; Ulrich et al., 2008). Such organisational tropes⁸, or 'management speak', allow the implicit communication of messages with complex, subtle and expansive meaning and help to shape the organisational reality of employees (Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002; Watson, 1995). Within Bourdieu's framework, euphemisms such as 'survival of the fittest' and 'toughness' provide a means of symbolic violence, privileging the dominance of management discourse in controlling employee performance when the goods that create symbolic capital for employees, such as promotions, are limited. They become incorporated into organisational doxa and the language of managers, serving to exacerbate the "fabrication of a "corporate clone", a distinct entity that nevertheless maps the goals of the organization" (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian & Samuel, 1998, p. 294). Employees come to accept and identify with these 'new rules of the game', which become incorporated into habitus and increase their acceptance of management control. Such metaphors are evident in employees' narratives of their experience in organisations, particularly when rationalising their feelings of loyalty (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000), suggesting that employees use these performance-related metaphors and rules of doxa to construct and interpret social practice at work.

⁸ A trope is a word or phrase that is used in a figurative, non-literal manner.

Thus, in relation to the social and organisational fields in which HRP practice is embedded, it appears that changes in the broader global economic field and the dominant discourse of market managerialism have resulted in contemporary organisational fields that are potentially more aggressive, competitive and insecure. The language of intensified work performance now permeates organisations, and as Chapters 2 and 3 will examine, these contexts and associated language have implications for both bullying and HRPs' practice in relation to it.

In summary, the approach taken in this thesis is that organisational reality is socially constructed through language. Meaning and practice, in the form of organisational doxa, are continually negotiated, legitimised, sustained or resisted discursively; with more powerful discourses and field members determining the taken-for-granted language and doxa of an organisational field. Thus, discourses organise the field; through the shared meanings in doxa, they serve to enable and constrain ways of perceiving and behaving. Bullying, and how people respond to it, is considered as a social practice that occurs within this context: its meaning is socially constructed and, thus, means different things to different people. However, by applying Bourdieu's framework to bullying, an HRP's interpretation of bullying is not solely determined by discourse; it is influenced by their relative position in the field, their habitus, and the way in which organising discourses act upon their position in the field. Thus, it is possible to examine the multi-level factors that might influence HRPs' interpretation and response to bullying claims, and how their perspective may differ to the other parties involved.

Having provided the rationale and theoretical approach of this thesis, and the HRPs' professional, social and organisational fields, the final section provides an outline of the remaining chapters.

1.9 An Outline of the Thesis

In order to develop the context for data collection and analysis that will permit an exploration of how HRPs might construct and respond to bullying, and whether their constructs might differ to those of employees, Chapter 2 will review the workplace bullying literature. It is structured around the pertinent question of "what is bullying?" The multiple ways that bullying is constructed will be explored by viewing this question through different

lenses: the predominant academic approach; organisational policy; the more recent critical academic perspective; and through the eyes of employees and targets of bullying. In asking this question, the empirical evidence supporting both the impact of bullying and the frequently negative experiences of targets who raise claims to HRPs will be examined, further supporting the research questions of this thesis. Finally, this chapter will explore what is currently (not) known about HRPs' response to bullying.

In Chapter 3, the professional field of HRPs will be examined. It is structured around the CIPD's 'professionalisation discourse', which aims to increase the value, credibility and status of the 'HRM profession' within organisations. Using empirical research with HRPs, this chapter will examine the impacts this discourse may be having on HRPs' practice generally, and specifically in relation to bullying. The way in which HRPs construct their roles, particularly in relation to managers, will be explored, and whether changes in these roles have implications for resolving bullying in organisations. This chapter concludes by drawing together the themes from the literature reviews of Chapters 2 and 3, and culminates by stating the research questions for this thesis, which will be developed from the literature reviewed in these two chapters.

The methodological approach, design and procedure are provided in Chapter 4. It will provide the rationale for integrating Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, critical realism and CDA into a holistic theoretical and analytical framework for this thesis. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the methodological contribution of this thesis by establishing how the application of Bourdieu's theory is being extended in order to examine bullying through the eyes of HRPs. The six stages of CDA applied to the data within this thesis will be explained and positioned as an appropriate analytical method for examining the research questions. In accordance with the reflexive nature of CDA and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, this chapter concludes with my own perspective on conducting this research.

The findings from the analysis will be presented in Chapters 5 and 6, structured around the two research questions of this thesis. Chapter 5 will show how, through their use of language, HRPs construct their organisational and professional contexts in which their construction, interpretation and response to bullying are embedded, including the discourses that they draw upon in doing so. Using the analytical constructs of CDA, this chapter will

also establish how the HRPs' construct bullying claims, before Chapter 6 presents the analysis regarding HRPs' interpretations and responses to bullying.

Chapter 6 will establish that HRPs use a range of discursive interpretive mechanisms associated with their constructs to interpret new claims of bullying, and that specific positions (roles) and practices are made available to the HRPs when responding to bullying, whilst other roles appear less available. This chapter culminates with an examination of the HRPs' construct of 'genuine bullying'; thus, contributing to our understanding of "what is bullying?" through the eyes of HRPs.

Finally, Chapter 7 evaluates and interprets the findings from this thesis in respect to the research questions, and provides explanations by integrating the findings with the empirical research and theory discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In doing so, it establishes the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis to both academic and practitioner knowledge, including particular reference to the extended applications of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. The implications of the findings will be discussed from the perspective of HRPs, and in relation to identifying, preventing, responding to and reducing bullying in organisations. The strengths and limitations are explored, before considering the significance of the findings for HRM training, roles and practice; for organisational anti-bullying policies and practices; and for future research. Finally, this chapter will present the conclusions that may be drawn from this thesis, emphasising the contribution to knowledge provided by this empirical study.

Chapter 2: The Multiple Social Constructions of Bullying

“Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal ‘strength’ are in conflict.”
(Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 15)

2.1 Introduction

The rationale for this thesis, as outlined in Chapter 1, is based on three premises: bullying remains a prevalent and costly problem for organisations and individuals and is, therefore, worthy of academic attention (e.g., Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003); targets’ reported experiences of HRPs’ responses to claims include inaction, denial and ‘target-blaming’ (e.g., D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Ferris, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Keashly, 2001); and HRPs appear to be reluctant to label situations of bullying as ‘bullying’ (Harrington, 2005). Whilst there is scant published research on how HRPs might define bullying (Salin, 2008), these findings suggest that HRPs and targets might hold different constructions of bullying. To examine this assertion, this chapter will ask the question, “what is bullying?” This chapter will consider the factors that might determine how HRPs would answer this question by exploring this question through multiple lenses: the predominant and critical academic perspectives; organisational bullying policy; the research on employees’ and targets’ constructions of bullying; and, finally, HRPs.

The definition of bullying that opened this chapter is the one most generally agreed and widely cited in the predominant academic research on bullying. It is through this academic lens that we begin our examination of this question, charting the development of knowledge and Einarsen et al.’s (2003) definitional operationalisation of this phenomenon from the early research with targets, the mainly positivist survey-based studies, through to the more recent multilevel explanatory models of bullying. In doing so, the definitional and methodological debates surrounding “what is bullying?” will be examined. The second lens

will be that of organisational anti-bullying policy, which has been significantly influenced by the academic bullying research (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010). Such policy is likely to have a direct influence on HRPs' bullying-related practices. Thirdly, this question will be examined through the more recent critical academic lens, which argues that the causes of bullying may extend beyond the individual and interpersonal level, existing within the practices and organising power structures of organisations as 'organisational bullying'. Through this lens, the bullying constructions of employees, both non-bullied and targets, will be examined by reviewing published research that suggests that employees consistently differentiate between interpersonal and organisational bullying (Liefoghe, 2001; 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). This lens is also important for the research questions of this thesis for two reasons: it provides insight into how employees are constructing bullying and, therefore, how these constructions might differ to those of HRPs; and it provides a perspective on HRPs' response to bullying, through the eyes of targets raising bullying claims. Finally, the chapter examines what is (not) known about HRPs' construction and interpretation of bullying.

Before doing so, it is appropriate to highlight the multiple terms used for 'bullying' within the academic literature and to clarify the approach within this thesis. A "plethora of terms" exists to describe the experience of persistent negative treatment at work that is psychologically or physically detrimental to the recipient (Einarsen et al., 2008, p. 466; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007); such as, abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000); emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998); harassment (Brodsky, 1976); incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999); mobbing (Leymann, 1990); mistreatment (Cortina & Magley, 2003); and victimisation (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). As will be explored within this chapter, the terms adopted by researchers have been influenced by the cultural nuances in the nature of the negative workplace behaviours, and the differing theoretical origins and positions of the researcher.

Whilst it has been argued that these terms are essentially synonymous (Einarsen et al., 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), the term 'bullying' will be generally adopted within this thesis except when the work of a particular author is being discussed, such as Leymann's (1996) work on 'mobbing' or Brodsky's (1976) 'harassment'. Two reasons have influenced this approach: firstly, whilst the term 'mobbing' is used within much of the research conducted

in Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands, both organisationally and academically in the UK the term bullying is used to describe the persistent experience of negative treatment, reflecting the one-to-one or one-to-many nature of the behaviour (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Secondly, ‘harassment’ has a specific and legal definition in the UK that emphasises the personally-targeted and discriminatory nature of this behaviour, which differentiates it from the broader definition of bullying. Thus, within the cultural context of this thesis, it would not be appropriate to use ‘harassment’ and ‘bullying’ interchangeably. Having acknowledged that the phenomenon is labelled in multiple ways, the next section turns to the academic literature to ask “what is bullying?”

2.2 The Academic Construction of ‘Bullying’

A major influence on the development of bullying research in Scandinavia, and subsequently the UK, was the work of Leymann (e.g., 1990, 1996). An understanding of Leymann’s approach to bullying is important, because his work underpins much of the subsequent research on bullying, particularly in Europe (Einarsen et al., 2003; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). Beginning in the 1980’s, Leymann’s research was inspired by his therapeutic work with the targets of direct and indirect conflict at work, and drew influence from Olweus’ (1993) work on bullying in schools. Leymann borrowed the term ‘mobbing’ from the work of Lorenz, an animal researcher, who had observed groups of animals attacking, or ‘mobbing’, a single animal (Lorenz, 1991, as cited in Leymann, 1996). Leymann thus defined mobbing as “hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position” (Leymann, 1996, p. 168). He distinguished mobbing from temporary conflict by stating that the mobbing must be frequent (at least once a week) and persistent (lasting at least six months); this persistency reduces the target’s coping resources and the systematic mobbing becomes psychologically, physically and socially damaging to the target (Leymann, 1990). Thus, for Leymann, mobbing was extreme conflict, differentiated by systematic frequency and duration, rather than the actual behaviours.

In developing this argument, Leymann (1990; 1996) proposed that mobbing was a *process* that began with an initial triggering situation, typically a work-related conflict. He argued that poor working environments were typically associated with the initial conflict and the

progression to mobbing, exacerbated by poor or ‘uninterested’ managers who failed to intervene early. Thus the initial conflict would progress to the target becoming stigmatised by repeated negative behaviours, exhibited by one or more individuals, “based on the intent to...punish him or her” (Leymann, 1996, p. 171). This issue of perpetrator intent will be explored throughout this chapter, because it remains a debated element of the definition of bullying. Furthermore, Leymann’s research indicated that managers tend to attribute ‘blame’ for the mobbing to the target’s characteristics rather than environmental factors. Thus, in the next stage of this process, when the mobbing is brought to the manager’s attention, managers’ responses can create further “violations of justice” for the targets by denying that the mobbing exists or unquestioningly accepting the prejudices of the mobbers and perceiving the target at fault (Leymann, 1990, p. 121). Leymann (1996, p. 172) saw this management failure to investigate as “administrative punishment”, caused by the manager’s fundamental attribution error of target culpability. As will be explored within this chapter, the tenets of Leymann’s early research remain evident in more recent bullying research (Agervold, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007).

Leymann’s work significantly contributed to the rise of academic interest in the phenomenon of bullying, or mobbing, at work (Einarsen et al., 2003). This coincided with increased practitioner and public awareness and recognition of the problem with publication of several more popular, practitioner-oriented publications in the USA (e.g., Davenport, Swartz, & Elliott, 1999; Namie & Namie, 2000), the UK (Adams, 1992), and Germany (Leymann, 1993b, cited in Einarsen et al., 2003). The resulting empirical research has remained predominantly within a positivist framework, typically adopting cross-sectional survey-based studies with targets of bullying (Salin, 2003a). The main imperatives of this approach are to provide an objective operationalisation of the phenomenon that allows accurate measurement and a ‘test for the presence of bullying’. This, in turn, is aimed at determining the causal factors and explanatory mechanisms for the phenomenon; and, hence, to measure the reduction or elimination of bullying from the workplace through effective interventions (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). Thus, academic research on bullying has been motivated by both the development of our knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon, and by the need for effective organisational interventions for bullying. Developing an accepted definition of bullying, to both measure and prevent bullying, has been an essential aspect of this body of research, which the next section will now examine.

2.2.1 The Academic Definition of Bullying

Einarsen et al.'s (2003) definition, provided at the beginning of this chapter, is generally accepted and used within the European bullying literature. As with Leymann's original definition of mobbing, bullying is defined as the persistent and frequent experience of negative treatment. The behaviours may be work-related (e.g., withholding information, excessive workload or monitoring), personal (e.g., spreading rumours or persistent criticism), or socially isolating (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), and are typically used in a systematic and escalating process (Einarsen, 1999; Zapf & Gross, 2001). A power imbalance must exist between the perpetrator and target such that the target cannot defend themselves or retaliate (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994), although the nature of this power may take different forms, such as hierarchical, social, physical size and outnumbering (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Whilst not explicitly stated in this definition, to qualify as bullying, there must be a negative impact on the target (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005); that is, the behaviours are "used with the aim or at least the effect of persistently humiliating, intimidating, frightening or punishing the victim" (Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 9).

The above quote highlights two of the debated elements of the bullying definition: the role of perpetrator intent, and the conflation of behaviours and impact in a single definition. This conflation refers to the fact that, within this definition, a person must experience negative behaviour *and* detrimental impacts to be considered bullied. The basis of this debate is that, whilst negative impacts and power imbalances are typically associated with situations of bullying, certain behaviours can be classified as 'bullying' independent of how individuals might evaluate the impact of experiencing such behaviours (Agervold, 2007). From this perspective, for example, some individuals may find being publically shouted at distressing, whilst others may be more tolerant of such behaviour; however, the act of publically shouting at someone at work is arguably a 'bullying' behaviour that should not be accepted in organisations, regardless of the recipient's individual reaction. By conflating behaviour and impact within the definition, the behaviour is not being differentiated from its impact. Thus, because prevalence studies rely on employees' self-perceptions of being bullied, the prevalence of actual 'bullying' behaviours may be under-reported (Agervold, 2007).

With regard to second debated element, intent remains a consistently thorny issue in bullying; that is, whether the perpetrator deliberately intended to cause harm to the target. In the USA, bullying research is strongly influenced by the aggression literature (e.g., Baron & Neuman, 1996); hence, intent is deemed an essential defining characteristic of bullying (e.g., Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Within Europe, intent is typically excluded from definitions, primarily because it is difficult to verify and also because of the possible ‘degrees’ of intent (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005)

For example, the perpetrator might be deliberately and systematically attempting to *harm* the target; or they might perceive their behaviour as “fair treatment of a difficult person”; or perpetrators might be using instrumental behaviour to gain an objective or goal, without intending to harm (Einarsen et al., 2008; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, p. 241). In fact, within the industrial relations framework of bullying, Beale & Hoel (2007) have suggested that bullying behaviour might be systematically and knowingly used by managers to serve their own interests; not as an intention to bully per se, rather as a deliberate means to exercise control over employees in high-performance environments. What is more accepted in the bullying literature is that *perceived* intent is an essential element of targets’ subjective experience of being bullied (Einarsen et al., 2008; Zapf, 1999). Hence, the number, complexity and contentiousness of these multiple definitional criteria reflect the challenge of attempting to provide a comprehensive definition of “what is bullying”, which can be operationalised for measuring bullying, to which the next section turns. An examination of the measurement of bullying within this academic lens is important because it contributes to answering “what is bullying?” within this approach and provides data on the nature and prevalence of the phenomenon in the UK.

2.2.2 The Measurement and Prevalence Rates of Bullying

Methodologically, measurement of the nature and prevalence of bullying is predominantly survey-based, using a checklist of negative behaviours (Salin, 2003a). The most common questionnaires are the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001), NAQ-Revised (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009), and the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT; Leymann, 1997), which are based on the analysis of targets’ experiences of bullying. However, more recent cultural-specific questionnaires have been developed (e.g., Escartin, Rodríguez-Carballeira, Zapf, Porrua, &

Martin-Pena, 2009). Typically, these surveys elicit two forms of self-report data from respondents within the same questionnaire. The operational classification method (OCM) presents employees with a list of negative behaviours and asks them to endorse how many they have experienced and how often within the recent past, typically either six or twelve months (e.g., Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte, & Vermunt, 2006). The second method, self-labelling, asks respondents whether or not they consider themselves bullied, usually after providing a bullying definition. The OCM thresholds reflect the generally accepted view that negative behaviour must be both persistent and frequent to qualify as bullying based on Leymann's argument, discussed earlier, that these factors distinguish bullying from more general conflict (Leymann, 1990; 1996; 1997).

These two forms of measurement give rise to different prevalence rates, further compounded by the industry sector and country (Einarsen et al., 2003; 2008). Agervold (2007) suggests that the wide range of reported prevalence rates might reflect the varying definitions and methodology employed, rather than actual differences in prevalence, such as variation in the thresholds applied to OCM measurement (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). When the more stringent OCM method is used, prevalence varies between 8 and 15%; for self-labelling, rates vary from 2 to 10%, and if no definition is provided this self-labelling may be as high as 50% (Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Notelaers et al., 2006; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003). Furthermore, when the rates from these methods are compared within studies, less than half of those classified as 'bullied' by OCM answer 'yes' to the self-labelling question, and some who self-label are not identified via OCM (Hoel et al., 1999; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Several authors have suggested that these inconsistencies may reflect targets' reluctance to label themselves as a 'victim' because of the connotations of 'failure' and 'self-blame', and that certain behaviours within the questionnaire are considered 'normal' in some organisations (e.g., exposure to an unmanageable workload) and, hence, not perceived as bullying (Agervold, 2007; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007; Salin, 2001). Thus, a 'checklist' approach may be failing to capture the complexity and contextualised nature of targets' subjectivity in bullying, providing descriptive rather than explanatory data (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Parzefall & Salin, 2010).

To add further complication, whilst bullying is a cross-cultural phenomenon, in the public, private and charity sectors, and at all levels of an organisation, there are established cultural

differences in the nature of bullying prevalence (Einarsen & Hoel, 2008). In Scandinavia, the predominant pattern is many-to-one amongst co-workers; hence, the label ‘mobbing’ (Zapf et al., 2003). Whereas in the UK, the majority of bullying is downwards; that is, a manager bullying subordinate employee(s), either one-to-one or one-to-many (Hoel & Beale, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002)⁹. The prevalence of manager-to-employee reported bullying and the associations with destructive leadership styles will be returned to when we consider the antecedents of bullying (e.g., Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). Despite these differences, typically the same questionnaire is used (the NAQ) and, hence, the impact and significance of these cultural nuances may be lost within the quest for uniformity and comparability of measurement. Furthermore, using the NAQ, Lewis and Gunn (2007) compared the bullying behaviours exhibited by managers and targets’ peers, and found that they appear to be of a different nature: managers are more likely to bully with work-related behaviour, such as allocating demeaning tasks and excessive monitoring and criticism, whereas peers use personally-related behaviour, such as offensive jokes, belittling and humiliation. Whilst acknowledging the methodological issues associated with measuring bullying, we now turn to the reported prevalence in the UK, the cultural context for this thesis.

2.2.3 The Prevalence of Bullying in the UK

Prevalence of self-reported bullying in the UK is estimated at between 10 to 20%, and the majority is manager-to-employee (Beale & Hoel, 2010). However, the subjective experience of being bullied (self-labelling) seems to be increasing: a recent study of over 7,000 employees, commissioned by a large trade union, found that 35% answered ‘yes’ to whether they had been bullied in the last six months (UNISON, 2009). This repeated a prior study, similarly commissioned by UNISON, where the figure was 18% twelve years previously (Rayner, 1997). However, the prevalence of reported negative behaviours using OCM had increased only slightly: hence, it is the subjective perception of being bullied that has increased (self-labelling), rather than the self-reported experience of the list of negative behaviours. Rayner suggests that a greater awareness of bullying in 2009 may have resulted in more employees labelling their negative experiences as bullying. This suggestion is

⁹ See Avergold (2007), Nielsen et al., (2009) and Zapf et al., (2003) for recent reviews of cross-cultural prevalence rates; and Einarsen (2000) and Moreno-Jiménez, Muñoz, Salin, & Morante Benadero (2009) for an exploration of how cultural differences may account for this distinction.

supported by the fact that the OCM measure of experiencing weekly negative behaviours predicted 80% of the self-labelling respondents in 2009 compared to 50% in 1997 (UNISON, 2009). Thus, the UNISON survey suggests that, whilst employees are now more likely to label their experiences of negative behaviours as ‘bullying’, the prevalence of these experiences has remained consistent, at approximately 35%, over the past twelve years.

This raises two important points for the aims of this thesis. Firstly, within the UK, organisational surveys suggest that between 74-80% of organisations have an anti-bullying policy (CIPD, 2004; 2005a; CMI, 2008). Given the involvement that HRPs have in handling bullying in organisations, established in Chapter 1, together the policy and prevalence survey findings provide additional support for the research questions of this thesis. That is, given the widespread implementation of anti-bullying policy, why might the subjective experience of being bullied have remained consistently high, and what role might HRPs’ bullying-related practices play in this empirically observed disparity? Secondly, as the next section will examine, the individual and organisational impacts of this continued prevalence of bullying are significant. Given HRPs’ role in managing bullying claims, these impacts provide further justification for developing our understanding of HRPs’ bullying-related practices.

2.2.4 The Impacts of Bullying

Individually, the impacts of bullying may be far-reaching and significant (Einarsen & Gemzoe, 2003). They may be *physical*, e.g., loss of appetite and sleep problems (Einarsen, 1999); *psychological*, e.g., difficulty concentrating, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001); *social*, e.g., relationships outside of work with friends and family (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003); *financial*, e.g., loss of employment and inability to secure another position (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003); and *work-related*, e.g., decreased motivation, performance and commitment (Einarsen et al., 2008; Ferris, 2009). Organisationally, the impacts of bullying include increased sickness absence, turnover, reduced productivity, reputational damage and costly legal investigations (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2004). Reported exit rates are 25% for targets and 20% for witnesses (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). A recent UK study established that the cost to the economy is £17.65bn per annum (Giga et al., 2008). Bullying has now been prioritised by the UK’s national occupational health and safety organisation

(Health and Safety Executive) because it is perceived as a significant source of stress-related sickness absence (Mackay, Cousins, Kelly, Lee, & McCraig, 2004). Hence, both organisationally and individually, the subjective experience of being bullied is damaging and costly. Thus, arguably, it is an issue that presents organisations with a moral and economic imperative to address.

Thus far, in attempting to answer the question “what is bullying?”, it appears that whether a person is classified as ‘bullied’ through this academic lens depends on what is asked (based on the operational definition), how it is asked (self-labelling versus OCM), where they live (cultural variations) and who the bully is (manager versus peer bullying behaviour). However, the research within this approach has identified a range of associated risk factors and potential explanations, which might provide a fuller answer to this question, which the next section will examine.

2.2.5 Antecedent Risk Factors and Explanations

Antecedents, or risk factors that contribute to the occurrence of bullying have typically been classified as individual, organisational and social (Einarsen, et al., 2008). It is not within the scope of this chapter to examine these in detail, rather to provide a contextualised overview; for reviews of these bodies of research see Zapf & Einarsen (2003), Hoel & Salin (2003) and Neuman & Baron (2003). Whilst some researchers have shown that targets differ on a range of personality traits, such as low independence, low extroversion and high conscientiousness (e.g., Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000), or interpersonal skills (Zapf, 1999), other findings have found no such differences (Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007; Glaso, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009). Research with perpetrators is even more challenging, because they are unlikely to admit to bullying, or may not realise the effect they are having; hence, most perpetrator research has relied on the observations of victims and witnesses (Einarsen et al., 2008). Potential perpetrator antecedents include a self-regulatory process to protect or enhance self-esteem (e.g., Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996); poor social competencies (Einarsen et al., 1994); and micro-political behaviour to protect the individual’s interests and improve their position relative to others (e.g., Salin, 2003b). However, despite a recent exception in the study of bullying impacts (Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009), there is a paucity of longitudinal research within the bullying

literature; hence, causality cannot be inferred from these antecedent studies (Einarsen, 2000).

Organisationally, risk factors have been identified within job characteristics, such as role conflict (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007), role ambiguity (Vartia, 1996) and high workload (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997); and within team dynamics, such as low social support (Zapf et al., 1996), poor communication (Vartia, 1996) and high competition (Salin, 2003b). Bullying has also been associated with large bureaucratic and hierarchical organisations (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), a lack of anti-bullying policies (Rayner et al., 2002) and rapid change (Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2007). In terms of leadership style, autocratic, unpredictable, laissez-faire styles and destructive leadership styles have been associated with increased self-reported and observed bullying (Einarsen et al., 2007; Hauge et al., 2007; Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010). Such findings with laissez-faire leadership parallel Leymann's (1996) concept of 'administrative punishment' associated with the inaction and attributions of 'uninterested' managers, previously discussed.

Furthermore, through framing bullying as an individual and interpersonal issue, within an organisational context, a range of explanatory approaches have been proposed. These include: escalating unresolved conflict (Einarsen, 1999; Zapf & Gross, 2001); work-environment models (e.g., Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009; Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2008); social interactionist and social exchange models (Neuman & Baron, 2003; Parzefall & Salin, 2010); broader models that integrate individual, organisational and social risk factors in recognition that the causes for bullying are likely to be multifaceted (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003); and the industrial relations framework, discussed in Chapter 1, which attempts to integrate the multilevel factors associated with bullying within socio-economic and historical contexts (Beale & Hoel, 2010; Hoel & Beale, 2006).

However, whilst it is acknowledged that the multilevel models and industrial relations approach to bullying are increasing our understanding of the complex and multi-causal nature of bullying, the approach to answering the question "what is bullying?" through this predominantly positivist academic lens remains at the individual and interpersonal level

(Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010). Through this lens, bullying is constructed as a dynamic interpersonal process, influenced by individual factors, and occurring within an organisational context (Beale & Hoel, 2010; Zapf et al., 2003). The organisation is viewed as a facilitating backdrop for individual behaviours that escalate into interpersonal conflict: the dominant view remains that, “only people bully, but organisations can make people bully. Organisations can be the cause, but it is still people who bully” (Einarsen, 2009, p. 3). Power, and its (il)legitimate use, remain located at the individual level (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2010a). Hence, this individualised interpersonal approach, combined with the emphasis on positivist research, has been criticised for offering a limited perspective on the potential role of the organisation and the nature of power in bullying (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003; Salin, 2003a). These criticisms will be returned to when we consider the construct of ‘organisational bullying’.

Before doing so, we first consider “what is bullying?” from the perspective of organisational policy for two reasons: the academic research and interpersonal construction of bullying, reviewed thus far, are evident in the guidance provided by institutions in the UK that influence organisational policy; and HRPs are embedded within these organisational contexts and, thus, their constructions of bullying might be potentially influenced by this policy.

2.3 The Organisational Construction of ‘Bullying’

The definitions of bullying in organisational policy and, hence, the way in which HRPs are likely to construct it, has been greatly influenced by the rise in publicity surrounding bullying over the past twenty years (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2005; Lee, 2000). The dominant individualised interpersonal definition of bullying and its associated explanations have entered organisations directly, through practitioner texts and Trade Union funded research, and indirectly through the ‘bully’ and ‘victim’ stereotypes in the popular media (Lee, 2000; Lewis, 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010). However, the research behind these influences, particularly regarding individual antecedents, has been criticised for “victim-blaming”, “bully-bashing” and individualising the problem, cementing the view with the public and practitioners alike that the fault lies with the individuals involved (McCarthy, 2003, p. 232; Sperry, 2009). Are such criticisms warranted; is there evidence to

suggest that the individual and interpersonal definition from this bullying discourse has influenced organisational bullying policy? To examine these questions, we also need to consider the professional influences on HRP practice with regard to bullying policy in the UK.

Whilst there is no legislation covering bullying in the UK, over 80% of organisations have a bullying policy according to the CIPD (2004; 2005a); a similar figure of 74% was reported by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI, 2008). Such policies are strongly influenced by two UK institutions: the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), and the CIPD, the HRM professional body in the UK introduced in Chapter 1. ACAS is a largely government funded, but independently regulated body. It works closely with academics and provides support, guidance, training and mediation services for employee relations issues, and a definition of bullying and related advice for both managers and employees (ACAS, 2009a; 2009b). As will be established, elements of ACAS' definition and guidance have been adopted by the CIPD (2009a) in the material they provide for HRPs on bullying.

In its guidance on bullying-related practices, ACAS begins by stating:

“For practical purposes those making a complaint usually define what they mean by bullying or harassment – something has happened to them that is unwelcome, unwarranted and causes a detrimental effect. If employees complain they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance which must be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.” (2009a, p. 1).

Hence, ACAS is acknowledging the subjective nature of bullying, and advising that organisations must respond to any complaint of bullying, regardless of whether it accords with the organisation's definition. ACAS then defines bullying:

“Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.” (p. 1)

It is this part of ACAS' guidance that is replicated in the CIPD's guidance to HRPs. Whilst this definition shows strong parallels to academic definitions (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003), it

is here that ambiguity begins to enter the definition: although ACAS begins by stressing the importance of the target's subjective experience, it includes intent within its definition, which is not the case for its definition of harassment:

“Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.” (p. 2)

Thus, it seems that ACAS is differentiating between bullying and harassment, both by the discriminatory nature of harassment behaviour, and through intent. Furthermore, as with academic definitions (e.g. Einarsen et al., 2003), the behaviour and its potential impact are conflated (Agervold, 2007; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). By ACAS' definition, to be considered bullying the behaviours must have a detrimental effect; the target must feel undermined, humiliated, denigrated or injured. Such conflated definitions are criticised for creating ambiguities and 'loopholes', which allow organisational representatives to discount organisational practices as non-bullying (Lee, 2000; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010).

The definition of bullying provided by the CIPD creates a more complex picture with regard to intent. The CIPD adopted ACAS' definition of bullying in 2009; prior to this, behaviour did not have to be intended for it to be bullying:

“It is not the intention of the perpetrator that is the key to deciding whether bullying or harassment has taken place. The defining principle is whether the behaviour was unacceptable by reasonable normal standards of behaviour and is disadvantageous or unwelcome to the person/people subjected to it.” (CIPD, 2005a, p. 6)

Hence, the acknowledgment of target subjectivity and the recognition that perpetrator intent is not necessary for this subjective perception have been removed from the CIPD (2009a) guidance. Furthermore, both ACAS (2009a) and CIPD (2009a) provide a list of behaviours that may constitute bullying. ACAS includes “unfair treatment” and “overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position” (p. 2); the CIPD does not. Thus, the

CIPD's guidance for HRPs omits management-related behaviours, which is important because, as established, the majority of UK bullying cases are manager-to-employee. Furthermore, the "CIPD viewpoint" on bullying states:

"Achieving high levels of performance from people at work is essential in today's competitive market place. Organisations should treat any form of harassment or bullying seriously not just because of the legal implications, but because it can lead to under-performance at work." (p. 5)

Therefore, it appears that the essence of the academic definition of bullying has been incorporated into the guidance provided by ACAS and CIPD in the UK, and that this guidance serves to create an ambiguous, conflated and individualised interpersonal construction of bullying in organisations. Given the significant influence that the CIPD has on HRPs' training and professional practice, it is plausible that this construction might influence HRPs' interpretation and response to bullying. Furthermore, it appears that the CIPD is embedding its guidance on bullying within the capitalistic and performance discourses of organisations, addressing the issue as a legal and performance imperative rather than an ethical duty of care. The question that emerges is whether, and how, this organisational view of bullying might influence HRPs' construction, interpretation and response to bullying; a question that will be empirically examined in this thesis.

Returning to the question of this Chapter, "what is bullying?", through the academic and organisational lenses discussed thus far, it appears that bullying is an interpersonal issue, influenced by a range of individual, organisational and social factors. Do we need to look further to provide the context for examining HRPs' constructions and responses to this phenomenon? What evidence is there to suggest that bullying is anything other than an individual and interpersonal issue? It is to this question we now turn by examining bullying through the more recent critical academic lens. This critical academic approach has emerged from qualitative research with both targets and non-targets (employees who report no bullying experiences), and argues that the causes of bullying may extend beyond the individual and interpersonal levels to the actual structures and practices of organisations; namely, 'organisational bullying' (e.g., Liefoghe, 2003; Rhodes, Pullen, Vickers, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2010). An examination of this perspective is important for the rationale of this thesis: in Chapter 1 it was proposed that HRPs might hold different constructions of bullying to

employees. In turn, it was suggested that such a disparity might help to explain the published research on targets' perceptions of HRPs' inaction or denial when responding to bullying (e.g., Ferris, 2004; 2009). The following sections will examine the tenets of this critical approach and review the published research that suggests employees hold constructions of both individual and organisational bullying (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; 2003). Whether HRPs hold similar, multiple constructions of bullying is an empirical question for this thesis.

2.4 The Critical Construction of 'Organisational Bullying'

This critical discourse argues that bullying goes beyond the individual and interpersonal levels, and that rather than organisational factors facilitating or enabling bullying, it is manifested through the structures and processes that constitute an organisation. That is, organisational practices, such as performance-management, appraisals and performance-related-pay may be forms of 'organisational bullying' because they privilege the interests of the organisation over those of employees; and, further, that the power imbalances inherent in organisational structures diminish employees' opportunity for voice or resistance to these practices (e.g., Liefoghe, 2001; 2003; Rhodes et al., 2010). It is important to note that this is not an either/or position: authors within this discourse are not suggesting that bullying is never an interpersonal process, rather that 'organisational bullying' may *also* exist by virtue of the power systems and structuring process inherent in organisations (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; 2010).

This perspective of 'organisational bullying' is not new; in 1976 Carroll Brodsky published a book in the USA called "*The Harassed Worker*", based on his therapeutic work with targets of harassment¹⁰, his label for bullying (Brodsky, 1976). At the time, this book had little impact on academic research in Europe (Einarsen et al., 2003). In Brodsky's analysis, he argued that competition is pervasive in all environments, and that harassment is a "social instinct" (p. 4) that individuals use to achieve and protect a privileged position, compared to others at work. He suggested that management is at the basis of all harassment by initiating, supporting or failing to prevent it, and proposed that harassment has become a "part of most management systems" to control employees (p. 7). This argument parallels those expressed

¹⁰ It should be noted that the targets Brodsky worked with had been severely harassed and had come to him because they were claiming compensation for being unable to work.

within the industrial relations framework, previously discussed (e.g., Beale & Hoel, 2007; Hoel & Salin, 2003).

However, as with this critical bullying perspective, Brodsky (1976) postulated that harassment was *not only* a ‘tool’ that management *chooses* to use. Instead, he proposed that harassment is *also* inherent in the management structures of an organisation, enacted through systems of reward, discipline and performance-management in organisational environments that focus on productivity. In an argument that reflects Bourdieu’s approach to the taken-for-granted nature and (in)accessibility of the practices and language in doxa, Brodsky proposed that harassment is embedded in the “organizational unconscious” whereby “messages are communicated at a subliminal level; certain types of behavior are reinforced, others are discouraged, and a mechanism for removing the worker [the target]...is triggered” (p. 146). Thus, for Brodsky, harassment is a “process at the unconscious level” because it is inherent in the structure, practices and language of management (p. 147), an argument that is strongly reflected in this more recent critical academic perspective of bullying.

Through this critical lens, power dynamics are considered as inherent in the economic, capitalist and managerialist discourses that structure organisations, as discussed in Chapter 1. Within this perspective, social practice, group membership and organisational processes, such as performance, reward and disciplinary practices, are viewed as creating and sustaining the power imbalances between different organisational groups (Hutchinson et al., 2010a; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010). Power is not simply viewed as invested in individuals through the legitimacy of hierarchy or social influence; it is enacted through the discourse surrounding organisational practices to privilege management whilst muting the voice of the employee (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Thus, as with Brodsky, bullying is constructed as a rationalised, normalised and acceptable management practice to achieve increased performance from employees in pressurised and profit-focused organisations (Rhodes et al., 2010). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this suggests that symbolic capital is accorded to management because they control and enforce these social practices and their associated discourses. Bullying has become embodied in doxa, and the social practices that constitute bullying have become incorporated into management habitus.

Before examining the published research that supports this perspective in the next section, it is important to draw a distinction between this view of ‘organisational bullying’ and the industrial relations framework of bullying. Whilst both the industrial relations framework and the critical perspective draw on the economic and performance discourses of market managerialism to construct the organisational context, the issue of management *choice* differentiates these approaches. Within the industrial relations framework, these discourses create the backdrop against which the manager may *choose* to use organisational practices as a means of controlling, exploiting or removing employees (Beale & Hoel, 2007), because the “achievement of organizational goals justifies its means” (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003, p. 3). In contrast, the critical paradigm argues that control, exploitation and the means of expulsion are embedded within the taken-for-granted structuring practices of the organisation, akin to Brodsky’s (1976) ‘organisational unconscious’, independent of how a manager may choose to use such practice. That is, the practices themselves are viewed as inherently unjust and exploitive, regardless of the choice and intent of the individual manager enforcing them.

Within the Bourdieusian framework of this thesis, this differentiation is important: the critical academic perspective of bullying suggests that it is the taken-for-granted practices and language of organisational doxa that are potential bullying mechanisms. This is conceptually distinct from the argument that managers may choose to use these practices to meet their own interests (e.g., Beale & Hoel, 2007), and Leymann’s (1996) construct of ‘administrative punishment’, which results from the attributions of individual ‘uninterested’ managers. Having drawn this distinction, the next section will examine published research on employees’ constructions of organisational bullying, because one question underpinning this thesis is whether HRPs might hold different bullying constructions to employees. Thus, it is important to examine the published research on employees’ interpretations of what constitutes bullying.

2.5 Employees’ Constructions of ‘Bullying’

In an attempt to address some of the methodological limitations of the survey-based bullying research discussed previously (e.g., Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Parzefall & Salin, 2010), research within the critical academic approach to bullying has adopted qualitative methodology to examine employees’ experiences and subjectivity of bullying. A broad and diverse answer to the question “what is bullying?” is beginning to emerge from the research

with non-targeted employees (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001). Across a range of organisational sectors, using focus groups and without providing a definition of bullying, employees consistently differentiate between interpersonal and organisational bullying (Liefoghe, 2001; 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). Employees appear to construct interpersonal bullying as ‘classic bullying’, perceiving it as an individualised problem between ‘stressed managers’ and ‘weak’ or ‘vulnerable’ victims (Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). However, unlike the predominant academic and organisational constructions, it appears that employees’ interpretations of bullying do not stop here.

This research suggests that, in addition to interpersonal bullying, employees also hold a construct of ‘organisational bullying’ for the use of organisational practices that they perceive as inherently unfair. Within this construct, performance-management and appraisal, surveillance mechanisms and disciplinary processes are perceived as forms of management control and exploitation, used to control and humiliate employees; to deny employees a voice; and to punish those who do attempt to speak up (Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; 2003; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). Therefore, whilst employees perceive these practices as ‘bullying’, they are reticent to speak out for fear of being labelled a ‘trouble-maker’ and potential retaliation via performance and disciplinary processes (Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). This point will be returned to in the next section, because the accounts of targets suggest that these fears are well founded.

For the employees in these studies, the importance of intention, the thorny issue for academic definitions of bullying, appears equivocal. For interpersonal bullying it seems important: employees’ accounts suggest that the feeling of being “singled out” and experiencing deliberate unjust treatment might be central to an interpretation of ‘being bullied’ (Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999, p. 45). However, ‘organisational bullying’ is perceived as subtler: employees describe it as unfair treatment perpetrated by a collective ‘them’ (management and ‘the organisation’) on a collective ‘us’ (employees) to suit ‘their’ interests (Liefoghe, 2003). In some instances, employees perceive that managers are *intentionally* abusing their power through these processes for individual gain (e.g., promotion) or organisational interests (e.g., meeting targets). However, at other times ‘organisational bullying’ is interpreted as *unintentional* and *depersonalised*: the manager is

perceived as having no choice but to enforce organisational practices. Thus, employee accounts of organisational bullying appear to reflect the distinction previously drawn between the industrial relations framework and the critical perspective of bullying. That is, for employees, organisational practices can be perceived as unfair and bullying regardless of the choice and intention of the manager. In these situations, employees perceived the organisation *as the bully*, rather than as a facilitator for individualised, interpersonal bullying (Liefoghe, 2003).

Furthermore, in these instances of depersonalised organisational bullying, employees did not necessarily position themselves as a 'victim' or feel emotionally distressed: it appears that the unfairness and questionable legitimacy of the practices is central to the employees' construct of 'organisational bullying', not the emotional impact (Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). Thus, these employee accounts of organisational bullying present a challenge for the previously discussed conflation of behaviours and impacts in the dominant definition of bullying. That is, this research suggests that employees may feel bullied because of the perceived unfairness and injustice of the practices, independent of whether they feel subjectively distressed.

Parzefall and Salin (2010) have recently theorised that these perceptions of (in)justice might be central to understanding employees' experiences of bullying, and may help to explain the equivocal role of intent for employees. Drawing on justice theory, and the notion of a just world, Parzefall and Salin argue that if the target believes that the perpetrator *should* or *could* have behaved differently and that, therefore, the target *would* have felt better, intention is ascribed to the perpetrator. Thus, within Parzefall & Salin's approach, it is not so much whether the behaviour was intended to harm, instrumental, or lacking awareness that is important; it is the target's interpretation and attribution of the 'should, could and would' and their individual threshold for accommodating unfair behaviour. Moreover, in relation to the aims of this thesis, the authors suggest that perceived organisational support (POS) from colleagues or organisational representatives (managers or HRPs) may mitigate the impact from bullying by helping to restore employees' perceptions of justice, and that "should the organizational representatives allow bullying to continue even after becoming aware of it, this would certainly dramatically reduce POS" (p. 771). Whilst this model has yet to be

examined empirically, three aspects of Parzefall & Salin's theorising are reflected in employee's accounts of their bullying constructions: the perceived unfairness and injustice of bullying; the equivocal role of intent; and, pertinent to the context of this thesis, the lack of support from HRPs reported by targets, as the next section will examine.

Thus, four important questions emerge from this research with non-targeted employees in relation to the aims of this thesis. Firstly, employees appear to hold multiple constructions of bullying at both the individual and organisational level. Do HRPs hold similar multiple constructions or, as suggested in Chapter 1, might their constructions differ to those of employees? Secondly, supporting Parzefall and Salin's (2010) theorising on the central role of (in)justice, these employee accounts suggest that perceptions of unfairness and injustice are central to the subjective experience of both interpersonal and organisational bullying. Are 'fairness' and 'justice' elements of HRPs' constructions of bullying, and does the perception of these factors influence their responses? Thirdly, it appears that 'intent' plays a different role in 'interpersonal' versus 'organisational' bullying for employees. What might be the importance or role of perpetrator 'intent' in HRPs' constructions of bullying? Finally, the research with employees on 'organisational bullying' suggests that individual subjective feelings of distress and intimidation are not necessarily a defining criterion for this form of 'bullying'; instead it is perceptions of unfairness and lack of voice. Do HRPs incorporate the target's subjectivity and 'distress' into their constructs and interpretations of bullying and, if so, what role might target subjectivity play in determining HRPs' responses? These questions will be returned to in Chapter 7.

Before we consider what may, or may not be known about HRPs' perspectives and responses to bullying, there is one final lens through which to examine "what is bullying?": targets' experiential accounts of raising bullying claims. These are relevant for the questions asked within this thesis because they provide an empirical perspective on HRPs' response to bullying and, hence, potential insight into how HRPs may define bullying.

2.6 Targets' Construction of 'Bullying'

Before reviewing this literature, it should be noted that this qualitative research with targets presents a potentially different employee voice to the survey-based research discussed earlier. The qualitative research comprises self-selecting participants: employees who have identified both themselves as targets and their experiences as bullying, and have subsequently volunteered to discuss these experiences. Survey-based research is typically conducted on broad working populations; participants identified as targets by their OCM and self-labelling answers within this quantitative research may be at different stages of recognising and labelling their experiences as bullying, and they may differ to targets who are willing to talk about their bullying experiences. Hence, whilst the research reviewed in this section provides a richer account of targets' experiences, direct comparisons to the survey-based research cannot be assumed. Furthermore, the published qualitative research with targets has predominantly been conducted in the UK, Australia and US, whereas the survey-based research data have been gathered from many other countries, particularly Scandinavia. Given the cultural-based nuances in bullying behaviour discussed earlier, particularly the nature of the perpetrator, cross-cultural generalisations may be not possible for the research findings reviewed in this section. However, because such research has been conducted in the UK, it is relevant and appropriate to consider it within this thesis.

Typically, within the research on target's accounts of their bullying experiences, the alleged bullies are managers or supervisors; individuals who have legitimate authority over the target. Peer-to-peer bullying is seldom discussed, supporting the previously discussed predominance of manager-to-employee bullying in the UK (e.g., Hoel & Beale, 2006). Targets report that their bullying experiences often comprise harassment and discrimination from their manager on the basis of allegations of poor performance; and targets perceive that managers continually seek reasons to justify these claims of 'incompetence' through organisational processes, such as increased objectives, performance management, appraisals and performance-related-pay (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2005; 2010a; Lee, 2000; 2002; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). These findings support the perspective that organisational processes may be a form of bullying, as suggested by the research with employees in the previous section.

However, research with targets who raise a bullying claim against their manager suggests that these organisational practices are both the *source* of the original bullying *and* subsequent ‘punishment’ for speaking up (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Keashly & Harvey, 2005). Such findings are not limited to bullying: similar retaliatory responses to targets have been found for the related phenomena of sexual harassment (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005); mistreatment (Olsen-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008); and whistleblowing, where acts of raising a bullying grievance against managers are conceptualised as a form of whistleblowing (Bjørkelo, Ryberg, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2009; Rehg et al., 2008). This ‘retaliation’ reported by targets is both work-related, through organisational processes such as performance appraisal and performance-related-pay (Keashly, 2001; O’Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009), and through personal-related behaviours, such as being labelled as a ‘trouble-maker’ and social isolation (Cortina & Magley, 2003). But what relevance is this to understanding *HRPs’* responses to bullying? It is because research with targets suggests that *HRPs’* responses to bullying claims *contribute* to the negative experiences of targets who raise claims against their managers, as we shall now explore.

As introduced in Chapter 1, targets often report feeling unsupported by *HRPs* (Ferris, 2004), because nothing seems to happen (Keashly, 1998; Rayner et al., 2002), or the bullying situation worsens (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Ferris, 2009). When the alleged bully is the target’s direct supervisor, targets report perceiving that *HRPs* are “in on the game” with the manager, and that *HRPs* turn a blind eye and ‘sabotage’ or discredit the target’s account (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006, p. 160). Targets believe that *HRPs* either immediately support the manager (Lee, 2002), or are ‘manipulated’ by managers, often changing their perspective once they have spoken to the alleged bullying manager, which is perceived as further unfairness and injustice (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). Furthermore, targets also report that *HRPs* label them as a ‘trouble maker’, often resulting in increased bullying from the manager and isolation from peers who fear similar victimisation if they associate with the target (Keashly, 2001; Lee, 2000).

From the target accounts, it appears that such responses from *HRPs* can compound the negative experience of being bullied (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2003; Vickers, 2006). This is of consequence for the aims of this thesis, because from this research it has been argued that the response from *HRPs* appears critical in determining how targets cope

with the bullying (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Keashly, 2001). Why might HRPs' actions be perceived as inaction, denial or 'management complicity'? If, as proposed earlier, HRPs' constructions of bullying are influenced by the individualised and interpersonal discourse of ACAS' and CIPD's guidance, is it possible that HRPs do not interpret targets' claims regarding organisational practices as bullying?

This is an important question in relation to this thesis for two reasons: employees' and targets' constructions of bullying suggest that organisational practices, such as performance-management and appraisal, are the basis of many manager-to-employee claims. Hence, if HRPs do not hold a construction of practice-related bullying, as employees appear to, this potential disconnect might be a frequent problem. Secondly, given HRPs frequent involvement and critical role in the prevention, detection and resolution of bullying (Ferris, 2004; Lewis & Rayner, 2003; Salin, 2009), understanding their construction(s) of bullying, and how this might influence their response to targets is crucial. Despite this, very little is known about the role of HRPs in responding to bullying (Salin, 2008). What is known will be the focus of the next section.

2.7 HRPs' Construction of 'Bullying'

Besides the study described in Chapter 1, which motivated this thesis (Harrington, 2005), to the author's knowledge only one other study has examined how HRPs might define bullying (Baillien, Neyens, & De Witte, 2008; Baillien et al., 2009). However, the sample also consisted of other 'subject matter experts', all of whom may be involved in bullying claims, such as union representatives and bullying prevention advisors; hence, it is not possible to extract the HRP-specific findings. Accepting this limitation, Baillien et al's interview study focused on how these organisational representatives constructed the cause(s) of bullying. They found that interviewees used individual factors, such as coping style, unresolved conflict, and organisational factors such as destructive leadership, work design and team climate to frame their explanations for bullying. Whilst these findings tend to support the assertion that HRPs might be constructing bullying as an individual and interpersonal phenomenon, it should be noted that interviewees were given a definition and a potential explanation for bullying *before* being asked to discuss the causes of bullying. A checklist of the antecedents found within the mainstream bullying research was then used to structure the interviews and prompt the interviewees. Given the number and complexity of bullying

constructions that exist, as discussed throughout this chapter, it may be that this more structured method was less likely to capture the potential breadth and complexity of the interviewees' own individual constructions on the causes of bullying.

Likewise, there has been little research examining HRPs' responses to bullying, the exception being the work of Salin (2008; 2009). She surveyed HRPs in the Finish public sector and found that, in terms of preventing bullying, the use of anti-bullying policies, awareness training and staff climate surveys were associated with high-performance work practices, such as regular appraisals, performance-based pay and formal training, although only half of the organisations had bullying policies compared to 70-85% in the UK (CIPD, 2004; 2005a; CMI, 2008). However, these prevention processes were also associated with the amount of negative bullying-related publicity experienced by organisations.

Furthermore, the majority of policies assigned responsibility for handling bullying claims to managers: "there was usually no mention of the HR/personnel management department" (Salin, 2008, p. 227). Salin suggests that such preventative measures might, therefore, be reactive rather than proactive, and that HRM's role in bullying resolution might be passive beyond developing policy.

With regard to the HRPs' actions in cases of bullying, Salin (2009) examined four types of actions: reconciliatory, such as talking to the parties involved or consulting occupational health; punitive, such as disciplining the perpetrator; transfer of target or perpetrator; and taking no action. The majority of HRPs reported reconciliatory actions and a quarter transferred either the target or perpetrator to a new role. Punitive actions occurred in less than 5% of cases, whilst 12% admitted to taking no action. Although the size of organisation, its HRM practices and the gender of the HRPs were related to the measures taken, the presence of an anti-bullying policy was not: it made no difference to the action taken and, more importantly, it did not decrease the likelihood of 'no action'. Furthermore, the content and wording of policies were extremely similar between organisations, suggesting that implementing policy may be instrumental: a "copy-paste" compliance exercise rather than one based on the organisation's specific requirements for identifying and preventing bullying (Salin, 2008, p. 228).

These studies have provided some insight into the preventative measures and responses of HRPs. However, they are based on the HRPs' self-report of their own actions; hence, it is possible that 'no action' is under-reported. Furthermore, as established previously, the nature of bullying in the UK differs from that of Finland, with the majority of cases being manager-to-employee, many of which go unreported (Rayner & McIvor, 2008); thus, the pattern of responses may be different from HRPs in the UK. Furthermore, whilst these findings shed light on HRPs' *actions* in relation to bullying claims, there remains a lack of research on how HRPs might *interpret* such claims and *decide* how to act.

It is this gap that this thesis seeks to address and a related body of research on HRPs' responses to other interpersonal organisational dilemmas may be useful in considering the potential factors influencing their responses to bullying. Within the business decision-making literature, a series of interview-based studies have examined HRPs' work-related ethical decision-making; that is, whether and how they decide to 'do the right thing' in people-related dilemmas (Fisher, 2000; Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson, 1999; Lovell, 2002; Macklin, 2006). Such studies have sought to inform the debate as to whether HRPs should be the 'ethical guardian' of organisations (e.g. Kochan, 2004), responsible for the morality of HRM practices (Macklin, 2006) or whether, because of the ambiguity and duality of the role, such a position is not possible (Greenwood, 2002; Legge, 2005; Lowry, 2006).

In each study HRPs were asked to describe work situations they had experienced that involved ethical decisions; examples included favouritism in recruitment, discrimination, harassment, unfairness in redundancies and terminations, and poor management of employee performance issues, and nearly all examples necessitated the HRP negotiating with a manager. Hence, in terms of the relevance to this thesis, it is suggested that these issues show similarity to the nature of bullying, as does the centrality of management involvement.

Across all of these studies, the HRPs consistently reported making 'compromise' decisions that were less than ethically-ideal and that were contingent on a range of organisational pressures. These included pressure to contribute to organisational profit, pressure from senior management, fear for their own job security, and the powerlessness of HRM and HRPs to change anything (Fisher, 2000; Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson, 1999; Lovell,

2002; Macklin, 2006). Ethics were perceived to be beyond the HRPs' scope of influence (Lovell, 2002); supporting employees was perceived as less important than supporting managers and the business and, thus, an ethical stance was seen as an unproductive luxury (Foote & Robinson, 1999). Concordant with Salin's (2009) findings, the most common action was simply to talk to the parties involved, despite acknowledging the issues of fairness and justice inherent in the dilemmas (Foote, 2001). Hence, these findings suggest that, when responding to people-related issues, HRPs are facing a range of competing pressures, and that a sense of powerlessness may be compromising their decision-making.

Both Fisher (2000) and Foote (2001) concluded that this lack of power appeared to diminish the HRPs sense of moral responsibility; instead, the HRPs believed responsibility lay with managers because they had the power. However, in several of the studies, there was evidence of the HRPs engaging in what Bourdieu terms position-taking (Section 1.7) in an attempt to actively manage their sense of powerlessness. The HRPs in these studies discussed positioning themselves as 'experts' in people-management processes, which resulted in managers seeking them out for advice, particularly when managing poor employee performance; they adopted a 'business language', based on financial benefit or legal risk, to encourage managers to treat employees with respect; and, in recognising that the power lay with managers, they described "stroking their [managers] egos" as a means of aligning themselves with this dominant group (Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson, 1999; Macklin, 2006, p. 218). In rare instances, HRPs reported resigning over ethical differences with their organisation (Foote & Robinson, 1999; Lovell, 2002; Macklin, 2006), leading these authors to conclude that HRPs' consideration of ethics, or 'doing the right thing', in people-related issues was an interaction between the strength of their personal values, pressures from organisation and the relative power of HRM.

Thus, in summarising this section, it appears that we know very little about how HRPs construct and respond to bullying beyond Salin's work on HRPs actions in relation to bullying (Salin, 2008; 2009). However, from the 'dilemma' research, it appears that HRPs' responses to other people-related problems are influenced by multiple organisational and professional factors: the relative power of HRM and the individual HRP, the need to contribute financially to the organisation, pressure to meet senior management requirements, and fear for their own position. Furthermore, the way that the HRPs manage their responses

seems to be influenced by their own values and a range of actions to align themselves with the more powerful management group. In logically extending these findings to bullying, as a similar people-related dilemma, the question arises as to whether HRPs might experience similar organisational and professional pressures and feelings of powerlessness when responding to bullying? It is to the HRPs' professional and organisational settings that Chapter 3 now turns, in order to examine the nature of the contexts in which HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying are embedded.

2.8 Summary

To provide the context for examining how HRPs might construct and respond to bullying, this chapter has sought to answer the question "what is bullying?" by exploring how the phenomenon is constructed through multiple lenses: the predominant positivist academic approach; organisational policy; the critical academic perspective; and through the published research on employees' and targets' experiential accounts of bullying, which have emerged from this critical approach. From reviewing these literatures, it appears that there is no single, definitive answer to "what is bullying?": concordant with the social constructionist approach to bullying assumed in this thesis, outlined in Chapter 1, it appears that 'bullying' means different things to different people.

It has been established that within the predominant academic approach and organisational policy, bullying is constructed as interpersonal behaviour occurring at the individual level, within an organisational context, and influenced by a range of individual, organisational and social factors. Within this view, the organisation is viewed as a facilitating backdrop, which may enable, motivate and trigger bullying if associated antecedent factors are present. This interpersonal construct of bullying is both recognised and accepted by the critical academic perspective. However, this critical perspective also espouses the construct of 'organisational bullying', which is located within the management and power structures, discourses, and organisational practices that comprise organisations, and is independent of the individuals enacting those practices. Therefore, this critical perspective adopts a fundamentally different perspective to the role of the organisation in bullying that, importantly, appears to be supported by the employees' accounts of organisational bullying reviewed in this chapter. Non-targets' and targets' accounts suggest that, *in addition* to interpersonal bullying, their

constructions of bullying include depersonalised organisational practices that they perceive as unfair and unjust, and against which they have no voice.

However, whilst this chapter has established the academic, organisational and employee constructions of bullying, it has also shown that we have very little knowledge on how HRPs construct bullying and respond to it, beyond the study that motivated this thesis and the work of Salin on HRPs' reported actions to bullying cases (Harrington, 2005; Salin 2009). Further limited insight is available from published research on targets' perceptions of HRPs' responses, which potentially suggest inaction, disbelief or apparent 'complicity' with the alleged bullying manager from HRPs. These findings also suggest that HRPs might hold different constructions of bullying compared to employees, as suggested by the findings from Harrington (2005). Moreover, in considering how the research on HRPs' responses to other people-related 'dilemmas' might apply to bullying, a range of factors emerged from these findings that may be salient for HRPs' responses to bullying: their own personal values; the relative power of HRM and the individual HRP, and the processes by which HRPs attempt to manage this power; the need to contribute financially to the organisation; the pressure to meet senior management requirements; and a fear for their own position.

Thus, whilst we do not know how HRPs construct bullying, or what might determine their response to claims, this chapter has raised some relevant questions. Given that HRPs are embedded within organisational and professional fields, are their constructions of bullying shaped by the individual and interpersonal definitions provided by institutions such as ACAS and CIPD, which are themselves influenced by the predominant academic literature? Do HRPs hold a similar construction of 'organisational bullying' that is evident within the research on employees' accounts of 'bullying'? If they do not, might this help to explain the apparent negative HRP responses reported by targets? When responding to bullying, are HRPs subject to the same, or similar, organisational and professional pressures reported in the 'dilemma' research? These questions will be addressed through the empirical study at the centre of this thesis.

Thus far in this thesis, Chapter 1 has considered the organisational fields within which HRPs' bullying related practices are embedded, and this chapter has examined the multiple constructions of bullying evident in the academic and practitioner literature. However, HRPs

are also located within the professional field of Human Resource Management. The CIPD, introduced in Chapter 1, is the professional body that determines the accredited training for HRPs and provides the professional standards for HRPs' organisational practices. Thus, Chapter 3 will now turn to this professional field and will review the pertinent HRM literature to provide an examination of the potential influences from the professional context on HRPs' bullying-related practices.

Chapter 3: HRM and its Implications for Workplace Bullying

“We believe that the purpose of HR has been evolving and we want to chart this evolution. In essence, we see a profession that has moved from a largely internally focused people agenda to one that has increasingly focused on the organisational and customer agenda, with the explicit purpose of driving and developing high performance organisations.” (CIPD, 2009b, p. 1)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the individual, organisational and broader social factors that may be influencing the practice of HRPs and, thus, their interpretation and response to workplace bullying. In doing so, it will provide a critical examination of HRPs professional context, and consider whether the organisational and management pressures identified in the published research on HRPs’ responses to other people-related ‘dilemmas’, reviewed in Chapter 2, might be pertinent for considering HRPs bullying-related practices. In accordance with the theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis, a social constructionist perspective of HRM theory and practice in the UK will be adopted, using the Bourdieusian framework outlined in Chapter 1. Thus, the HRP is positioned as a social agent within their organisational, professional and broader social fields, a position determined by the relative power of the HRP and HRM. This will provide the means for exploring the interaction between the social structures of these fields, HRPs’ relative position within these fields, and the individual and shared characteristics of habitus on HRPs’ social practice, both generally and more specifically to HRPs’ response to bullying.

Furthermore, the chapter provides a critical examination of HRM practice and HRP roles within the CIPD’s ‘professionalisation discourse’, epitomised in the opening quote of this Chapter, which seeks to increase the legitimacy, credibility and value of the HRM ‘profession’ in organisations. The relevance of this professionalisation project is significant: this discourse influences HRPs’ practices through the CIPD’s accredited training programmes, professional standards and practitioner publications. Thus, for the cultural context of this thesis, it provides the professional context for considering HRM practice in UK organisations and, thus, HRPs’ construction, interpretation and response to bullying. Within Bourdieu’s framework, an understanding of HRPs’ organisational and professional fields is important, because this knowledge helps to understand the how these fields might

influence and structure individual and shared habitus and, thus, HRPs' practices (Bourdieu, 1988; Laberge, 2010).

Before examining how this discourse might influence the nature of HRPs' shared professional habitus, their construction of an 'HRM professional', and their organisational practice, it is appropriate to examine the managerialist and critical lenses through which HRM and HRPs are viewed within the academic and practitioner literatures, and how these two perspectives have developed. As within the predominant and critical academic perspectives in the bullying literature, there are two competing, but this time, almost irreconcilable discourses in the HRM academic literature. On the one side, there is the dominant unitarist and management-aligned "normative division" (Heery, 2008, p. 354), and on the other is the critical perspective, which argues that HRM practices serve to perpetuate the power imbalances between management and employees (e.g., Legge, 1978; 2005). This distinction is important for the establishing the context of the content and approach of this chapter because, as will be shown in this chapter, published HRM research appears to be one-sided: it focuses on the managerialist perspective of HRM and the beneficial link between HRM practice and organisational performance. There is scant research on the delivery or benefit of employee-focused practices within HRM, apart from empirical findings within the critical perspective that suggest the reduction of such practices (e.g., Keegan & Francis, 2010). Thus, this chapter begins by examining the reasons behind the emergence of HRM from Personnel Management, and charts the related development and nature of these two perspectives of HRM.

3.2 From Personnel Management to Human Resource Management

The shift from Personnel Management (PM) to HRM occurred as a direct result of the boarder socio-economic changes, discussed in Chapter 1. That is, the move from pluralist to unitarist organisations in line with the increased dominance of capitalism, managerialism and the performance-imperative: market managerialism (e.g., Parker, 2002). These shifts gave rise to significant changes in the theory and practice of HRM, initially in the US, aimed at helping organisations to achieve competitive advantage in a changing technological and economic climate (Guest, 1997; Guest & King, 2004; Storey, 1993). Until then, PM had provided prescriptive and administrative functions that focused on employee relations, resourcing and development (Guest, 1987; Legge, 1978; Watson, 2004; Wright, 2008).

However, PM had been criticised for both its pronounced under-professionalism (Sisson, 1995), and its failure to demonstrate economic value to organisations (Caldwell, 2003; Legge, 1995; Watson, 2002). New managerialist HRM theories were based on the assumption that PM practitioners, with their focus on welfare and administration, had relatively little power and influence in organisations and were, therefore, unable to establish the effective management of human resources as a means of competitive advantage (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quine Mills, & Walton, 1985). Hence, this task was deemed too critical to reside with PM practitioners, who had failed to demonstrate professionalism and economic value; instead, the management of human resources, people, was deemed a mainstream management activity (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1995). As will be examined in this chapter, these managerialist criticisms have directly contributed to the content of the CIPD's professionalisation 'project': particularly, the development and alignment of new management-focused HRP roles, and the devolvement of many HRM practices to managers.

These criticisms of PM underpinned two consequential models of HRM that emerged in the USA, which argued that competitive advantage could be achieved through the effective management of human resources. It is not the intention to provide a detailed review of these models; interested readers are pointed to Blyton & Turnbull (1992) and Storey (1989). However, it is important to provide a summary of these approaches because of their significant influence on the development of HRM practice in the UK, the related development of the critical perspective of HRM, and the potential implications for HRPs' bullying-related practice.

The first is the Michigan model (Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984): strongly influenced by an economic discourse, it argues that human resources are no different to any other form of organisational resource and that HRM practices, such as selection, performance appraisal, reward and development, should be determined by the business strategy driving organisational performance (Brewster, Wood, & Brookes, 2008). It provides a management-focused, utilitarian-instrumentalist view of human resources, aimed at maximising the economic return of HRM practices (Prowse & Prowse, 2010). The second is the Harvard model (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills, & Walton, 1984), which focuses on the 'human' aspect of HRM practices and argues that effective management of people requires employees' understanding and commitment (Brewster, 2007). This, it is suggested, is a more

humanistic form of HRM because it focuses on employee involvement, participation and commitment to organisational goals (Legge, 1995; Prowse & Prowse, 2010). However, in practice and in academic research, it appears that the managerialist Michigan approach has gained dominance over the more humanistic Harvard approach, with the latter forming little more than rhetoric: most organisations will profess that people are their “greatest asset” whilst simultaneously treating them as “part of a balance sheet equation” (Bolton & Houlihan, 2007, p. 1). Thus, the critical perspective of HRM argues that current HRM theory reflects the dominance of a capitalist and economic approach to employee management (Ferraro et al., 2005). A further examination of the nature and assumptions of the managerialist and critical perspectives of HRM is important for this thesis: the former, as will be established, has significantly influenced the HRM professionalisation discourse and, thus, HRPs’ organisational practice in the UK. The critical perspective is important, because it argues that HRM’s focus on management and organisational performance has obscured the argument that HRM has an ethical role in supporting and balancing employees’ interests with management interests, which has potential implications for HRPs’ bullying-related practices.

3.3 The Managerialist and Critical Perspectives of HRM

In response to the socio-economic changes and the criticisms levelled at PM, the managerialist approach argues that HRM is now required to justify its existence by delivering value to organisations through greater accountability in terms of organisational performance and profit, which requires understanding the economic factors driving the organisation (Wright and Snell, 2005; CIPD 2010b, 2010c; 2010d). Thus, HRM practices should be aligned with an organisation’s strategy for achieving high performance and competitive advantage. This is based on the assumption that HRM can effectively perform multiple business and employee focused roles, which will positively impact the performance and profitability of an organisation (Ulrich, 1997; CIPD, 2010b). By doing so, this perspective argues that the power, influence and value of HRM will be increased through demonstrating this financial value to organisations (Wright & Snell, 2005). It is to this discourse that the CIPD is aligned (e.g., CIPD 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) and, as the following section will establish, it underpins the HRM professionalisation ‘project’ (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Trehan, 2004).

In contrast, the critical perspective argues that the unitarist normative approach to HRM is a management rhetoric; a metaphorical or euphemistic use of language, which fails to acknowledge HRM's role in manipulating, disciplining and controlling employees, and disguises and perpetuates the power imbalances between managers and employees (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Legge, 1978; 2005; Wright, 2008). The managerialist discourse in both academic and practitioner literature is viewed as complicit in sustaining an unreflective acceptance by HRPs of this management-focused approach to employee management in line with the rise of 'performance-management' cultures (Keegan & Boselie, 2006; Keegan & Francis, 2010; Watson, 2010). This critical perspective argues that the reality is actually an increase in work intensification, management control and employee manipulation, and a concomitant loss of employee voice and trust (Keenoy, 1999; Knights & McCabe, 1998). As a result of these changes, HRM has been criticised for moving away from a language of 'care and humanism' towards one of 'strategy and effectiveness' (Winstanley and Woodall, 2000). The consideration of ethics within HRM practitioner texts has been described as "a curiously underdeveloped area of analysis" (Mabey, Salaman, & Storey, 1998, p. 15). Consequently, Wright (2008) argues that the language of ethics and care are often second-place to HRPs' struggle for control and power, thus inhibiting HRPs' social and ethical obligations to organisational members (Payne & Wayland, 1999). Whilst these, often empirically-based, critical arguments may appear compelling, they have been marginalised by the managerialist normative approach (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Keegan & Boselie, 2006), which has been driven by the economic imperative to understand the factors that might influence the relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance (Grant & Shields, 2002; Wright, Gardner, & Moynihan, 2003).

Thus, the critical perspective argues that the managerialist approach to HRM has become dominant because of its professed economic value to market-driven organisations and that, as a result, the discourses of ethics and employee-interests may have been diminished. If such a view is accurate, there might be potential implications for HRPs' people-related practices, of which responding to bullying is one. However, this raises a pertinent question for this thesis: what evidence is there to suggest that the managerialist view is influencing HRPs' professional practice? To begin addressing this question, the next section will examine HRM's professionalisation project and the research that underpins this project, commencing with an examination of what is meant by 'professionalisation'.

3.4 HRM's Professionalisation 'Project'

Bolton & Muzio (2007) argue that a 'profession' is determined by its ability to offer a service that others outside of the profession are unable to deliver, thus maximising demand, economic rewards, and the social value accorded to the profession. That is, professional 'closure' is achieved by restricting access to the rewards and opportunities of the profession to those individuals who have acquired the scarce knowledge and expertise required to perform the profession's work (Abel, 1988; Larson, 1977). Thus, the boundary of a profession is typically determined by distinct specialised knowledge acquired via formal education, regulation from a professional body, an ethical code of conduct, and the social recognition of its identity and legitimacy as a profession (Farndale & Brewster, 2005; Gold, Rodgers, & Smith, 2003; Goode, 1957). It is this closure, or boundary of an occupation that determines its 'professionalisation' (Mueller & Carter, 2005; Wright, 2008). From Bourdieu's perspective, this closure determines the boundaries of a professional field: it sets the limits of the profession's symbolic capital, the value of its knowledge and scarce resources, and the legitimacy of field membership.

However, what constitutes professional practice is socially constructed within the dialectical relationship between its practitioners, their environment and those external to their profession (Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, & Scott, 1993; Waller, 2009). There is a continual struggle to establish, maintain and defend the legitimacy and jurisdiction of a profession in the eyes of other professional groups (Quinn Trank & Rynes, 2003). Hence, in order to demonstrate its authority and autonomy as a profession, HRM must be perceived as having power, status, credibility and value within an organisation; it must be "amongst the controllers rather than the controlled" (Armstrong, 1986, p. 25; Wright, 2008). HRPs must secure the trust of senior and line managers by demonstrating that their specialised knowledge leads to organisational advancement (Gilmore & Williams, 2007). Hence, HRM's professionalisation is not simply dependent upon whether it is able to deliver competitive advantage through effective people-management; this capability and contribution must also be recognised as legitimate and valuable by other field members, particularly senior and line management. That is, HRPs' symbolic capital is dependent on whether their knowledge and practices are legitimised as valuable by the more dominant managerial field members.

Thus, to demonstrate HRM's value within managerialist and market-driven organisations, the CIPD is striving to increase the professionalism of HRM and achieve professional closure through the three main elements of its professionalisation project: the acquisition of chartered status, achieved in 2000; defining the professional standards that regulate the training and qualification of practitioners; and the provision of a framework for the roles and practices of HRPs, which includes the devolvement of people-management HRM practices to managers and the alignment of HRM practice with management (Farndale & Brewster, 2005; Gilmore & Williams, 2007). Two significant factors from the managerialist perspective of HRM underpin the CIPD's project: firstly, the criticisms levelled at both PM and HRM have motivated the development of this project; that is, the weak professional status of PM and HRM's lack of power and ability to demonstrate economic value to organisations because of its continued focus on operational and administrative HRM practices (Hammonds, 2005; Watson, 2010). Secondly, based on empirical research conducted within the managerialist approach to HRM, it is claimed that a strong causal link exists between HRM practice and organisational performance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Guest, 2001; Guest, Michie, Conway, & Sheehan, 2003). The critical HRM perspective, however, maintains that, at best, the link is tentative because of a range of theoretical and methodological issues (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005) and, at worst, this link is an artefact resulting from the desire to find such an economically significant relationship, because it would 'prove' HRM's value to organisations (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2008; Godard, 2004; Wall & Wood, 2005).

An examination of this espoused HRM-performance link, the research underpinning it and the debates surround it is important because the proclaimed existence of this link has significantly influenced the CIPD's professionalism project and, thus, the roles, language and practices of HRPs in the UK (Bolton & Houlihan, 2007; Grant & Shields, 2002). Thus the next section will firstly examine the evidence of this influence and, subsequently, the debates that surround this research.

3.4.1 The HRM-Performance Link Evidence

The research that claims to have established a positive relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance has been incorporated into the CIPD's professional standards and commissioned research reports, whilst the critical side of the debate receives

no mention (Gilmore & Williams, 2007; Marchington & Zagelmeyer, 2005; Wall & Wood, 2005). For example, in an article published in *People Management*, Cooper (2000, p. 28) stated that, “Academic studies have established a link between HR and profitability. The race is now on to find out how and why people policies make a difference to shareholders”. Likewise, in a textbook recommended by the CIPD to its students and practitioners, Caulkin (2001, p. 4) states that, “more than 30 studies carried out in the UK and the US since the early 1990s leave no room to doubt that there is a correlation between people management and business performance, that the relationship is positive, and that it is cumulative”. Such performance-related messages have been directly translated into the CIPD’s recent ‘Next Generation HR’ programme, which argues that “HR functions have gone beyond simply being the people function into overall performance, we [the CIPD] see the crucial need is for HR to not only support short-term performance but also to put driving sustainable performance at the heart of its purpose.” (CIPD, 2010c, p. 2). Because these messages are prevalent in the CIPD’s practitioner publications, arguably, it appears virtually impossible for HRPs to avoid the conclusion that business-focused HRM practices will achieve economic return, thus allowing them to demonstrate their value to organisations. However, if empirical evidence provides overwhelming support for the HRM-performance link, as these publications suggest, is this managerialist approach as flawed as its critical opponents suggest? In response, a review of this body of evidence appears to provide a set of compelling and consistent criticisms.

Whilst a range of methodological issues has been raised with the HRM-performance link research¹¹, the major criticism is the lack of agreed theoretical basis for the operationalisation of ‘HRM’, reflecting the ongoing debate regarding its definition and the actual practices that comprise ‘HRM’ (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2008; Marchington & Grugulis, 2000). Hence, there has been an overall failure to *explain* the processes that may link HRM practice and organisational performance (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005; Wall & Wood, 2005). Furthermore, given the widespread devolvement of HRM practices to managers, most studies have failed to assess the extent to which HRM is executed by managers and the efficacy of this delivery (Dany, Guedri, & Hatt, 2008; Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005; Marchington & Zagelmeyer, 2005). This criticism is particularly

¹¹ Interested readers are pointed to Baptise, (2008), Boselie, Dietz, & Boon (2005), Prowse & Prowse (2010) and Wall & Wood (2005) for recent reviews of these method-related issues.

important for this thesis in light of the following two bodies of published research.

Firstly, employees' perceptions of how well and fairly HRM practices are executed are strongly associated with a range of employee outcomes, such as organisational citizenship behaviours, commitment, engagement, well-being, and trust; all of which, in turn, are associated with employee performance. That is, poorly executed HRM practices can lead to decreased employee performance (Baptise, 2008; Boselie et al., 2005; den Hartog et al., 2004). Secondly, the research with targets of bullying, reviewed in Chapter 2, suggests that accusations of the target's underperformance and the manager's subsequent execution of HRM practices, such as performance management, appear to underpin many bullying claims (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2005; 2010a; Lee, 2000; 2002; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Hence, poorly implemented HRM practices by managers may actually result in a decline in employee and organisational performance, rather than an improvement (Hope-Hailey et al., 2005), and may be giving rise to claims of bullying. We will return to this latter point when we consider the empirical research on how HRPs construct their own roles and those of managers, particularly in relation to performance-management practices.

A more fundamental criticism of this normative HRM-performance research is one of 'reification'; that is, the assumption of an implicit, *a priori* link is influencing the approach, analysis and interpretation of this research (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2008; Godard, 2004; Wall & Wood, 2005). From this perspective, it is argued that this research seeks consensus of the HRM-performance link through an 'evidence-based' approach, rather than remaining open to dissensus (Janssens & Steyaert, 2009; Keegan & Boselie, 2006). In doing so, it is criticised for privileging and sustaining management and economic discourses within HRM, viewing the employee as a commodity to be exploited for organisational benefit (Grant & Shields, 2002). These criticisms are significant because they may help to explain the earlier observation that research on HRM practices appears one-sided, focusing on the performance link rather than employee-related practices. Morrell (2008) suggests that such an unreflexive approach privileges specific forms of research and knowledge production, such as the HRM-performance link. This, in turn, "brings into being a series of practices and understandings" that create a self-fulfilling prophecy; in this case, that 'HRM practices contribute to organisational performance' (Ferraro et al., 2005; Harley & Hardy, 2004, p. 379). Within Bourdieu's framework, this perspective suggests that the output from the HRM-performance

research has become incorporated into the taken-for-granted doxa and language of HRPs and the management-focused academic research perspective. Hence, the apparently unreflexive assumptions of this research serve to reify and reinforce the existence and economic value of the HRM-performance link, which appears to be perpetuating an economically-framed construction of HRM roles and practices.

More importantly, as established earlier, this ‘reification’ is not restricted to the academic literature. It has permeated the practitioner literature because the CIPD has embraced the narratives from this ‘epistemic community’, defined as a group of experts who share a common belief in a cause-and-effect relationship and how it should be applied in practice (Haas, 1989). Power is accorded to this community by virtue of its academic status and ‘scientific method’, which legitimises its narrative and its application to practice (Morrell, 2008)¹². However, Hesketh & Fleetwood (2006) argue that, in adopting this management-focused search for causation, academics within this perspective are failing to acknowledge the complexity and social nature of HRM practice in organisations. Instead, academics have been accused of being ‘servants to power’ and ‘slaves to management’ (Brief, 2000; Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Watson, 2010), and of developing instrumentalist approaches to management and HRM that, when taught in Business Schools to trainee HRPs, have “actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility” (Ghoshal, 2005, p. 76).

The implication of these criticisms is that HRPs are being inculcated with a management and economic-focused approach, from their professional training onwards, rather than one that balances economics with a consideration of employee interests and the ethics of HRM practices. If this is the case, what impact might this approach have on HRPs’ response to bullying? In order to explore these potential implications further, the next section will examine the direct impact that the CIPD’s professionalisation project has had on the roles and practices of HRPs. Three pertinent aspects of this project will be discussed: the espoused typology of recommended roles for HRPs; devolvement of people-management HRM practices to managers; and the alignment of HRM practice with management. The first two strands will be examined in turn and in doing so the third will be established. The implications of each for HRPs’ bullying-related practices will be considered.

¹² Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey (2010) adopt a similar position on the ‘power’ of the dominant academic research on bullying, arguing that the power accorded by its ‘scientific’ credentials has enabled this research to influence the organisational adoption of the dominant individual and interpersonal construction of bullying.

3.5 HRM Roles in the UK

The most significant and current influence on the construction and adoption of HRM roles in the UK is from the work of Dave Ulrich (Harris, 2007; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005). His work has been embraced by the CIPD: a recent search of the CIPD website and People Management Magazine identified over 300 articles and webpages promoting Ulrich's approach, reflecting the "increasing 'Ulrichization' of the HR function" (Keegan & Francis, 2010, p. 874). His assumptions underpin the CIPD's professional standards for the education, qualification and practice of HRPs in the UK, which subsequently influence the way HRPs construct their roles and practice (Gilmore & Williams, 2007; den Hartog et al., 2004; Wall & Wood, 2005). Thus, an examination of Ulrich's approach is crucial in understanding UK HRP practice, both generally and in relation to bullying.

Ulrich's approach is strongly couched in managerialist and economic discourses (Keegan & Francis, 2010). He argues that HRM practice should be an integral part of an organisation's strategy for achieving sustained organisational performance, and that HRM practices should be aligned with business strategy at all levels of the organisation, from the board to first-line managers (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005a). The result, argues Ulrich, is effective HRM that will deliver value by enhancing the capability and performance of the organisation (Ulrich et al., 2008). Thus, Ulrich's assumptions have reinforced the aims of the CIPD's professionalisation project and contributed to justifying the HRM-performance link research. Whilst it is not the intention to provide an in-depth review of his work, a description of his typologies is appropriate given the established influence his work exerts in the UK and, as will be shown in subsequent sections, because HRPs draw upon the language and roles of this typology to construct their practice in organisations; a practice in which their response to bullying is embedded.

Thus, Table 1 shows the development of Ulrich's role typologies, which have been directly incorporated into the CIPD's guidelines (e.g., CIPD, 2005b, 2007, 2009c, 2010d). Two particular roles are significant for examining HRP practice in relation to bullying, because of the inherent duality and conflict they create for HRP practice (Caldwell, 2003): employee advocate and strategic partner. As an employee advocate, HRPs are tasked with supporting and voicing employees' interests with management. This follows through from HRM's roots in Personnel Management, when practitioners were the "humane bureaucrat", focusing on

employee welfare and processes associated with recruitment, training and dismissals (Legge, 2005, p. 52). In contrast, Ulrich's strategic partner role, which has been re-labelled as HR Business Partner (BP) in the UK (CIPD, 2005c; 2010d), requires the alignment of HRM practice with the priorities, strategy and goals of management and the business. Hence, the BP role is one that focuses on supporting management to "deliver performance targets" (CIPD, 2005c, p. 41; 2010d).

Furthermore, a close reading of Ulrich's (1998; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005b) conceptualisation of employee advocacy shows that HRM's predominant focus should be on securing employees' commitment, engagement and full contribution, and ensuring that procedural and legal compliance occurs in situations such as redundancies. Hence, even employee advocacy is aimed at protecting and enhancing the organisation. Thus, rather than acknowledging the challenge of balancing the plurality of different stakeholder interests, this conceptualisation of employee advocacy has been criticised for reinforcing unitarism and the management alignment of HRM (Caldwell, 2003; Keegan & Francis, 2010; Marchington, 2008). However, what evidence is there to suggest that this criticism is justified, and that it has implications for HRPs' bullying related practices? These questions will now be considered by examining the research on how HRPs construct their roles, and what implications these role constructions may have for their response to bullying. Thus, the next section will begin by considering the business partner role.

Table 1: Ulrich's HRM Typologies

Ulrich (1997, 1998)		Ulrich & Brockbank (2005a)		Ulrich et al. (2008)	
Function	Purpose	Function	Purpose	Function	Purpose
Administrative Expert	Provide expertise on the creation and delivery of HRM policy and process, which enhance organisational effectiveness.	Functional Expert	This reformulation of the Administrative Expert now includes providing organisational efficiency via technology and process redesign, in addition to policy expertise.	Shared Services	Centralised and standardised transactional processes, e.g. payroll, applications, pensions.
				Operational Executors	Delivery of the operational activities that are not covered in Shared Services or Centres of Excellence, e.g. disciplinaries and grievances, attending recruitment interviews.
				Centres of Expertise	Likened to “consulting firms inside the organization” (p. 842). Providing expertise on areas such as training and recruitment
Employee Champion	To ensure that employees are engaged, committed, feel valued and have the resources to meet the demands placed upon them; to be the employees voice with management.	Employee Advocate	The Employee Champion was split into two. Employee Advocate focuses on supporting employees in the present and ensuring that the employment relationship is mutually beneficial.	Embedded HR	This is a relabeling of the strategic partner role. It is aligned with line managers of the different business units, and includes the role of ‘championing’ employee interests.
		Human Capital Developer	Human Capital Developer ensures that employees are prepared for the future plans of the organisation, and builds the workforce to meet the organisations requirements.		
Strategic Partner	To be involved in the development of organisational strategy with senior management; to define the organisation’s HRM framework; to align HRM strategy and priorities with those of the business.	Strategic Partner	Change Agent was incorporated into Strategic Partner, which comprises: business expert, change agent, knowledge manager and HR consultant. It includes brining employee interests to senior management.	Corporate HR	Aligned with the senior management team, contributing to the development and delivery of HRM strategy to meet organisational strategy.
Change Agent	Ensuring that the organisational has the resources to implement and capitalise on change & innovation; to address resistance to change				
		Leader	This has two dimensions. Firstly, the sum of the four roles above should equate to ‘leadership’. Secondly, being an HR Leader involves leading and monitoring the HR function, collaborating with other areas of the organisation, and providing corporate governance.		

3.5.1 The Increased Focus on the BP Role in UK

The professional drive for the BP role in the UK has grown significantly over the past 10 years (Beckett, 2005). A recent survey of CIPD members reported that 57% of organisations had restructured their HR function in the past five years using Ulrich's model (CIPD, 2008). Whilst only 18% had implemented his model in full, 47% had adopted the BP role, compared to 33% in 2003 (CIPD, 2003). Interview-based research with BPs suggests that they are drawing on an economic discourse, evident in the CIPD's translation of Ulrich's model, to describe how their role has shifted from a traditional and bureaucratic "policing" role to one of "trusted advisor" and "partner" to management (Wright, 2008, p. 1073). They construct the BP role as an opportunity to 'add value' and 'become strategic' (Pritchard, 2010); a role that focuses on 'cost reduction' and contributing to the organisation's 'bottom-line' in times of 'competitive pressure' (Keegan & Francis, 2010). Furthermore, they perceive the BP role as a way of increasing their influence, credibility and professionalism in organisations (Francis & Keegan, 2006). Indeed, as Bourdieu would predict, when socially constructing their BP role, the language practitioners use is imbued with a discourse of "business speak" (Francis & Keegan, 2006, p. 231).

Thus, this research suggests that HRPs' business focus and management alignment is fundamental to their construction of their role and practice. The consistency of these findings across studies suggests that the imperatives of HRM's professionalisation discourse have become incorporated into a shared professional HRM habitus, defining the 'rules of the game' for HRPs. Furthermore, the BP role appears to have become a valued goal for practitioners, who seem to use title of 'BP' to strengthen their own position and power: they describe it as 'a release' from the 'confines' of their previous generalist role, positioning themselves as 'experts' and concomitantly downgrading operational HR activities (Pritchard, 2010). In particular, BPs differentiate themselves from any HRP who continues to use the language of employee advocacy, casting them as 'weak', 'old school' and 'ineffectual' because of their 'reliance on moral arguments' (Keegan & Francis, 2010). From a Bourdieusian perspective, BPs appear to use this role as a means of position-taking in an attempt to increase their perceived value and legitimacy in the eyes of management and, thus, their symbolic capital, but at the expense of practitioners executing employee-focused roles.

However, despite the prevalence of the BP role, its adoption has not provided the “Holy Grail of competitive success” that Ulrich advocates (Caldwell, 2004, p. 198; 2008). Rather than increasing HRM’s professionalisation, it appears that the emphasis on the BP role is creating professional fragmentation and conflict between HRM sub-groups (Caldwell, 2003; Gilmore & Williams, 2007; Wright, 2008). Moreover, multiple interpretations of BP exist between organisations (Arkin, 2007; CIPD 2007); and implementations are often partial, depending on the size and type of organisation, the demand for BPs to execute operational HRM practices, and BPs’ inability or unwillingness to adopt a strategic role (Caldwell, 2004; 2008). Ironically, by focusing on strategy and disengaging from more generalist practices, BPs may actually be diminishing their value in the eyes of managers, who still expect and value the execution of operational HRM practices from HRPs (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). Consequently, determining whether the BP role is creating the desired value is problematic (CIPD, 2007).

Furthermore, Kochan (2004) suggests that HRM’s central and critical *raison d’être* should be balancing the needs and expectations of management and the organisation with those of its employees; in effect, to be the guardian of the social contract at work (Lansbury, 2004). However, despite the widespread organisational rhetoric that employee well-being is important in gaining employee engagement, commitment and performance (Harris, 2007), the research reviewed in this section suggests that BPs appear to have discarded a person-centred discourse in preference for a performance, business-focused discourse and, in doing so, appear to have separated and devalued employee advocacy (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Winstanley and Woodall, 2000). Keegan & Francis (2010, p. 874) have suggested that this “elimination” of employee advocacy and the consideration of employees’ interests are “occurring by stealth” as HRM practice becomes increasingly couched in the language of ‘competitive advantage’. Hence, contemporary HRM is now accused of omitting the ‘human’ from HRM (Bolton & Houlihan, 2007). Arguably, a logical extension of this research and critical view of HRM would be to question whether HRPs’ response to bullying might be more influenced by economics and managerialism than by employee advocacy. However, the research on BPs’ experiential accounts of the tensions inherent in their ‘management partnership’ role suggests a more complex picture, as the next section

will examine.

3.5.2 The Role of Employee Advocacy

In 2007, the CIPD surveyed 800 HRPs on the most important objectives for HRM (CIPD, 2007). Those endorsed most frequently were ‘developing employee competence’ (62%) and ‘employee performance management’ (61%). ‘Employee support’ was endorsed by 1%, and a focus on ‘employee needs’ had fallen to 29% from 47% in 2003. Considering these survey findings in conjunction with the research reviewed in the previous section, that BPs appear to position the value of their role at the expense of generalist and advocacy roles, raises the question of whether employee advocacy might be incongruent with a BP role? The simultaneous requirement to provide both the management-focused BP role and an employee-focused advocacy role has frequently been criticised for creating an irreconcilable conflict for practitioners (Brown, Metz, Cregan, & Kulik, 2009; Caldwell, 2003; Reilly & Williams, 2006). If the focus on ‘competitive advantage’ and the concomitant alignment with management have now become incorporated into habitus and doxa, are the practices and language associated with employee advocacy less available to HRPs, as Bourdieu’s theory would predict, and what implications might this have for HRPs’ bullying-related practices?

Whilst the published research in the previous section appears to support such a proposition, there is evidence from BPs’ discursive constructions of their role that they may recognise this conflict. For example, some BPs report feeling ‘guilty’ for having less time for employee interests, acknowledging that employee issues must be constructed within an economic discourse if they are to be taken seriously by management; they perceived that the pressure to be ‘strategic’ and ‘create value’ has removed their “‘permission’ to advocate employee interests” (Keegan & Francis, 2010, p. 20). Thus, whilst an increasing number of practitioners are eager to adopt a BP role, this is not without difficulty for some practitioners. Hope-Hailey et al. (2005) have suggested that this inherent tension in HRP roles from balancing management and employee interests might be mitigated by the final element of the CIPD’s professionalisation project: devolvement of HRM practice to managers, which includes employee advocacy. It is this devolvement that the next section addresses.

3.6 Devolvement of HRM Practice to Managers

The increased adoption of the BP role has been accompanied by the devolvement of many HRM practices to managers, such as recruitment, employee development, performance-management and employee advocacy (Caldwell, 2003; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Devolvement is central to the CIPD's professionalisation project: "HR business partnering can only flourish if line managers are willing and able to discharge their people management role: the two processes should be mutually supportive and need to go hand in hand" (CIPD, 2005b, p. 44). It is predicated on three related but conflicting premises. The first is the criticism from the managerialist perspective that HRM practice is too critical to be performed by HRPs and should reside with management. The other two premises emerge directly from the economic focus of contemporary HRM: organisational efficiency; that is, managers are closer to their employees, thus decision-time and cost can be reduced by consolidating HRM practices with other management activity (Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Renwick, 2003). Finally, Ulrich's (1997; 1998; Ulrich et al., 2008) assertions that managers own the responsibility for the execution of HRM practice and securing employee performance and engagement, whilst HRPs are responsible for architecting the policies and supporting the managers' delivery of the policy. However, rather than easing tensions, as Hope-Hailey et al. (2005) suggest, devolvement, and the premises on which it is based, appear to have created conflict between managers and HRPs.

Tensions have arisen in relationships between BPs and managers, particularly regarding the responsibility for HRM practices (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007). On the one hand, research with BPs suggests that they perceive managers as both unwilling to execute HRM tasks and lacking the necessary skills and knowledge when they do (Bond & Wise, 2003; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). Conversely, research on managers' perspectives suggests that, although managers acknowledge their insufficient expertise to deliver HRM tasks, they feel a lack of support from HRPs and, more importantly, that these HRM tasks distract managers from delivering their business objectives (Renwick, 2003; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Research on managers' actual execution of HRM practices suggests that both BPs' and managers' perspectives may hold some truth:

managers frequently appear to lack the skill, motivation, commitment and time to perform these tasks, which often conflict with their short-term business goals (Dany et al., 2008; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Marchington & Zagelmeyer, 2005).

Thus, it is not simply a case of skill or time pressure. Even when managers recognise the importance of these tasks, and are motivated and committed to delivering HRM responsibilities, including employee advocacy, they too report experiencing conflict and dissonance between delivering business targets and employee-focused HRM tasks. Business targets frequently take precedence over employee needs, because managers are typically measured and rewarded on business targets, not HRM objectives (McConville, 2006). Hence, rather than resolving the tensions inherent in BPs' business and employee focused roles, devolvement appears to have shifted this conflict from BPs to managers, and in doing so, has created additional conflict *between* BPs and managers. Furthermore, it appears that the devolvement of HRM practices to managers may have served to further obfuscate the responsibility for, and ownership of the employee advocacy role. It appears that, in general, neither BPs nor managers are providing sufficient employee advocacy, beyond procedural and legal compliance, because of the prioritisation of business objectives over employee concerns.

However, crucially for this thesis, it is proposed that the devolvement of two specific HRM practices, beyond employee advocacy, have potential implications for bullying: performance management and grievance processes, through which employees would raise a bullying claim. In Chapter 2 it was established that both targets and non-targets perceive performance management processes as organisational bullying (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001); that targets frequently report that their bullying experience began with an accusation of under-performance and subsequent performance-management from their manager (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2005); and that raising a bullying grievance was often followed by target-blaming and further bullying through the retaliatory use of performance-management and appraisals (Keashly, 2001; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009). Hence, we now consider performance-management and grievance practices in light of this devolvement and the established

rise in ‘performance-management’ cultures, and what implications these may have for HRPs’ response to bullying.

3.7 The Implications of Devolved HRM Practice for Bullying

The CIPD (2009d; 2010e) describe performance management as a strategic approach for organisations to manage their business, involving the effective management of individuals and teams to achieve high organisational performance. Typically, this involves setting employees targets and objectives that align with the goals of the organisation; appraising employees’ performance against these objectives; and identifying, monitoring and improving any underperformance in employees’ execution of their objectives (CIPD, 2009d). Furthermore, the CIPD (2010e, p. 1) states that “performance management is not owned and driven by the personnel function, but by management in general and individual managers in particular”; HRPs’ role is to help managers develop the processes and skills required to execute effective performance management.

However, research indicates that performance management is a task that managers neither like nor execute well (Redman, 2001), with managers often reporting that they are more concerned about the impact their decisions will have on others’ perceptions of their integrity and judgment (Harris, 2001). Furthermore, managers’ predominant focus on business targets raises the question of their objectivity when dealing with employee performance issues. For example, Renwick (2003, p. 274) found that managers adopt “strong characters” when executing performance management, giving employees “a hard time” because of their primary alignment to senior management, customers and shareholders. Furthermore, Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003) found that, whilst managers claimed that micro-management was ‘bad’ for employees, this is exactly what they did: micro-managed employees’ performance to meet organisational targets. These findings support Simpson and Cohen’s (2004) assertions, previously discussed, that the increase in performance-management cultures may be resulting in more autocratic and ‘strong’ management styles, and suggest that managers’ approach to performance management may be more influenced by meeting their business objectives and satisfying shareholders, than by a balanced consideration of the employee’s perspective.

With respect to employees' bullying claims, research suggests that managers are reluctant to conduct grievance processes because they are complex, time-consuming and may highlight a deficiency in their own management (Renwick, 2003). Managers also appear to lack the motivation and capability to deal with employee issues, perceiving them to be outside their main business objectives (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Teo, 2002). The implication is that both informal and formal bullying concerns may not be effectively investigated because of managers' reluctance and inability, which may, in part, help to explain employees' reported negative experiences of raising a bullying grievance. Furthermore, if HRPs have devolved the conflicting practices of employee advocacy, performance management and grievance processes to managers, it raises the question of who is protecting the employees' interests in performance-management and grievance situations?

This question is particularly important in relation to bullying for three reasons. Firstly, as established in Chapter 2, employees' accounts suggest that performance-management related practices appear to underpin many bullying claims (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2005; 2010a; Lee, 2000; 2002). Secondly, as established in this chapter, the combination of managers' strong emphasis on performance, and their dislike and lack of skill and 'tough' approach to performance-management (Redman, 2001; Renwick, 2003) may be contributing to employees' experience of bullying. Finally, this chapter has also established that the CIPD's professionalisation project has significant implications for HRPs' practices: the strong management alignment and focus on supporting performance-management within this project is evident in HRPs' constructions of their roles (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Keegan & Francis, 2010; Pritchard, 2010; Wright, 2008).

It is appropriate to consider this final point in light of the 'dilemma' research reviewed in Chapter 2, which examined the factors influencing HRPs' responses to other people-related issues (e.g., favouritism in recruitment, discrimination and harassment). The findings from this research suggested that HRPs' responses were influenced by their need to contribute financially to the organisation; that supporting employees was perceived as less important than supporting managers; and that an ethical consideration was a luxury (Fisher, 2000; Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson,

1999; Lovell, 2002; Macklin, 2006). Arguably, a similar management-alignment and economic focus is evident from the research on HRPs' role constructions reviewed in the current chapter, giving rise to a series of questions in relation to the aims of this thesis. Might such an alignment and focus be evident in HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying and, if so, what might the implications be for their bullying-related practice? Do HRPs balance their employee advocacy and business partner roles when responding to bullying and, if so, do they experience tension between these roles? More specifically, given the predominance of manager-to-employee bullying in the UK (e.g., Beale & Hoel, 2010), what might the implications of these roles be for HRPs' responses to bullying claims raised against managers? These questions will be addressed by the empirical study presented in this thesis.

In advance of Chapter 4, which examines the methodology for this thesis, the final section of this chapter will draw together themes from the first three chapters to consider the context within which HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying occur, and will restate the research questions that have developed from Chapters 1-3.

3.8 Summary of the Literature Reviews

The current chapter has examined HRM in the UK through the eyes of the CIPD's professionalisation project, which aims to improve the legitimacy and power of HRM as a profession by demonstrating its strategic and economic value to powerful organisational stakeholders. To achieve this, the CIPD has championed three key changes that have influenced HRPs' practices: the business partner role, devolvement of operational HRM practices to managers, and strategic HRM-management alignment. Empirical research reviewed in this chapter suggests that these changes within HRM's professionalisation project are having a substantive impact on HRP practice in the UK. This project appears to have reinforced a strong management alignment, particularly through its focus on the BP role, and an apparent concomitant reduction in employee advocacy.

Furthermore, in Chapter 1, it was discussed that changes in the socio-economic context of organisations appear to have strengthened the dominant discourse of market managerialism, which may have increased the likelihood of more aggressive and competitive performance-management cultures, and the potential adoption of stronger, more autocratic management styles. From the current chapter, it appears that the nature of HRM's professionalisation project is both embedded in and sustains this discourse and practice in organisations. The examination of the CIPD's professionalisation project suggests that economic and managerialist discourses have been inculcated into this project, intensified by the 'declared' HRM-performance link within the normative academic HRM research. In attempting to create closure of their professional field, the published research discussed in this chapter suggests that practitioners now draw upon these discourses to socially construct their role as a 'strategic' and 'economically valuable' management 'partner', endorsing the imperative of supporting the manager in achieving high employee performance, in order to create a shared understanding of their value in the eyes of management.

Concomitantly, this published research on HRPs' role perceptions also suggests that, by constructing their role within economic and management discourses as a management 'partner', practitioners now perceive the role of employee advocacy as 'weak' and 'ineffectual'; the language of care, necessary for employee advocacy, appears to have been diminished. Coupled with the devolvement of employee advocacy to managers, these empirical studies suggest that the potential risk might be that neither HRPs nor managers are protecting the interests of employees, particularly in grievance and performance-management practices. If so, what might the implications be for HRPs' bullying-related practices? This is an important question in light of the published research with targets, reviewed in Chapter 2, which suggests that bullying claims are often related to managers' performance-management practices, and that managers also control the grievance process that provides the route for employee voice in situations they perceive as bullying. However, the published research examined within Chapters 2 and 3 also suggests that there may be complexity within HRPs' management-alignment. Both the 'dilemma' research and the HRPs' narratives on employee advocacy suggest that *some* HRPs experience

dissonance in balancing their management-alignment with employee interests. How might this dissonance influence HRPs' responses to bullying?

Together, these bodies of literature raise further pertinent questions for this thesis. Might the management alignment and focus on supporting managers' performance-management practices and organisational profitability, empirically evidenced in HRPs' role constructions in this chapter, be factors that influence HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying? How might HRPs construct their roles in terms of 'partnering' managers or employee advocacy when responding to bullying? These questions are also important, because Lewis & Rayner (2003) have suggested that the management assumptions and legal obligations underpinning HRM may have resulted in HRPs implicitly condoning bullying by failing to challenge the associated behaviours, or worse, that management-aligned HRM may itself be a form of bullying.

However, as established in Chapter 2, whilst we currently know very little about how HRPs construct and respond to bullying, based on the review of the literature, three questions were raised for this thesis. Firstly, might HRPs construct bullying as an individual and interpersonal issue due to the influence of the dominant academic bullying literature and the guidance from ACAS and CIPD? Secondly, based on the research of employees' and targets' accounts of bullying, do HRPs hold different constructions of bullying to employees? More specifically, this previous research suggests that employees hold a construction of 'organisational bullying' in addition to interpersonal bullying; hence, do HRPs hold similar constructions of both interpersonal and organisational bullying? Thirdly, are HRPs responses to bullying influenced by the factors that have emerged from the published research on HRPs' responses to similar people-related 'dilemmas'? That is, are HRPs bullying-related practices influenced by the HRPs' own personal values; the relative power of HRM and the individual HRP, and the processes by which HRPs attempt to manage this power; the need to contribute financially to the organisation; the pressure to meet senior management requirements; and a fear for their own position? These questions will be considered within the empirical study of this thesis.

Based on the literatures reviewed in the first three chapters, how might the questions raised be approached within the Bourdieusian framework of this thesis? Firstly, the published findings on HRPs' role perceptions, suggest that BPs construct their role as 'different' and 'more valuable' than generalist practitioners. Does constructing their role as a management 'partner' serve as a form of symbolic capital for HRPs, which they are able to use as a means of position-taking to manage their power in relation to managers? Has this construction of a management-aligned 'partner' role, with its focus on supporting managers and the organisation, become incorporated into professional habitus? Secondly, the literatures reviewed in these chapters suggest that the 'management speak' language of 'strong management, toughness and targets' is used by managers, HRPs, employees, the CIPD and academics. Has this language become incorporated into organisational doxa, and how might HRPs use this language when constructing and interpreting bullying?

Lastly, the published research on HRPs' role constructions and responses to 'dilemmas' suggest that some HRPs may experience tension in balancing management and employee interests. Do HRPs experience such tensions when responding to bullying, and what factors might influence whether or not HRPs experience these tensions? Might HRPs' responses to bullying be influenced by an interaction between their values in habitus, the structures of their professional habitus, their relative field position and capital, and their active position-taking to manage this capital? These questions, generated from applying Bourdieu's theory to these literature reviews, provide potential routes for exploring the empirical data central to this thesis. From this Bourdieusian perspective, the potential relationships and influences between the socio-economic, organisational and professional discourses, discussed in these chapters, and the HRPs' language, doxa, habitus and practices are suggested in Figure 3.

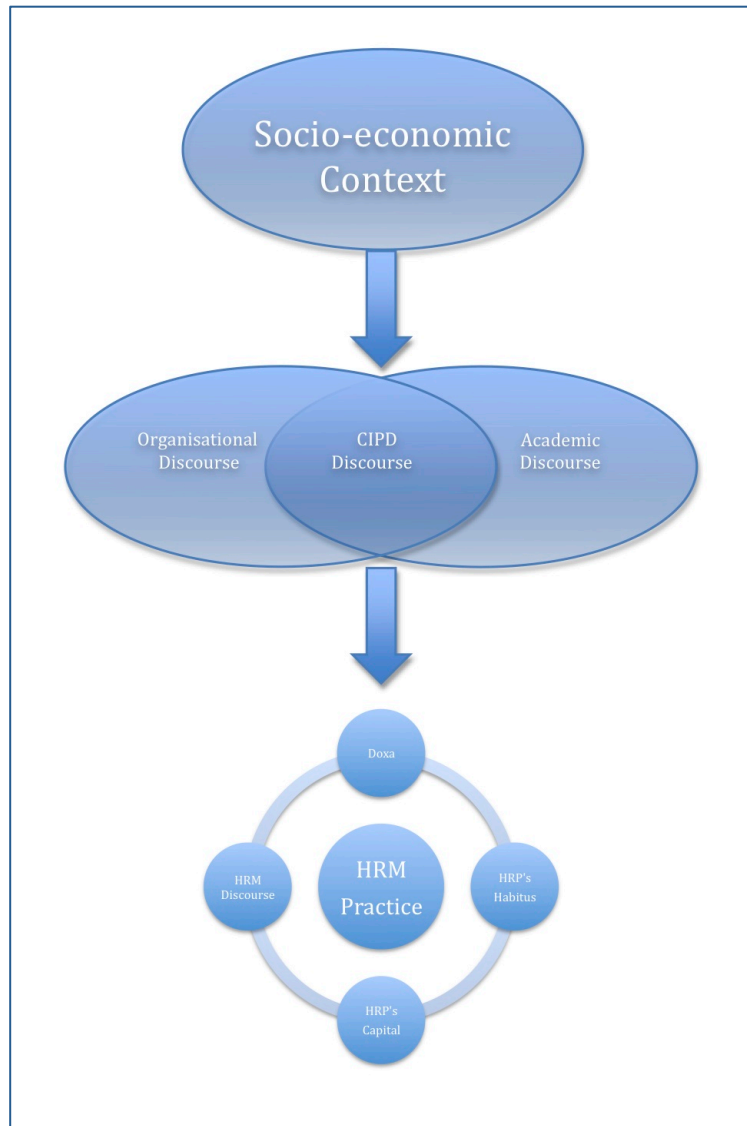


Figure 3: The Factors Influencing HRPs' Practice

Finally, in preparation for Chapter 4, which provides the methodological framework and research design and process of this thesis, Table 2 presents the questions that will be empirically addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. Firstly, this table states the two overarching research questions for this thesis and subsequently draws together the propositions that have been generated by the bodies of literature reviewed within the first three chapters. Thus, this table sets the context for the methodological discussion in Chapter 4, the empirical findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6, and the resulting discussion in Chapter 7.

Table 2: Empirical Research Questions for this Thesis

Overarching Research Questions	
	<i>How do human resource practitioners construct workplace bullying?</i>
	<i>What factors influence their interpretation and subsequent response to employees' bullying claims?</i>
Literature-based Supplementary Questions	
1	Do HRPs hold similar or dissimilar constructions of 'interpersonal' and 'organisational' bullying as those reported for employees and targets in previously published research?
2	Are 'fairness' and 'justice' elements of HRPs' constructions of bullying, and does the perception of these factors influence their responses?
3	What might be the importance or role of perpetrator 'intent' in HRPs' constructions of bullying?
4	Is the target's subjectivity an element of HRPs' constructs and interpretations of bullying and, if so, what role might target subjectivity play in determining HRPs' responses?
5	What discourses do HRPs draw on when constructing, interpreting and responding to bullying? Are the discourses of market managerialism, performance and HRM professionalisation evident in their bullying-related language? Do HRPs draw on a discourse of employee advocacy?
6	How do HRPs construct their roles when responding to bullying? Do they construct their role as one of management 'partner' or employee advocate?
7	Do HRPs experience tensions between management and employee interests when responding to bullying? What factors might influence whether or not HRPs experience these tensions?
8	Are HRPs responses to bullying influenced by the factors that have emerged from the published research on HRPs' responses to 'dilemmas'; that is, HRPs' own personal values; the relative power of HRM and the individual HRP, and the processes by which HRPs attempt to manage this power; the need to contribute financially to the organisation; the pressure to meet senior management requirements; and a fear for their own position? Do HRPs engage in position-taking when responding to bullying?
9	What influence might an HRP's individual habitus, professional habitus, relative field position and capital, and active position-taking have on their response to bullying?

Chapter 4: Methodological Assumptions and Process

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will establish that Bourdieu's framework, provided in Chapter 1, critical realism and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) form a cohesive theoretical approach for examining the factors influencing HRPs' constructions and response to bullying, and for considering the questions that have emerged from the literature reviews, presented at the close of Chapter 3. This current chapter will present the theoretical and epistemological reasons for the methodological choices regarding the design and research process for the empirical part of this thesis. In summary, as introduced in Chapter 1, the aims of this thesis are not only to develop our understanding on *how* HRPs might construct and respond to bullying, but also *why* they may be reluctant to label bullying behaviours as 'bullying' (Harrington, 2005). Thus, an exploratory, qualitative interview-based methodology was chosen because it provides the means for examining how individuals might construct the meaning of a particular phenomenon, in this case bullying (Riley, Sims-Schouten, & Willig, 2007; Willig, 2008a). Furthermore, because little is known about what factors might influence HRPs' bullying related-practices, the research design is predominantly inductive. However, as will be explained, the design involved an iterative analysis process; that is, themes that emerged inductively from the data were reapplied in subsequent iterations of the analysis to further confirm or disconfirm their presence in the data.

Thus, because the nature of this empirical study is both exploratory and qualitative, this chapter will also include a section that discusses evaluating the validity of such research. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1, reflexivity is central to both Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992) and critical qualitative research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). That is, the researcher is viewed as an active and constitutive part of all stages of the research process and knowledge creation, and should, thus, remain critical of their own subjectivity and influence on the research process (Bott, 2010; Reason, 1988). Hence, this chapter will include explanations for the choices and decisions made during the process, ending with a reflexive account of conducting the research for this thesis.

Before turning to these issues, this chapter will begin by examining how this empirical study extends the previous application of Bourdieu's tools of practice within organisational research and, thus, how this thesis provides a methodological contribution.

4.2 Extending the Application of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

In Chapter 1, Bourdieu's framework was expounded as a means of exploring the individual, organisational, interpersonal, professional and social factors that may determine how an HRP constructs, interprets and responds to bullying. This section examines how this thesis is extending previous applications of Bourdieu's theory in order to do this.

In a recent theoretical paper, Emirbayer and Johnson (2008, p. 25) propose a methodology for a structured analysis of a single *organisation-as-field*; viewing the organisation as a "space of struggle for organizational power" in which field members might use their various forms of capital in the 'battle' to decide who might determine organisational policy and practices. Drawing on Bourdieu (2005), Emirbayer and Johnson theorise that, because economic capital is legitimised as valuable in organisations, the field members who typically control organisational policy and practices are likely to be those with economic capital underpinning their symbolic capital. Hence, Emirbayer and Johnson suggest that an analysis of the interaction between habitus, the structures and capital that determine field positions, and individuals' position-taking may provide an understanding of the perpetuation of organisational *practices*. In particular, they suggest Bourdieu's theory may provide the means for examining organisational practices that might serve as "subtle, insidious, and even invisible mechanisms" that may deprive organisational members of the ability to take "transformative action" and of having a voice, particularly against practices that may be underpinned by powerful economic organisational discourses. Emirbayer and Johnson suggest that these discourses might perpetuate organisational practices that potentially serve to protect the power of the dominant field members, through symbolic violence and the muted complicity of the less

powerful¹³. Thus, Emirbayer and Johnson theorise that, through its practices, “organizational life produces individuals predisposed to perceive, feel towards, and act within organizations in ways that conserve the power” of dominant field members (p. 30). Bourdieu (2001, p. 1) calls this the “paradox of doxa”; that is, through the means of symbolic violence, the accepted taken-for-granted order of the world, doxa, may create conditions where “the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural”.

The purpose of the above analysis is that previously published empirical research on bullying, reviewed in Chapter 2, suggests that the nature and possible role of power specifically in relation to bullying should be explicitly considered within this thesis. For example, in the ‘dilemma’ research, HRPs’ reported feelings of powerlessness and pressure from senior management when responding to people-related dilemmas (Fisher, 2000; Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson, 1999; Lovell, 2002; Macklin, 2006), and employees reported a lack of voice in situations that they perceive as bullying (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). Thus, power and the potential imbalances of power between organisational field members might be possible influences on HRPs’ bullying-related practices. Examination of this proposition requires a methodological extension of Emirbayer and Johnson’s (2008) proposed analysis of a single *organisation-as-field*, because HRPs and their bullying related-practices are situated within the both the organisational field *and* HRM professional field, which are, in turn, embedded within the broader socio-historical field. Furthermore, within this thesis, it is not the organisation-as-field that is the focus of the analysis: it is the HRPs’ bullying-related *practices*. Hence, the application of Bourdieu’s theory in this thesis will provide a unified and comprehensive analytical framework for examining HRPs’ bullying-related practices at the intersection of organisation-as-field and *profession-as-field*. That is, it will permit an examination of whether the constructs of habitus, field, capital, doxa and symbolic violence might provide a useful framework for exploring the multiple factors that may be influencing HRPs’ constructions of bullying and their related practices. It is this application of Bourdieu’s theory to social *practices* at the intersection of organisational and

¹³ See Section 1.4 for Bourdieu’s explanation for the mechanisms of this complicity.

professional fields that is extending previous uses of his theory in organisational research and, thus, provides a methodological contribution.

Furthermore, as the analysis of Bourdieu's theory in Chapter 1 has established, the taken-for-granted nature of doxa, the struggles for different forms of capital and the dominance exerted by symbolic violence are not transparent to organisational members: "It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). Thus, in applying Bourdieu's theory to this thesis, an analysis of the language used by HRPs, and the discourses that they draw upon, are critical considerations. Bourdieu argues that "it is impossible to elucidate any act of communication within the compass of linguistic analysis alone", and that to fully understand the social effect of language, analysis should include what is and what is not said, by whom and to whom, and *for what purpose* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 142). Hence, an analysis of HRPs' language should focus on what their language is *attempting to achieve* rather than what is actually spoken. As will be established in this chapter, CDA is a qualitative, language-focused methodology that will permit such an examination and, thus, the next section will begin presenting the rationale for integrating Bourdieu and CDA within this thesis.

4.3 An Analytical Framework for Exploring HRPs' Bullying Construction(s)

As established in Chapter 2, it seems that bullying means different things to different people: multiple constructions exist through the predominant and critical academic lenses, and those of organisations and employees. Whilst a generally accepted definition exists (Einarsen et al., 2003) in the predominant academic literature, Chapter 2 showed how non-targeted employees might interpret a range of interpersonal behaviours and organisational practices as bullying (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001), and that these practices are reported as the underlying cause of bullying by targets (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2005; 2009). Furthermore, even within the predominant academic view, bullying is recognised as "a subjective process of social reconstruction" (Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 12). As a practitioner and

through my MSc research (Harrington, 2005), I had observed that individuals construct bullying in different ways, and that HRPs' constructions might not align with organisational definitions. Together, these points suggest that the current operationalisation of bullying, which has emerged from predominantly positivist research, might not be capturing the breadth of how bullying is constructed by organisational members. A similar point has been made by other researchers within the field of bullying, who have suggested that findings from the commonly-used survey-based methodology might not be representing the complexity and contextualised nature of individuals' bullying-related experiences (Hoel & Beale, 2006; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Parzefall & Salin, 2010). Hence, for this exploratory study, a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate because it would provide a richer and more nuanced exploration of HRPs' constructions and interpretations of bullying.

A qualitative methodology that provides an examination of the social *purpose* of language and dialogue, in addition to what words are spoken and how, is also appropriate given Bourdieu's approach to language. He proposed that language is power-laden and individuals draw upon discourses because they yield a material or symbolic benefit (Bourdieu, 1991). Linguistic practices, argued Bourdieu, enable powerful organisational members to assert their view of the social world over other organisational members through the taken-for-granted nature of organisational doxa and associated language, and the influence these have on shaping and constraining employees' practices. Furthermore, the 'dilemma' research, reviewed in Chapter 2, suggests that the relative power of HRPs might be an important factor in understanding their bullying-related practices. Hence, as will be shown, CDA is a methodology that permits an explicit analysis of Bourdieu's view of language and power, providing the mechanism for exploring how practitioners might create, negotiate and represent their constructions of bullying.

Moreover, there is precedence within organisational research for combining Bourdieu's theory with CDA. For example, in an in-depth CDA analysis of job interviews, Scheuer (2003, p. 144) argues that Bourdieu's construct of habitus offers a mechanism for examining the relationship between language and wider social practices and, in doing so, provides the means for "strengthening the analysis of social

practice in CDA”. Likewise, in their analysis of how healthcare workers construct ‘the public’, Contandriopoulos, Denis & Langley (2004) used Bourdieu and CDA to examine how language may be used to reproduce the power relations that serve to maintain the dominance of more powerful groups, by allowing powerful individuals to impose their categorisation and view of what constitutes ‘the public’ on other, less powerful people. Hence, theoretically and empirically, there is strong rationale for combining Bourdieu and CDA within this thesis.

Thus, the choice of the theoretical and methodological approach for this thesis was based on the following suppositions:

- Individuals’ understandings of the world are constructed via social processes and linguistic interactions;
- Social constructions and interactions are influenced by the specific context in which they occur; the constraining influence of enduring social structures; the relative power of competing discourses; and the social and historical context in which all these are embedded;
- Social constructions and interpretations of the social world have meaning and implications for the practice of the individuals holding them.

Therefore, by focusing on HRPs’ language and discourse, the analysis will seek to understand the meaning of ‘bullying’ through their eyes, and the factors that might influence their construction, interpretation and response to bullying. Based on the reasoning outlined thus far, the following section will examine the rationale for adopting a critical realist approach over other interpretive frameworks.

4.4 From Social Constructionism to Critical Realism

The heterogeneous domain of qualitative research is plagued with paradigm wars in relation to epistemology and ontology (Alvesson et al., 2008), further complicated by the complex, overlapping and multi-faceted nature of competing methodological approaches, such as the variants of discourse analysis (Grant, Hardy, Osrick & Putnam, 2004). Moreover, complexity increases through the interchangeable and

conflicting use of terminology, such as ‘social constructionism’ and social constructionist’, for which there are no consensual definitions. Under these ‘terminological umbrellas’, both realist and relativist epistemological approaches are adopted (Coyle, 2007a; Parker, 1998). Both terms are now applied to many diverse theoretical approaches, such as postmodernism and discursive psychology, and underpin multiple methodologies, such as discourse analysis and grounded theory, leading some to argue that the term is more a statement of direction or epistemology than a discreet theoretical approach (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Coyle, 2007b). What is consistent across these approaches and methodologies is the assumption that social phenomena are socially mediated and discursively produced; that, therefore, multiple realities exist; and that the ‘social constructionist’ perspective is reflexive and critical (Hammersley, 2008).

However, where these approaches differ is in the importance they place on the meaning and implications of language and social constructions for individuals’ subjective experience; the degree to which social structures are assumed to have an enduring objective reality beyond human consciousness; and whether individuals and their social interactions are placed within their broader social and historical contexts (e.g. Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Willig, 1999; 2008a). Social constructionism/ist approaches that assume complete relativism have been criticised for negating individual agency (Burr, 1998), placing the individual in an historical and political vacuum (Willig, 1999), and collapsing ontology into epistemology by assuming that ‘language is reality’ (Reed, 2004). That is, relativist social constructionism views all social structures as discursively constructed. Such a perspective has been criticised by more realist approaches, because by subordinating enduring social structures, such as organisations, governments and schools, to the products of discourse their “impact on the discursive has been not just under-theorized, but effectively ignored” (Sims-Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007, p. 102).

Partly motivated by these concerns, critical realism, and its associated methods for CDA have developed as an approach to address the criticisms of relativist social constructionism (Fairclough, 2005; Reed, 2004; 2005; Willig, 1999) and the recent polarised choice between positivism and postmodernism evident in organisational

studies (Ackroyd, 2000). Based on the work of Bhaskar (1986), critical realists argue that, whilst multiple realities are socially mediated and constructed through discourse, there is a ‘real’ social world that exists independent of individuals’ perceptions of it; that is, “the social world is pre-constructed for any human being” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 922).

Furthermore, critical realists argue that the enduring social structures (e.g., organisations, management, teams) and mechanisms (e.g., paid work, managing, surveillance) of this pre-constructed social world are generative, causal and, hence, ‘real’ (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). That is, they shape individuals’ discursive constructions through the possibilities and constraints they create for individuals’ way-of-being and way-of-seeing. Discourses are one such mechanism, because they “enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when” (Willig, 2008a, p. 112). Discourses make certain subject positions possible, particularly through the way in which power relations are established and contested through discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). For example, in Keegan & Francis’ (2010) empirical research on how HR business partners construct their roles, reviewed in Chapter 3, they found that by constructing their role within a ‘business partner’ discourse, HRPs perceived their role as more ‘valuable’ than an HR generalist, but in doing so, the practices associated with employee advocacy had become less ‘desirable’ and ‘permissible’ within their construction of the BP role. Thus, social structures and mechanisms, including discourses and their relative power, influence individuals’ subjectivity, social practice and discursive construction of social events within a dialectical and dynamic relationship (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007; Willig, 1999).

Critical realism, therefore, assumes a stratified ontology, which distinguishes between the constructed nature of subjectivity, practice and agency of individuals, and the ‘real’ and enduring nature of the social structures and mechanisms (Fairclough, 2005). However, whilst structures and mechanisms are assumed to have a causal and generative reality, independent of human perception, they are not directly accessible to experience. They need to be understood through the way that individuals construct the events they produce (Reed, 2005); hence, “they can only be known through the phenomena that they generate” (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 105). Because this

relationship is dialectical and dynamic, it is neither direct nor linear: the interests of the individual and the situational, social and historical contexts all influence individuals' social constructions. Thus, enduring social conditions determine both possibilities and constraints on individuals' ways of perceiving and behaving, resulting in multiple discursive constructions, which are grounded in, but do not directly reflect, the underlying structures (Willig, 1999).

By using established social theories, critical realists thus attempt to explain how these underlying structures and mechanisms influence events, subjectivities and practices: by assuming an enduring reality for structures and mechanisms, critical realism attempts to provide the potential to effect change (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). From this perspective, causality cannot therefore be reduced to positivist statistical generalisations of observed events, or to the actual discursive practices individuals use, as argued by postmodern and discursive psychological approaches (Reed, 2005).

However, critical realism is not without its critics. For example, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) argue that it over-claims the nature of reality and, in doing so, attempts to categorise objects that are, in fact, discursively constructed, such as 'employee' and 'manager'. Critical realism would argue that such roles do have an enduring existence in the organisational world, in that there will be commonalities across the discursive constructions of similarly situated individuals. Thus, the focus of analysis is the way that an individual perceives them, within their organisational and social context, and the implications this perception has for their practice and subjectivity (Willig, 2000). Furthermore, Alvesson and Skoldberg argue that terms such as 'structure' and 'mechanism' are poorly defined and, at best, descriptive. Critical realists would counter this by arguing that the aim is not to provide prescriptive definitions of these concepts; rather that, through discursive analysis, it might be possible to understand the influence of social structures on individuals' interpretive mechanisms, their ways of perceiving and thinking, which individuals use to construct the meaning of the social world and behaviour within it (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). As the next section will establish, CDA provides the means for examining the structures and mechanisms that may underpin individuals' constructions of the research phenomena,

hence providing insight into the ‘reality’ of similarly situated individuals. Thus, whilst acknowledging such criticisms, there are nonetheless five main advantages from adopting a critical realist approach for this thesis.

1. It enables analysis that considers *why* individuals draw on particular discourses, why some discourses are more or less available, how these discourses influence individuals’ discursive practices, and how individuals’ actions influence the structures in their environment (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). Hence, it may be possible to examine which discourses are influencing HRPs’ interpretations of bullying, and the implications of these constructions for HRP practice when responding to bullying in their organisational environment.
2. Critical realism situates individuals in their specific context, which is socially and historically located (Willig, 1999). Hence, the analysis will be able to consider the broader socio-economic influences, discussed in Chapter 1, on HRPs’ practices in relation to bullying, and the potential influence of HRM’s professionalisation project, discussed in Chapter 3.
3. Situating the individual in the above way provides a more ethical approach to research: compared to approaches that reduce individuals subjective experience to its discursive elements, critical realism places emphasis on the individual’s subjectivity and agency, and accords meaning to the tensions and contradictions of their experience, (Riley et al., 2007). Hence, the analysis will be able to examine the implications that competing discourses may have for the subjective experience of HRPs, according meaning and value to their lived experience. This point will be returned to when the ethical considerations of this study are discussed later in the chapter.
4. In assuming that human agency is both influenced by and, in turn, influences underlying structures and mechanisms, “critical realism aims at explanation” (Fairclough, 2005, pp. 922-923); that is, how structures and agency have contingent effects on social practices and events. Furthermore, in seeking this explanation, critical realists argue that relevant theoretical and research literature should inform both research questions and the interpretation of

analysis; thus, situating new research findings within an established body of literature. Therefore, this approach creates the opportunity to generate findings and interpretations that have potential explanatory power for both academics and practitioners.

5. In terms of justifying the rationale for integrating Bourdieu, critical realism and CDA within this thesis, Bourdieu's work is drawn on significantly by the main proponents of this approach (e.g., Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992; 1995; 2001; 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001). In particular, Bourdieu's theory has shaped the way in which the power of discourse is considered and affected through symbolic violence (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001); how the structure of the social world may be conceptualised as a network of fields (Fairclough, 2001); and how "objects of research" are constructed and situated in the broader socio-historical context (Fairclough, 2005, p. 927). Hence, for this thesis, there is a clear and established link between Bourdieu, critical realism and CDA, to which the next section will now turn.

4.5 From Critical Realism to Critical Discourse Analysis

As a method for analysing textual data, there are many forms of discourse analysis (DA), using a range of methodological and interpretive techniques. Willig (2008a) argues that these may be categorised into two broad approaches to DA, based on epistemology, the purpose ascribed to language, and the type of research questions generated. Table 3 provides a comparison between these two forms of DA, drawn from Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Wiggins & Potter, 2008; Willig, 2008a.

Table 3: Comparison of Discursive Psychology Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Element	Discursive Psychology Discourse Analysis (DPDA)	Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
Epistemology	Social phenomena are socially mediated and discursively produced, therefore, multiple realities exist. Social structures are purposively constituted in the immediate text: Social constructionist and predominantly relativist.	Social phenomena are socially mediated and discursively produced; that, therefore, multiple realities exist. Social structures mediate between constructions and practices: Social constructionist and predominantly realist.
Appropriate Research Questions	How do people use discursive practices and interpretive repertoires to achieve personal objectives in linguistic interaction?	What types of objects and subjectivities are constructed through the use of language and discourse; what ways-of-being are made available; what are the implications for social practice?
View of interviews	Problematic: they are instances of individuals using their discursive practices and repertoires to achieve their interests.	Useful for exploring an individual's subjectivity and the implications of the way they construct objects on their social practice.
View of discourse	Constructed and constructive; situated in the order of the text and the immediate situation; action oriented; a tool for individuals to manage their linguistic interactions.	Situated in situational, social and historical contexts. Discourse constructs objects, ways-of-seeing and ways-of-being (subjectivity), making specific subject positions possible. Dominant discourses implicated in power relationships and can become 'common-sense'.
Point of Focus	The interaction/text within its immediate context; broader social and historical context is generally not considered; how realities are constructed by text as action.	The immediate interaction within the context of the institution, its social structures, and the broader social and historical context.
Role of researcher	Social research requires the analysis of discourse. Researcher is active in the construction of knowledge.	Social research requires the analysis of discourse. Researcher is active in the construction of knowledge.
Influences of social structures	One-directional; how reference to social structures is used by the individual to achieve their objectives in the text. How culture is constituted through discourse.	Bi-directional; social structures mediate the construction of objects and subjectivities through discourse; these constructions influence practice, which has implications for social structures.
Meaning to individual	How languages serves their interests in the immediate interaction.	What subjective experience is constructed for the individual through their use of language.

Firstly, discursive psychology discourse analysis (DPDA, e.g., Wetherall, 2001a) adopts a relativist and deconstructive approach to DA, viewing discourse as a social practice that both represents and constructs the social world. It seeks to examine *how* individuals use discursive practices to meet their interests and objectives in the immediate text (e.g., a document, email or conversation) based on their ‘footing’ or subject position (e.g., manager, employee, sick person, victim) and their ‘stake’ in the text (Wetherall, 2001b). The focus is on the construction, function and consequences of language itself and its discursive organisation (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). The subjective experience of the individual is positioned as a discursive resource that individuals draw upon when managing their linguistic social practices, e.g., “micro-management makes me feel disempowered” helps the individual to position themselves as a ‘victim’. Hence, the discursive reductionism of DPDA has been accused of ‘losing the person’ by positioning subjectivity as a ‘tool’ rather than as a research focus in its own right (Butt & Langdrige, 2003). Furthermore, whilst DPDA acknowledges that individuals’ discursive practices “take on the discourses of our culture” (Wetherall, 2001b, p. 24), its focus on the immediate context of the text typically disregards the broader social and historical context in which it occurred (Willig, 2008a).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the aims of this thesis are not only to explore *how* HRPs construct, interpret and respond to bullying, but also *why*. Thus DPDA is not deemed an appropriate method of analysis for three reasons: it focuses on how language is used, not why; it does not provide a means for examining the HRPs’ subjectivities, only how they might use their subjectivity within their dialogue; and it does not permit an examination of the broader contexts within which HRPs are embedded beyond the interview setting.

The second approach is CDA, which is strongly associated with a critical realist approach (Fairclough, 2005; Riley et al., 2007; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). Here, discourses are viewed as means of creating both objects and subject positions for individuals, positions that facilitate or constrain what can be said or done from that position (Parker, 1992). Discourses are located within socio-historical contexts in which dominant discourses, e.g., capitalism, become ‘taken-for-granted’ and a means

for legitimating social structures and power relations by determining ways-of-seeing and way-of-being (Willig, 2008b). Individual subjectivity is not simply a resource that individuals use in their discourse: subjectivity is influenced by the subject positions created via discourse and, hence, it is a focus for analysis. Thus, by situating individuals in their broader socio-historical contexts, CDA allows an exploration of *why* individuals draw on a range of discourses, and how these might influence their subjective experience and practice. Hence, in light of the discussion in Chapter 1 on the implications that recent socio-economic changes might have for organisations in relation to bullying, the situated nature of CDA is appropriate for this thesis because it provides a means for examining these broader contextual implications. Furthermore, CDA has been used within Bourdieusian analyses of organisational behaviour (e.g., Contandriopoulos et al., 2004; Scheuer, 2003), and for exploring the roles and practices of HR practitioners (e.g., Francis, 2002; Keegan & Francis, 2010). Thus, it seems that CDA is an appropriate methodology for examining the multilevel factors that may be influencing HRPs' construction, interpretation and response to bullying. Having discussed the rationale for adopting CDA for the analysis in this thesis, the next section focuses on the final choice: the actual CDA method.

4.5.1 The Choice of CDA Method

Fairclough's (2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) CDA methodology has developed within a critical realist perspective and provides a detailed and multi-level analysis of discourses, including the subject position of the individuals, the role of power and the influence of the broader socio-historical context. However, it is strongly influenced by sociolinguistics and involves an in-depth analysis of the formal properties of the text, e.g., sentence types, grammar and modality (Fairclough, 2001). In contrast, Willig's (2008a; 2008b) method for CDA, based on the work of Foucault (e.g., 1990), primarily seeks to understand the discursive world of individuals, and the implications for practice and subjectivity; that is, 'what is it like to be an HRP dealing with bullying cases?' Hence, this latter approach provides a more appropriate CDA method for the 'big' exploratory research questions of this thesis.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there is no set procedure for conducting CDA (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008), and multiple alternatives are offered (e.g., Kendall &

Wickham, 1999; Parker, 1992; Van Dijk, 2001; Walton, 2007), Carla Willig's (2008a; 2008b) six-stage process provides an effective structure for the research questions of this thesis, as will be illustrated in Table 4. Multi-level analysis of the data is achieved through the following six stages; for clarity, the descriptions have been made relevant to this thesis:

Stage 1: Discursive Constructions: This involves examining how bullying and HRM roles are being constructed. This includes explicit reference (e.g., use of words such as 'bullying' or 'business partner') and implicitly, through the use of metaphorical language, which Bourdieu would call euphemisms (e.g., 'autocratic management' or 'pink and fluffy', which is a metaphor for welfare-based personnel management).

Stage 2: Discourses: Once the different bullying and role constructions have been identified, they are examined for differences and similarities, particularly the broader discourses that have been used in their construction, e.g., the economic climate, HRM professionalisation, duty of care.

Stage 3: Action Orientation: This stage involves examining the contexts in which the bullying and role constructions have been used, and considering what the HRP may gain from using a particular construction in relation to their other constructions; that is, what might that particular construction be achieving for the HRP, e.g., constructing the HRP role as a 'business partner' may serve to enhance the HRP-manager relationship; constructing bullying as a 'personality clash' may serve to locate responsibility for resolution with the individuals involved.

Stage 4: Positionings: Having identified the various constructions of bullying and HRP roles and the constitutive discourses, this step examines the subject positions that have been created for the HRP. For example, by constructing bullying as a 'personality clash', the HRP maybe positioned as a 'mediator'.

Stage 5: Practice: This examines the relationship between discourse and practice: based on the subject positions created through discourse, what actions are facilitated and constrained; what ways-of-seeing and ways-of-being are open and closed to the HRP? For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, by constructing their role as a 'business partner', acting as an 'employee advocate' may be less available to the HRP.

Stage 6: Subjectivity: Finally, the relationship between discourse and subjectivity is examined: stage 5 considers what can be said and done from the subject positions, and stage 6 focuses on what might be felt, thought and experienced from these positions. Again, if bullying is constructed as a ‘personality conflict’, the HRP may find it frustrating and irritating.

Thus, this model of CDA will, firstly, permit the exploration of the main research questions:

- How do human resource practitioners construct workplace bullying?
- What factors influence their interpretation and subsequent response to employees’ bullying claims?

Secondly, by applying each of these six stages of CDA to the empirical data, it will be possible to deconstruct these two ‘big’ questions into the following sub-questions, to permit a more detailed and nuanced analysis:

- How do HRPs construct bullying and which discourses do they draw on to create these constructs?
- How do HRPs construct their roles in to responding to bullying, and which discourses do they draw on to create these constructs?
- What mechanisms do HRPs use within these constructs to interpret bullying?
- What positions and practices become available and, thus, unavailable by these constructs and mechanisms?
- What is the nature of HRPs’ subjective experience of handling bullying cases?
- What purpose might these constructions of bullying serve for the HRPs in relation to handling bullying?

To further illustrate the function of each stage, how these sub-questions are made possible by these stages, and how this model of CDA will be appropriately applied to this thesis, Table 4 presents these six stages, showing the typical questions asked at each stage (2nd column), and how these translate into the specific questions for this thesis (3rd & 4th columns).

Table 4: The Six Stages of CDA and Related Questions

<i>CDA Stages</i>	<i>Purpose of Stage*</i>	<i>Questions for this thesis</i>	<i>Bourdiesian Analysis</i>
Discursive Constructions	How is the discursive object being constructed through language? What type of object is being constructed?	How are the HRPs constructing bullying and their role in responding to it? How are they talking about bullying and their role in responding to cases?	How are habitus, field and doxa influencing the construction? What individual, organisational, professional and social factors are reflected in the way HRPs talk about bullying and their role?
Discourses	What discourses are being drawn upon, and what are their relationships to each other? Which are dominant?	What organisational and broader discourses do HRPs draw upon when they talk about bullying? What are the relative strength, power and influences of these discourses?	What social, organisational and professional discourses are used? Whose perspectives are voiced? Whose is the dominant voice? What influence do these discourses have on the language, symbolic capital, position and position-taking of the HRPs?
Action Orientation	What do these constructions achieve for the individual? What are the functions of these constructions? What is the individual attempting to do?	What is gained by constructing bullying or their role in these ways? What function might the constructions serve the HRPs in their role when dealing with bullying? What are the HRPs attempting to do by talking about bullying in this way?	How do the language and constructions of the HRPs reflect their relative level and use of symbolic capital; how are they managing their credibility, position and relative power within the organisational field?
Positionings	What subject positions are made available through the discourses used?	What subject positions are made available to the HRP as a result of these constructions? What implications do these subject positions have for their role in responding to bullying?	What are the HRPs positions in the field, and what position-taking are they engaged in? How are the HRPs attempting to manage others' perceptions of their roles, value and position?
Practice	What actions are made possible by these constructions? What can and cannot be said and done from these subject positions?	What practices are available or closed off to the HRPs as a result of their constructions and positionings? What ways of talking are no longer available from these positions?	How are the HRPs' social practices made more or less available by their position and language?
Subjectivity	What can potentially be felt, thought and experienced from the subject positions created through these discourses and constructions?	What are the HRPs' subjective experiences of bullying and handling such cases as a result of their discursive constructions and positioning?	What is the relationship between HRPs' social practice and habitus? Does their social practice create hysteresis?

*These questions are drawn from Willig (2008a, p. 129).

4.5.2 The Rationale for Using Interview Data

Having provided the rationale for adopting a critical realist approach and CDA within a Bourdieusian framework, one final point needs clarification before progressing to the research design and process: the use of interviews. It is not the intention to examine this debate in detail, rather to recognise the issues and establish my position on the use of interview data. Interested readers are pointed to the ongoing debate between Griffin (2007) and Potter & Hepburn (2005, 2007); Roulston (2010); and Tanggaard (2009). This essence of this debate centres on the nature of the research interview, and whether the resulting text can be considered as a reflection of the interviewee's own 'reality' or whether, instead, it is a 'reality' constructed through the interaction between the researcher and interviewee within the interview context. On one side of the debate, proponents of DPDA, whilst acknowledging the difficulty of obtaining this form of data, argue that analysis should focus on naturally occurring texts, e.g., organisational documents, transcripts of grievance processes, and emails, rather than interview transcripts (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Wetherall, 2001b). This is because the interview is a specific form of interaction, and will be subject to a particular, interest-driven set of discursive practices.

Conversely, proponents of CDA argue that the aim of linguistic analysis is to examine the effects of discourse on the subjectivity and meaning to individuals. Hence, theoretically and practically, transcripts of semi-structured interviews provide data on how "ordinary people construct meaning in relation to a particular topic" (Riley et al., 2007; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007; Willig, 2008a, p. 114). Whilst I acknowledge that an interview provides an account that is co-constructed between interviewee and interviewer (Rapley, 2001), the active involvement of the interviewer can often lead to valuable data that might not have occurred without their engagement in this process (Griffin, 2007). Furthermore, one of the aims of CDA is to explore how individuals use language and discourse to construct their positions in relation to others (Stage 4 above); how the HRPs might do this in the interview setting may provide another layer to the data analysis. Whilst there is precedence for using interviews and CDA for exploring HRPs' interpretations of their roles (Francis, 2002; 2007; Francis & Keegan, 2006; Keegan & Francis, 2010), ultimately, the choice of data source should be determined by the research questions and the analytical approach (Willig, 2008a). Hence, I would contend that, based on the methodological rationale discussed thus far, interviews and focus group data on HRPs' experiences of handling bullying are appropriate for the research

questions of this thesis. Thus, the following section will now turn to the methodological design of this empirical study, commencing with the sample within this research.

4.6 Interviewees

This section will discuss the issues considered regarding sampling method and sample size before describing the interviewees who contributed to this thesis.

4.6.1 Sampling Considerations

The interviewees comprised a purposive sample, the defining feature being that “participants are selected according to predetermined criteria relevant to a particular research objective” (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 61). Hence, a purposive sample is driven by theory (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001; Patton, 2002): information-rich participants who are able to contribute to the phenomenon under study are selected, rather than, as with an opportunistic sample, because they are available and willing (Payne, 2007). Hence, for this thesis, participants were selected because they occupied HRM roles that involved dealing with bullying cases; non-HRM individuals and specialised roles, such as payroll and benefits, were excluded. This criterion provided homogeneity in terms of participants having experience of handling bullying. Selection also sought to balance the public and private sectors and represent the gender bias in the HRM profession (Ackah & Heaton, 2003). These criteria provided diversity across the organisational contexts in which bullying occurred. Together, these criteria provided a sample that was relevant, broad and informative for the research questions (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002; King, 2004). Participants were recruited via adverts in three local CIPD branches and through my own organisational contacts.

4.6.2 Sample Size Considerations

Whilst there is considerable debate regarding the sample size for qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 2000), it is argued that *participant* sample size lacks relevance for discourse analysis, because the ‘sample’ size is determined by the *discursive instances* of the phenomenon under study (Coyle, 2007b). The aim is to create compelling and justified arguments regarding the construction of the phenomenon, bullying, by moving beyond the specific instances of language to uncover discursive and interpretive themes, which can then be supported by particular discursive instances. Thus, it is the ongoing and iterative analysis

of the collected data that will help to determine the need for additional participants (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001; Wood & Kroger, 2000).

In this manner, it is argued that ‘saturation’ determines the number of participants. Saturation is reached at the point when further data do not add new insights or change to the emergent themes from the analysis (Guest et al., 2006; Strauss, 1987). Based on empirical analyses, Guest et al argue that, with a theoretically-defined purposive sample, this may be achieved after approximately twelve interviews. Furthermore, Wood & Kroger (2000) posit that discourse analysis is seeking neither the ‘truth’ nor exhaustive and comprehensive explanations; it seeks to provide arguments on how individuals are using language to reflect their interpretations. Thus, in this sense, saturation refers to a sufficient number of arguments to convey this ‘story’, and enough examples to justify that the arguments are well-grounded in the data. Whilst it is accepted that, “to the extent that each life is unique, no data are ever truly saturated” (Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007, p. 1400), saturation was used as a method for evaluating the final sample size in this thesis. The initial estimation was thirty interviews; however, as will be described subsequently, saturation, for the aim of this thesis, occurred after seventeen interviewees.

4.6.3 Sample Description

A total of seventeen HRPs participated in the research; fourteen in one-to-one interviews, lasting between one and two hours, and three in a focus group, lasting two hours. Appendix 1 provides the demographics of the sample. The mean age of the interviewees was forty years, and the mean number of years of HRM experience was fifteen. This generally reflects a significant level of HRM practice across the sample: 15 of the 17 practitioners had between 10 and 29 years experience; however, there were 2 ‘outliers’, with 5 and under a year of experience. Twenty-three percent of the sample was male, reflecting the gender split of CIPD graduate membership (Ackah & Heaton, 2003). The sample represented both the public (n=8) and the private (n=9) sectors and, within these, a range of organisations were represented: Public: Further Education (2), Higher Education (3), Local Councils (2), Services (1); Private: Retail (5); Financial (3) and Distribution (1). Hence, it would be possible to explore whether similarities and differences emerged in the construction of and response to bullying between the sectors and types of organisations.

The interviewees occupied a range of different job roles; however, all were currently in positions that involved dealing with bullying cases. Interestingly, in light of the professionalisation debate in Chapter 3, only two defined their role as ‘HR Business Partner’ (PSM3, PSM6); however, the way in which all interviewees constructed their role in comparison to their job title will be examined in Chapter 5. Three interviewees occupied positions on the Board of their organisation (PSA3, PSM4, PSM6), although PSA3 and PSM6 were in interim positions. Twelve interviewees were member of the CIPD: Associate (1), Graduate (3), Chartered (6) and Fellow (2). Three were not members and two declined to answer this question. Seven interviewees occupied specific bullying roles, e.g., bullying & harassment officer, which is not reflected in their job titles (PSA11, PSA15, PSM1, PSM2, PSM5, FG1 & FG2).

4.7 Research Design and Process

This section will describe the three phases of the research, and the development of the materials and questions, and the process used across these phases.

An iterative approach was adopted for the development of the interview questions, data collection and analysis, because “tasks of exploration and inspection create a cycle in which discovery leads to attempts at verification which lead, in turn, to further exploration and new discoveries” (Liedtka, 1992, p. 175). That is, because no current research and theory exists on how HRPs construct and respond to bullying, this thesis is exploratory. Drawing on the process for grounded theory, this iterative approach involved returning to existing literature and theory during both data collection and analysis. Thus, there was a recursive process of data collection, coding and analysis (e.g., Charmaz, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 had provided some potential theorising on research questions, the approach to the analysis was ‘inductively’ *data-led* rather than commencing from the position of an established *a priori* framework. This process is represented in Figure 4. However, in approaching the analysis, I acknowledge that no analysis can ever be truly inductive because “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This point will be discussed in the reflexivity section at the end of this chapter.

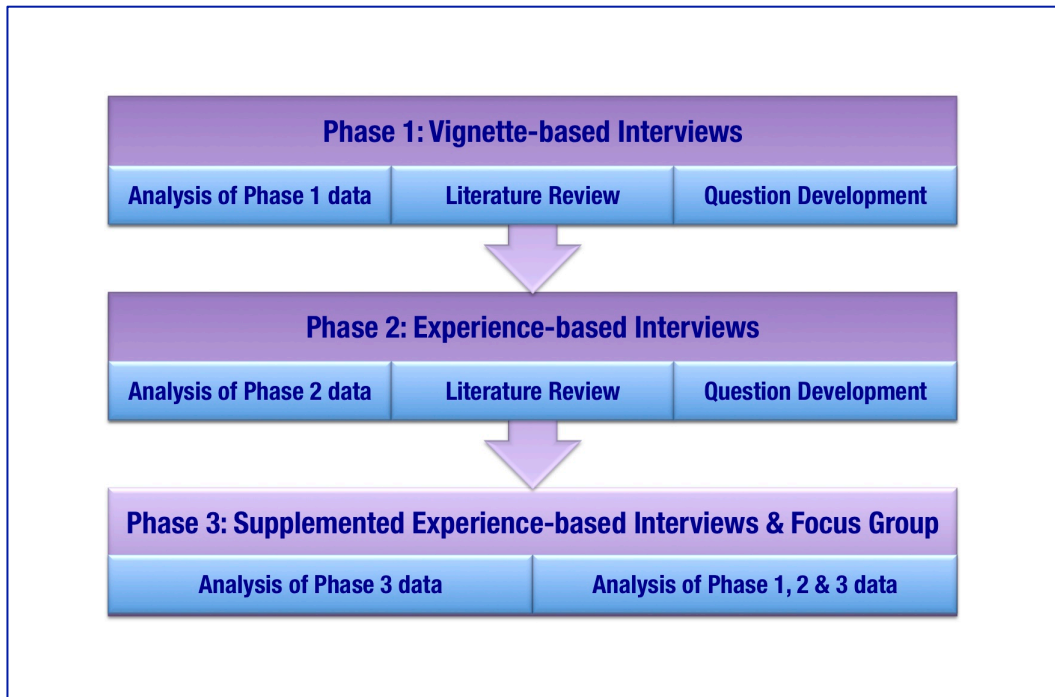


Figure 4: The Iterative and Recursive Design Process for Data Collection and Analysis

4.7.1 Phase One: Vignette Interviews

The findings from my MSc study, described in Chapter 1, suggested that HRPs were reluctant to label bullying, preferring to construct the behaviour within the discourse of management style (Harrington, 2005). One aim of this current thesis is to explore *why* this might be the case. Therefore, the first phase sought to examine how HRPs might interpret a situation that included bullying behaviours but which was not presented to them as ‘bullying’. What factors might they draw on when interpreting this situation; what might influence whether they do or do not label it as ‘bullying? Hence, for this phase, I chose to develop the vignette methodology and the subsequent open questions from Harrington (2005). Based on the analyses of these interviews, further questions would be developed for the second phase.

Construction of the Vignette

Phase one consisted of six interviews (participants PSA11-16) in which interviewees were presented with a vignette of a bullying situation, shown in Box 1. This was deemed appropriate for the theoretical, ontological and epistemological assumptions of this thesis and the topic: firstly, the aim of a vignette is not to replicate reality or allow the prediction of

behaviour, rather to explore the factors that may influence individuals' perceptions and social practices (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010). Hence, a vignette would provide the means for examining how HRP's constructed the meaning of the situation, and the discourses that they draw upon when determining a response to the situation. Secondly, because bullying can be a sensitive and distressing topic for interviewees (Hoel et al., 1999), a vignette provides the means for exploring sensitive topics unobtrusively; participants are able to discuss issues in the vignette from a non-personal, non-threatening perspective, whilst voluntarily introducing relevant personal experience (Hughes, 1998; Jenkins et al., 2010).

Although vignettes have been criticised for artificiality, lacking the complexity of 'real life' and eliciting socially desirable responses (Faia, 1979; Parkinson & Manstead, 1993), these may be addressed by ensuring that the vignette is relevant and realistic for the interviewees, and that sufficient information is provided on the context (Hughes & Huby, 2004).

Furthermore, ambiguity and incomplete information can encourage interviewees to elaborate their narratives with relevant personal experience (Barter & Renold, 2000). Asking the interviewees to assume multiple positions during their narrative can reduce social desirability (Hughes & Huby, 2002), which was adopted in the process: HRP's were asked how they thought the bully, target and bystanders might feel; what an HRP in that situation might think and do; and what they themselves might think and do if they were that HRP.

Furthermore, vignettes are a recognised and growing methodology for both interviews and focus groups (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Hughes, 1998), providing "a valuable technique for exploring people's perception, belief and meanings about specific situations" (Barter & Renold, 2000, p. 4). Vignettes are a recognised method for researching sensitive topics, such as drug addiction and HIV (Hughes, 1998), how social workers deal with abused children (Sheppard & Ryan, 2003) and patient care (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Moreover, this methodology has been used to examine the role of gender in bullying (Salin, in press), bullying constructions of managers and targets (Lewis, 2006), and how the related issue of sexual harassment is constructed (Smirles, 2004; Wayne, Riordan, & Thomas, 2001). Although, as discussed in Chapter 3, vignettes have been used for examining HRP's ethical decision-making processes (Mencl & May, 2009; Shacklock, 2006), these studies have used surveys and ratings of closed questions. Vignettes used in interviews with open questions are likely to provide richer data and reduce the likelihood of social desirability (Hughes, 1998;

Hughes & Huby, 2004; Sheppard & Ryan, 2003). Furthermore, one implication from Bourdieu's theory is that HRPs may be unaware of the nature and influence that organisational doxa and discourses might be having on their practice. Hence, exploratory interviews with open prompt questions were deemed more appropriate than using vignettes and structured questions within a survey.

The vignette in Box 1 was selected from Harrington (2005) for development because, as part of this original study it had been reviewed by three subject-matter experts (2 psychologists and an HR Manager), piloted on 2 HRPs and used within 20 interviews with HRPs and employees. In constructing this vignette, elements of generalised academic and practitioner definitions of bullying were incorporated (CIPD, 2005a; Einarsen et al., 2003), because, as established in Chapter 2, HRPs are likely to be familiar with these definitions. Based on the initial literature review, particularly the 'dilemma' research in Chapter 2, a series of open prompt questions were designed. These questions, and the rationale for asking them, are presented in Table 5. The aim was to explore whether and how multiple contexts, positions and emotions might influence the HRPs' interpretations of the vignette; hence, providing richer data by asking the interviewees to adopt multiple perspectives (Hughes & Huby, 2004).

For this phase, when recruiting interviewees, the purpose of the study was described as 'understanding how HRPs handle difficult interpersonal situations between employees at work'. Whilst it is acknowledged that this was a slight deception, it was deemed necessary and granted ethical approval because one aim of this phase was to explore whether HRPs labelled the vignette as bullying. This will be discussed in the section on ethics. A similar approach and rationale has been used to explore bullying, using vignettes positioned as 'conflict' rather than bullying (Salin, in press).

Prior to the interviews in all three phases, the purpose and nature of the research was explained to the interviewees by phone. Each was asked to set aside approximately ninety minutes, and interviews took place in a quiet office, either at the interviewee's place of work or my office. Informed consent was obtained from each interviewee before the interview, and all agreed for the discussion to be recorded using a digital voice recorder and small microphone for subsequent transcription (Appendix 2). Following each interview,

interviewees were thanked for their time in person, asked to complete a demographics form (Appendix 3), and a follow-up email was sent to each. No incentives were offered for participation, although all interviewees have been offered a summary of the findings. Immediately after each interview I recorded my reflections in a research diary, which was used as an *aide-memoire* during analysis.

Box 1: Vignette from Phase One

Sally, 32, has been with the organisation for 12 months. Based on her extensive experience in both sales and people management she was recruited into a team leader role within the European sales division. Her initial appraisal after 3 months was extremely positive and she successfully passed her probationary period. A month later there was a restructuring within the sales division and Mike, 47, took over as Sally's manager when his team was redeployed. Mike has been with the organisation for 19 years, working within a number of divisions.

Sally says she noticed a change at work almost immediately. She claims that Mike began to criticise her work most days. Initially this happened one to one, but gradually over the months it has began to occur in front of her colleagues, mostly by the use of sarcasm to make her look foolish. She says that Mike's public criticisms have now extended to the way she talks to her customers, the tidiness of her desk and her dress sense. She has also found out that he is keeping information from her that she needs to do her job. She recently made a mistake in the pricing of a new order because she hadn't seen the new sales procedures. It was only when a colleague sent her the relevant e-mail that she realised she had not been included on the mailing list. Twice the team has been out to celebrate a big sales win, and Sally says that she was not invited and only knew about it when a colleague asked her why she hadn't been there. The colleague told Sally that during the evening Mike was very disparaging of Sally's work in front of the team, and claimed that her CV must have been full of lies.

The final straw occurred this morning, which is when Sally decided to talk to HR. She had spent many hours working on a significant sales proposal that Mike needed this morning for a review meeting with the senior management team. She had worked very late yesterday evening to finish the report and left the hardcopies on Mike's desk for his meeting this morning. When Sally arrived at work today Mike came storming out of his office and proceeded to shout at Sally in front of the team. He claimed that she had failed to deliver the report, which meant that he had to go to the meeting unprepared for the review. He stated that she will now be on a formal performance improvement plan for a catalogue of poor work

Using the vignettes, the interviews for phase one took place during November 2007 to January 2008. At the beginning of the interview in this phase, volunteers were provided with an information sheet (Appendix 4). The vignette in Box 1 was then given to the interviewee. It was described as a “difficult interpersonal situation”, chosen as a sufficiently familiar phrase that would not prime thoughts of bullying, allowing the construct to potentially emerge as part of the sense-making process (Keashly, 2001; Liefvooghe & Olafsson, 1999). Interviewees were asked to read the scenario and to simply ‘think aloud’; that is, to verbalise the thoughts they were having as they read the story (Gilhooly & Green, 1996; Sheppard & Ryan, 2003). Once the interviewee indicated that they had no more to say, they were asked the prompt questions in Table 5. At the end of each interview, whilst still recording, I explained the full purpose of the study and explained why the word “bullying” had not been used from the start. There were no negative reactions from any interviewee, and this process generated some pertinent observations from interviewees, which were included within the analyses.

4.7.2 Phase 2: Experience-based Interviews

The analysis from phase one, described subsequently, informed the approach and questions for the second phase of six interviews with different HRPs (PSM1 to PSM6; the change in prefix was adopted to differentiate the vignette-based interviews from the experiential interviews). This analysis suggested that, whilst the vignette had given interviewees the opportunity to include personal experience, it was not providing rich enough data to answer some of the questions emerging from the analyses, such as *why* HRPs were constructing bullying within particular discourses, and at *which point* their interpretive frameworks were being activated. Hence, for this phase, the purpose of the study was fully transparent; it was described as ‘understanding how HRPs handle workplace bullying’ and the interviews focused on HRPs’ actual experiences of handling cases of bullying. The aim was to explore the influences and discourses that were salient for the individual interviewees’ own experiences, rather than the ones they used to interpret the vignette. Hence, a new interviewee information sheet was developed (Appendix 5). This also informed the interviewees that a different researcher would be transcribing the recording, the reasons for which are fully discussed in a later section.

Table 5: Phase One Post-Vignette Questions

Question	Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think is happening? • Why do you think it is happening? • How do you think that ‘Sally’ and ‘Mike’ feel? • How do you think the rest of the team would feel? • What do you think the impact would be? • What do you think the HR manager should do? Why? • Do you think this is the optimal course of action in this scenario? • What would you do if you were that HR Manager? Why? • How do you think you’d feel if you dealt with a situation like this? 	<p>These prompt questions were only asked if the interviewee had not covered these aspects.</p> <p>The aim was to encourage the interviewee to consider the perspectives each individual involved in the vignette, including how they might think & feel in that situation.</p>
<p>I’d now like you to imagine yourself outside of a work context and that someone that you care about, for example, a close friend or family member is experiencing Sally’s situation. What would your thoughts be?</p>	<p>The aim was to encourage the interviewee to adopt a different perspective, position and context, and to explore how this might influence their construction of the situation, particularly emotional salience, which had emerged as a factor in Harrington (2005).</p>
<p>I’d now like you to return to your first thoughts on Sally and Mike’s situation, and what you thought the HR manager should do. How would you feel if you were that HR manager and your decision was about to be published in People Management or a national newspaper?</p>	<p>Based on the ethical decision-making literature, public scrutiny may influence decision-making (Bell & Hughes-Jones, 2008). Hence, this question aimed to explore the impact of publicity within their peer group on participants’ interpretations.</p>
<p>When you deal with situations like Sally’s at work, do you think about behaviour at work from an ethical perspective?</p>	<p>This was asked if the interviewee had not mentioned ethics or morals in relation to behaviour at work and the response to such situations.</p>
<p>Did you at anytime think that the scenario was a situation of bullying?</p> <p>At which point did you think that?</p> <p>Why did you think that?</p> <p>Was there any reason why you didn’t call it bullying at the time?</p>	<p>These questions were only asked if the word ‘bullying’ had not emerged during the interview; the aim was to explore why they might have chosen not to label the behaviour bullying.</p>

The interview questions and prompts developed for phase two from the analysis of phase one were aimed at encouraging the interviewees to discuss their own experiences of handling bullying cases, what factors might influence their approach to bullying, and to adopt a number of perspectives when considering bullying (Box 2). It was acknowledged that interviewees might find it difficult to recall cases at the interview without prior notice and thought. Hence, a set of participant instructions was developed and sent to interviewees in advance of the discussion (Appendix 6).

All six interviews were conducted during January to March 2009. Based on interviewee feedback in phase one, I focused on improving the positioning, or ‘footing’ of the interviewer and interviewee (e.g., Goffman, 2001), because this appeared to be influencing the interview process; a point that is discussed in the reflexive section of this chapter. Part of this involved sending the interviewees the information sheet and consent form with the preparation sheet prior to the interview. Whilst the interview schedule in Box 2 was used to guide the discussion, because these were semi-structured interviews, the conversations were steered by what the interviewee was saying, allowing the interview to stray from the questions if appropriate.

Box 2: Phase Two Interview Questions

1. How often does the issue of bullying come into your work?
2. Can you describe to me what you consider workplace bullying to be?
[Explore: do you think employees and managers have a similar view of what workplace bullying is?]
3. Please would you describe a case you have handled where you feel that the outcome was as optimal as possible?
[Explore: what the outcome was, why they felt it was optimal, who was it optimal for, how could it have been even better]
4. Please would now do the same for a case that you have found particularly difficult or challenging?
[Explore: why was it difficult, how did it differ from the optimal case, how did their approach differ, has it changed their approach?]
5. If you think about the first case of bullying you handled and more recent cases, do you think your approach to handling bullying has changed?
[Explore: what has changed, why it changed, and whether there have been any specific influential cases; what are their immediate thoughts/feelings/reactions now when cases are brought to them?]
Prompt questions if these elements don't emerge in questions 3, 4 & 5:
 - a. *Do you ever need to balance any personal thoughts and feelings with your other responsibilities in circumstances of bullying? How?*
 - a. *Do other people influence you; for example, the individual reporting the bullying, the person who is accused of bullying, your manager, and other managers in your company? In What way?*
 - b. *Have you ever felt a conflict in loyalties or values?*
 - c. *Have you ever felt doubtful about the outcome of a case?*
6. If you were to take your “HR hat” off, how would you prefer to approach cases of bullying?
7. What guidance would you give a new HR practitioner on handling situations of reported bullying?

4.7.3 Phase 3: Supplemented Experience-based Interviews and Focus Group

As with the previous phase, the ongoing analysis of the data from PSM1 to PSM6 and recursive use of the literature were used to provide a final iteration of the questions and process for the focus group (FG1, 2 & 3) and the remaining two interviews (PSM7 & PSM8). Two key points had emerged that required further data for analysis:

1. Three consistent constructs for interpreting bullying had emerged across the interviews, and it appeared that the initial meeting, when an employee raised a case of bullying to the HRP, was crucial in determining which construct was used by the HRP. This seemed particularly important when the target was complaining about their manager; consistently, the interviewees had discussed that “something else must be going on” when an employee claimed their manager was bullying them. However, more data were required to further understand the importance and relevance of this first meeting.
2. Secondly, the analyses so far suggested that the constructs used by the HRP might serve multiple purposes, particularly in relation to role conflict and the relative power of HRM. Again, more data were required to elaborate this analysis.

Hence, the questions, materials and process for phase three were developed with the aim of gathering data on, firstly, the initial meeting, focusing on cases where the alleged bully was the target’s manager; and secondly, by exploring the interviewees’ perceptions of the three emergent bullying constructs, the potential reasons for how and why they use these constructs could be examined. Thus, illustrating the recursive, iterative process described at the beginning of this section on the research design.

Therefore, a scale based on the three bullying constructs was devised for the final phase (Appendix 7). This was used as a visual prompt with the interviewees for exploring the ways in which they perceived bullying and what factors might influence how they used these constructs. Secondly, a collection of depersonalised, decontextualised and anonymous quotes were selected from the previous interviews to illustrate how “other HRPs” had discussed three key aspects of handling bullying cases: a) how HRPs view their own role in bullying cases; b) how HRPs thought managers and employees perceived their role in bullying cases; and c) what HRPs’ thoughts were at that initial meeting (Appendix 8). The rationale was that, by presenting the remaining HRPs with the “voice of other HRPs”, the quotes may provide

the interviewees with ‘permission’ to voice thoughts that might otherwise feel less socially acceptable. The ethical consideration of using quotes will be discussed in a subsequent section. At certain points during the interview, the printed materials were provided to the interviewee whilst they were being asked particular questions. These were described as “other HRPs’ thoughts” from previous interviews. Finally, interview questions were developed for phase three to incorporate the scale and quotes, and to focus on the two points highlighted above. These questions are shown in Box 3.

A further observation was that, thus far, the interviewees were predominantly from the public sector. In consulting the literature, research has suggested that bullying may differ between the public and private sectors, and that this may be related to the differing impact of broader socio-economic factors between the sectors (e.g., Hoel & Beale, 2006). Hence, HRPs’ constructions of bullying might be influenced by the nature of their sector. To examine this possibility, private sector organisations were approached for the remaining interviews.

Furthermore, because the more direct nature of the bullying scale and quotes might feel threatening to individual interviewees, a small focus group (FG) was conducted before the remaining interviews. Whilst it is acknowledged that FG participants may withhold their opinions if they feel the risk is too high (Kaplowitz, 2000), FGs with peers can actually encourage fuller disclosure (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005), leading to richer and more informative data than interviews (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001). The three FG participants had offered to participate, either as a group or individually; hence, I decided to conduct the FG in order to explore the impact of using the scale and quotes before subsequent interviews. It transpired that, within both the FG and final interviews, the scale accelerated the conversation and was perceived as ‘familiar’ by the interviewees rather than threatening, a point that will be returned to in the reflexive section. The focus group and interviews took place during August and September 2009.

To enable the iterative and recursive process, described in at the beginning of this section, during each phase the recordings from the interviews were transcribed and coded after each interview, to permit concurrent analysis and data collection. It is to this process of transcribing and coding that the next section now turns.

Box 3: Phase Three Interview Questions

The numbered items are the main questions; the bulleted lists are prompt questions, which may be asked if the areas are not covered spontaneously by the interviewees.

1. How relevant is the issue of bullying for you here at [your organisation]?
2. What do you see your role as when an employee comes to you with a case of bullying?
[First set of quotes]
3. How do you think managers and employees see your role in cases of bullying? [Second set of quotes]
4. Is it difficult to handle bullying cases?
5. How do you tend to feel when handling bullying cases?
6. From the previous interviews, HR practitioners seem to assess bullying cases along a scale that looks something like this [Present scale]:
 - What are your thoughts on this scale? Are any parts unnecessary/is anything missing? Do you think that the cases you have dealt with fit into similar categories? Is it something that you might consciously use when assessing new cases?
 - What do you think this scale might look like to managers or employees?
 - How important is the deliberateness of the behaviour?
7. Using this scale, where do the cases where the manager is the alleged bully tend to fall?
8. Most of the people I have spoken to have said that when someone comes to them with a new claim of bullying, their first thought tends to be “there must be something else going on”. What are your thoughts? [Third set of quotes]
 - Have you always thought that?
 - Is it just for bullying that you think this?
 - Is it for particular types of cases?
 - Even if there is something else going on, might the employee still be feeling bullied? And might the “something else” be a result of bullying rather than the cause?
9. To date, none of the HR people I have spoken to have talked about cases of genuine bullying when the alleged bully is the manager. It almost seems that managers don’t tend to exhibit genuine bullying. [Fourth set of quotes]
 - Why do you think this might be?
 - Have you had cases when a manager has been genuinely bullying an employee?
10. Finally, I’d like you to take your HR hat off for a moment. Do you think you would handle bullying situations differently?

4.8 Preparation of Interview Data

Before describing the process, two particular issues regarding transcription require exploration in relation to the focus on language and the chosen method of CDA in this thesis: the nature of the act of transcribing, and the fullness of transcription.

It is argued that transcription is itself a social, interpretative and political act (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997). Interpretation begins in the interview, which is a dialogical relationship within a specific context between interviewee and interviewer (Denzin, 1995; Rapley, 2001). It continues through transcription, based on the researcher's decisions on how much to transcribe and whether to mark up aspects such as pauses, speed, intonation and non-verbal utterances (Bird, 2005; Bucholtz, 2007). It is argued that these decisions influence the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, analysis and interpretations (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), and the authenticity of representing the interviewee's voice (Searle & Silverman, 1997). Such decisions should reflect the researcher's theoretical approach, their research questions and an ethical consideration of representing the interviewees' voice (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Roberts, 1997).

For this thesis, CDA focuses specifically on language and how the speaker uses language in constructing meaning (Willig, 2000). Pauses, tripping over words and other utterances can provide insight into how the individual may be struggling to verbalise, or not verbalise, their thoughts (Harding, 2008). Hence, for CDA, it is important to transcribe the interviews verbatim, and to subsequently mark up instances of these verbal indicators. The transcription coding for these indicators was adapted from Silverman (2005) and Sims-Schouten et al., (2007) and is presented in Appendix 9. Whilst it is accepted that, even with coded verbatim transcriptions, a researcher can never fully capture the unique interaction of each interview and the interviewee's true voice (Denzin, 1995; Tilley, 2003a), the aim was to produce a representation that was as accurate, authentic and trustworthy as possible: in Bourdieu's words, to produce "the whole social person" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 54).

For phase one, I transcribed each interview, using a combination of two software packages: firstly, Express Scribe, which is transcription software that allows the use of a foot-pedal to speed up navigating the recording, particularly multiple rewinding to clarify a particular element. Secondly, Dragon Naturally Speaking, which is voice recognition software. Both are

recognised as techniques to reduce transcription time (Bird, 2005; MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004; Tilley, 2003b). Hence, transcription involved listening to the recording via headphones, repeating it into a microphone, and the voice recognition software converted it to print. This process reduced each transcription by approximately two hours. It is estimated that the software was 85-90% accurate after voice training and corrections were made immediately. On average, one hour of interview recording took six hours to transcribe. Once an interview was transcribed, I then re-listened to the interview, adding the mark-up language in Appendix 9 to the transcription. This process of re-listening rather than transcribing and coding simultaneously helps a researcher to become more familiar with the data, and to reflect on their interviewing style (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

The time taken to transcribe and mark-up each interview (approximately ten hours) was creating difficulties for the conducting concurrent analysis. Hence, for the remaining interviews (PSM4-PSM8 and FG), it was decided to use a transcription service, whilst I continued to mark-up the text subsequently. My Director of Studies approved this after consultation with the ethics committee, which is discussed within the ethics section. Use of transcription services is not uncommon in the literature, although accuracy can be an issue (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000; Tilley, 2003a; 2003b). Therefore, I checked each completed transcription against the audio recording, correcting any errors and completing any parts marked as inaudible where possible. Subsequently, I listened to the recording again and added the coding. Therefore, each recording was listened to in full at least twice, which helped me to gain a fuller understanding of the interviewee's voice (Bird, 2005).

Each marked-up transcript was loaded into a software package, NVivo 8, for managing the data analysis. The use of software is increasing in qualitative research, as a more flexible and efficient method for coding the data, managing the emerging themes, and making changes as a result of including subsequent data and analysis iterations (Bird, 2005; Travers, 2009). It is, however, no substitute for the researcher's analysis of the data. The decision was made to use NVivo 8 based on my previous experience of how challenging it is to manage a large amount of qualitative data. Hence, it provides a 'tool' to support the 'real analysis'.

4.9 Analysis

As discussed in the design section, because this research was exploratory, a concurrent and iterative approach was adopted for data collection and analysis, providing the opportunity to revisit the literature between each phase of the research. This process was shown previously in Figure 4 (p. 103).

At the interview level, the six stages of CDA were applied in two iterations across all the interviews for each specific phase: that is, analysis of the HRPs' discursive constructions, the discourses they drew upon, and their action orientation, positionings, practice and subjectivity (Table 4 on p. 98). This two-stage iteration process was adopted because it was too cognitively intensive to attempt to apply all six stages in a single iteration, and the choice was made to focus on specific aspects of the analysis in two separate iterations. Once all six stages had been applied, each interview was re-examined using the full thematic framework. This is represented in Figure 5.

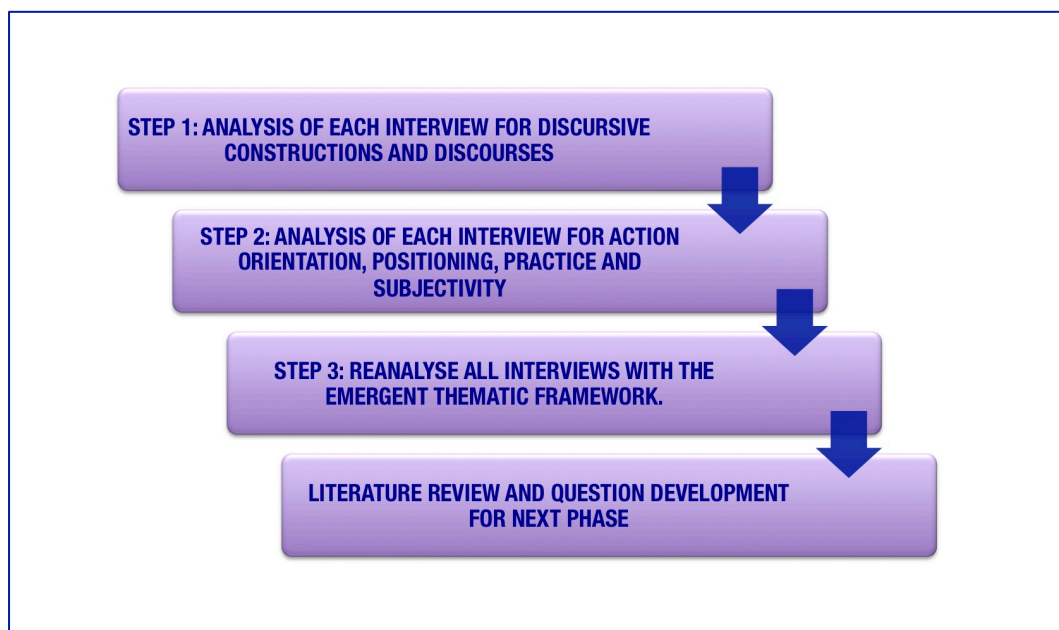


Figure 5: Analysis of Interviews using the Six Stages of CDA

4.9.1 Analysis Process

As previously described, the analysis of phase one was approached inductively with no *a priori* thematic framework. Thus, the initial analyses of the first few interviews resulted in a large number of themes that gradually began to emerge into a pattern, culminating in an early thematic framework (Table 6). This framework formed the basis for the analysis of phases

two and three; that is, phases two and three involved both inductive and deductive analysis. Whilst new and amended themes emerged from these phases, the data were also analysed for further instances of the themes that had emerged in phase one. The final thematic framework is shown in Table 7. The final table was used to re-examine all data. Hence, the findings will not present the analysis in phases; all data were finally considered as a single corpus so that similarities and differences, and instances of each theme could be drawn from all the interviews.

A line-by-line approach was taken for the analysis of each interview, and all data were examined; that is, analysis was not restricted to selected sections. Based on the aims of the six stages of analysis (Table 4), coding was applied to phrases and sentences that represented instances of each stage. Both the language and the way in which it was spoken were explored for an indication of the purpose it might be serving for the interviewee's construction of their role and bullying (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007).

For example, in the following excerpt, PSM3 had just been asked what factors would help her decide if a case was bullying. She avoids using the word 'bullying', calling it 'that word', and 'that terminology'. In the next sentence, her pauses (in seconds) indicate that she is taking fleeting 'thinking spaces' (Bollas, 1993) whilst deciding whether to use the word 'victim', which she then minimises with the use of the concessionary phrases 'as such' and 'sort of' (Lee, 1987). She also positions herself as 'we' all through her response, rather than 'I', suggesting that she is diminishing her own responsibility for her response by identifying with a collective 'we' (Harding, 2008). For PSM3, this 'we' was 'the organisation' rather than 'managers' or 'HRM'; her relationship with senior management, particularly the CEO, appeared to be an important aspect of her symbolic capital and, thus, credibility and status. Finally, her response provides examples of, firstly, the HRPs' consistent thought that "there must be something else going on" and, secondly, interpreting bullying through the lens of performance management. These findings are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

“When you are actually dealing with somebody, (1) unless they have actually used that word ↑ or that terminology, we, we, we would tend to steer away from it ↑. You tend to find the minute that you start talking about bullying then that, (1) if anything, if you've got a... (2) call them the victim as su::ch... (2) we tend to find,

(1) certainly in this industry, that (1) there are other issues going on with the people who then, sort of, raise, sort of, bullying allegations ↓ and that there is other stuff, (1) be it poor performance or something else.”

All coding was applied within NVivo 8, initially using ‘free’ nodes; that is, no theme hierarchy was applied. Once patterns, similarities and differences began to emerge across the interviews, the free nodes were organised into a hierarchy of tree nodes: this hierarchy is represented in the frameworks provided in Table 6 and Table 7. Throughout all stages of analyses, a coding diary was maintained, containing my ongoing reflections. Likewise, reflections from each interview’s analyses were noted in a separate coding log. These documents were used for the ongoing and final interpretation of the analyses.

Table 6: Thematic Framework from Phase One

First Level	Second Level	Third Level
Bullying Language		
	Negative Adjectives	
	Sanitising and minimisation	
Experience of Handling Bullying		
	Complex	
	Conflict	
	Difficult to handle	
	Emotional	
	Intent	
	Interesting	
	Trust	
Reasons for Bullying		
	Individual	
		Blaming manager
		Blaming target
	Interpersonal	
		Envy
		Misunderstanding
		Personality clash
	Organisational	
		Economic climate
		Pressure of targets
	Performance Management	
	Something else always underlying bullying claim	
Role Constructs		
	Coach and support	
	Investigator	
	Judge and Jury	
	Mediator and facilitator	
	Organisation Protector	
	Policy Police	
	Preventer	
	Self-protector	
	The Fixer	
	Welfare and Care	

Table 7: Final Thematic Framework

First Level	Second Level	Third Level
HRPs' Language of Bullying	Negative Adjectives	
	Normalising, Sanitising,	
	Metaphors for bullying	
	Framing Discourses	Economic climate
		Performance Management Culture
		CIPD Professionalisation
The Experience of Handling Bullying Cases	Complex	
	Difficult to handle	
	Emotional	
	Conflict	
	Pressurised	
	Bullying Business	
	Trust	Employee Trust in HRM
		'Burning Experiences': HRPs trust in targets' claims
	HRP's trust in managers	
HRPs' Roles	'Support and Protect'	
	'Mediator'	
	'Clarifier'	
	Employee Advocacy	
	'Position-taking'	
Bullying Constructs	'Genuine Bullying'	
	Manager-to-employee' bullying claims	
	Peer-to-peer bullying claims	Interpersonal conflict, bickering
		Personality clash
		Misunderstanding
		Envy
		Work issue
Interpretive Mechanisms	Target-related	Target Performance Issue
		Target's characteristics and behaviour
		Misunderstanding bullying
	Manager-related	Target's responsibility
		Poor management
		Lack of self-awareness
		Managers avoiding their responsibilities
		'Drive and ambition'
		'Old School' managers
		'Untouchables': Managers
'Purposeful repackaging'		

4.10 Ethics

Prior to commencing the interviews for this thesis, ethical approval was sought and granted, after amendments, by Portsmouth Business School (PBS). In preparing the ethics request, four particular issues were important for this research. Firstly, as already noted, bullying can be a sensitive and potentially distressing problem for individuals (Hoel et al., 1999). Secondly, many HRPs themselves have been targets of bullying (Robinson, 1999), as had been the case for several of the HRP's in Harrington (2005). Hence, potentially, the HRPs contributing to this thesis may have more personal and emotional experiences of bullying. Thirdly, phase one necessitated a slight deception in the positioning the research, discussed in the design section. That is, the vignette was presented as a 'difficult interpersonal situation' rather than one of 'bullying' so as not to prime this construction. These three aspects were covered in detail on the ethical approval application for phase one, particularly with respect to causing no harm to research participants and providing adequate debriefing and available support for this sensitive research topic. Finally, as a member of British Psychological Society, I needed to ensure that the research adhered to the society's code of ethics (British Psychological Society, 2006). The ethical application form for phase one is provided in Appendix 10.

An amended ethical application was submitted to cover the use of HRPs' own experiences rather than a vignette, and was approved after minor modifications (Appendix 11). Furthermore, the decision to use a transcription service and depersonalised, decontextualised and anonymous quotes was discussed with, and approved by my Director of Studies, who consulted the PBS ethics committee. An amended ethics request was not required. However, I explicitly addressed these points with each of the interviewees, and no concerns were raised.

In choosing the transcriber, I approached three companies who provided academic transcription services, seeking references and details of their confidentiality agreements. A non-disclosure agreement (NDA) was signed between the organisation and myself; copies of the NDAs signed by the individual transcribers were provided. Furthermore, prior to sending the audio recordings to the transcription service, I listened to the interview in full and, using an audio software package called Audacity, blanked out any instances of personal names, organisation names, and any data that may have identified the interviewee or their

organisation. Hence, I felt confident that all possible measures had been taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees and their organisations. In choosing the quotes for phase three, I specifically chose parts of the text that gave no indication of the organisation, sector or HRP's details; thus, ensuring that the quotes were completely anonymous.

Finally, throughout the research process I was mindful of the 'ethics of care' advocated for critical studies (Spicer et al., 2009) by respecting the position and account of the interviewees. This involved taking a balanced view to the analysis, which considered not only the mechanisms and discourses that might be sustaining the antecedents of bullying, but also the tensions and difficulties that these may create for the HRPs. During the interviews this involved a careful consideration of how to question and challenge the interviewees' views on bullying, and maintaining a dialogue that recognised and respected their view of the world in their organisations. My reflections on these aspects of the process are included in the final section of this chapter. Before providing my reflexivity on this research process, because of the nature of the research within this thesis, the next section discusses the evaluation of exploratory qualitative research.

4.11 Evaluating the Validity of Qualitative Research

By its very ontological and epistemological nature, interpretivist qualitative research cannot, nor does it seek to provide the statistical generalisability arguably possible with positivist, quantitative research (Williams, 2000). In fact, the indeterminate, socially constructed nature of the social world has led some to argue that any form of generalisability from qualitative research is impossible (Denzin, 1983; Guba & Lincoln, 1982), and that attempting to evaluate such research using positivist constructs of reliability, validity and generalisability is, therefore, inappropriate (Johnson, Buerhing, Cassell, & Symon, 2006; Symon & Cassell, 2004). However, I would suggest that it is a matter of 'degree' rather than 'possibility': that is, it is possible to evaluate the level of contribution of qualitative research in a manner that is concordant with, and appropriate for its epistemological and ontological assumptions

Firstly, because of the broad range of qualitative methodologies available, the criteria used to evaluate qualitative findings should be appropriate for the theoretical and epistemological assumptions of the research (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000; Willig, 2008a). For the

theoretical approach in this thesis, such criteria would include the credibility and authenticity of the participants' accounts; the transparency, cohesion and reflexivity of the researcher's position, theoretical assumptions and methodological choices; and the coherence and persuasiveness of the findings, which should be grounded in data and located within previous research (Johnson et al., 2006; Taylor, 2001). Hence, this chapter has attempted to provide a full and transparent account of the research process, the rationale for the methodological choices, and the credibility and authenticity of the interviewees' account through the process of verbatim transcription and coding. My own reflexive position is provided in the next section, and Chapters 5 and 6 aim to present a grounded account of the findings.

Secondly, Williams (2000, p. 215; 2002; Payne & Williams, 2005) has argued that it is possible to draw *moderatum* generalisations from interpretive research; that is, aspects of grounded qualitative findings that can be seen as instances of a "broader recognisable set of features", which are applicable to similar situations. To do so, Williams argues that the 'cultural consistency' must be explicit in the research; that is, there must be clear and relevant links between the research 'site' (the HRPs and their organisations) and the site of generalisation (other HRPs in similar roles and organisations), which, I would argue, would equate to 'field consistency' in this thesis. Theoretical sampling, argues Williams, is essential to demonstrate this consistency. Hence, in this thesis, interviewees were selected from the field of HRM, who had experience of handling bullying within both private and public organisational fields, providing relevance and consistency with other HRPs within these contexts.

Thus, in providing the methodological context in this chapter, and the findings in Chapters 5 and 6, I have attempted to provide the reader with the necessary information to evaluate the coherence and contribution of this thesis (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). Before moving onto the findings, the final section provides the reflexivity 'piece' to this evaluation 'jigsaw'. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, reflexivity throughout the research process is an essential part of critical qualitative research, based on the recognition that the researcher's subjectivity is an active part of all stages of this research process: constructing the research questions, collection of the data, analysis and interpretation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Reason, 1988). Part of this reflection requires the researcher to consider how their own social history, values and attitudes might influence their interpretation of the narratives of others; in

this case, the HRPs' accounts of bullying (Bott, 2010). Hence, the researcher's critical reflections provide further insights into how knowledge was constructed during the research process (Berg, 2007).

4.12 Reflexivity

This final section aims to provide the position, context and reflections of the author. I am a forty-something, female Chartered Occupational Psychologist; and I work at a university, lecturing in Occupational Psychology to Masters-level students. Thankfully, I have never been bullied; I have never worked in HRM; and I am not a member of the CIPD. I managed people for many years in large, private, information-technology organisations, eventually moving on because I did not like the way I was required to manage my staff: economically rather than pastorally. I moved into a job where I provided evaluation and intervention projects for workplace bullying, which is where my fascination developed for how differently people construct the phenomenon, particularly between employees and HRPs. This fascination motivated my MSc dissertation and, in turn, this thesis.

However, there were a number of challenges during the process described in this chapter that I would like to reflect on in relation to the data collection and analysis. Firstly, and linked to the ethics of care discussed in 4.10, early in the research process, I recognised that my attitudes towards bullying and its resolution were employee-centred and that I needed to manage my feelings of “anti-HRMism”, which had developed as a result of my previous bullying work and MSc findings. In effect, for me, HRPs had become what Bott (2010, p. 168) terms an “unlovable group” to research, because the way the HRPs had discussed bullying from a management perspective in my MSc study had conflicted with my own attitudes, particularly my concern for targets. I had to work through this during the early interviews and initial analysis, constantly questioning myself on my own assumptions versus what the data were ‘saying’. It was a process akin to Reasons’ (1988) ‘critical subjectivity’, whereby I was consciously reflecting on and questioning my own biases and assumptions because these can “muddy the waters of enquiry” (p. 29). I was acutely aware of the shifts in these biases and assumptions, partly from thinking about them, but also because of the generous candour of my interviewees, and because their narratives were showing how difficult and complex bullying was for many of them. I am aware that these initial biases never completely disappeared, but I did learn to recognise them and manage them. Part of the

problem was the data: there were some interviews that reinforced my original thoughts because of the HRPs' attitudes towards bullying and targets, but I will not highlight which interviews because of the ethical sensitivity of doing so. Thus, during the analysis, I specifically questioned my interpretations of the data in relation to my feelings of dissonance between my attitudes and the HRPs' narratives. This process of critical subjectivity continued throughout the ongoing data collection, analysis and write-up of the thesis, with the aim of providing as balanced an account as possible. However, I believe that my initial attitudes may have contributed to the following problem early in the interviews.

My fourth interviewee (PSA14) told me she felt like she had been 'examined' on her knowledge of HRM policy and process. I found this very distressing and it knocked my confidence as a 'research interviewer'. With the support and guidance of my supervisors, I reflected on the way that I was framing the interviews and the 'positions' or 'footings' this was creating for the interviewee and myself (Goffman, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). By calling the discussions 'an interview' and conducting the process of going through participant information and the consent form at the beginning, I was setting the discussions up as 'something official'. Hence, I changed my approach. I sent all the information to interviewees, including the consent form, in advance and asked that, if they had no questions, to simply bring the signed form to our meeting. This way, there was no 'official business' at the start. I stopped using the word 'interview'; instead, I asked people if they would be willing to 'meet up' to discuss *how they found* dealing with bullying in their jobs (for PSA15 and PSA16, this was dealing with 'difficult interpersonal situations'). I explained that I was researching bullying and that I was interested in understanding *their experience*, explaining that it was their personal thoughts, not policy, that I was interested in. In effect, I was attempting to turn the table: instead of me being the 'expert researcher', I was attempting to position them as the 'expert practitioner' and myself as the 'interested student' (e.g., Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Whilst I accept that these 'meetings' were always going to be 'out of the ordinary' for my interviewees, and that the nature of each discussion would be influenced by the specific interaction between that particular practitioner and myself, these changes did appear to significantly improve the 'interviews'.

A related, but also distinct issue was that the vignette interviews appeared to lack richness, which, again, was disappointing and confidence-knocking. In part, I think that the issue of

‘positioning’, described above, was restricting the HRPs’ personal candour. The interviews after PSA14 were much more of ‘a discussion’ and in my ‘new role’ as an ‘eager and hungry student’, I felt I had ‘permission’ to ask more questions; hence, the discussions were more like natural conversations. However, as I progressed through phases 2 and 3, strikingly consistent themes and findings emerged, and I started to question my analysis of the vignette interviews. I was perplexed that I had found such consistent findings in the latter two phases but not in the first. Was it my poor early interviewing ‘technique’, the use of a vignette, or had my analysis skills gradually improved (or a bit of all three)? Hence, I went back to the vignette interviews and found that they were just as rich, but that I had needed the findings from the later phases to inform the re-analysis of the first six. This is because asking for HRPs’ own experiences in phases two and three had resulted in them using a more personal perspective than the vignette. Hence, it appears that the HRPs talked much more about what they thought and did in relation to bullying *because* they were using their own experience. In the vignette interviews they did not need to do that; they could discuss the scenario from a detached perspective. Hence, I would suggest that, although vignettes may be a useful method for reducing the threat associated with sensitive topics, they produce qualitatively different data to personal experience. It was also a real learning point on the process of qualitative analysis, that the findings from subsequent stages can be so valuably applied back to earlier data.

There was another issue related to the ethics of care and, rather than *my* critical subjectivity, it was related to the interviewees’ subjectivity and reflection. During the interviews there were many instances when the interviewees talked about situations where the employee thought the situation was bullying but the HRP did not. Without ‘giving the game away’ ahead of the findings in Chapters 5 and 6, the employee’s claim often centred on their manager’s behaviour. In such instances, I would follow-up by asking whether the HRP thought that the employee might still subjectively ‘feel’ bullied, even if the HRP felt it was unsubstantiated. In several instances, this resulted in a “sticky moment” (Riach, 2009, p. 361): a moment of participant reflexivity when the interviewee became visibly uncomfortable and talked about how I had made them question their assumptions. They were like moments of Bourdieu’s hysteresis, whereby my question had resulted in them questioning their taken-for-granted social practice. Worse, I felt guilty for causing this discomfort for my interviewee: it felt like I had imposed some form of symbolic violence on them, that my view

as the researcher had made them question their own view of the world. Hence, I had two conflicting responses: guilt, on the one hand, at the same time it was an insight. Firstly, into the doxic nature of the HRPs' approach to bullying and, secondly, into the possibility of challenging individuals' acceptance of the bullying constructs that will be presented in Chapters 5 and 6, a point I will return to in the Discussion.

Finally, and more practically, the analysis itself was a huge challenge: there was so much data to manage and so many ways of approaching it; knowing when to stop was very difficult, as was a lack of confidence in the credibility and defensibility of my findings. A constant challenge was remaining open to the data, to allow inductive data-driven themes to emerge, and to manage the biases I felt early in the process. I managed this challenge by questioning my findings and by returning to each interview multiple times to confirm, or disconfirm, my interpretations. The introduction of the bullying scale and quotes for the FG and PSM7, PSM8, proved to be a turning point for determining saturation. The quotes were not the 'permission granter' that I had imagined they would be; in fact, there were more or less irrelevant for the interviewees. The bullying scale resulted in an 'immediate recognition' from the interviewees, followed by candid and consistent input. This not only gave me confidence in the findings from the previous phases, but also convinced me that, for the aims of this thesis, my arguments were well-grounded and saturation had been reached.

In summary, I would like to think that, through this process of critical self-reflection, my research might be considered as 'co-operative inquiry'; that is, research that is "*with and for* people rather than *on* people", and that it might be beneficial, in some small way, to HRPs, targets and perpetrators involved in cases of bullying at work (Reason, 1988, p. 1, emphasis in original). I have many words that describe my reflections of collecting and analysing these data: exciting, fascinating, shocking, illuminating, humbling, addictive and never-ending. I recognise that the analyses of these data can never be complete, and that another individual may find other meanings and interpretations in the same data. However, through the iterative and recursive analysis process described in this chapter and the findings presented in the following two chapters, my intention is to provide a rigorous, consistent and convincing narrative that is grounded in the data. Finally, in accordance with Mishler (1986, p. 112), I would suggest that, within the exploratory research of this thesis, "the critical issue is not the determination of one singular and absolute "truth" but the assessment of the relative

plausibility of an interpretation when compared with other specific and potentially plausible alternative interpretations” (Mishler, 1986). It is to the analysis and interpretation of the empirical data of this thesis that Chapter 5 now turns.

Chapter 5: Findings: HRPs' Context and Construction of Bullying Claims

This chapter begins by re-stating the two overarching research questions to provide the context for the findings:

How do human resource practitioners construct workplace bullying?

What factors influence their interpretation and subsequent response to employees' bullying claims?

As discussed in Chapter 4, during the analysis, Bourdieu's constructs of habitus, field, capital, doxa and symbolic violence were used as a means of examining the individual, organisational, interpersonal, professional and social factors that may determine how HRPs construct, interpret and respond to bullying. Through the application of CDA, HRPs' language formed the focus of analysis, including the discourses that they drew upon, to examine not only what they said, but also what purpose this may serve them. The six analysis stages of CDA, the questions asked of the data, and the way in which the themes emerged, were substantiated and interpreted were also explained in the previous chapter, and Table 7 presented the final thematic framework. These themes will be presented within the findings chapters within a structure that aims to address the two research questions and provide a comprehensive account of the data, as will now be described.

The findings from the analysis of the interview data will be divided into two chapters, as shown in Table 8. Chapter 5 will predominantly address the first research question by presenting how HRPs construct peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee bullying claims. To provide the backdrop for these constructs, this chapter will begin by examining how the HRPs construct the organisational and professional contexts within which their bullying-related practices occur. Chapter 6 will then address the second research question by presenting the findings on the mechanisms used by the HRPs to interpret new bullying claims, and what roles, positions and practices are made more and less available by their bullying constructs and interpretive mechanisms. In doing so, this chapter will also explore what purpose the constructs and mechanisms might serve the HRPs. This chapter concludes by returning to the first research question and examining HRPs' construction of 'genuine bullying'.

Table 8: The Structure and Sequence of the Findings

Chapter 5 – HRPs’ Context and Constructs of Bullying Claims		
Section	Title	Description of Content
5.2	The Organisational and Professional Context of HRPs’ bullying-related Practice	This section provides the contextual background for the HRPs’ bullying-related practice, including: the HRPs’ discussions on what it is like to handle bullying claims; the organisational pressures they experience; their roles and positions in relation to their bullying-related practice; and how they discuss bullying with managers. The purpose of this section is to provide the backdrop within which HRPs’ bullying-related practice occurs.
5.3	Peer-to-Peer Bullying Claims: “An Interpersonal Conflict”	How the HRPs constructed bullying claims where the alleged perpetrator was a hierarchically equivalent peer of the target.
5.4	Manager-to-Employee Bullying Claims: A “Performance Issue”	How HRPs construct bullying claims raised by targets where their manager is the alleged perpetrator. This section also presents the findings on when the HRPs appear to apply the construct that they use to interpret new bullying claims.
Chapter 6 – HRPs’ Interpretations and Responses to Bullying Claims		
Section	Title	Description of Content
6.1	Target-related Interpretive Mechanisms	This section presents the findings on a range of mechanisms that the HRPs used to interpret targets’ behaviours in bullying claims.
6.2	Manager-related Interpretive Mechanisms	This section focuses on the mechanisms that the HRPs used to interpret managers’ behaviours in manager-to-employee bullying claims.
6.3	HRPs’ Available Roles, Position and Practices in Relation to Bullying	The roles, positions and practices adopted by HRPs in relation to bullying, made available as a result of the way in which HRPs construct and interpret bullying claims.
6.4	The Purpose of the HRPs’ Discursive World	This section examines the findings on what purpose the bullying constructs and interpretive mechanisms might serve the HRPs within their bullying-related contexts.
6.5	HRPs’ Less Available Roles, Position and Practices in Relation to Bullying	The roles, positions and practices in relation to bullying that appear to have become less available to HRPs as a result of the way in which they construct and interpret bullying claims.
6.6	The Potential Impact of HRPs’ Bullying-Related Practice on Targets	Analysis of how the HRPs talked about the impact of their practice on targets.
6.7	What is ‘Genuine Bullying to HRPs?’	This final section examines the findings on HRPs apparent construct of ‘genuine bullying’. This analysis is positioned at the end of the findings because the constructs of bullying claims and the interpretive mechanisms contribute to the analysis and understanding of this ‘genuine bullying’ construct.

Before presenting the findings, the following section will provide the conventions used throughout this chapter.

5.1 Conventions within the Findings

1. To simplify the reporting of the findings, the terms ‘target’ and ‘bully’ will be used throughout this chapter to represent the individual raising the claim and the person accused of the bullying. However, it is acknowledged that in many of the accounts provided by the HRPs, they were discussing ‘complainants’ and ‘alleged perpetrators’, and no assumptions are being made as to whether the individuals were ‘actual’ targets and bullies. Secondly, after participant quotes, their unique identifier is provided, e.g., PSA11. The interviewees’ details are provided in Appendix 1.
2. Based on the HRPs’ language, the following terms will be used throughout, and will be examined fully within the chapter:
 - Bullying versus bullying claims and bullying behaviours: ‘bullying claim’ will be used when the HRP is talking about a situation that the employee perceives as bullying; ‘bullying behaviours’ will be used to reflect HRP’s discussions regarding behaviour that *could* be considered as bullying; and ‘bullying’ is used when the HRPs are specifically discussing the phenomenon.
3. As will be established in this chapter, two constructs for bullying *claims* emerged from the data analysis, determined by the nature of the alleged perpetrator: whether it was the target’s peer or manager. Therefore, ‘peer-to-peer’ and ‘manager-to-employee’ will be used to represent the relationship between the bully and target in the claims discussed by the HRPs.
4. Finally, the analysis assumed no *a priori* definition of bullying; it did not seek to confirm or challenge the definitions discussed in Chapter 2, rather to explore how HRPs construct and interpret bullying. Comparisons with other definitions will be discussed in the Chapter 7.

Having established these points, the findings begin by examining what it is like for HRPs to deal with bullying claims at work. This is presented first because it provides the context of the ‘HRPs’ world’ in which their constructions of bullying and subsequent responses are made.

5.2 HRPs' Organisational and Professional Context of Handling Bullying

Firstly, we consider the HRPs' experience of handling bullying claims: the nature of bullying claims, the multiple pressures on HRPs and the issue of power will be explored in turn. From a CDA perspective, this involved examining the HRPs' language to analyse how they were constructing their environments and the discourses that they drew on, as presented in Section 4.5.1.

5.2.1 Bullying as a "difficult" issue

Across the interviews, the HRPs regularly talked about the complexity of handling bullying claims; it was frequently described with words such as "hard", "difficult", "uncomfortable" and "horrible". HRPs consistently discussed the challenge of making decisions when it was one person's word against another's and the difficulty of ascertaining enough evidence to reach an unambiguous judgement. For example, as PSM2 discusses, the issue is a difficult one for her, and she struggles to find the word 'draining', suggesting that the emotional impact may be greater than she describes:

"In cases of bullying and harassment it is often one person's word against another, you know, they did have a discussion on their own and that person didn't like how that person talked to them, but that person's perception was that they didn't speak loudly or they didn't say these words...So, you know, you have to make a judgement call and sometimes there will be no evidence, sometimes it's just one person's word against another...you really feel like you're making a judgement call on really quite a big thing there....it's, it's, it's quite draining." PSM2

Both 'judgement' and the emotions associated with bullying seem to be important factors in this being one of the "more difficult" issues that HRPs are required to handle. PSM4 discusses the high emotions, and how claims are often complicated by situations outside of the work environment. However, he appears to be minimising this emotion through his double use of the concessionary phrase 'sort of' (Lee, 1987; as discussed in Section 4.9.1):

"I think it's probably more difficult than a lot of other HR related stuff because some of it is about judgement, you know, you can't pick a textbook up which will say this is how you deal with harassment bullying cases, not when you've got somebody sitting across the table from you, whose, whose absolutely in bits, you

know, and sort of all the, sort of sometimes the external non-work pressures that are involved as well.” PSM4

However, there was further complexity to the “difficult” nature of conflicting accounts and emotion. It appears that HRPs have developed a sense of “scepticism” towards employees’ accounts through their experience of handling bullying claims. Many of them talked about not being able to take targets’ accounts “at face value” because there were always “two sides to the story”. This appears to be a lesson they have “learned the hard way” by trusting a target’s account that subsequently proved untrue or partial, as these HRPs discuss:

“I think it's just experience because there's been so many times when, you know, we have employees phoning us and saying "my manager has done this, that and the other” ...when actually you go back to the manager and you get it from their point of view, you know, you find out that this person has had, you know, horrendous sick leave before...been totally unreliable...there's always another side to the story, and I think you learn kind of the hard way...You can't believe everything you hear.”

PSA12

“The reason I am going more carefully at the start is because I have actually seen it where unfortunately the woman [the target] was being very vindictive to the manager [alleged bully]...so the next time you don't just jump in and automatically assume that what you are reading is correct.” PSA16

“We sort of take an uber-cautious approach because you've got to ascertain whether this is a really serious situation that's putting someone's personal circumstances at risk as opposed to somebody who is a weak performer...or is being disruptive and is using it as an angle to try and get some cash out of the company...unfortunately we do get situations of that. That's, that's the hard thing I think, finding between that line of somebody who is just being difficult and somebody who has got a really serious problem.” PSM3

Three points are highlighted here. First, it appears that HRPs have been ‘burnt’ by previous experience, when they have accepted an employee’s account at face value that transpired as ‘untrue’ after they had spoken to the manager. This has resulted in a more “sceptical” approach to targets’ accounts, which PSM3 sanitises as “uber-cautious”. This will be further examined in Section 6.7 when the issue of ‘target genuineness’ is explored. Secondly, whilst

accepting that we cannot know whose account is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ from these data, they do suggest that HRPs may ‘change their opinion’ after talking to managers, as reported by targets in Chapter 2, a point that will be returned to in the Discussion. Finally, PSM3 also uses sanitising language for ‘bullying’; instead of using the word she calls it “a really serious situation”, acknowledging the severity but not the nature of the issue. The HRPs’ use of ‘sanitising language’, or Bourdieusian euphemisms, will be examined in detail in Section 6.2. Target ‘genuineness’ is explicitly questioned: is this a “serious situation” or a disruptive underperforming employee trying to exploit the organisation? Thus, she focuses on the behaviour of the target to understand the claim. This emphasis on rationalising the reasons for the bullying claim by recourse to the target’s behaviour will be examined in Section 6.1.

One further issue adds to the “difficult” nature of bullying: the HRPs often discussed claims as trivial, “ridiculous” and a waste of HR’s time. It was likened to ‘childish’ behaviour and a ‘game’, providing an example of how the HRPs used the analogy of a game, as does Bourdieu. In the following examples, the HRPs talk about how they would *like* to respond to bullying claims, rather than how they *actually* do. These answers were in reply to the interviewer’s question, “*If you were to take your “HR hat” off, how would you prefer to approach cases of bullying?*” PSM7 talks about employees “playing” her, and PSM4 talks about “grown men” needing to “pull themselves together”. PSM2 talks about “ridiculous” behaviour, and her frustration comes across in the ‘aggressive’ language she uses, wanting to “throw people in a room” so that they can “thrash it out”:

“For God's sake, this is absolutely ridiculous, I'm going to get you in a room together, you can thrash it out, and we'll sort it out here and now.” PSM2

“Actually you're just playing me, go away and come back if and when you have a serious complaint so stop wasting my time” PSM7

“Probably deal with things a little bit quicker. And perhaps be a little more honest...not to the point, “oh pull yourself together you herd of clowns”, but occasionally not far off that, if I'm honest. Occasionally you do get the odd case where I think, “pull yourself together, you know. Sort yourselves out, you're two grown men”.” PSM4

However, whilst the HRPs talked about wishing they could “*be a bit more honest*” with the targets, less “*bound by procedure*” and, therefore, “*deal with it faster*”, they felt this was not

possible with their ‘HR hat on’, predominantly because of the pressure to strictly adhere to policy, which is explored in the next section.

Hence, bullying appears to be one of the most “difficult” issues that HRPs deal with, because of the conflicting and ambiguous accounts, the emotions involved, and the perceived ‘triviality’ of some claims. Furthermore, it appears that HRPs may get ‘burnt’ by accepting targets’ accounts that later transpire to be ‘false’, leading to a more cautious and sceptical attitude. As will be explored within the next theme, there appear to be other pressures that contribute to this attitude.

5.2.2 The “Pressure” of Handling Bullying Claims

HRPs talked about experiencing numerous “pressures” when handling bullying claims. Firstly, there was the pressure of understanding and managing the implications and impacts associated with bullying. Below, PSM6 talks about understanding the wide range of “ramifications” that his decision might have to all of the individuals involved:

“What you need to understand is that the ramifications of your investigation are far reaching. It could be that person’s [the bully] career. It doesn’t just affect that person; it affects the families of that individual. You could end up in an industrial tribunal. The person that’s been harassed or bullied, it has an impact on them, their families etc. It has impacts in the work place, the morale, everything. So that’s the bit I would say I still find uncomfortable.” PSM6

These “ramification” considerations were not only other individuals; HRPs also talked about the pressure to maintain their own credibility, made harder by the conflicting accounts and ambiguity of most claims. HRPs feel pressure to have the ‘evidence’ for a ‘convincing case’, to ensure they are not making the ‘wrong’ judgement call before they raise the case with managers. For example, PSM3 discusses the need to develop a credible case, consisting of “three or four solid events” before she raises the complaint to the manager and creates the “ramifications” by “ruffling feathers”:

“The minute you start having to have those conversations, you’ve really got to think to yourself, “okay, where is this going to come out?” because you can never turn it back, and once you have ruffled those feathers it, you know, you’ve got to be pretty

sure, and make sure that you've got a pretty convincing case before you then go and start to check out the allegations.” PSM3

Her account illustrates how HRPs consider a formal investigation to be ‘a big step’, one that they need to be very sure about before commencing. This ‘fear of formalisation’ was also a strong theme in Harrington (2005), and appears to be linked to the pressure HRPs feel to protect the organisation from legal, financial and reputational implications, typically employment tribunals, compensation costs and adverse publicity. This was the dominant consideration, as discussed by PSM4 below. He had just been asked the importance of protecting the organisation, and his response epitomises the significance of this pressure for HRPs, to the apparent detriment of employee interests. His rationale for this approach is economically based, it is “*the potential publicity/political fall out, or the potential financial fall out*” that may arise from the situation:

“If I’m honest, massive. Massive. If I’m absolutely honest, possibly at times even overriding the consideration for the employee...and in a case [bullying claim], is HR there for employee benefit or to protect the [organisation’s] interests?...sometimes if I’m honest, my primary consideration will be protecting the [organisation’s] interests and I’m picking up the employee stuff afterwards.” PSM4

Frequently, the HRPs talked about the importance of protecting the organisation from legal and financial risk. Their narratives suggest that protecting the organisation might be the HRPs’ most important priority and pressure. However, at the back of their minds there also appears to be a concern for their own credibility, particularly if a case were to reach a tribunal, where their actions would be scrutinised minutely. The impact of any mistake was seen as significant to both the organisation and the HRP’s professional credibility. Hence, HRPs need to be sure they have a ‘convincing case’ before conducting “more thorough investigations” formally, a thoroughness that is motivated by protecting both the organisation and their own credibility should litigation arise:

“I think we do more thorough investigations, you know, making sure that the processes are followed by the book. Only because when you do get called up, you know, it gets to litigation or something like that and, you know, you go through the steps, and it's like, “oh, step 47, you didn't quite do that, therefore...” and that does happen a lot.” PSM3

PSM3's account also suggests that being 'burnt' by not following policy closely enough may also contribute to the more cautious approach to target's accounts. As a consequence, it seems that the position of the target is considered through the eyes of policy, rather than from their subjective experience: has the employee been provided with all the options stated in policy and employment law?

"I just need to feel comfortable that as a company we have done everything we can so if it goes to tribunal...we can honestly, hand on heart, say we gave him [the target] all these options and these choices." PSM1

"You are looking at the situation and you're thinking, "is it worth the risk? Can we deal with it in a different way? If we, you know, don't do this investigation what is the potential impact?" And yes, it is a risk management thing, it is about protecting the [organisation]." PSM2

Here, PSM2 is primarily considering the implications for the organisation, and whether she can risk *not* conducting an investigation; it is not a consideration of the best interests of the target. This 'balancing act' of competing pressures is complex: HRPs are considering the risk to the organisation, the manager involved and the potential damage to their own credibility, as PSM3 observes:

"So you've got a head of the business group who has done something diabolical to an individual. Not only have you got to reprimand that person, hope that the individual is okay and that they are not going to sue the organisation [laughter], you could also potentially be left without a head of that business, which generates a lot of money, which is driving the bottom line here. You've got to think about the implications...there is something about damage limitation...just something getting leaked that is derogatory can have such a knock-on effect." PSM3

Her account epitomises the complexity of HRPs' 'balancing act': she is weighing up the risk of the organisation being taken to tribunal, the financial implications of losing the "diabolical" senior manager and the impact of bad publicity. In doing so, the "diabolical" nature of the behaviour and the impact on the target is minimised and made light of by laughter. This point will be returned to in Section 6.5, where the tensions and conflicts in HRPs' responses are considered. Her response is also embedded in an economic discourse; the predominant concern is the financial implication to the organisation.

Furthermore, HRPs discussed the pressure they were under from senior management: pressure to speed up the investigation process and to protect senior management. For example, PSM2, who was criticised by her senior management team for taking ‘too long to resolve cases’, subsequently changed her approach to become more “challenging” of the target, again resulting in a more “cautious” approach to targets’ accounts, suggesting that HRPs may be ‘burnt’ by employees, policy *and* management pressure:

“I am more thorough in how I deal with things, a bit more cautious, but since the feedback [from senior managers] that we've had about being so sympathetic to people, also more challenging in what we say back to people, rather than more or less taking it as read that, you know, that there's something to be looked into.”

PSM2

Pressure is also exerted to *protect* accused senior managers. PSM8 discussed how his Board pressurised him to drop a case against a Director by a subordinate. Issues relating to senior managers accused of bullying will be examined in Section 6.2.4; here it is used to illustrate the multiple pressures reported by HRPs when responding to bullying:

“The issue that I had, as the person that was advising on this case, was huge pressure saying, “look, this is a senior manager of our business, we cannot believe that we are following a formal process for a one off remark”...huge pressure on HR from the directors to say, “look you’ve got to, we need to manage this in a way where we can protect a director”.” PSM8

This complex ‘balancing act’ comprising pressure from senior managers, and pressure to protect the organisation and their own credibility appears to create a paradox for HRPs in terms of organisational policy. In one sense it appears to be a protection method for HRPs: they can safeguard their credibility by following it “by the book”, as PSM3 described earlier. However, adherence to policy and employment law conversely creates problems for the HRPs. Even when this compliance is mandated by their obligation to protect the organisation, it can create conflict with managers who view it as ‘constraining’. Thus, HRPs are criticised by the very organisational group they feel pressured to protect and support, as PSM5 explains:

“You’re protecting the [organisation] but it’s still not what the manager that you’re talking to wants to hear. They want to be able to do whatever they want to do, and

if you're telling them that they can't...you're a deliverer of bad news and they don't like it. So that can be quite difficult, even though you are actually working in their interests they don't see it [laughs]." PSM5

Again, it appears that PSM5 uses laughter to diffuse the tension she feels from both pressure and criticism from managers. The ambiguity and imprecise nature of the wording of bullying policy was also a problem, particularly because many of the HRPs' policies adopted ACAS' (2009a) guidance on considering the target's subjective experience (see p. 38). As PSM4's discusses, this creates a challenge in deciding whether the manager's "over the line" behaviour is "sufficient enough" to take action:

"What we then find is well, ok the behaviour that the person's [target] complaining about perhaps was over the line, so to speak, but we don't think its sufficient enough for us to take action against the offender...And they [target] come back to us and say, "well you say I've been bullied and harassed because your policy says, so why aren't you taking action against my manager". PSM4

Again, PSM4 avoids the word 'bullying', instead describing the manager's behaviour as "over the line", followed by the concessionary "so to speak". He highlights the challenge that policy is creating the target's expectation that the claim will be investigated; a pressure that PSM4 finds difficult to meet because of the pressure of determining what constitutes "enough" to warrant investigating. This seems to bear support to the targets' accounts in Chapter 2; that organisational policy is not consistently followed. This will be returned to in the Discussion.

The HRPs' descriptions of the nature of bullying show striking similarity with the 'dilemma' research discussed in Chapter 2, where HRPs reported being under pressure from managers and organisational expectations, and a fear for their own position when responding to people-related dilemmas. In the data presented here, it appears that HRPs balance multiple and conflicting pressures when responding to bullying: pressure from senior managers for speedy resolutions that protect accused managers; pressure to protect the organisation, whilst also protecting their own credibility; and coping with criticism from managers who feel stifled by HRPs' adherence to policy. Past experience of each appears to have 'burnt' HRPs, resulting in a more "cautious" approach to targets' accounts. Three further aspects emerged in the

‘dilemma’ research that will now be explored within the data of this thesis: powerlessness, position-taking and the framing of bullying within an economic discourse.

5.2.3 Power and Position-Taking

Power and position-taking will be considered together because, as will be shown, whilst power was an issue, the HRPs’ used different forms of position-taking to help manage this problem. Some HRPs were very explicit about the lack of power they felt HRM had in organisations:

“HR doesn't have any power at all. I mean, I've worked in enough organisations, you know, and you don't have any power at all...I've sat on a number of boards now as an interim HR Director...you're not part of the club, you're not really part of the management team...you're a specialist support function...[HRM] is a second division function really.” PSA13

PSA13’s account suggests not only the powerlessness of HRM, but also that membership to an organisation’s field of power, the “club” of the Board, might be symbolic rather than influential, as discussed in Chapter 3. PSA16 is also a Board member and whilst she recognises the reputation HRM has as a “policing” support function, she engages in active position-taking as a “creative problem solver”:

“HR is often seen as being the policing role, so it's always very “ oh yes, come here and let me get my policy out” ...I think why I have managed to be successful in organisations is because I have put myself down as a creative problem solver and that is how you get the problem solved rather than just the procedures followed... being very useful, and adding some value at that top team” PSA16

By casting herself in this role she felt she was able to add real value to the management team. She had incorporated this into her habitus, providing her with a sense of efficacy and, therefore, capital, which was not evident for PSA13. However, the indications of powerlessness were often more indirect and were apparent in the way HRPs discussed deferring the investigation and the decision to managers, whilst their role was to support the manager with policy, as epitomised by PSA11’s account:

“I would want the line manager's involvement because I think it isn't an HR problem on its own, it is clearly a problem that needs line manager involvement as

well with some HR input. There needs to be some kind of initial investigation by the line manager, and the line manager should then come back to HR to discuss what their findings are. And what their findings are will determine what the future action should be.” PSA11

There is both a sense of powerlessness, almost impotence, and an indication of the pressure from managers in PSA11’s account: she feels obliged to “clearly” involve the manager, and to accept the manager’s decision. However, there is a complex interaction between the acceptance of this powerlessness and HRPs’ questioning of manager competence, as PSM3 describes:

“That’s senior management’s responsibility [resolving bullying] and in HR you can talk until you are blue in the face but if you’ve got somebody in that senior role who is not that particularly HR friendly and says “ oh, yeah, yeah, I will deal with that I’ll deal with it” and then obviously hasn’t, it’s just a pain in the neck when you’ve then got to do all the legwork afterwards...you really do have to spoon-feed them...at the end of the day we in HR are doing all the work [laughter] and they are seen as the person in that position taking the lead on it.” PSM3

There is an implicit sense of resentment in PSM3’s account: whilst, again, appearing to diffuse this tension with laughter, she articulates several of the challenges associated with the power and responsibility residing with managers. Firstly, HRPs’ ability to protect the organisation is reduced if managers do not heed their advice. Furthermore, she perceives that managers do not have the requisite skills to conduct the investigations, and that she may need to ‘pick up the pieces’ afterwards, which concurs with the published research discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, devolving these HRM practices to managers and removing the resolution responsibility from HRPs appears not only to reduce HRPs’ capital, it also diminishes their ability to execute one of their key objectives: protecting the organisation.

Moreover, from the targets’ perspective, this powerlessness and deferral to management may be perceived as passivity or management collusion from the HRPs, reflected in the published research on targets’ accounts discussed in Chapter 2. The HRPs are cognisant of this: they discussed how employees often bring claims of bullying to HR expecting them to be ‘fixed’. HRPs perceive that when employees are simply provided with a copy of the policy and advised to speak to the bully’s manager, the employee feels not only let down, but that the

HRP may be complicit in the situation. PSM5 articulates the difficulty this places her in: she appears frustrated by not being able to “intervene”, and suggests that this lack of action might result in employees considering HRPs as “management lackies”, a thought reminiscent of the targets’ accounts in Chapter 2:

“Quite a lot of the time, the individual coming to see you expects you to be able to deal with the problem and solve it for them and that’s, you know, that’s not achievable quite often, you know, very often. It’s not, we can’t intervene, we can give them advice and support...I think there probably is a general perception that maybe we are management lackies.” PSM5

Hence, it appears that the lack of capital, exacerbated by management-focused bullying policies, impacts the way that HRPs can act in bullying claims. Rather than a proactive and independent position, their actions appear limited to the passive provision of advice and support, reflecting Salin’s (2008) findings in Chapter 2. As a result, HRPs appear to devolve the responsibility for ‘fixing it’ to the target and the bully’s manager, despite their concerns over managers’ ability to do so, as summarised by PSM5:

“We’ve produced a little leaflet for people that makes it clear what our remit is...that we can’t solve the problem for people. We’re there to give them advice and support. You know, this is their problem; we’re empowering them to deal with it.”
PSM5

More importantly, it appears that this passive approach and the fact that managers have the decision-making power in bullying claims can be very damaging for the outcome of claims, as described by PSA14:

“Ultimately you, we, the department go with the, manager’s request. Iron it out and justify it and make it acceptable to employees the best way we can, given the circumstances. It’s not always easy.” PSA14

Tension with this situation appears evident in PSA14’s account: she appears to resist taking direct responsibility for deferring to management by shifting from “you” to “we” and then “the department” rather than using “I”. This diffusing of responsibility suggests that it is a situation that she finds difficult. Thus, it appears that the powerlessness and ‘picking up the pieces’ extends to the manager’s decision, and HRPs’ are expected to “make it acceptable” with the employees. Hence, paralleling the ‘dilemma’ findings, it appears that the lack of capital and the power imbalance between managers and HRPs has implications throughout a

bullying claim, from the target raising the issue through to making the manager's decision "acceptable".

Position-taking appeared to be a way of managing this powerlessness, again paralleling the 'dilemma' findings. Besides PSA16's earlier stance as a "creative problem solver" the HRPs tended to use "knowledge and experience" in an attempt to manage their capital. For example, PSM6 talked about his "*wealth of knowledge on conduct and attendance and dealing with hundreds of cases*"; PSA12 used her employment law expertise to position herself in relation to managers: "*managers can't be experts in HR and in employment law...I see that as our role, we can provide them with that expert advice*". PSA11 positioned herself as a guru, but through the eyes of a colleague to emphasise this 'recognised' knowledge:

"Somebody mentioned today that I am a Guru on all dignity at work matters, because there's nobody else...in the UK I am seen to be the one with the knowledge on how to deal with these types of issues" PSA11

Often, the HRPs talked about their "knowledge" of the people involved. It appears to be a form of social capital that helps HRPs to position themselves not only as policy experts, but also as 'local' experts. For example, FG3 said that "*In most cases I would hope we already know about the people and what's going on*" and PSM6 stated that he knew "*all the intricacies out there...all the problems, all the history, all the sick absence, whose done what to whom*". Furthermore, *not* knowing enough about the people was perceived as some sort of failure, as PSM3 explains: "*if I haven't seen it [bullying claim] coming then I generally think, "gosh that's a bit of a surprise, I'm obviously not seeing what's going on in my group clearly enough"*".

Hence, it seems that HRPs are placed in a position of powerlessness in responding to bullying, throughout the claim process: power and responsibility lay with the managers, and HRPs are cognisant of the impact this has on employees' perceptions of them in relation to bullying. Further, it appears that HRPs use position-taking in an attempt to use the cultural and social capital they possess as symbolic capital. However, there is another means they use to increase their symbolic capital, construct their roles and engage in position-taking: their language. Three related factors will be examined: the way in which they construct their organisational fields; their roles; and the way they discuss bullying with management.

5.2.4 The “Performance” Organisation

In the HRPs’ eyes, the recent economic climate had given rise to greater competition in their industry, increased target-driven performance in their organisation and a requirement for employees to achieve ever-increasing goals and objectives. This not only reflects the analysis of contemporary organisations in Chapter 1; it also supports previous findings with BPs discussed in Chapter 3. The HRPs talked about employees being under pressure to perform more flexible jobs, to a higher level, and managers having the difficult task of performance-managing employees in this new culture, as described by PSM7:

“Organisational cultures have changed over the past five years, especially the past 12 months, you know, everybody’s tightening their belts and targets are more important and stretch goals and all of that sort of thing, so people are being managed more to achieve more.” PSM7

Furthermore, it appears that the HRPs have accepted that organisations need to be more focused on targets, and that managers are required to push and actively manage their employees, because it reflects on their ability as a leader. It, therefore, suggests that this ‘performance culture’ is part of doxa; moreover, the HRPs’ accounts also suggested that, within this culture, their alignment is with management. For example, implicit within PSM1’s following account is her management alignment: “we are an organisation”, indicating that she sees herself as part of that drive for increased performance. This management alignment will be further examined in the next section. The employee is positioned as the ‘target’ of this drive, as “you”, and PSM1 implies that if the leader ‘fails’ it would be the employees’ ‘fault’ for not doing their job “properly”, which is a further indication of her alignment:

“We are an organisation that has become more target driven now. You are accountable; you can't have half a dozen jobs and take all the time you like to do the job. People are under pressure to achieve targets, the push, push, push to get more things done. At the end of the day, targets will reflect on how well that leader has done their job, so they are also trying to make sure their teams do their job properly.” PSM1

Against this backdrop of the current economic recession and its impact on organisations, she perceives increased performance management as a *necessary* and *legitimate* job for managers, and that HRPs have a role, almost a duty, in supporting them to do this, as does FG3:

“It's been a performance culture for some time now...the leaders have a responsibility for managing performance or underperformance of our organisation, and we expect them to do that.” PSM1

“So it's quite a big thing for us in HR at the moment where we're trying to improve on performance management, step it up, what we call raise the bar.” FG3

The HRPs also perceive that this increase in “performance-management” has amplified the time, cost and legal pressure from senior management when responding to bullying:

“What I see in these situations is probably more pressure from leadership where this [bullying claim] is impacting on the operation because the investigation is taking lots of time. So HR will be under pressure for a spectrum of different reasons.” PSM8

“Anything that comes up with the word bullying in it, legal have to know about it straightaway. They want to make sure it gets dealt with very quickly, that's the firm's policy.” PSM3

Hence, it appears that the intensification of a “performance culture” within the HRPs’ organisational fields has implications for the HRPs as well as employees and managers. Within the HRPs’ narratives, this ‘performance imperative’ appears accepted and unquestioned by the HRPs: it appears to be a taken-for-granted aspect of doxa, and their perceived role seems to be one of supporting the managers in this legitimate task. The next section now examines the HRPs’ view of their role in more detail, and will return to the earlier observation on management alignment.

5.2.5 The Roles and Alignment of HRPs

In discussing the issue of bullying in their organisations, the HRPs drew on a ‘professionalisation’ discourse, strongly reflecting the theoretical and empirical discussions in Chapter 3. Compatible with Ulrich’s (1997, 1998) model and the CIPD’s drive for HRM professionalisation, HRPs discussed how ‘HRM’ was qualitatively different from ‘personnel management’. They no longer saw their role as one of welfare and protecting the employee, rather one that supports management goals and organisational strategy; reflecting the published research on BPs’ perceptions of their roles discussed in Chapter 3. In the following excerpts on handling bullying claims, PSA14 draws a distinction between the “we” of HR

and the business, casting the employees as ‘the other’, to whom she needs to make business decisions “acceptable”. However, her phrase “we have to be like that” may suggest that she is not completely comfortable with this approach, a point that we return to in Section 6.5. For PSA12, it seems that supporting management, therefore, precludes “advising employees”, suggesting that she perceives employee advocacy as an either/or role, a point that we return to in Chapter 6. For PSA11, it is a role that has “no benefits” to her organisation:

“HR are there for the good of the business. They need to justify the decisions of the business to the employees, to make it acceptable. I am all for the good of the business...and, you know, everything that we do is right, because we have to be like that.” PSA14

“We are not here as a welfare system for employees, we are not here to be an adviser to employees. We are predominantly here to support management and take the organisation forward. We’ve been quite honest really in aligning ourselves to the business and to management so that we can assist them to manage their staff and so the organisation runs effectively”. PSA12

“You can’t just be like tea and sympathy because that has no real benefits to the company.” PSA11

Thus, a consequence of this management alignment is a consistent prioritisation of the “organisation” over employee interests. The HRPs were very clear that their main role in bullying claims is to support and protect the interests of their organisation above those of the employees. Below, both PSA13 and PSM4 acknowledge that this alignment might sound “horrible” or “callous”: this may be an indication of tension in their role; equally they may have been considering the reaction of the interviewer (see Section 4.12):

“I would be looking more at the risk to the organization than sorting the problem [bullying claim] out. It might sound a bit horrible but that’s the way I look at it.” PSA13

“As an HR professional I would see the organisation as the biggest stakeholder because ‘morally wrong to do that’ doesn’t cut an awful lot of ice with a lot of people.” PSA15

“You’ve always got to protect the [organisation’s] interests. Sounds a bit callous, but there’s no getting away from that.” PSM4

PSA15's comment on morals will be returned to in the next section when we consider how the HRPs are framing bullying issues with management.

In conjunction with their management alignment, and similarly supporting the previously published research findings in Chapter 3, HRPs also perceive that their roles have 'improved', moving from being 'organisational police' to 'business partner': a role that understands the business and contributes to organisational strategy. This was seen as important when handling bullying cases. In the following accounts, the HRPs imply that being a business partner is 'better' than a transactional generalist or 'policing' role, a role that PSA12 does not appear to consider as a legitimate "HR job". Although PSM2 recognises that welfare is one aspect of her role, it is minimised in comparison to the more "strategic and measureable" elements:

"I also think that it is vital that HR is shown as being, um, having that business sense, that business acumen, otherwise it would just be "oh, the soft and fluffy side." PSA16

"I left [my previous HR job] because I felt that it wasn't an HR job, it was a manager of budgets and labour costs, the discipliner of people, and someone who just had a big stick to hit people constantly." PSA12

"We are a business partner to other managers in the [organisation] and I think welfare would be one thing, but there are more measurable things that I think we should be contributing to, strategic headlines." PSM2

In FG3's following account, she also perceives the business partners role to be superior and appears to gain a sense of legitimacy and symbolic capital from her membership of the senior management team, because it gives her "a strong business understanding". It is this that makes her 'better' at handling bullying claims than an "advisory" practitioner, suggesting that she is constructing the BP role as 'superior' and positioning bullying as a 'business issue':

"I would say I'm an HR business partner, I'm not just here to do transactional work. I report directly to the overall director for [organisation]. And I sit in his team. So my peers are the senior directors in [organisation]. I do think it's important because I have a strong understanding of the business and I think it's really helpful, particularly when you're dealing with something like bullying. If you're a consultant advisory type of personnel team how can you really come in

and investigate a bullying allegation thoroughly when you haven't really got an understanding of how the business works.” FG3

It is worthy of note that nearly half of the HRPs had dedicated roles as bullying and harassment officers in their organisations; they had the specific remit of handling all bullying cases. Yet most worked in organisations where the policy stated that the manager was responsible for decisions in bullying cases. Hence, employees were provided with a specific point of contact if they felt bullied, yet this person had no authority to take proactive action, and would re-direct them to the bully's manager.

Hence, it seems that the HRPs have incorporated the professionalisation constructs of 'management alignment', 'business partner' and 'strategy' into their professional habitus. The HRPs consistently perceived their role as one to support managers and organisational strategy. Regardless of whether their actual job title was 'Business Partner', it was this stance they assumed, one that appears to provide them with symbolic capital because it is perceived as 'better' than more generalist roles. However, in doing so, it appears that employee advocacy might be precluded as a role, an interpretation that is examined in Section 6.5. Furthermore, this management alignment and business focus appears to influence the way in which they discuss bullying with managers, to which we now turn.

5.2.6 The “Business” of Bullying

As discussed above, the HRPs appear to have incorporated a 'business' and 'strategy' role into their habitus, and draw on 'performance' and 'economic' discourses to construct their organisational fields and their roles. This view of the world and language is then used to present the issue of bullying to managers as a 'business issue', described in 'business-speak'. For example, both PSA16 and PSA13 were clear that their alignment was with management and their role was protecting the organisation. They had both developed a 'business language' for positioning bullying as a financial and business issue in order to garner management attention and to encourage them to resolve claims in a way that would avoid potential litigation:

“This is still driven by business targets, because you are saying “I understand that you have got to sort that [bullying claim] out quickly, but you also need to realise that if you do it like that, that is going to happen, and you are going to be in this

situation. Why not look at this way of doing it, it's going to cost you less, and you'll still meet your targets." PSA16

"You've got to think more about what will resonate with them [management]. Just tell them that you could be looking at £100,000 claim here...so you say, "This behaviour, not only is it illegal, it's like a business case", rather than saying "oh please don't do it because it's nasty". I have found the legal argument to be more successful than the moral one." PSA13

Again, there appears to be a tension in PSA13's account: he acknowledges that the behaviour is "nasty", but recognises that positioning bullying as a "business case" "works better" than a "moral" argument, as did PSA15 earlier. Interestingly, across all the interviews, PSA13 was the only interviewee to spontaneously raise the issue of morals or ethics in relation to bullying. When the HRPs were specifically asked about whether they considered an ethical perspective, the business case was prioritised, as PSA15 describes:

"It's [bullying] a business issue for, for organisations, because you get good employees leaving, you have sickness, you have the time it takes to deal with bullying issues. So it is an ethical issue but it's a business issue as well...for the smooth running of the organisation." PSA15

"As well as the ethical thing there is a legal obligation because obviously people are protected by employment law so, you know, even if the organisation doesn't give a monkeys about its employees and their own personal rights, an organisation is exposing itself if it allows its employees to treat each other in an inappropriate way because of the, you know, resulting action that can be taken against the company."

PSA12

In PSA12's reply, she appears to be 'excusing' herself from an ethical responsibility because employees have employment law to "protect" them. Instead, her focus is on the potential damage to the organisation. Implicit is her acknowledgement of a lack of employee advocacy, because the organisation may not "give a monkeys" about the employees. She also avoids and sanitises 'bullying' by calling it an "inappropriate way" to behave. For some HRPs, the ethics of bullying was explicitly discounted. For example, PSM7 discussed how she did not consider her role to be about "values" or "righting all wrongs", and that *"if you were to talk to practitioners about morals and ethics, you'd just switch them off"*. Hence, as earlier with employee advocacy, it appears that by framing bullying as a business issue,

within financial and legal language, the HRPs are precluding a language of care and ethics. This will be returned to in Section 6.5.

Thus, within this section on the HRPs' organisational and professional contexts of bullying, it appears that intensified "performance-management cultures" have become a taken-for-granted aspect of doxa for HRPs. The HRM professionalisation constructs of 'management alignment' and 'business partner' appear to have been incorporated into the HRPs' professional shared habitus, and they perceive their role as one to protect and support managers and the organisation. In doing so, they have developed a 'business language' to discuss bullying with managers, positioning it as a 'financial issue' rather than a moral one. However, within this context, bullying is one of the most difficult issues that HRPs are required to handle in organisations. By its very nature, bullying is complex and ambiguous, and the HRPs are under multiple pressures to protect the organisation, managers and their own credibility when responding to bullying claims. HRPs appear to have been 'burnt' by past experiences of 'dubious' accounts from targets and criticism from managers, resulting in a more 'sceptical' and 'cautious' approach to targets' bullying claims. This is further compounded by HRPs' lack of capital in comparison to managers, which the HRPs attempt to address through position-taking, using their 'expert knowledge' as symbolic capital.

Having established the context, the next section will explore how HRPs actually construct bullying. Three constructs of bullying emerged from the analysis. Before presenting these, some clarification is required that will highlight the importance of the distinctions between bullying versus bullying behaviours and bullying claims, described in Section 5.1. At the beginning of each interview, the HRPs were asked if bullying was an issue for them. Typically the response was that it was not, as epitomised by PSM3 and PSM7 below:

"We probably get one or two cases a year where the B-word is mentioned as such, I would say" PSM3

"It's not something which, um, I have to deal with all that often so, um, so I wouldn't say that it is that relevant really. I suppose I am more involved with other matters really. Um and actually, if I'm honest, when I tend to have to deal with them, um, my first reaction [laughs] is to think of them as a bit of an inconvenience I suppose". PSM7

This was a consistent response from the HRPs: they reported not handling much *bullying*; instead, they have to deal with many *claims* of bullying. Hence, they did not discuss *cases of bullying*; they discussed *bullying claims*. More specifically and importantly, across all the data there was only one case presented as ‘genuine’ *bullying* by the HRPs, which is examined in Section 6.7. The significance of this point will be discussed in Chapter 7. What follows in the next two sections is the analysis of how HRPs construct and interpret peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee bullying *claims*; the HRPs did not discuss these as situations of *bullying*. In conducting this analysis the transcripts were analysed, using the stages described in Section 4.5.1, to examine the HRPs’ language and the broader discourse they drew upon in order to build a picture of how HRPs construct employees’ claims of bullying and Sally’s story in the vignette (p.106). First, we turn to their construction of peer-to-peer bullying claims.

5.3 Peer-to-Peer Bullying Claims: An “Interpersonal Conflict”

Although few peer-to-peer cases were discussed by the HRPs, these were consistently constructed as a ‘relationship difficulty’ between two individuals, either as the result of an unresolved conflict or a ‘personality clash’ over a work-related issue, and both individuals were perceived as responsible for the situation. ‘Peers’ could be either managers or employees; the critical factor was that they were of equal hierarchical status. Hence, this construct aligns with the individualistic and interpersonal definitions of bullying discussed in Chapter 2. Bullying *behaviour*, such as shouting or exclusion, may be involved as part of the ongoing conflict; however, the situation was not interpreted as *bullying* because there was a *logical underlying reason* for the situation, such as an argument over work that had become ‘out of hand’. This ‘understandable reason’ is important because, as will be explored in Section 6.7, it appears to be a factor that differentiates this construct from that of ‘genuine’ bullying. HRPs also drew on the ‘performance culture’ of their organisation, because it provided them with the context, the rationale, for why these conflicts occur. This is illustrated in PSM5’s account, although her language suggests that she is minimising the importance of the organisational culture with multiple uses of ‘you know’ and ‘sort of’:

“It’s peak times for staff, you know, that can sometimes, sort of, create, well not create tensions, but make people less able to cope with what they’ve been dealing with, you know, prior to the particular, you know, stressful time.” PSM5

PSM3's excerpt, below, highlights several aspects of this construct: whilst her description includes bullying behaviour ("screaming and shouting" and "name-calling"), her account reflects the 'personality' and 'conflict' nature of these claims for HRPs; they are about people who "don't get along" because of a "personality clash". Her laughter seems misplaced: PSM3 is describing a case that involved some very negative behaviours between peers, which she laughs about, suggesting that she may be experiencing some tension in her account of the claim. She also differentiates this case from something "really malicious" that would necessitate the "big investigation", suggesting that she perceives peer-to-peer claims as 'less important':

"It's always the assistants who don't get along with each other [laughter]...so two assistants got to the stage where they were sort of having shouting and screaming matches, name-calling between each other, it didn't need a big investigation, I didn't need to ruffle feathers, it didn't need the whole cloak and daggers hype. I think you've got to be careful when you know it's just a case of two people who have got a personality clash versus something that's really malicious." PSM3

Hence, implicit within this peer-to-peer construction is the assumption these claims are trivial, "inconvenient" and 'childish', as PSM6 and PSA13 describe, which is further indication of the 'sceptical' approach HRPs towards bullying claims discussed in Section 5.2.1. PSM6's account provides an example of how HRPs view these claims as work-related:

"I think most of it is just literally a typical misunderstanding or a failure of vocabulary...you may get a worker and the person next to him doesn't [work] as fast as he does, and either directly or indirectly a humorous remark might get said and you then get a flashpoint, he don't like me, I don't like him, let's all throw our teddies out the pram." PSM6

"I think, "blimey, I'm back when I was 10 years old". It's normally a bit cleverer than school ground bullying, but it was just like being back at school" PSA13

Furthermore, within this construct, the HRPs appear to consider that it is not their responsibility to resolve these claims. That lies with the individuals involved, and their managers. Noticing the development of potential peer-to-peer claims and 'nipping it in the bud' lay with the managers. In both PSM6 and PSM3's account, they perceive that managers have the responsibility for ensuring that employee behaviour does not escalate into a bullying case. Both avoid the word 'bullying' by using what Bourdieu would call euphemisms:

“something a little bit more serious” and “something so extreme”. Both also imply that the managers have failed, or are unable, to prevent the issue escalating, a theme that will be examined in Section 6.2.2:

“The way I look at it is that ninety per cent of [peer-to-peer] bullying harassment is general management of the situation. So if a manager sees something happening, he nips it in the bud...if managers haven’t got the knowledge to deal with the situation then it starts to manifest itself into something a little bit more serious.”

PSM6

“I think it was a shame that it took him to get to this level before [laughter] somebody nipped it in the bud and that something so extreme had happened that it caused this [the claim] to happen and I think that's the senior manager’s responsibility.” PSM3

Responsibility for resolving the claim also appears to be attributed to the target and bully within this construct; for example, PSM4 believes that, besides owning the problem, the individuals “own the solution as well...there’s a mutually, a mutual obligation to resolve the problem.” However, it appears that HRPs perceive that the *target* is more responsible, not just for *resolving* the claim, also for *causing* the problem. In PSM5’s excerpt below, she discusses the target’s responsibility for resolving the issue, justifying it as the “best way” for the employee to “no longer be a victim”, although she acknowledges that this can be difficult because the target’s expectation is that HR will take action. Interestingly, she is using “impassivity” as a reason for the target to act, whilst her own response is similarly passive. Arguably, this response likely to fuel employees’ perceptions of HRPs’ inaction and management alignment, as discussed in Chapter 2:

“If you are being bullied you are a victim of bullying and I think the best way, to ensure that you are no longer a victim is for you to deal with that yourself. If someone else deals with it for you, you’re an impassive person in the process. But it does make it difficult sometimes, when people want you to just, do, you know, deal with it for you.” PSM5

Cause of the ‘conflict’ also appears to be attributed to the target. In PSM2’s account below, she discusses how peer-to-peer claims often develop from an initial, small incident; however, she attributes this escalation to the target’s ‘sensitivity’ and ‘misinterpretation’. Likewise, although PSM3 interprets the bullies’ ‘lack of self-awareness’ as a contributing factor, as

noted earlier, she also focuses on the target's "other issues" and "diabolical absence record" as a way of establishing the target's culpability. Again, she avoids the word 'bullying', euphemistically referring to it as being "controlling" behaviours and being "treated quite badly":

"I think that something minor can happen and can set someone on edge with another person and they'll become extremely sensitive to anything that that person does and they can almost misinterpret everything that that person does...because they've got this mindset now, you know, they're sort of struggling to see it any other way if you see what I mean." PSM5

"I think she [the bully] certainly displayed some behaviours that were very controlling, and if she didn't get her own way she certainly didn't make it very easy for other people working with her. The problem was, I think, she was so thick skinned, I don't think she had any idea of the impact she had on others...and the girl who raised the claim, whilst I think she genuinely had been treated quite badly by this other girl, she's got all sorts of other issues going on. She's got a diabolical absence record." PSM3

Hence, it seems that HRPs do not consider the targets' subjective experience, instead they are focusing on the targets' culpability, suggesting that, as reported by employees in Chapter 2, there is an element of 'target-blaming' in the HRPs' response to peer-to-peer bullying claims. This will be returned to in the next section, when we consider manager-to-employee claims.

However, before doing so, although these peer-to-peer claims appear to be somewhat frustrating and less important to HRPs, they seem easier to handle; they were more 'clear cut', and the HRP were able to apportion the blame between the two employees, as PSM8 and PSM5 describe:

"They're [peer-to-peer cases] less difficult because it's quite apparent, the course of conduct, the nature of the issues and the evidence that you get generally is much, much more clear and compelling than [manager-to-employee] related situations." PSM8

"I think usually what the judgement is, "it sounds like there's six of one and half a dozen of the other here". PSM5

Hence, from the analysis of the peer-to-peer claims discussed by the HRPs, bullying is constructed as a work-related, individual-level interpersonal issue, caused by conflicts and misunderstandings, which are exacerbated by ‘performance cultures’. These claims arise when conflicts escalate because managers have failed to manage the situation effectively. Hence, these claims appear to be frustrating for HRPs: if managers were doing their jobs properly, it would not reach HR. Both bully and target are perceived as culpable for the problem, and responsible for the solution. Thus, the HRPs do not appear to consider the subjective experience of the target, instead focusing on aspects of their behaviour or characteristics that may ‘explain’ the problem. As will now be explored, many of these factors apply to manager-to-employee cases.

5.4 Manager-to-Employee Bullying Claims: A “Performance Issue”

The majority of the bullying claims discussed by the HRPs were manager-to-employee, as was the situation presented in the vignette (p. 106). Again, for clarification, these cases were not *defined* as ‘bullying’ by the HRPs; they were situations they discussed where an employee was *claiming* that their manager was bullying. Hence, the analysis is of the manager-to-employee claims discussed in the interviews.

Within these data, including phase one with the vignette, *all* manager-to-employee claims were constructed within a discourse of *performance management*; that is, these manager-to-employee claims are constructed as poorly managed, misunderstood or disliked performance-management. A crucial element of this construct is that the HRPs consistently perceive that the target’s performance is at fault, for example, by not meeting targets or job objectives, or because of their attitude. This is interpreted as the root cause of the situation: because of the employee’s underlying performance issue, the manager has instigated a process of performance management in an attempt to rectify the performance issue. The bullying claim is a *symptom* of this process: the employee is reacting to being performance managed by raising the claim. The following quotes illustrate how HRPs perceive that a performance issue is often the underlying cause of a bullying claim, and that employees who are being performance-managed will frequently raise a bullying claim:

“They [manager-to-employee claims] very often are connected to matters concerning an individual’s ability to do their job or the way in which an

individual's carrying out their job. So very often we find that issues around claims of bullying or harassment are based on, actually I'm not happy with the way I'm being managed." PSM8

"Quite often when someone's performance is called into, quite often they will claim that they're being bullied. That's quite common." PSM5

"There have been cases where people think it's bullying because they've been put on a performance improvement plan and they don't see that's right, that's bullying in their mind. But it's not; it's what we do for people who are underperforming.

PSM1

PSM1's use of the word "we" highlights another aspect of this construct: HRPs perceive that intensified focus on performance-management is legitimate and their alignment is with the managers executing this task, as established in Section 5.2. Thus, in their eyes, this justified focus on improving employees' performance has resulted in an increased number of manager-to-employee bullying *claims*, which are then interpreted as employees reacting to being performance-managed, not as an increase in *bullying*:

"[As a result of the economic recession] we've seen a definite increase in people challenging when they're being performance managed and then linking that to them being treated differently by my manager or whatever else." FG1

"What we're dealing with, I think, more and more, are allegations of bullying as appeals against performance work where the person's saying "I've been treated differently"." FG3

"I've had 100 times more of those kind of cases at [the organisation] and I can almost predict that every time the line manager says "I'm really going to deal with this person" that it will result in an allegation of bullying." PSM2

Thus, it appears that the HRPs are doubly attributing the rise in manager-to-employee claims to employees: firstly, because of the underlying performance issue; and secondly, for reacting 'negatively' to the justified performance-management. The managers' actions are perceived as "reasonable" in the performance-driven "environmental culture", as PSM1 discusses:

"You've got some people who feel bullied because they are expected to reach a certain target, but what the manager is trying to do is to say " we've already established that this is a reasonable amount for anybody to do given your level of

experience. Ultimately it becomes one of constantly having to achieve certain numbers and for some people that's an environmental culture that they're not happy with." PSM1

Likewise, PSM4 identifies "tighter performance management" in his organisation's culture and attributes the claims to employees' dislike of this environment:

"We certainly have people who, in a more and more tighter performance management regime, they've played the bullying card for want of a better phrase, as a way of avoiding being taken to task. Sometimes it can be a convenient excuse because I don't like the fact that I'm being performance managed and I never was previously." PSM4

Furthermore, within this construct, the HRPs appear very clear that both their alignment and sympathy are with managers, and that the HRPs' role is to support this intensified performance-management:

"My view is one of sympathy with leadership trying to performance manage somebody who really wasn't paying any attention to anything they said or wouldn't accept their views." PSM1

"I will often to try and support managers in cases of performance management, if they are trying to manage performance and people complain, and that does happen quite often." PSA11

Hence, the HRPs appear to be constructing manager-to-employee claims as an employee reaction to justified performance-management, which has been "reasonably" instigated by the manager because the employee is failing to meet the demands of their high-performance environments. The legitimacy of the requirement for 'high performance' was not questioned by the HRPs; it was perceived as a necessary requirement to maintain the organisation's competitive advantage in the tougher economic conditions. Hence, linking back to Section 5.2, the nature and 'rules' of the performance-driven environment and the intensified performance-management practices appear to be part of doxa, and HRPs' role in supporting managers seems an integral aspect of their professional habitus.

This world-view also appears to influence the nature of the conversations that HRPs have with employees raising manager-to-employee claims. As highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter, the HRPs tend not to use the word 'bullying', instead using a range of

euphemistic language. However, for manager-to-employee claims, this is explicitly discussed by the HRPs, because, more so than peer-to-peer claims, the targets' accounts are challenged openly and the target is expected to 'prove' their case. For example, PSM2, below, describes how she will now have more 'open conversations' with employees, challenging their allegation of bullying because it is "serious" and putting the onus on the target to prove that the behaviour is bullying:

"When I deal with something, I won't say, "bullying", I'll see if that comes out of the conversation. If that does, then I'll say, "so you're making an allegation of bullying, that's a serious allegation". And at that point, I would give them our policy and procedure...and say, " let's just look through what bullying behaviour is. Tell me which category it falls into. Talk me through what the behaviour has been", and if they can't do that, then I will say to that person "so what you're describing probably isn't bullying behaviour I get them to go off with the policy and procedure and think about it." PSM2

PSM2's stance here is, arguably, aggressive. As found with peer-to-peer claims, she is not considering the target's subjective position, her focus is on the 'objective' behaviours and the burden of proof rests with the target. Furthermore, the HRPs appeared to use policy to 'cloud' the issue. For example, in discussing how she used the policy document for manager-to-employee claims, PSM3's quote suggests ambiguity in her policy. Likewise, PSA14 discusses the difficulty employees may have finding the policy, her reluctance to provide it and uncertainty on its content:

We've got this big policy, seven pages, and it really kind of defines what sort of behaviour is, like a list of 10 behaviours that would be deemed as bullying. And I can't remember the exact language used, I have a funny feeling that it doesn't use bullying, it uses something else." PSM3

"Unless the employee has trawled through the intranet or company handbook, they may not even be aware that there is a bullying and harassment policy. I mean I'd make them aware of the grievance procedure. I never tell them to make a decision now. Tell them to go away, "Have a think about it. Come back and see me tomorrow"...I think they would hear something about the bullying and harassment policy...but I'm not overly keen on advertising the bullying and harassment policy,

because I think potentially you're opening yourself up to a big can of worms."

PSA14

Not only is PSA14 obstructing employees' access to the document, but her stance is also, arguably, aggressive. Again, there is an implicit 'fear' of opening up the "can of worms", the 'ruffled feathers' from Section 5.2 that a formal investigation would entail. Thus, it appears that HRPs are not only more challenging to targets in manager-to-employee claims, they are also placing obstacles in the path to resolution. Why this might be the case will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Thus, having established how HRPs construct both peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims, Chapter 6 will move onto the analysis of how the HRPs use these constructs to interpret and respond to new claims. However, before doing so, there was one important question that arose during the concurrent data collection and analysis that warrants examination. The consistency of HRPs' discursive construction of manager-to-employee claims as an 'employee performance issue' emerged during the analysis of phase two. However, the question remained, *when* might HRPs decide that a manager-to-employee claim is an employee performance issue? Do they gather all the relevant information, talk to the parties involved and *then* decide whether it is an issue of employee (under)performance? Or is it an immediate 'assumption' when an employee first alleges that their manager is bullying them, at that first meeting? That is, do they immediately apply this discursive construction of 'manager-to-employee claims as an employee underperformance issue', or do they substantiate it first by talking to all the parties involved? The next section provides the analysis of this 'when' question.

5.4.1 Applying the 'Bullying as a Performance Issue' Construct

The analysis of the interviews suggests that this construct is activated and applied to the situation as soon the HRP establishes that it is a manager-to-employee claim; they do not wait until they have spoken to all parties involved. A new case of manager-to-employee bullying appears to initiate a reaction of *'what else is going on here?'* at the *initial meeting* with the target. This point appears critical in understanding how and when this construct is applied to bullying claims and, therefore, multiple examples from the data are provided to support this interpretation. Both PSM1 and PSM5 talk about the relationship between performance issues

and bullying claims, that employees ‘use’ bullying to “hang their hat on”. Therefore, the assumption is that “there is something else in the mix”:

“More cases have been about...about performance improvement plans, and there is always something else in the mix, if you will, that is actually making me think “actually, is this just another way of trying to avoid, you know, dealing with the fact that you are not performing or you have done something that you shouldn't have done”. It feels a little bit as if they are hanging their hat on the word bullying.”

PSM1

“Often when someone’s performance is called into question in the employment situation, quite often they will claim that they’re being bullied.” PSM5

Hence, it appears that the employee’s motives are immediately called into question if the claim is regarding their manager and, again, the HRPs appear to seek confirmation of the target’s culpability. Both PSM3 and PSM7 highlight the “mixed motives” and “other stuff” underlying most bullying claims. In PSM3’s account, there is an implicit questioning of the target’s genuineness in her phrase “call them the victim as such”, indicating that she does not think they warrant such a label. Hence, both quotes appear not only to diminish the targets’ subjective experience, they both appear to disbelieve the targets:

“You tend to find the minute that you start talking about bullying that, if you've got a - call them the victim as such - we tend to find...that there are other issues going on with the people who then raise, sort of, bullying allegations and that there is other stuff, be it poor performance or something else.” PSM3

“My experience of them [manager-to-employee claims] is that very few you ever find that there is bullying and harassment at the recourse of it, so you normally find that people have mixed motives in raising the grievance...in a lot of cases its somebody with...a performance issue” PSM7

Further support for this immediate ‘assumption’ of the employee’s performance issue was provided by the analysis of the HRPs’ interpretations of the vignette. Despite the consciously designed explicit nature of the bullying behaviours and Sally’s ‘high performance’, the HRPs sought reasons for Sally’s culpability in the situation; that there might be something else about Sally’s performance that was not provided in the vignette. PSA12 appears to hold a taken-for-granted acceptance of employee performance issues in such claims, indicated by

her phrase “quite often what happens in this type of case”. PSA15 appears to lack trust in Sally’s account, preferring to seek the view of a previous manager:

“It may be something about Sally's conduct, in terms of her challenging him, as her manager - quite often what happens in this type of case is that there is genuinely a performance issue, the employee just doesn't appreciate it.” PSA12

“It might be that we need to look back and see what exactly her [Sally] previous line manager thought of her performance and try to sort of drill down and find out.” PSA15

Hence, it appears that when HRPs are presented with a new manager-to-employee claim, again, it is not the employee’s subjective experience that is considered. It seems that the immediate thought is ‘what else might be going on’, and a taken-for-granted assumption of employee under-performance is applied. That is, *because* it is an employee ‘complaining’ about their manager, the HRPs use a taken-for-granted construction of ‘manager-to-employee claims as an employee underperformance issue’ to interpret the employee’s claim, rather than considering all the information from all parties before deciding that is the case. Hence, the HRPs subsequently interpret the claim from this worldview. In Chapter 7, the implications of this finding, which are, arguably, significant for both targets and the continuance of bullying (claims), will be discussed.

5.5 Summary

The elements of the analysis presented in this chapter sought to explore the first of the two research questions:

How do human resource practitioners construct workplace bullying?

In summarising the findings thus far, in terms of the context within which HRPs construct, interpret and respond to bullying, it appears that the economic pressures from the broader socio-economic field have influenced the local organisational field in three main ways: intensified pressure on employee productivity, with concomitant pressure on managers to performance-manage their staff to meet greater targets; and greater pressure on HRPs to resolve bullying claims swiftly, which seems to have resulted in a more challenging language from HRPs to targets. These organisational changes appear to have become incorporated into doxa: HRPs appear to perceive the rise in managers’ performance-management practices as

legitimate, necessary for the organisation to remain successful and competitive in the current climate. HRPs appear to perceive that this increase in performance-management has resulted in an increase in bullying *claims* as employees react negatively to these changes. HRPs also drew on the HRM professionalisation discourse to construct their role as one that is closely aligned with management, and functions to support managers in their execution of performance-management to achieve organisation targets. The consistency of this view suggests that this construct of the HRP role is embedded within a shared professional habitus. Within this organisational and professional context, it appears that HRPs perceive their main objectives as protecting the organisation and supporting managers. However, in relation to HRPs' bullying-related practices, the findings suggest that management-focused policies, a lack of capital and being 'burnt' by bullying claims has contributed to a sceptical and passive response to bullying claims.

Within this context, it appears that HRPs hold two constructions for bullying claims, determined by the alleged bully. Peer-to-peer claims are constructed as work-related, individual-level interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings, often resulting from the pressures of 'performance cultures'. HRPs appear to perceive that the culpability is shared between the bully and the targets, exacerbated by managers not 'nipping it in the bud'. Manager-to-employee claims appear to be constructed as a 'symptom' of the manager's justified performance-management of an employee's underperformance. The HRPs' immediate response to these claims is that 'something else' is going, and that 'something else' consistently appeared to be an assumption of the target's underperformance. In these situations, the HRPs do not appear to question the legitimacy of the requirement for 'high performance' or the manager's performance-management actions; it is the target's response to this process that is perceived as the 'cause' for the claim. For both peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims the HRPs do not appear to consider the subjective experience of the target: it is the targets' behaviour or characteristics that become the focus in seeking an 'explanation' for the problem.

It is to the HRPs' interpretation and subsequent response to bullying claims that Chapter 6 will now turn.

Chapter 6: Findings: HRPs' Interpretation and Response to Bullying

This chapter will now turn to the second research question:

What factors influence their interpretation and subsequent response to employees' bullying claims?

As will now be examined, the analysis suggests that the HRPs hold a range of interpretive mechanisms that serve to rationalise and justify the peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee bullying claim constructions, to 'fit' the claims into these world-views. These interpretive mechanisms fall into two groups, determined by their function: target attributions and manager attributions. The next section presents the analysis of target attributions.

6.1 Target-Related Interpretive Mechanisms

The previous chapter established that HRPs appear to immediately assume that the target has a performance issue when claiming manager-to-employee bullying. The analysis of the interview data suggest that subsequently the HRPs interpret the targets' claim within this world-view, and in doing so appear to interpret that the 'cause' of the claim lies with the target in two main ways: the employee's 'naïve' or deliberate misunderstanding of the performance-management process; or aspects of their personality or behaviour. Furthermore, as established in Section 5.2, the HRPs appear not to question the legitimacy of either the intensified performance culture or performance-management practices. Instead, it is the targets' understanding of these that is questioned.

This 'misunderstanding' could be interpreted as either genuine or as a deliberate act to sabotage or stop the performance-management process (the HRPs' emphasis on target 'genuineness' will be further examined in Section 6.7). For example, PSM5 believes that some employees will deliberately use "bullying and harassment" in performance-management situations, and PSM2 subsequently differentiates between "savvy" employees who are attempting to stop the performance management process and employees who "genuinely" perceive performance management as bullying.

However, it seems that her assumption is that “the problem” is the employee for not appreciating their performance issue. Likewise, PSM6 discusses employees who raise a bullying claim because they do not like the way they are being managed; he implies that the management behaviour is legitimate: “the manager is just managing”.

“I would say that some people blatantly choose to misunderstand a situation and interpret it in a way that is not necessary, it’s easy to interpret anything as bullying or harassment” PSM5

“I think there are some quite savvy people out there who will come into HR and see them as a way of avoiding and being dealt with by their manager...I think there are also a number of people who genuinely do think they are being bullied because they are being told that you're not doing this job well enough, and they've never been told that before...they can't really see the problem is them, they think the problem is the manager. And so they do struggle with that bullying definition really.” PSM2

“The problem we get is that we’ve got people who don’t like a decision or an action by the manager, when actually, the manager is just managing and you don’t like it...or you just want to have a moan about it.” PSM6

Furthermore, as well as the performance-management process, the HRP’s discussed how employees ‘misunderstand’ what ‘bullying’ and ‘management’ mean. In PSM2 and PSM6’s excerpts, the targets claim is interpreted as them not understanding the difference between ‘management’ and bullying, and not liking the way they are being managed. There appears to be an implicit assumption that it is the employees’ interpretation, not the management, which is the problem. FG2’s quote, again, seems to indicate that the subjective experience of the target is not considered, even when the employee is discussing the unfairness of the treatment:

“Sometimes people call it bullying when it is strong management. You know, they will say “I’ve been told this by my line manager, I don’t really like it, I’m being bullied.” PSM2

“I still think there is a minority of staff that feel it’s still appropriate to put in a bullying harassment claim without actually understanding what process they’re following. Actually, is it bullying or is it just your manager asking

you to do your job? The individual perceives it as harassment but actually it's the manager managing his work area." PSM6

"I think one of the things that you've got is misunderstanding of bullying... it's not fair and, therefore, in their terminology not being fair means it's not true and, therefore, you're bullying me by telling me something I don't want to hear." FG2

Linked to employee 'misunderstanding' was the HRPs perception that targets were either unable or unwilling to take feedback from their managers, and this was seen as another 'reason' for the claim. For example, FG1 describes this 'inability' as a defence mechanism to being performance managed, an inability that FG3 believes underpins the allegation. PSM1 concurs with this, and implicit in her quote is that the manager's view is the right one:

"You couldn't say it was a false claim...it's a bit of a defence mechanism to being performance managed but it is this inability to accept that they have any issues with their performance." FG1

"They're alleging bullying and I think that's more about the individual who just doesn't want to accept feedback, can't take feedback." FG3

"He [the target] went on and on. A lot of it was repetitive stuff, which for him was supporting evidence...to me, it was him not accepting his leader's final decision. And they [management] have a right to make an observation about your behaviour, and he won't accept it." PSM1

Whilst one interpretation might be that the HRPs are 'right', and that employees are 'misunderstanding' their managers' behaviours, there is other data that suggests otherwise. The HRPs frequently inferred that they were aware of managers whose behaviour might be 'inappropriate' at times:

"I've got managers where if someone came and told me this I would say, I would believe that that was the truth and, you know, but I have other managers where if someone came and said this to me I would think "well that, that doesn't sound like them." PSA15

“To be frank, some of our managers have interesting ways of speaking to people. So yes we might be aware of the fact that it could be an issue, they could have behaved in a way which we’ve seen or heard of before.” FG3

In addition to targets’ ability or willingness to take feedback, culpability for the claim was also attributed to other aspects of their personality and behaviour. For example, in Section 5.3 it was established that HRPs draw on aspects of targets’ work-related behaviour, such as sickness-absence. In the examples below, this extends to the targets personality. For example, targets are perceived as “perfectionists”, “odd”, “self-important”, or possessing a “victim personality”. These interpretations of the targets’ behaviour suggest that HRPs are individualising the ‘cause’ of the bullying claim to an aspect of the targets’ character or behaviour, reflecting the arguments in Chapter 2 that HRPs’ hold an individualised construction of bullying that may be influenced by how bullying is portrayed in the media:

“I’m thinking that perhaps they’re a perfectionist so that’s their trait in their personality, so any type of feedback that is given to them, they see it as a criticism and they just can’t handle it, they can’t accept it.” FG3

“The complainant was a little bit odd; he had high expectations of his own career...he had the whole self-importance, which didn't have any substance to go with it.” PSM3

“Well you do have some people that inherently feel they’re the victim.” FG2

Hence, it seems that HRPs are interpreting the culpability for manager-to-employee claims in two main ways: as established in Section 5.4.1, they appear to immediately assume that the target has an underlying performance issue, the “something else”. Subsequently, the HRPs use a range of mechanisms to interpret the target’s claim within that perspective, such as misunderstanding of performance-management or bullying, or an aspect of their personality. Thus, it appears that rather than considering the targets’ subjective experience and the *possibility* of bullying, the HRPs, instead, seek ways to justify the construct a performance-related claim in manager-to-employee situations. Furthermore, it suggests that such a response could lead to the targets perceiving that HRPs do not believe them or are labelling them as a trouble-maker, as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests.

Before moving onto examine the interpretive mechanisms that HRPs use for managers' behaviour in these claims, a caveat is appropriate here. In presenting the analyses of the interpretive mechanisms that emerged from these data, I am not assuming that the HRPs are 'wrong' and that the targets accounts are 'right'; it may be that many of the claims that HRPs face are, in fact, based on employee performance issues. It is not possible to ascertain this from these data because only the voice of the HRP is available. However, from analysing the HRPs' narratives in this thesis, it appears that these HRPs do not consider the possibility that the claims *could be* bullying, or even that they could be *perceived* as bullying by the targets. It is this apparent lack of consideration that could be crucial in understanding the targets' perspectives presented in Chapter 2. We now turn to consider the HRPs interpretive mechanisms for managers' behaviour in relation to bullying claims.

6.2 Manager-Related Interpretive Mechanisms

This section presents the findings for the mechanisms that HRPs appear to use when interpreting managers' behaviour in manager-to-employee claims. That is, the manager-related interpretive mechanisms that appear to provide the HRPs with the means of legitimising both the construct of a performance-related claim, and behaviour from managers that could otherwise be interpreted as bullying, as will be shown. The HRPs' language is important: within these interpretive mechanisms, they use a range of Bourdieu's euphemistic labelling, sanitising language and normalisation techniques, which serve to restructure the behaviour into 'something more acceptable'. For example, bullying behaviours are labelled as "inappropriate management behaviour", "strong management", "ill-judged management", "poor citizenship skills", and "diabolical management". The managers themselves were accorded with a range of labels reflecting their behaviour: "bull in a china shop", "alpha male", "child abuser", and "a nightmare". Although the HRPs avoided applying the words 'bullying' and 'bully', these euphemisms suggest there may be an awareness of the negative and serious nature of managers' behaviours, as the following analysis will examine.

In analysing the way in which this sanitising language was used, the following themes emerged. Each has been provided with a short definition, which will be substantiated

in the subsequent analysis. Each signifies an interpretive mechanism that the HRPs used to ‘explain’ managers’ behaviours:

- ‘*Company managers*’: as a result of organisational pressures, they are driven, ambitious, and focused; managers who want to be in control of their team’s performance;
- ‘*Insensitive managers*’: lack self-awareness or have a blinkered focus on their objectives;
- ‘*Poor management*’: untrained, under-skilled, or over-promoted managers;
- ‘*Old school managers*’: long-service or very senior managers who have entrenched out-dated styles of management;
- ‘*Untouchable managers*’: deemed outside of normal policy because of their status or seniority.

These mechanisms were not independent and mutually exclusive; as the following analysis will illustrate, multiple attributions can be applied to one manager. However, the final category, ‘untouchable-manager’ is of a different nature to the others, as Section 6.2.4 will present. We begin with ‘company managers’ and ‘insensitive managers’ because these mechanisms frequently went hand-in-hand.

6.2.1 ‘Company Managers’ and ‘Insensitive Managers’

‘Company managers’ were often perceived as ‘insensitive’ by the HRPs because this insensitivity could result from either blinkered hard work, or a personal lack of self-awareness, but, as PSM1 describes, it is legitimised by the need to be driven and target-focused in the ‘performance culture’ of her organisation:

“A lot of the leaders aren’t good at being with the pink and fluffy stuff...they are focused on the targets, and they need to get there; and you’ve got some really good leaders who take time out to engage with their staff...but some are really driven with targets. And so they’re not in the space where they really want to know the person that well, they just want you to come in and do your job” PSM1

PSM1’s use of the word “good” is interesting; it appears to be an implicit recognition that leaders who do take the time to “engage” and be “pink and fluffy” are ‘better’ than the “really driven” managers. This theme of “good” and, hence, ‘bad’

management will arise in other mechanisms. The focus group also discussed their “highly driven” environment “ambitious” managers. Whilst FG3 acknowledges that there may be a fine line between the “achieving” behaviour of a “good leader” and the “controlling” behaviour of an implicitly ‘bad leader’, FG2 immediately goes onto legitimise any potential impact to employees by attributing this to the managers’ lack of awareness of the impact:

“We’ve got a lot of people around here who are very, very highly driven and...who like to be in control and...ambitious people who want to get on. Well adding that up you’re going to have people who are really pushing all the time to achieve...where you draw the line between just wanting to achieve, a very good leader, to controlling, not necessarily what we want, well not what we want, to bully.” FG3

“Their [driven managers] minds work very, very quickly and they move on...they miss the impact they’re having because they are so quickly thinking of the next thing” FG2

Implicitly, there are indications that the HRPs in the focus group appreciate that these driven managers, the “drivers”, are behaving in a manner that may be perceived as bullying by their employees, because they go on to discuss how they identify and train these ‘company managers’ to have a greater awareness of the impact of their behaviour:

“So if you’ve got a manager, a driver, and they are not checking for understanding and clarifying that the person is comfortable with how they’ve been treated... we would give them the feedback that they’re not doing it right and it might well then appear into their personal development objectives.” FG3

Likewise, PSM3 discusses how managers may behave in ways that could be considered bullying, but which are not, because of their lack of awareness and focus:

“If someone came to see me because their direct manager was bullying them then, actually I haven’t had anything like that for a few years actually [laughter], but...I think you’d know if that manager probably had displayed those tendencies before or even if they weren’t a bully per se, certainly had certain behaviours that could be perceived to be bullying even if they

weren't, and it was again just somebody's lack of awareness in their personal style, which is most cases here, because people just stay focused."

PSM3

Her account appears full of contradictions; she is acknowledging that she may know that this manager is capable of using bullying behaviours but, because of his/her lack of awareness and focus, PSM3 does not interpret this as bullying. Hence, both PSM3 and the focus group appeared to be sanitising and normalising the potentially bullying behaviours of these managers, reframing them as 'focused behaviour' and 'lack of self-awareness'. Both the economic and HRM professional discourses seem to be influencing this interpretation: HRPs have embraced the need to increase performance to meet organisational requirements in the current recession. They see their role in partnership with managers to achieve this. To satisfy these field requirements, bullying behaviours are legitimised as 'management drive', sanitised as 'determined focus' and a 'lack of self-awareness'. This approach has potential implications for the management of bullying and the perception of employees: if bullying behaviours from 'company managers' are being accepted and sanctioned by HRPs, the risk might be that employees are likely to doubt the impartiality of HRM and the efficacy of coming forward with a claim, as Chapter 7 will discuss.

6.2.2 Poor Management

The second mechanism for interpreting managers' behaviours was 'poor management', which functions in a similar fashion to above. Here, behaviour was reframed as 'inappropriate' as a result of the manager struggling to do their job because of a lack of skill/training or over-promotion. Hence, behaviours that would be classified as bullying within a policy are, instead, perceived as "ineffectual" or 'inept'. There is a sense that FG3 has sympathy for the manager, almost a sense of complicity in the manager's lack of skill and, therefore, questions the motives of the employees raising the claim, despite acknowledging the impact on the employees:

"I don't think he [the manager] was particularly skilled, in some ways I think he'd probably been over promoted, he didn't have the experience and we...hadn't trained him properly and the team was not being managed in a way that was wanted by the business, but he wasn't bullying them, he was

ineffectual in my opinion...they just didn't like him and so they concocted all these stories.” FG3

In some of the claims discussed, the HRPs described, arguably, serious bullying behaviours, which were then excused by interpreting them within the framework of ‘poor management’. In PSM4’s account, he describes a range of behaviours that *could* be interpreted as bullying, but because PSM4 interprets them as not “malicious” and the manager as “crap”, it is not ‘bullying’ in his eyes:

“It wasn't down to...maliciousness, it's just he was a crap manager, basically...and that sort of manifested itself in the way he dealt with his people, which was, you know, shouting, bawling, demanding, unacceptable, you know, sort of demands placed on them...it was the only way he thought he'd get their co-operation.” PSM4

PSM4’s comment on the lack of ‘maliciousness’ was a recurring theme, and is one that will be returned to when we consider ‘genuine’ bullying in Section 6.7. However, the sense, in PSM4’s account, that managers use the ‘wrong’ behaviours to garner employees’ “co-operation” was evident in other HRPs’ discussions. They talked about poor managers developing a ‘tool-kit’ of ‘inappropriate behaviours’, as a result of a lack of training or observing the ‘successful’ use of this behaviour by other managers. Below, PSM8 discusses how managers ‘learn’ behaviours from more senior managers who are ‘able to get away with it’ because of their seniority, and because it ‘gets results’, which again reflects the dominance of the economic ‘performance-imperative’. Likewise, PSA12 appears to be reframing a manager “shouting” at employees as ‘acceptable’ or ‘understandable’ because s/he has no option because of a lack of training:

“I think behaviour sometimes breeds behaviour, so if you see your boss do something that you think is particularly effective then you may well be influenced by that to think, “actually that's okay because my boss does...others don't find that inappropriate because of their seniority...I can use that in the tool kit of different management leadership's behaviours that are available in order to effectively deal with a situation”. PSM8

“For some people that is the only way they can manage, they’ve not been taught any other tools in their manager’s box, so the only way they know to get people to do things for them is to shout at them.” PSA16

Both PSM8 and PSA16 perceive these ‘inappropriate’ behaviours to be a result of observation and a lack of opportunity to develop more suitable skills in their “tool kit”. However, implicit in their accounts is that it is not the manager’s ‘fault’ and, therefore, it is unintentional. As with PSM4 earlier, it appears that the HRPs perceived that these managers do not mean to be “malicious”. This issue of intentionality will be examined in detail in Section 6.7.

Furthermore, within the mechanism of ‘poor management’, the HRPs also perceived that the situation could be exacerbated by the way the manager handles the performance issue. Again, lack of training, experience or interpersonal skills may result in a poor performance-management style. PSA12’s account brings elements of the manager-to-employee construct together: her assumption of the “genuine performance issue”, the target’s lack of understanding, and a ‘poor management’ response. Again, PSA12 seems to be implicitly ‘blaming’ the target for their lack of “appreciation”:

“Quite often what happens in this type of case is that there is genuinely a performance issue, the employee doesn’t appreciate it...unfortunately, the manager hasn’t necessarily raised it in the most appropriate way” PSA12

“We’ve got a lot of technically brilliant managers; absolutely hopeless when it comes to dealing with people issues. Don’t just flounder, not just flounder, get it desperately wrong at times you know.” PSM4

PSM4’s comment is interesting; whilst he was also sanitising the bullying claim as “hopeless” and “floundering” management skill, such managers are still “brilliant”. This suggests that “brilliant” management is not people-related in HRPs’ eyes; it is determined by managers’ ability to deliver their business targets.

Thus, it appears that HRPs perceive ‘poor management behaviour’ as a *contributing factor*, not as the *cause* of the claim, because the manager is only attempting to remediate taken-for-granted under-performance. Moreover, by interpreting the

managers' behaviours as 'poor management' and labelling them as 'inappropriate' rather than bullying, HRPs appear to be complicit in the continuance of these behaviours. In such situations, the target's claim of bullying is unlikely to be validated, because it can be 'explained' by poor management. Thus, as will be examined in Chapter 7, the target is likely to perceive the HRP's response as 'disbelief', 'inaction' or management 'collusion', as described in Chapter 2.

6.2.3 'Old School Managers'

Yet more serious (potentially) bullying behaviours were sanitised and, thus, accepted via an interpretation of 'old school' management, which was often related to 'untouchable managers'. Within this 'old school' mechanism, HRPs perceived that some long-service managers were unable to 'move with the times' or 'cope' with the demands placed on them by the economic and performance changes in the organisational field. It is this inability to change that is seen as a contributing factor to the bullying claim, not that the behaviour is interpreted as bullying, as PSM6's comment illustrates:

"Because some managers can't cope with the rapid change that the business is asking for, that then exposes their managerial capabilities...because the manager acts under stress...makes the wrong decision, the manager can't cope with the decision so makes a completely illogical or irrational decision based on what he thinks, and therefore these problems do come up." PSM6

Again, implicit in his account is the assumption that it is not the managers' 'fault' and that they did not intend to behave that way. However, there were some 'old school' behaviours described in managers' 'tool-kits' that were, arguably, intentional and harmful. For example, PSM7 discusses an 'old school' management "tool" called a "chiller chat"¹⁴. She sanitises this extreme behaviour by calling it "a bit of a joke" in her organisation; an implicit acceptance that it occurs unchallenged. Furthermore, she casts doubt on the target's account and motives because he is cast as "a pain in the arse". As HRPs before, she appears to 'excuse' this behaviour because he is a "really good" manager, whilst acknowledging he might have "a bit of an edge", an "edge" that is diminished by the concessionary "bit of":

¹⁴ A 'chiller' is a large walk-in cold-room/fridge.

“They’re a bit of a joke in the company now, chiller chats, I suppose really, “Oh we’ll take him and we’ll have a chiller chat”. So that means taking them into the chiller where nobody can hear them, where there’s no witnesses and then telling them exactly what you think of them or worse...I think the individual is a pain in the arse and I would have thought the manager has possibly told him that...he’s a really good manager but I may be think there is a bit of an edge there where he might do something like that.” PSM7

There is some indication that PSM7 is not completely comfortable with these “chiller chats”, because she also uses the concessionary phrases “a bit of” and “I suppose really” in relation to it being “a joke”. However, she subsequently rationalises this extreme behaviour by recourse to the organisational field. Managers are required to be less tolerant of “second-rate” performance; such intolerance is organisationally-desired. Her alignment with management is apparent in her role of supporting the managers to achieve this performance improvement. When managers’ performance-management related behaviour becomes a ‘problem’, it is interpreted as ‘poor management’, because unlike the “great people managers”, the poor managers become “task-setters” instead of “inspiring”. PSM7 seems to struggle to find a way to describe this behaviour without acknowledging the potential bullying:

“Some managers, you know, they struggle with that [managing performance] and they flip into what I call, you know, a negative level of tolerance where they become very, you know, just sort of like, there’s a name for it I suppose, sort of just task setters, I suppose, very task focused and pace setters...whereas actually the ones that do it really well can really stretch people...great people managers, they really inspire them but at the same time really stretch them”

Hence, although PSM7 distinguishes between “great inspiring” leaders, who are good at people-management, and “task-setters”, a label she has difficulty finding, her “chiller-chat” manager is still described as “really good”. This, again, suggests that “good” management to HRPs is defined by something other than people-management skills. As with PSM8’s and PSA16’s accounts of ‘inappropriate’ management tool-kit behaviours earlier, PSM7’s account implies that the managers are not intending to

bully; their management style is interpreted as ‘poor’ because their tool-kit contains unsuitable ‘old school’ techniques. However, it is questionable how any behaviour as extreme as a “chiller chat” can be rationalised as a means of dealing with under-performance, rather than being interpreted as bullying. However, similarly extreme behaviour is also rationalised in the final mechanism: ‘untouchable managers’.

6.2.4 Untouchable Managers

This mechanism was used to interpret the behaviour of managers who were considered to be ‘too senior’ to tackle, and in the following exchange PSM8 discusses how he handles ‘old school’ behaviour from senior managers. Whilst he acknowledges that the claims are “serious”, he minimises the behaviour with multiple concessionary phrases: it is “kind of” bullying behaviours, “sort of” shouting, and “a little bit kind of or not quite right”, labelling what *could* be interpreted as bullying with “inappropriate conduct”. As with PSM7 above, he appears to be struggling not to use the word ‘bullying’:

“I’ve been recently involved in cases involving significantly serious claims of kind of bullying behaviours or inappropriate conduct, sort of shouting, unacceptable demands over workload and availability to work...cited against very, very senior individuals... if I can call it old school leaders...you do see almost an acceptance because the person’s always behaved in that way...and actually we all might cringe and say well that was a little bit kind of or not quite right but yeah it, it just bypasses; whereas if it’s someone new, that hasn’t got the bank balance....we’d be hot onto it and probably we’d sort it out quite quickly.” PSM8

Hence, PSM8 describes how behaviours that could be considered bullying are being accepted from senior managers because of the “bank balance” they have with the organisation, implying that these managers have economic value to the organisation. Along with their seniority, this creates an ‘acceptability’ of their behaviour. The implication is that they have a ‘right’ to behave this way; they have earned that privilege. They are ‘untouchable’. The interests of the organisation and the senior manager are considered, but no mention is made of the target.

Similarly, PSM3 recounts behaviours from senior managers in her organisation towards the junior staff, behaviours that she labels as “very, very derogatory”. She later admits that this is ‘bullying behaviour’ but does not label the senior managers as ‘bullies’. Implicit in her account is an awareness that the behaviour is wrong: she labels the senior managers as “child abusers”, which is an emotive label, as she acknowledges, imbued with implications of mistreatment, damage and exploitation. Although she does consider the targets in these situations, there is an implicit assumption that they need to accept the behaviour as a ‘rite of passage’¹⁵, which she appears to minimise with her laughter:

“When they [senior managers] get to a certain level and everyone will say “oh yeah, he’s evil, or he’s a...”, we call them child abusers, which, which I think to an outsider will think “oh God, that’s a very strong word to use”, but that, that’s what you use if somebody senior displays behaviours that are effectively very, very derogatory towards the junior [staff], because the junior [staff] are so desperate to be big senior [staff] they will do anything, you know, if you tell a junior [staff] to jump off a cliff, he’ll jump off a cliff. Now, we don’t really want them to be doing that [laughter] but they are so keen and so eager they won’t complain...I think that’s bullying behaviour...that’s what we get a lot of, it’s somebody who is abusing their position and in a lot of cases it is “well I had to do it when I was that level so you’ve got to do it now”” PSM3

PSM3’s interview is full of contradictions; when she was asked at the start of the interview if bullying came into her work very often, she replied “*I probably get one or two cases a year where the B-word is mentioned as such*”. Yet, here she is saying that they “get a lot” of bullying behaviours, supporting the subtle yet important differentiation that the HRPs consistently made between ‘bullying behaviour’ and ‘bullying’. Managers may exhibit behaviours that *could* be perceived as bullying, but because it is interpreted and rationalised, as for example, ‘poor management’, it is not interpreted as actual ‘bullying’; the managers did not *intend* it to be bullying. This will be explored further in Section 6.7. In PSM3’s account, the junior staff’s acceptance of this ‘way of life’ appears to provide further justification for the inaction

¹⁵ The job role of these employees has been replaced with ‘staff’ for the sake of anonymity of the organisation and HRP.

of HR and management. She went onto discuss how she perceives that this excessive workload is actually beneficial; it makes it a “good and interesting place to work” and is all part of their ‘career development’. The term ‘abuser’ becomes even more appropriate, because her account suggests a potential ‘cycle of abuse’, with senior managers repeating their experience of being junior staff.

Thus, whilst these ‘old school’ and ‘untouchable managers’ mechanisms were similar in legitimatising bullying behaviours from long-serving managers, the ‘untouchable’ managers are different. The HRPs can ‘talk’ to ‘old school’ managers about their “inappropriate tool-kit”; however, as the label suggests, this is not the case with ‘untouchable managers’. PSM8 describes how policy just “*bypasses*” these ‘untouchable’ managers because “*commercially that’s a better thing to do*”. Likewise, PSM3 agreed that whilst the “child abuser” manager should be “*hung up to dry and the press should have him for breakfast*”, she has to “*think about the commercial point of view within the firm*”. Hence, it appears that this ‘untouchable’ behaviour is not without its challenges for the HRPs; it seems that they are implicitly acknowledging the serious and damaging nature of the behaviour. However, the economic pressures on their role appear to be a greater influence on their response. This will be examined further in Section 6.4 when we consider the potential purposes of these interpretive mechanisms for the HRPs.

Thus, overall, the HRPs appear to use these five interpretive mechanisms to legitimise and sanitise management behaviour in manager-to-employee claims; thus, allowing HRPs to justify their unquestioned assumption that employee under-performance is the ‘cause’ of these claims. In doing so, this appears to have created two practice orientations for the HRPs in response to bullying claims. That is, the analysis of the interviews for the HRPs’ positionings and practice (see Section 4.5.1) suggests that the HRPs’ discursive constructions and interpretive mechanisms are making some positions and practice possible, and others considerably less accessible. The next section focuses on those made available.

6.3 HRPs' Available Roles, Positions and Practices in Relation to Bullying

As established thus far, the economic and performance discourses evident in the HRPs organisational fields appear to have resulted in a taken-for-granted 'understanding' and 'acceptance' of the managers' behaviours: managers are under pressure to achieve organisational targets and manage their employees' performance accordingly. This is perceived as a difficult task, made harder by the employees' lack of understanding. Furthermore, the HRM professionalisation discourse appears to have resulted in HRPs' management alignment and, thus, a role in supporting the managers in their performance management task. Using the mechanisms in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, managers' behaviour is legitimised and sanitised and aspects of the target are frequently interpreted as the 'cause' of the claim. This appears to have created two positionings and related practices for the HRPs, which they deem as 'valuable' and 'useful': a 'coach' and 'advisor' for managers and a 'clarifier' for employees.

For example, PSA11 talks to managers about "managing performance better"; hence, implicit is her acknowledgement that managers do not do this well, although she justifies this by saying that "it's a hard job". Likewise, FG3 "coaches" managers on performance-management, again suggesting a skills deficit. However, she is implying that the fault lies with the employees: they have the performance problem and they "frighten" the managers because they might raise an accusation of bullying as a result of the performance-management:

"It's a hard job trying to manage performance. I spend a lot of time as an HR manager talking to managers about managing performance better and properly." PSA11

"We're trying to coach our managers to performance manage and some of them are frightened...to performance manage because they're worried that they're going to get accused of bullying...they'd rather put up with a poor performer than would risk having a bullying allegation on their file" FG3

As well as coaching, the HRPs appear to take the position of 'knowledge experts' in performance management and bullying policy, providing support for managers in these situations. PSM2 discusses how she is there to provide this support to managers facing an allegation of bullying. However, her use of the phrase "I do feel that...I

have to”, a point she makes twice, suggests that she might feel some pressure to provide this support:

“If I had been involved in advising a manager who had an allegation of bullying against them, I would see myself as being there to give advice and options, and that's supported by policy and process, but I do feel that for managers I have to be supportive with them if they're dealing with an issue of poor performance and they've come to me for advice and guidance...I do feel that I do have to give them support” PSM2

Hence, perhaps this role of supporting managers is an aspect of the pressure HRPs experience within their context of bullying, presented in Section 5.2. This will be returned to in the next section when we consider the action orientation of the HRPs' practices within their discursive constructions.

The second positioning and related practice is in relation to the targets. Linking back to the target-related interpretive mechanisms that HRPs hold in Section 6.1, it appears that HRPs see their role as one of ‘correcting’ the employee misunderstanding and improving the communication between manager and employee. By doing this, there appears to be an implicit assumption that the target will no longer ‘misinterpret’ the situation as bullying and, thus drop the claim, as FG2 discusses below. However, as with peer-to-peer cases, she sees the responsibility for resolving the issue with the two individuals; her role is simply to ‘talk to them’:

“Hopefully I can facilitate like a three way conversation because quite often it's that they don't hear each other. So being able to open up the communication channels so that they listen and actually then can sort of forge a way forward...I make it quite clear I can't fix anything. That's in their hands and in their power to be able to do something about it.” FG2

Hence, the HRPs appear to assume a ‘clarifying’ role, aimed at ‘clearing up’ employee misunderstanding by facilitating communication between the manager and the employee. The assumption, again, is that the target’s perception is questionable, not the manager’s. For example, PSM5 discusses how she talks to targets to “get them to see” their misunderstanding, and that this is difficult when the target is perceived to be deliberately misconstruing events. Again, the taken-for-granted assumption is that

the employees, “they”, are “wrong” and that if the ‘misunderstanding’ is resolved, the claim will disappear:

“I would try tactfully, where I thought that their complaint was unfounded...or they were interpreting things the wrong way, I’d perhaps say to them, “Well have you thought that perhaps they [manager] meant this?” To try and get them to see...people that are unconscious, they often will say, “Oh no I hadn’t thought of that”, whereas if they are doing it consciously they actually don’t care. They just say, “Well I don’t care what she meant. I interpreted it like this, so it’s wrong.”” PSM5

This ‘clarifying’ role also includes HRPs encouraging employees to ‘consider their own behaviours’, implying that the target might be complicit in the situation. For example, PSM1 recounts a conversation she had with an employee who had raised a bullying claim. She attempts to make the employee reconsider his own behaviour by challenging him and expressing how managers might feel about him:

“Then I asked him if he gave any thought to how people might perceive him, and his constant challenge...and we had this debate...he understood that he was challenging...he has a reputation out there. And I said, “do you think that it could be that management just see you as hard work?...because every time you say I’m not happy with that, they think, “oh my God, here we go again.”” PSM1

PSM1 appears to be implicitly telling the target that not only is this *not* a case of bullying, but that the situation has been caused by his own behaviour. This links back to the impact of the pressure that HRPs feel under to resolve cases quickly; the HRPs discussed putting the onus on the employee to ‘prove’ that it was bullying, rather than accepting, or even considering, the target’s subjective experience of feeling bullied. Again, this may have implications for employees’ perceptions of HRPs’ neutrality in bullying claims, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Furthermore, the positioning and practices made available in this construct appear to limit the HRPs’ roles to that of advisor and functional (policy) expert. Although, within these data, there is significant discussion of supporting the manager in performance-management, this is an advisory role rather than a partnership. As established in Section 5.2, the relative

capital and management-focussed policies of the HRPs means that the decision power remains with management. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 7.

Having established the HRPs' available positionings and practices that are made available to the HRPs within their discursive world, it raises another question: Why? Why might HRPs have developed a range of interpretive mechanisms, positions and practices that appear to associate 'blame' with aspects of the target and legitimise management behaviour that, as has been shown, can be seriously negative? To examine this question, we need to analyse the action orientation of these mechanisms in more detail. Within the six stages of CDA, action orientation refers to what *purpose* the constructs, positioning, practices and interpretive mechanisms might serve the HRPs when dealing with bullying, which is the focus of the next section.

6.4 The Purpose of HRPs' Discursive World

In the following excerpt, PSM7 had been describing a case of 'poor management'; the manager had exhibited a range of behaviours that *could* have been interpreted as 'bullying', which she had euphemistically labelled as "*inappropriate management behaviour*". At this point she was asked by the interviewer why she did not think this was bullying. This is her response:

"If I'm honest we politically, sometimes we do wrap things up as inappropriate management behaviour rather than labelling it as bullying and harassment...I think it sometimes helps with the, you know, the resolution of the case...sometimes you do tend to recognise that something has gone on, that it wasn't appropriate and that we're taking it seriously...but we do tend to downplay it by not labelling it bullying and harassment, so that we don't create this kind of "I've been bullied" ... those words [bullying and harassment] get bandied about a bit too much, when actually they [employees] are being asked to do something that is quite reasonable by their manager." PSM7

Thus her account implies 'complicity'; even when she recognises that "something has gone on" that necessitates "taking quite seriously", she "wraps it up" and "downplays" it as "inappropriate management behaviour". She then seems to justify

this approach by ‘blaming’ employees because they have ‘inappropriately’ “banded it about too much”, when they were actually being asked to do something “quite reasonable”. She also claims that this helps to resolve the case. How? In part, it may be related to the HRPs’ interpretative mechanism of ‘employee misunderstanding’ discussed in Section 6.1 and the HRPs’ subsequent ‘clarifying role’. By not accepting the targets’ label of ‘bullying’, this practice of ‘clarifying’ the targets’ misunderstanding is made easier.

However, it seems that this ‘repackaging’ might serve other purposes. In PSM7’s case, she has been able to fulfil one of her main pressures, protecting the manager, because s/he has not been labelled as ‘a bully’. Moreover, it seems that this ‘repackaging’ might also provide the HRPs with ‘permission’ to talk to managers about their ‘inappropriate behaviour’, particularly as the assumption often is that the managers’ behaviours are unintentional, a point that will be returned to in Section 6.7. In the following example, PSM2 had also been asked by the interviewer why she chose not to label a case of “inappropriate management” as bullying. This is her response:

“It is a difficult, a difficult conversation to have and the person at the other end is often not aware that they are bullying. Sometimes it isn't bullying behaviour, sometimes it is, but they're not aware, they just think they're being perhaps, an assertive manager or are really going for it and are not really aware of the effect that their actions are having on other people. So it's always a difficult conversation, because nobody, you know, wants to be told that [being accused of bullying]...the initial reaction from somebody is to be quite offended, quite hurt, and, if they haven't perceived they've been bullying at all, then they are very defensive.” PSM2

Her account illustrates several points that emerged across the interviews. Talking to managers about their ‘bullying’ behaviour is a very difficult task for HRPs; they talked about managers not believing them, ignoring them or, as in PSM2’s example, becoming defensive and upset. The HRPs talked about the strain that this puts on their relationships with managers, relationships that they wish to protect and preserve, as exemplified by PSA15:

“People feel extremely threatened if they are called a bully or a harasser...and it [the relationship] can completely change immediately, it can be like a backing a rat into a corner situation where people come out fighting, and you can never have a relationship with the person again in the same way.” PSA15

Hence, given HRPs’ strong and taken-for-granted management alignment, the ‘repackaging’ of potentially bullying behaviours into “inappropriate management” serves several purposes: it protects the manager, and indirectly the organisation, because the manager is not labelled a ‘bully’, and it enables the HRP to talk to managers about ‘more appropriate’ ways of behaving without damaging their relationships. Furthermore, the consistent assumption that managers’ “inappropriate behaviour” is not an ‘intention to bully’ appears to further justify this ‘repackaging’, as illustrated by PSM8:

“There are two conflicting agendas sometimes and one agenda is completely non-intentional but the impact of certain behaviours and a management style...could constitute bullying in the cold light of day. I have to find a compromise that respects and acknowledges the behaviours and the impact that a situation has had on an individual but that doesn’t encourage the individual to focus on the fact that actually it, you know, this situation may have constituted bullying. Because actually I have found that it then becomes counterproductive altogether, that’s why I’d be less inclined to be that explicit to say, “actually I think you’ve been bullied”. I’d be more inclined to say, “Actually I think there’s been, you know, clearly been inappropriate behaviours.” PSM8

Again, he discusses how he does not want to ‘reinforce’ the targets’ perception of being bullied, but is implicitly acknowledging that this might be the case “in the cold light of day”. He argues that to acknowledge the ‘bullying’ is “counterproductive”, and when asked why, he said that to do so would be damaging to the company because *“How can this person [manager] continue to work for the company?”* Hence, PSM7 drew on an economic discourse to justify ‘repackaging’ the behaviour to protect the organisation. Furthermore, by handling the claim this way, he can *“be more open with the manager to say, “actually the nature of this issue is very, very*

serious actually””. Hence, as with PSM2 and PSA15, he would not use the word ‘bullying’ so he was able to talk to the manager about his/her behaviours, whilst protecting the relationship. Finally, again in PSM8’s account is the assumption that the manager’s behaviour is “non-intentional”, which will be further explored in the next section.

Thus, a closer analysis of the HRPs’ action orientation suggests that these constructions and available positionings and practices may serve a purpose for the HRPs in relation to responding to bullying within the their pressurised context. Given the strong management alignment and the imperatives to protect the organisation and managers, a construction of manager-to-employee claims as ‘employee under-performance’, and the associated interpretive mechanisms, appear to provide the HRPs with the means of fulfilling these obligations, whilst protecting their relationships with managers. A full discussion of this proposition and its implications will be provided in Chapter 7. Having examined the HRPs available positionings and practices, the next sections turns to those positions and practices that appear to be much less available within these discursive constructions.

6.5 HRPs’ Less Available Roles, Position and Practices in Relation to Bullying

As the previous section has established, whilst certain positionings and practices are made available to the HRPs through their discursive constructions of bullying claims, others are made less so. It has already been established that HRPs appear not to consider the subjective experience of the targets, instead focusing on behaviours and using interpretive mechanisms that serve to attribute ‘blame’ to aspects of the target and rationalise managers’ behaviours. Consideration of the targets’ perspective appears to focus on whether the HRP has defensibly and precisely followed organisation policy and, in doing so, provided the target with all the procedural options. However, this appears to be more motivated by protecting the organisation and the HRPs’ credibility than the targets’ interests, as established in Section 5.2. The analysis of these data suggests that the HRPs do not consider bullying claims from the targets’ subjective perspective, as discussed by PSM7 below. She had just

been asked in what way she considered the targets' perspective, and her reply is provided in full because it illustrates a number of aspects regarding the HRPs' positioning in relation to the targets' subjectivity. She argues that she cannot put herself "in the shoes" of the target because to do so is "not being fair" to the manager. There is a suggestion of some tension in her response; her use of the word "can't" is interesting, and she uses it three times at the beginning of the quote. It suggests that contemplating the targets' perspective and subjectivity might be difficult for the HRPs, a point that will be examined further in this section. However, her comment on the 'fairness' to managers implies that she *does* put herself in the 'manager's shoes'. She justifies her approach because of the need to be the "objective, reasonable one", but in doing so, she appears to be 'tipping' to the side of the manager and diminishing the "genuine stuff" and "genuine emotion" from the target. The implication is that she perceives the emotion as genuine but opts to 'ignore' it, and she appears to rationalise this by the "other stuff" going on in their lives and the assumption that a "normal person" would not consider this as bullying. It is unclear who she might be basing this 'other' upon besides her own opinion:

"You do to a certain extent try to put yourself in their [targets] shoes but you can't. You can't, you know, you can't be in their shoes. I suppose I think of my role as being the objective, reasonable one I suppose, because you have to, so you have to be fair to the person [manager] that they're claiming it against as well and actually if I'm not the firm reasonable one then that's not being fair on them either so, you know, you can't tip too much into, "yeah this is genuine stuff, this is genuine emotion I can see where you're coming from" when actually there's a lot of stuff going on in your life, you know, that actually these things to a normal person, for want of a better word, I don't think they would construe this as bullying." PSM7

As PSM7 continues to describe her approach, instead of being "objective and reasonable", she acknowledges that her response to the target is both false, she "hams it up", and is duplicitous or "two-faced". It appears that she does not balance an "objective" consideration of the two perspectives. Instead, she views the case through the manager's eyes. In discussing her conversation with the manager, she calls it "a serious matter", implying that she does appreciate the impact of the "tools" s/he is using. However, because being a "good cop, bad cop" is difficult, she opts for the

“good cop” with the manager by supporting him/her, and “bad cop” with the employee with a “two-faced” response:

“I have felt a bit two faced about things sometimes...when you’re dealing with the victim you ham it up for them...and then with the manager, it is about getting the message across that they need to do some things differently and it is a serious matter. But at the same time, you know, they look to you for reassurance about their career...they say “how do I go about dealing with them [employee performance issues]...you’ve taken tools away from me” ...it’s difficult to be, you know, good cop, bad cop really.” PSM7

PSM7’s example illustrates how the HRPs’ appear to have incorporated the requirement to balance multiple organisational and management stakeholders into their habitus, but that this does not appear to include employee interests. Furthermore, for some, this appears to cause no conflict. For example, for PSA12, it is the fact that employees still expect HRPs to support them that presents her with a challenge, not the potential conflict of attempting to do so. She is clear that HRPs, “we”, cannot do both, she cannot be “poacher and gamekeeper”. Likewise, PSM3 uses the analogy of a “social worker” to differentiate her role as one that focuses on “business process”, diminishing the former with the concessionary “kind of thing”. Implicit in her quote is that not finding work “really unpleasant” is ‘good enough’:

“It’s one of our biggest challenges, employees still believe that HR or personnel, as it used to be known, is there for them to come and have a whinge [complain] about their manager, and personnel then go and beat their manager up about it...for a lot of employees, that is how they view us. And the view we take is that you can't be gamekeeper and poacher, you know, you can't be supporting management and at the same time supporting employees, it just doesn't work.” PSA12

“I’m not here as a social worker, kind of thing, I’m here to facilitate a business process...to make sure people don't find it really unpleasant going to work every day.” PSM3

Hence, for some HRPs, there appears to be no conflict in balancing managers and employees; they were clear that their alignment was with ‘management’ and ‘the business’ and this appears to preclude any practices associated with the positioning of

employee advocacy. However, it was less clear-cut for other HRPs; as discussed in relation to PSM7's quote earlier, there appears to be a tension between attempting to support the target whilst balancing the pressures presented in Section 5.2. The very nature of the pressures within this 'balancing act' appears to create a further pressure in attempting to support the target. PSM 5 described this as *"a horrible job really [be]cause you're just constantly balancing everything thinking...what's right?"*. It appears that these HRPs try to support the target in a way that does not "reinforce" their subjective experience of being bullied, and that this is a difficult practice. Several aspects of this 'balancing act' are apparent in PSM5's account. She talks about the need to be careful when giving "empathy and sympathy" because she does not want to "reinforce" the target's perception of bullying, which *"might not necessarily be correct"*. Hence, as discussed in Section 5.2, it appears she is *"cautious"* about the employee's claim. Furthermore, the implication is that, even though she is attempting to support the employee, the target's subjective experience is not being considered fully. That is, her response is still not providing the target with an open acknowledgement that they *feel* bullied:

"So as much as you can give empathy and sympathy to someone, and offer them support and advice. You don't say, "Yeah, he's [the manager] a real bastard." You can't. You have to be very careful about what you say because, also the other thing that I think is really important is you can actually reinforce their view by agreeing with them...their view might not necessarily be correct. You know, you only have to take what they're saying and help them deal with what they're saying. Not to reinforce it." PSM5

Hence, there appear to be differences between the HRPs regarding their view on providing support to employees. For some, their management alignment was very clear, and their role does not include supporting the employees beyond the provisions in policy. For HRPs who do attempt to support employees, this support seems to be constrained by the position created by the multiple pressures of the HRPs' 'balancing act'. Thus, it appears that the practices associated with employee advocacy are unavailable for some HRPs and significantly constrained for others. How the interaction of habitus, capital and position-taking might influence the likelihood of employee advocacy, and the implications of advocacy availability will be examined in Chapter 7.

One final question was asked of the data in relation to HRPs' positions and practices regarding bullying: what might the impact of these be on employees? Whilst it is not possible to ascertain the 'real' impact on targets from these data, it was possible to analyse the perceived impact of HRPs' bullying related practices on employees through the eyes of these practitioners, which the next section presents.

6.6 The Potential Impact of HRPs' Bullying-Related Practice on Targets

In Section 5.2, it was established that the HRPs' appear to be "cautious" and "sceptical" of employees' bullying claims, suggesting a lack of trust in targets, which may, in part, be due to previous experience of unsubstantiated cases. However, through the eyes of these HRPs, it appears that this 'distrust' may flow both ways. The HRPs discussed how employees might perceive HR to be "part of the establishment" and "too closely aligned" to management and that, because of this loyalty, employees might question HRPs' impartiality:

"There are some people out there who will feel that we are part of the establishment and wouldn't be impartial." PSM2

"I think there probably is a general perception that maybe...we're just doing what management want us to, but that's probably people that have not got what they wanted out of HR...there is still a bit of a perception amongst some people that it [management] might be too closely aligned to HR and those are the sort of the naturally more cautious and sort of less trusting people." PSM5

PSM5's comment is interesting; whilst she acknowledges that employees may feel that HRPs are "doing what management want", she appears to diminish the size of this perception with concessionary "a bit of" and "some people". Furthermore, she seems to 'blame' this perception on 'disgruntled' employees who "have not got what they wanted from HR". The implication is that employee distrust of HR neutrality is not widespread or the HRPs' 'fault', it is the perception of 'disgruntled', "cautious" or "less trusting" employees. Moreover, the situation is further complicated because, as established in Section 5.2, HRPs do not consider that it is their role to 'fix' the claims brought to them by targets; however, there was a general acknowledgement from the

HRPs that employees expect HRPs to do just that, which is an expectation that HRPs do not appear to meet, as exemplified by PSA12:

“Very often...people have the expectation that they can come and dump everything and say, “Right, what are you gonna do to sort this out for me?”” PSA12

Thus, there may be two possible causes of employee ‘distrust’: unmet expectations and HRPs’ alignment with management. For example, PSM3 discusses how this alignment may actually prevent employees approaching her directly when they feel they are being bullied because they question her neutrality:

“I think that person [target] would have to have a pretty good level of confidence in, well we are talking about me, in me that I would handle it properly and I wouldn't just be acting on behalf of management. And there is sometimes a little bit of, “oh, well are HR independent or are they just working for management?”” PSM3

Interestingly, implicit in PSM3’s account is an acknowledgement that responding “properly” to a bullying claim is at odds with “acting on behalf of management”, a stance that she seems to adopt because she went on to explain that her response is guided by “*what's best for the firm*”. She, as with PSM5 above, diminishes this employee distrust with the concessionary “a little bit”. When PSM3 is asked how she feels about HRM’s perceived lack of independence, she laughs and replies that:

“It's never going to be straightforward. So yeah, you tend to find that you are repeating the party line, and do you really honestly believe that, no you probably don't.” PSM3

Hence, it appears that HRPs recognise the impact their responses and practices might have on employees (dis)trust and willingness to raise claims. However, it appears that the HRPs’ taken-for-granted management alignment results in a duplicitous approach to the “party line” given to targets. This, in conjunction with the targets unmet expectations of HRPs ‘fixing’ the problem, may be perpetuating a lack of trust amongst employees towards HRPs in cases of bullying. The implication is that the employees’ perceptions may well be correct: HRPs might not be impartial and they may actually be *conscious* of their management bias rather than it being an

unconscious consequence of their management alignment. This implication will be examined in Chapter 7.

Thus far, this chapter has provided the analysis of the HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to peer-to-peer bullying claims and to the significantly more predominant manager-to-employee claims. However, before summarising the findings, we return to the first of the two research questions because there is a final construct to present, that of 'genuine' bullying. In doing so we will also examine the issue of intent, which has emerged in several sections throughout this chapter. As discussed in Section 5.2.6, there was only one instance of 'genuine' bullying described by the HRPs across all the data. This was a situation of one-to-many peer-to-peer mobbing. Whilst it cannot be assumed that the HRPs did not consider any of their other experiences to be claims of 'genuine' bullying, no others were voiced. Hence, the analysis presented in the next section is based on the HRPs' responses to the interviewer's question, "what is bullying?"

6.7 What is 'Genuine' Bullying to HRPs?

The aim of this section is two-fold: to examine the central elements of the HRPs' construct of 'genuine' bullying; and to examine the analysis that might suggest why there was only one reported case across these data.

Hence, this section will begin with a short summary of the one case of 'genuine' bullying, because it contains all the elements that appear to be central to HRPs' construction of 'genuine' bullying. Early in his interview, PSM4 discussed a case he had dealt with in the mid 1980s, which he still thinks about 20 years on, where a young homosexual man had been systematically bullied¹⁶ by a group of "middle-aged" female colleagues in a care home facility for the elderly. Contextually, at the time in the UK, there was a great deal of media attention and 'scare-mongering' about AIDS/HIV. In his account, he is as shocked by the "appalling" behaviour as he is by the nature of the perpetrators, because it appears particularly discordant with his view of how older females with families working in a 'caring profession' *should* behave;

¹⁶ PSM4 used this word himself

there is a sense that they should have ‘known better’. Because of the relevance of his description a lengthy quote will be provided:

“They made his life hell for a good couple of months...this was primarily female, primarily middle aged, you know female with families, with sons, you know, and it quite shocked me the way they treated this guy, it was appalling the way they treated the guy. He ended up going off sick with stress, really ill, purely because of the way they treated him...they sent him to Coventry [stopped talking to him], wouldn’t involve him in any discussions team meetings or anything. He’d come in the morning and his cup, his mug would be full of bleach because they were scared of catching anything off him. They wouldn’t touch him, wouldn’t sort of allow him to shake hands or anything like that, turned some of the residents against him, sort of “be careful of what you do with him, you’ll catch stuff off him” and all that stuff you know. So the lad’s position became untenable in the end you know, and I think the cruelty of it shocked me, you know, a sort of mature grown-up gang of women who I said would’ve had sons, this lad’s only 19 or 20, this kid. This is horrific, you know. The kid ended up leaving in the end...that shocked me...that professional caring people could be so hurtful, you know, and deliberately, not sort of accidentally hurtful, go out of their way to do it.” PSM4

There were several aspects that particularly shocked PSM4: the cruelty and *focus* of the behaviour (the target’s sexuality), the *vulnerability* of the target (young, no allies), the deliberate *intention* of the bullies, the nature of the bullies (older, family women), the *impact* it had on the target, and the *power* these women had in this situation, gradually removing any allies the target may have had. PSM4 perceived this situation as *unfair and unreasonable*; there was no ‘justifiable’ cause. The behaviour of the female colleagues was interpreted as deliberate and intentional, aimed at causing great distress to the target, probably motivated by their fear and prejudices related to homosexuality and AIDS/HIV.

PSM4’s case highlights several key factors that appear to define ‘genuine bullying’ for HRPs: it is *deliberate* behaviour with the *intention of causing harm* to the target; the behaviour is *unfair and unreasonable* because it focuses on a *personal* rather than

professional aspect of the target; the negative *impact* on a *genuine* target is significant; and the bully is *abusing their power*. This power need not be hierarchical; the women in this case had power due to their number and their social influence over other colleagues and the residents. These factors are important because they help to understand how the HRP's justify and rationalise their constructions of individualised interpersonal conflict-related peer-to-peer claims and employee underperformance-related manager-to-employee claims.

When HRP's were asked by the interviewer, "what is bullying?" there was a strong focus on the behaviours involved; that they would be 'nasty' and of a *personal* nature, such as extreme criticism and teasing, and social exclusion. For example, PSM6's answer concentrates on behaviour relating to individuals' gender or weight:

"Bullying is very much centred around the nastier side of people's behaviours, whether it would be sexual remarks, sexual inappropriateness, sexual behaviour towards colleagues, you know, whether that be touching people, you know, inappropriately, making sexist nasty remarks saying "the job was great when we didn't have women in it"... "the only reason why it takes you six hours to [do this task¹⁷] is because you're so fat"...the nasty side." PSM6

For PSM6, the construct of 'genuine' bullying focused on the concept of "nasty" behaviour, and appeared to reflect the typical definition of 'harassment'. The construction of 'genuine' bullying as harassment was a common response; it appears that if 'bullies' focus on more personal aspects of the target, it helps the HRP's to differentiate 'genuine' bullying from the other two work-related constructs.

Further support for this differentiation between personal- and work-related behaviour came from the HRP's interpretations of Sally's vignette. Mike's criticism of Sally's dress sense was typically called "bullying behaviour" because it was personal, whereas his public criticism of her work was interpreted as "inappropriate management"; it was justified by Sally's potentially poor performance but handled badly by Mike in public, hence inappropriate. FG1 calls this "justification"; that is, is

¹⁷ The actual job task has been removed to protect the anonymity of the HRP and organisation.

the perpetrator's behaviour 'justified'. HRPs appear to consider whether the behaviour is 'fair and reasonable', which includes managers' 'justified' professional criticism to address a performance issue; or is the behaviour a personal attack (like PSM4's example case) and, therefore, unfair and unreasonable. In FG1's comments, she sees short-term objectives to address a performance issue to be justification for the behaviour, and hence, not bullying.

"And there's something for me about the justification as well. So it's like unacceptable behaviour to that person but...sometimes there is a justification for that behaviour, be it performance management or whatever, so "I'm victimised because on a short-term objective, no-one else in the team is", but there's justification for that...it's difficult to pin down any definition [laughs]." FG1

However, her laughter appears to be indication of the tension she has in "pinning down" this definition of 'bullying'. As will be examined below when 'intention' and target 'genuineness' are considered, FG1's tension might be because she is considering a manager-to-employee case in her example.

Power, and its abuse, appears to be another element of 'genuine' bullying. Below, FG3 focuses on power, whilst also using 'harassment' to shape her construction of bullying:

"It's about power for me...using their power inappropriately to make a person feel uncomfortable or to get their own way. So particularly that definition works with the sexual harassment or, you know, bullying somebody in discriminatory type things, disability or racial discrimination."

FG3

The power imbalance and abuse in 'genuine' bullying need not be hierarchical power; social power and the cultural power of the team were also discussed. Within this construct, the HRPs discussed how this power is then abused to make the target feel "uncomfortable" and "unworthy, frightened, or threatened". For example, FG3 talks about the power that established teams may have through their "banter" and how this form of power might contribute to a target's experience of bullying:

“That becomes the norm in the team and “oh it’s just banter”. One person comes into the team...and is aghast and, you know, “this isn’t what I’m used to or what I want to accept”...they’re a fish out of water and not comfortable.” FG3

However, for behaviour to qualify as ‘genuine’ bullying, the power imbalance or personally-related behaviours are not sufficient; this power and personal behaviour must be perceived by the HRPs as intentional to cause harm, not simply to “get someone to do something better”. Thus, for example, with the vignette, Mike’s personal comments were perceived as ‘bullying behaviours’ because they were perceived as *intending* to “humiliate” and “embarrass” Sally, or to “make her feel bad about herself”. This linking of intention, power and negative impact is exemplified in FG2’s account:

“It’s about really an intention of making someone feel unworthy, frightened, threatened, and an intention to do that...it can be power, it can just be somebody doing the most irritating things every day to the same person and knowing they don’t like it.” FG2

Thus, within the construct of ‘genuine’ bullying, the HRPs must perceive the target to be *genuinely* and significantly impacted by *intentional* behaviour. However, as has emerged through this analysis, the HRPs appear to hold a taken-for-granted assumption that managers’ behaviours are not “intentional” or “malicious” (Section 6.2.2). This is typified by FG2’s comment that “*you’d find it very hard to find any manager who would have the intent to bully.*” Furthermore, section 6.2 has established that HRPs use taken-for-granted interpretive mechanisms that allow them to justify and legitimise managers’ behaviour in manager-to-employee claims, regardless of their severity. In doing so, it appears that managers’ behaviour is unlikely to be perceived as intentional by HRPs. This begins to raise the question of whether manager-to-employee claims would ever be constructed as ‘genuine’ bullying by HRPs and, hence, why none were reported in these data. To explore this further, we next examine the complexity of target ‘genuineness’. This factor is crucial, because it seems that without it, a claim will never be considered genuine.

In response to “what is bullying?” FG3 provides an example where the target feels bullied, and she comments that she has “no doubt” that the target “perceived that they

had been bullied” because s/he “described it accurately”, suggesting that the target felt genuinely bullied. However, because this claim has occurred in the context of performance management, the manager’s behaviour is perceived to be appropriate and fair and the target is blamed for being “innately” unable to take criticism. Whilst this example supports earlier findings in Section 6.1, it is FG3’s first comment that that is important. It appears that it is not the target’s *actual* genuineness that is crucial for ‘genuine’ bullying; it is the HRPs’ *perception* of genuineness. In FG3’s example, the construct of ‘manager-to-employee claims as an employee underperformance issue’ had already been applied because the target was complaining about their manager, as established in Section 5.4.1. Hence, the claim is interpreted from the manager’s perspective and the target’s account is, thus, questioned. FG3 has applied one of the target-related interpretive mechanisms to this claim, and concludes that the target cannot accept criticism:

“The person genuinely felt that [bullied], and I have no doubt about the fact that they perceived that they had been bullied, they described it accurately and I don’t think they were lying to me, but when I went into all of the actions of the manager I could find nothing which in my opinion was inappropriate. It was firm but fair...it was somebody [target] who innately could not take criticism so, therefore, they felt bullied.” FG3

There is no way of knowing if the behaviour in this case was bullying or appropriate management; however, the issue is that FG3 discounted the targets subjective experience, despite acknowledging that they had “accurately” described feeling bullied, because it had been interpreted within the ‘manager-to-employee claims as an employee underperformance issue’ construct. PSM7’s following account further supports the complexities of ‘genuineness’. The target, who is a manager, has raised a bullying claim against his manager, who is a Director of the organisation. There are two interesting assumptions in PSM7’s account, which suggest the power of the manager-to-employee construct and associated mechanisms: an under-performance issue is assumed for the target, despite the absence of a formal performance-management process. Secondly, despite acknowledging that the Director is “the kind of person that would bully”, the target is perceived as “not coming from a genuine place”:

“It’s a manager actually whose raised a grievance against a director, but at the root of that I think was performance, even though he wasn’t being performance managed. I think he knew that he wasn’t meeting his targets...so he’s raised a grievance around bullying and harassment against a director. But I’m struggling with the manager [the target] because I believe that he is not coming from a genuine place...the director that he’s describing is quite a taskmaster and actually I think he probably could be the kind of person that would bully an individual as it goes. But I just don’t happen to think that [laughs] he did with this person. I do think that this person is just playing me really. I think he’s just playing us.” PSM7

This implicit assumption that targets are not ‘genuine’ in manager-to-employee claims was also evident in Sections 5.2 and 6.1; however, the HRPs were much more explicit regarding this when asked, “what is bullying?” PSM8’s following account also indicates this general assumption that manager-to-employee claims preclude the possibility of target ‘genuineness’. He describes how such claims are treated less seriously and that the burden of providing “compelling evidence” resides with the target:

“Where people raise grievances about bullying in the context of performance, I probably have developed my own view on that...there’s almost like a separate agenda...they’re treated less seriously if I’m honest. Unless the employee is able to really provide some, some very compelling evidence otherwise the organisation tends more to take the side of the management.” PSM8

Thus the HRPs accounts suggest that, for them, ‘genuine’ bullying is unfair and personal-related behaviour directed at a genuine and less powerful target, with the intention to cause harm, and which has a significant negative impact on the target. However, their accounts also suggest that manager-to-employee claims are unlikely to ever be considered as ‘genuine’ bullying. Given the multiple economic and management pressures the HRPs appear to experience, and the nature of their constructs and interpretive mechanisms, it raises the question of whether managers can *ever* ‘genuinely’ bully in the eyes of HRPs. If managers’ behaviours are always interpreted within mechanisms such as ‘poor management’ and ‘old school’, will their

behaviour ever be accorded the factor of deliberate intention, which seems to be a crucial factor for determining ‘genuine’ bullying for HRPs? Likewise, if targets are always assumed to have a performance issue in manager-to-employee claims, will they ever be perceived as ‘genuine’ in the eyes of HRPs? These questions, and their implications will be returned to in Chapter 7.

6.8 Summary

Based on Chapters 5 and 6, this section will summarise the findings in relation to the two research questions of this thesis. The section concludes with Table 9, which provides a synopsis of the main findings of this thesis, providing the context for the discussion that follows in Chapter 7.

The analysis presented in these two chapters suggests that the first research question, how HRPs might construct bullying, is not straightforward to answer because across the data these HRPs only reported one case of ‘bullying’; the remainder were bullying *claims*, which predominantly concerned employees raising bullying allegations against their managers. The analysis of their narratives regarding these bullying claims suggests that HRPs hold two constructions of bullying claims. Firstly, it appears that all peer-to-peer claims are initially constructed as unresolved interpersonal conflict between peers, and HRPs perceive that the responsibility for resolving such claims resides with the individuals involved and their managers. Secondly, manager-to-employee claims are constructed as an employee under-performance issue, with the claims resulting from the employees’ dislike or misunderstanding of the process; that is, as a ‘symptom’ of legitimised performance-management. The analysis suggests that this construct is applied as soon as the HRP encounters a new claim raised by an employee against their manager. Subsequently, the HRPs use a range of interpretive mechanisms that serve to justify this construction by locating the ‘cause’ within aspects of the targets behaviour or personality, and legitimising the managers’ behaviour, regardless of its severity. In doing so, the employee’s claim is interpreted within a management-aligned and performance-management framework, which serves to diminish the target’s subjective experience and focus on the behaviours involved.

These constructs and mechanisms have, thus, made certain positions and practices more or less available for HRPs when responding to bullying. With managers, their role is predominantly one of ‘coach’, policy ‘expert’ or advisor. However, it appears that this remains a reactive and relatively passive role in most cases because of the HRPs’ lack of capital in comparison to managers, and the management focus of organisational bullying policy. Deferral to managers for the decision in bullying claims was evident in many of the HRPs’ discussions. With employees, the HRPs main role appears to be one of ‘clarifier’, acting as a conduit between the manager and the employee to ‘rectify’ the employee’s misunderstanding of either bullying or the performance-management process. Furthermore, as a result of their constructs and mechanisms, it appears that the role of employee advocacy has become less available to the HRPs; it no longer seems to be part of their professional habitus because it conflicts with the HRPs’ main role of supporting and protecting management and the organisation. By focusing on the behaviours of the target as the ‘cause’ of the claim, the ‘need’ for employee advocacy and a consideration of the targets’ subjective experience is effectively ‘negated’. However, although all the HRPs were clear on their management alignment, some appeared to experience no conflict between supporting management and the employees’ *expectation* of support, whilst other HRPs appeared to experience more tension within this ‘balancing act’, suggesting that there may be conflict between individual and professional habitus for some HRPs.

Whilst only one case of peer-to-peer bullying was discussed by these HRPs, from their answers to the question ‘what is bullying?’ and their responses to the vignette, it appears that, for these HRPs, ‘genuine’ bullying is unfair and personally-targeted behaviour, intended to cause harm to a less powerful and trustworthy target, who is negatively impacted by the behaviour. However, the analysis suggests that this issue of target ‘genuineness’ is complex and that as a result of the constructions and mechanisms that HRPs hold in manager-to-employee bullying claims, they are unlikely to perceive that the target is ‘genuine’ and the manager’s behaviour is intentional. Thus, it appears that, through the eyes of these HRPs, ‘managers never bully’. This proposition and its implications will form part of Chapter 7, which aims to discuss possible explanations and potential implications of the findings within Chapters 5 and 6, summarised in Table 9 overleaf, and will conclude the thesis.

Table 9: Summary of the Main Findings from this Thesis

HRPs' Context of Bullying		
Organisational Context	Framed within economic and performance discourse; organisations perceived as target-driven and performance-management as necessary and legitimate; appears taken-for-granted aspect of doxa	
Professional Context	Framed within HRM professionalisation discourse: management alignment; protection and support of management and organisation; and perception of HR business partner role as 'better' than generalist roles. These aspects appear incorporated into shared professional habitus.	
Context of Bullying for HRPs	Bullying as "difficult issue"	Complex, ambiguous and conflicting accounts from target and perpetrator; HRPs 'burnt' by previous bullying experiences.
	Pressurised context	Pressure from senior management for speedy resolutions that protect managers; predominant objective for HRPs appears to be protecting the organisation; a difficult 'balancing act'.
	Powerlessness	Relative lack of power of HRM and HRPs in comparison to management; exacerbated by management-focused anti-bullying policy; position-taking used to manage this powerlessness.
	Business language of bullying	HRPs appear to have developed a 'business language' to discuss bullying with managers; language of ethics appears diminished.
HRPs' Construction of Bullying		
Peer-to-peer bullying claims	Unresolved, escalating interpersonal conflict between hierarchically equivalent peers; typically caused by a work-related and 'understandable' incident; exacerbated by management failing to 'nip it in the bud'.	
Manager-to-employee bullying claims	Bullying claims constructed as a 'symptom' of performance-management; employees' dislike or misunderstanding of this process and/or bullying; employee underperformance perceived as underlying 'cause'.	
'Genuine bullying'	Behaviour between peers that is intentional and personal, and which has a significant negative impact on a trustworthy target.	
HRPs' Interpretation of Bullying		
Immediate and perpetrator related interpretations	It appears that the peer-to-peer or manager-to-employee bullying claim construct is immediately applied based on whether the perpetrator is the target's peer or manager. In manager-to-employee claims it appears that HRPs assume that 'something else' is going on, and appear to consistently assume that this is the target's underperformance.	
Target-related interpretive mechanisms	HRPs appear to attribute the cause for bullying claims to aspects of the target, such as their personality, behaviour or misunderstanding, both deliberate and naïve.	
Manager-related interpretive mechanisms	HRPs appear to legitimise and rationalise the managers' behaviours in manager-to-employee bullying claims, regardless of how negative the behaviours are, through a range of mechanisms: poor or 'old school' management styles; drive, ambition and lack of self-awareness; and 'untouchable' senior management. These mechanisms appear to remove intent and culpability from managers' behaviours.	
HRPs' Responses to Bullying		
Target-related responses	HRPs appear to primarily provide a mediation role with targets in peer-to-peer claims, and a role as 'clarifier' for targets in manager-to-employee claims, to correct the target's 'misunderstanding'.	
Manager-related responses	HRPs appear to assume the roles of advisor, support and coach for managers to help resolve the conflict in peer-to-peer claims and to assist the managers' performance-management in manager-to-employee claims.	
Employee Advocacy	This role appears to be undervalued by the HRPs. There appeared little indication that the HRPs adopted an employee-focused support role in bullying claims, and they did not appear to consider the targets' subjective experience of their perception of being bullied.	
Purposive repackaging of bullying behaviour	The HRPs' constructs of bullying claims and interpretive mechanisms appear to serve a purpose for them: they seem to provide the means for the HRPs to meet their management-aligned objectives and roles within the context of management pressure and relative powerlessness.	

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis examined how HRPs construct, interpret, and subsequently respond to bullying. Previous empirical findings that suggest that HRPs are reluctant to label situations of bullying as ‘bullying’ (Harrington, 2005); and that their responses to bullying claims are frequently perceived as inaction, denial and ‘target-blaming’ by targets (e.g., D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Ferris, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Keashly, 2001). Because we currently know very little about how HRPs might construct and respond to bullying, the findings within this thesis have contributed to addressing this gap in our knowledge by examining two main research questions:

How do HRPs construct workplace bullying?

What individual, organisational and cultural factors influence HRPs’ interpretation and response to new workplace bullying cases?

By applying the six stages of CDA, these questions were broken down into:

- How do HRPs construct bullying and which discourses do they draw on to create these constructs?
- How do HRPs construct their roles in responding to bullying, and which discourses do they draw on to create these constructs?
- What mechanisms do they use within these constructs to interpret bullying?
- What positions and practices become available and, thus, unavailable by these constructs and mechanisms?
- What is the nature of HRPs’ subjective experience of handling bullying cases?
- What purpose might these constructions of bullying serve for the HRPs in relation to handling bullying?

Whilst a predominantly inductive approach was taken during the analysis, the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3 gave rise to list of supplementary questions, shown in Table 2 (p. 81), which will be addressed in this discussion. Furthermore, before discussing the findings from this thesis, I acknowledge that the sample size is small, and that the nature of the research was exploratory, both of which place limitations on the generalisability of the findings, which will be returned to in Section 7.10 of this chapter. However, in referring back to Chapter 4, I would suggest that the iterative process of analysis, achieving saturation and the consistency of the findings across the maximum variation sample provide the means for evaluating the validity of these findings.

In summarising the findings, it appears that bullying is a difficult and ambiguous issue for HRPs to handle. Their responses to bullying appear to be influenced by their lack of power compared to line managers, and pressures from both management and their professional field, which seem to create a complex balancing act for HRPs. However, the HRPs consistently constructed their role as one to support and protect the line manager and organisation in situations of bullying claims, whilst the role of employee advocacy appears to be significantly diminished. Within this context, the HRPs appear to construct peer-to-peer bullying claims as work-related interpersonal conflict, and manager-to-employee claims as a symptom of employee underperformance. This choice of construct appears to occur at the initial meeting with the target, based on the nature of the alleged bully: peer or manager. Subsequently, the HRPs appear to use a range of mechanisms to interpret the claim, which serve to attribute 'blame' to the target and, when the manager is the alleged perpetrator, to legitimise and rationalise the manager's behaviour.

The findings also suggest that these constructs and mechanisms serve a purpose for the HRPs: they appear to provide the means for HRPs to respond to bullying in a way that accords with the managerial and organisational imperatives within their role construct. The apparent consequence seems to be that managers cannot bully in the eyes of HRPs. For HRPs, 'genuine bullying' appears to be only applied to peer-to-peer claims when the behaviour cannot be explained by an 'understandable' work-related issue. Thus, through the eyes of HRPs, 'genuine bullying' appears to be unfair

and personal-related peer-to-peer behaviour, directed at a genuine and less powerful target, with the intention to cause harm, and which has a significant negative impact on the target. The implications and potential explanations for these findings will be discussed within this chapter by applying Bourdieu's theory of practice. Thus, a brief recap of his theory is appropriate here before commencing the discussion.

Bourdieu argues that whilst the social world, and individuals' behaviours within it, are socially constructed, there are enduring structures that shape and influence these practices. These structures become incorporated into individual and professional shared habitus, as ways of perceiving and behaving. Each field develops a 'taken-for-granted' way of doing things, its doxa, including the associated language, which is influenced by relevant larger discourses. Furthermore, within a field, each individual has a particular position, relative to other members of the field, which is determined by their relative amount of power and influence in that field; that is, their capital. The meaning and value of this capital is itself determined by the structure of the field and what resources are deemed important within it; hence, capital is symbolic. Dominant individuals with greater symbolic capital are able to influence doxa and the worldview and practices of less powerful individuals, through a combination of their own behaviour and their use of language, because of the power accorded to them through symbolic capital; this process is symbolic violence. This framework, and its related terms, will be used to integrate and explore the analysis findings in this chapter.

This thesis sought to investigate how HRPs construct 'bullying'. However, as explained in Chapter 6, there was only one incident of 'actual bullying' reported by the HRPs in these data (p.190). Hence, what emerged in the analysis was how HRPs construct peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee bullying *claims*. In other words, the analysis has shown how HRPs construct, interpret and respond to *employees' constructions of bullying* within the claims they raise. Rather than providing data on what constitutes bullying in the eyes of HRPs, the HRPs' experiential descriptions of bullying claims have answered the opposite question, "what is *not* bullying in the eyes of HRPs?", because only one of the claims provided was interpreted as 'genuine bullying'. This finding of only one reported case of 'genuine bullying' is significant

in itself: as discussed in Chapter 2, 35% of UNISON's (2009) respondents reported feeling subjectively bullied; yet these HRPs reported only one case. What might explain such a disparity? This chapter aims to provide possible explanations and begins by discussing the context within which HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying are embedded.

7.2 The Organisational and Professional Context of HRPs' Bullying Responses.

In Chapter 1, it was established how organisational cultures have changed as a result of the increase in market managerialism (Parker, 2002), giving rise to intensified performance-management cultures (Buchner, 2007), greater management control, internal competition and an emphasis on employee performance (Hoel & Beale, 2006; Ironside & Seifert, 2003). Furthermore, as established in Chapter 3, these discourses of managerialism and the performance imperative have been inculcated into CIPD's professionalisation project, motivated by the drive to increase HRM's credibility and economic value in organisations (Farndale & Brewster, 2005). These messages now reach HRPs through their training and a multitude of professional material (Gilmore & Williams, 2007). This gave rise to the question as to whether these discourses would be evident in the HRPs' bullying-related practices. Throughout the interviews, the HRPs did indeed draw heavily on these discourses within both their organisational and professional fields to construct their position, the targets and perpetrators, and to interpret and rationalise the bullying claims; all of which appear to subsequently constrain and shape their response to new claims. Thus, as Bourdieu's theory would predict, the HRPs' organisational and professional fields appear to significantly influence how HRPs construct both bullying and their roles and, hence, how they respond to bullying claims.

The need for intensified performance-management within their organisational fields was not questioned by the HRPs; it was accepted as necessary within the economic climate. It was justified by recourse to the language of managerialism and capitalism discourses (e.g., Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010), performance discourses (e.g., Buchner, 2007), and the discourse of 'organisational sustainability' from the CIPD's

professionalisation material (e.g., CIPD, 2010b). The HRPs described their organisations as “*performance cultures*” and “*target-driven*”; where employees are “*under pressure to achieve targets*” and “*stretch goals*”; and managers “*have a responsibility for managing performance or underperformance*” (p.144-145). HRPs perceived their role as one to support managers in managing employee performance, to “*improve on performance management, step it up, what we call raise the bar*” (p.145). The HRPs used the language of these discourses to rationalise the way that organisations have changed; to justify the intensified focus on employee productivity and performance in order to meet organisational goals and strategy; and to legitimise managers’ increased emphasis and control over employees’ performance. Although the HRPs acknowledged that organisational changes have placed both managers and employees under greater stress, it was accepted as ‘the way of life’, the doxa, of modern organisations and employees. Thus, it appears that the economic and performance discourses of contemporary organisational culture are now ‘taken-for-granted’ for HRPs; they appear to have become part of organisational doxa and permeate the language and bullying-related practices of HRPs.

The HRPs also drew on the HRM professionalisation discourse, as anticipated by the literature review in Chapter 3. The influence of the CIPD’s professionalisation project, with its emphasis on HRPs’ contribution to organisational performance through the business partner role, appeared evident in the HRPs’ role constructions in two main areas. Firstly, as with previously published research on HRPs’ role constructions (e.g., Keegan & Francis, 2010; Pritchard, 2010), the HRPs drew significantly on the language associated with the ‘business partner’ role espoused by the CIPD to position their own role as a ‘trusted advisor’ and “*business partner to other managers*” (p.147). The HRPs were exceptionally clear that their alignment was with management, and their role was one to support and protect both the organisation and management. This was epitomised by PSA12 (p.146): “*We are predominantly here to support management and take the organisation forward*”. Regardless of their actual job title, it was this ‘business partner’ framework that the HRPs used to construct their role, which was perceived as superior to the previous welfare-based personnel management and to more operational HRM roles. The strength and consistency of this finding suggest that this role construction, as a ‘partner’ to

managers, has become incorporated into the HRPs' professional habitus. Furthermore, the sense of 'importance' that this business partner role appeared to have for the HRPs reflects previously published research (e.g., Keegan & Francis, 2010; Pritchard, 2010; Wright, 2008), and suggests that it may provide them with symbolic capital; a point that we will return to.

Secondly, within this management alignment, the HRPs talked about 'delivering value', contributing to "*strategic headlines*" (p.147), and the 'influence' they have with managers, which is the CIPD's 'new generation of HR' discourse (e.g., CIPD, 2009d, 2010c). Hence, as suggested by the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, it does indeed appear that the HRPs have incorporated the espoused link between HRM practice and improved organisational performance into their role constructions; a link emphasised in CIPD publications (e.g., Caulkin, 2001; Cooper, 2000). Implicit in the HRPs' accounts was that their management alignment and focus on 'strategy' was beneficial for the organisation. As with Francis & Keegan's (2006) findings, the HRPs drew on an economic discourse to develop a 'business language', to position their role as one that added value to business strategy. Again, this suggests that the 'partner' role and associated 'business language' may be a form of symbolic capital that HRPs might use in a process of position-talking to manage the meaning of their role in the eyes of managers. Within this context, bullying claims were perceived as an 'inconvenience' because they prevented the HRPs from working on more 'important and strategic' tasks. This will be returned to when we consider the role of employee advocacy.

Thus, it appears that the role and function of a 'business partner' has been incorporated into the HRPs' professional habitus; this role appears taken-for-granted and unquestioned. HRPs then appear to use the language of the HRM professionalisation discourse to engage in position-taking, positioning themselves as an active and valuable 'partner' for management, contributing to organisational performance by supporting managers in the legitimate and necessary task of managing employee performance. Yet, whilst the HRPs talked about their 'influence' with managers in relation to bullying, the findings from this thesis suggest that they may have little, to which the next section turns.

7.3 The Context of Responding to Bullying Claims

Whilst the HRPs positioned themselves as an ‘influential’ partner with managers, the analysis of the nature of bullying, the associated ‘balancing act’ and the roles and responsibilities of managers and HRPs suggest otherwise. For HRPs, it appears that bullying is a complex and difficult issue; several of them discussed how it was one of the most challenging problems they dealt with as an HRP. Partly, this complexity was attributed to the nature of bullying itself: the HRPs talked about it being ‘one person’s word against another’s’, the difficulty of uncovering ‘evidence’ and the ‘truth’, and being able to ‘make a judgement’. Four factors appear to exacerbate this complexity: devolvement of HRM practices to managers; management-focused anti-bullying policy; pressure from senior managers; and having been ‘burnt’ by previous experiences of bullying claims. Each will be discussed in turn because, in conjunction with the context of the HRPs’ organisational and professional fields, they provide the backdrop against which HRPs construct and interpret bullying claims.

7.3.1 Devolvement of HRM to Managers

Devolvement of HRM practices to managers, which was evident across the interviews, appears to be one aspect of the CIPD’s professionalisation project that is more problematic for HRPs in terms of bullying. As with previous research (e.g., Bond & Wise, 2003; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002), the HRPs talked about managers’ reluctance and inability to perform people-related HRM tasks, such as grievance processes. The HRPs discussed managers’ dislike of ‘dealing with people issues’ and their failure to proactively intervene in employee conflict, to ‘nip it in the bud’ and thus prevent a bullying claim. In support of Redman’s (2001) findings, HRPs talked about managers’ lack of performance-management skill; that managers do not handle performance issues “*in the most appropriate way*”; and that managers “*get it desperately wrong at times*” (p. 172). As will be discussed subsequently, HRPs often saw this as contributing to the reasons for employee-to-manager claims.

If this perception of HRPs is correct, that managers lack the skills for handling people-related issues and performance-management, this presents a significant challenge for organisations given the established rise and emphasis on performance-

management that all the HRPs discussed. This point will be returned to when we discuss how HRPs interpret manager-to-employee claims. However, the findings also suggest that HRPs might feel partly responsible for managers' lack of skills by not training them sufficiently. That is, in constructing their role as a 'trusted advisor', 'support' and 'coach' for managers, HRPs may feel culpable in the managers' inadequacies.

More importantly, as with previous findings (e.g., Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Renwick, 2003; Watson et al., 2007), this devolvement appears to have created tensions between the HRP and the managers of the target and/or perpetrator when responding to bullying claims; such as, who should be responsible for 'nipping things in the bud', conducting the claim investigation and making the final decision on the outcome. Paradoxically, whilst the HRPs discussed how managers and employees believe that it is HRM's role to resolve bullying cases, most HRPs talked about deferring this decision to managers, and that it was the manager's responsibility to resolve bullying. This appears further complicated by the organisations specific anti-bullying policy. For some, it was explicitly stated that it was the manager's responsibility to conduct the investigation, as Salin (2008) found. However, even for those HRPs whose policies assigned responsibility for the investigation to the HRP, they appear to seek the manager's approval of the decision. The HRPs talked about bullying being "*management's responsibility*" to resolve, and that it is the manager's decisions that "*will determine what the future action should be*" (p. 141). Thus, contrary to their role constructions as 'valuable partners', it appears that the HRPs may have limited influence or power with managers in situations of bullying.

Hence, the combination of devolvement to managers and the content of organisational policy appear to create role tensions between managers and HRPs regarding the responsibilities for identifying the antecedents of bullying claims and resolving cases. This does not appear to be simply an issue of policy; this deferral to management seems to occur even if the policy assigns responsibility to HRPs. Within the Bourdieusian framework of this thesis, this deferral may be a result of the HRPs' apparent lack of capital in comparison to managers when responding to bullying. However, this situation creates a disparity for targets: the HRPs discussed how targets

expect HRPs to ‘fix’ the problem. Instead, the findings suggest that through a combination of lack of capital and management-focused policy, the HRPs’ responses are less proactive in practice. The HRPs discussed ‘talking to managers’ without using the word ‘bullying’, supporting Salin’s (2008) findings on the more passive role HRPs may take in situations of bullying. If HRPs’ role is limited in this way and the decision rests with the manager, this may be perceived as ‘inaction’ by targets, as previously published research suggests (e.g., Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Rayner et al., 2002). Furthermore, as the next section examines, there are other dominant organisational members who appear to be further undermining the HRPs’ capital in bullying claims: senior management.

7.3.2 Pressure from Senior Management

The findings suggest that HRPs may be under pressure from the dominant members of their organisational field to resolve claims quickly, with little cost; to protect the organisation; and to protect alleged bullying managers. The HRPs also talked about “*huge pressure on HR from the directors*” to stop being “*so sympathetic*” to employees, and not to assume “*that there's something to be looked into*” when an employee raises a claim (p. 138). From the HRPs’ accounts, this appears to be because the performance-management practices used by managers, which underpin these claims, are perceived by senior managers as “*particularly effective*” in ‘getting results’ (p. 171), and this is even more so when the manager has a significant “*bank balance*” from economic success for the organisation (p. 175). The HRPs’ accounts indicate the strength of the ‘performance’ discourse in organisations, because the alleged bullying managers’ performance-management practices appear to be deemed economically ‘effective’ and, thus, acceptable by senior management.

This apparent protection of allegedly bullying managers by senior management suggests the existence of what Hutchinson and colleagues have called ‘networks of alliances’ (Hutchinson et al., 2005; 2009; 2010a; 2010b). These are informal alliances between managers that serve to silence bullying by problematising the target and, thus, protecting the manager accused of bullying. In their empirical research on targets’ experiences of bullying, these authors suggest that, because managers are rewarded by the very organisational practices that underpin the targets’ reported

bullying experiences, such as performance appraisals and performance-related-pay, informal ‘alliances’ develop between those who have the power to control and adapt such processes to serve their own interests. Hence, managers become complicit in ‘minimising, ignoring or denying’ bullying by ‘blaming the target’ and ‘turning a blind eye’; thus, bullying managers become “untouchable” (Hutchinson et al., 2009, p. 223). Such ‘collusion’ between managers to redefine, diminish or disregard the target’s experience is also reported in the emotional abuse literature (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Thus, it appears that the senior management pressure on HRPs may be reinforcing the ‘untouchable’ nature of managers in bullying claims, and through their apparent complicity with this pressure, HRPs may themselves be members of these alliances. This proposition will be examined further in Section 7.9.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this senior management pressure suggests that HRPs are subject to symbolic violence from more dominant organisational members when responding to bullying, particularly when the perpetrator is a manager whom more senior managers value and want protected. Arguably, this symbolic violence may itself be a form of bullying, from senior management to HRPs. Through this pressure, senior management within the organisation’s ‘field of power’ (defined as the senior management of an organisation in Section 1.5) appear to be using their capital to protect management interests by influencing the practice of HRPs when responding to manager-to-employee bullying claims, not only through the ‘speedy’ resolution of claims, but also through encouraging HRPs *not* to investigate claims. Furthermore, it seems that this symbolic violence is framed within a discourse that the HRPs understand: it is to reduce the cost to the organisation and protect it from legal or reputational damage.

Protecting the organisation emerged as the most important responsibility for these HRPs; it was discussed as their primary consideration because the organisation was frequently perceived as the HRPs’ biggest stakeholder. For these HRPs, consideration of the risk to the organisation was more important than “*sorting the problem out*”, thus “*overriding the consideration for the employee*” (p. 136). It seems that senior management pressure taps directly into this responsibility, and serves to reinforce this responsibility as a primary imperative. Thus, this symbolic violence from

management appears to influence both HRPs' bullying-related practices and HRPs' view of their responsibilities. As Bourdieu's theory might predict, the dominance of senior management appears to be constraining the HRPs' way of perceiving and behaving within their organisational fields. Coupled with HRPs' relative lack of capital in relation to management, this pressure may begin to explain why HRPs interpret manage-to-employee claims as 'performance-related' and the mechanisms they use to rationalise managers' behaviour within this construct. This proposition will be developed when we consider the mechanisms that HRPs appear to use when interpreting manager-to-employee claims and what role HRPs may play in these 'networks of alliances'. Next, however, we examine the third factor that contributes to the complexity of bullying for HRPs: their apparent perception of the 'untrustworthiness' of targets.

7.3.3 The 'Untrustworthiness of Targets'

The final factor that appears to add to the complexity of bullying for HRPs is their previous experience of 'untrustworthy' targets. The HRPs talked about targets having a "*separate agenda*", particularly for claims raised "*in the context of performance*" (p. 196); they discussed being more 'sceptical' or "*uber-cautious*" because they have learnt "*the hard way*" that they "*can't believe everything you hear*" (p. 133): it appears that target's accounts 'could not be trusted' by these HRPs. This issue of distrusting targets emerged from the data, and whilst it is not possible to fully ascertain how this has developed because of the focus of the interview questions, it was a uniform finding across the interviews. Thus, this is a new and significant finding: that HRPs appear to distrust the targets' account in claims of bullying. It is important to note, that in discussing this finding, I am not suggesting that we could or should assume that the targets were 'trustworthy' in the claims that the HRPs described; it may be that in some claims the target does have a 'separate agenda'. However, the importance of this finding, of HRPs' apparent universal 'distrust' of targets, is twofold. Firstly, it has significant implications for HRPs' interpretation and response to bullying because it reinforces the manager's voice that appears dominant in the HRPs' accounts, as will be discussed below. Secondly, in Chapter 6, target 'trustworthiness' was found to be an essential criterion for HRPs' construction of 'genuine bullying'. Yet, as we will go onto discuss, the HRPs' target-related

interpretive mechanisms predominantly result in ‘target-blaming’. Therefore, it seems that it is extremely difficult for a target to ‘qualify’ as ‘trustworthy’. Hence, for these two reasons, it is important to ask the question, “why might this sense of ‘distrust’ have developed in HRPs?”

Three related possibilities are suggested by the findings on HRPs’ emphasis on ‘trustworthiness’. Firstly, the findings in Chapter 5 suggests that HRPs have been ‘burnt’ by previous experiences of bullying claims where they have believed the target, responded accordingly and it subsequently transpired that the target’s story was ‘untrue’. These experiences appear to have contributed to a ‘distrusting’ attitude towards targets’ bullying claims. The potential mechanisms underpinning this ‘distrust’ will be discussed when we consider the role of both HRPs’ and targets’ trust in bullying claims. However, the findings suggest that the ‘distrust’ resulting from these ‘burning’ experiences is applied to subsequent targets; hence, ‘trustworthiness’ becomes a crucial factor for ‘genuine bullying’.

Secondly, believing and acting upon unsubstantiated target accounts is likely to damage the credibility and value of HRPs with managers, reducing their symbolic capital and further exacerbating the power imbalance between managers and HRPs. As described by PSM5 on p. 138, when HRPs do attempt to follow anti-bullying policy and address a bullying claim, it appears that they might be resisted and criticised by the very people they are trying to protect: managers. Given the apparent dominance and taken-for-granted nature of HRPs’ management-alignment, such criticisms are likely to be another form of ‘burning’ experience.

Thirdly, within the HRPs’ accounts of the targets’ trustworthiness, the voice of management seemed dominant. In addition to the pressure from senior management, the HRPs discussed how, once they had spoken to the manager, they ‘realised’ that ‘something else’ was present, such as the target’s poor absence record or unreliability. This is epitomised by PSA12’s comment on p. 133, where she says that “*when actually you go back to the manager and you get it from their point of view*”, the target has “*horrendous sick leave*” and is “*totally unreliable*”. These findings suggest that, when responding to bullying, it may be the manager’s account that takes

precedence, and that what managers might think of the HRPs' responses may be a more important consideration for HRPs than the targets' subjectivity. Thus, it appears that the HRPs' strong management-alignment within their professional habitus, their apparent lack of capital in relation to managers, and the symbolic violence from senior management may have a further impact on HRPs' bullying related practices by influencing the way in which HRPs perceive the targets.

Thus, by considering Bourdieu's assertion that an individual's practice is motivated by self-interest, if HRPs have been 'burnt' by 'untrustworthy' targets and managers' criticisms of their bullying-related practices in past claims, the scene might be set for HRPs to adopt a more 'sceptical' attitude towards targets. This 'distrusting' attitude may be serving to protect the HRPs from further criticism from this important and dominant management group. Moreover, it appears that there are strong parallels between the HRPs' subjective experience of responding to bullying claims and the previously published research on HRPs' responses to other people-related 'dilemmas', reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g., Fisher, 2000; Foote, 2001; Foote & Robinson, 1999; Lovell, 2002; Macklin, 2006). As with this 'dilemma' research, when responding to bullying claims, the HRPs within this thesis also appear to be influenced by a sense of powerlessness in comparison to line managers, pressure from senior management and a concern for their own position and credibility. One further proposition that was drawn from this 'dilemma' research in Chapter 2 was that HRPs' responses to bullying might also be influenced by their own values in habitus, to which the next section now turns.

7.3.4 The role of Individual Habitus, Values and Ethics

The findings in Chapter 6 suggest that some HRPs appear to experience tension in balancing their management alignment with supporting employees. Whilst these HRPs still adopted a management perspective to bullying claims, their narratives indicated that this was sometimes difficult for them, suggesting that their personal values and attitudes within their individual habitus may be competing with their professional habitus. The HRPs discussed the difficulty of the "*horrible*" balancing act between supporting managers and being sympathetic to the target, whilst not 'reinforcing' the target's perception of being bullied. Furthermore, the HRPs'

narratives suggest an implicit awareness that managers' behaviours might be detrimental to employees. The HRPs used a range of Bourdieusian euphemisms to describe managers and their behaviour, implying an appreciation of the negativity of managers' behaviour; such as "*bull in a china shop*", "*a nightmare*", "*child abusers*", "*ill-judged management*", and "*diabolical management*" (p. 167). The HRPs also discussed 're-packaging' bullying behaviours into 'inappropriate management', suggesting that HRPs are aware that managers are using bullying behaviours, but may be powerless to resist the management pressure that demands this 're-packaging', a point we will return to when we discuss how HRPs interpret management behaviour.

Thus, it appears that the combination of the taken-for-granted nature of professional habitus, an apparent lack of symbolic capital and the dominance of management may outweigh any 'pressure' the HRP might experience from their values and attitudes in individual habitus. Across all the interviews, there were no examples of employee advocacy, and no instances where the HRPs discussed considering the subjectivity of the target. Whilst the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 suggests that employee advocacy may have diminished, the absence of this discourse in the findings was unexpected. This suggests that the data in this thesis support Foote & Robinson's conclusions from their research on HRPs' responses to other people-related 'dilemmas: that supporting employees appears less important to HRPs than supporting managers, and that an ethical stance appears to be an unproductive luxury "to be left at the door when you go to work" (Foote & Robinson, 1999, p. 95).

Whilst academics have discussed bullying as an ethical issue, and highlighted the duty of care that managers and HRPs have in addressing it (Kelly, 2005; Kochan, 2004; Winstanley & Woodall, 2000), only one HRP, PSA13, spontaneously raised the issue of ethics in relation to bullying. He was emphasising the lack of impact that a morally framed argument has with senior management when discussing the issue of bullying. Instead, he treats bullying as "*a business case*", because he has found "*the legal argument to be more successful than the moral one*" (p. 149). In his experience, this 'business language' was the only means of gaining management support in tackling bullying, a recognition that was shared by other HRPs. Hence, it appears that HRPs

are drawing on the market managerialist discourses of organisations to frame their discussions of bullying with managers. That is, it seems that HRPs have developed an ‘economic discourse’ for bullying, couching bullying in the language of ‘financial cost’ and ‘legal risk’ to organisations. Furthermore, the consistency of this ‘business language’ for bullying within the findings suggests that both the language and the discourses on which it is based have also become incorporated into HRPs’ professional habitus.

Therefore, it appears that ‘ethics’ may not be a useful discourse for HRPs; instead, it is the discourse of economics that shapes their approach to discussing bullying with managers. More specifically, it appears that an ethical discourse is explicitly rejected by HRPs, as epitomised by PSM7’s comment: *“if you were to talk to practitioners about morals and ethics, you’d just switch them off”* (p. 149). The combination of management alignment and lack of relative capital seems to have created a context where HRPs’ approach to bullying claims reflects Hope-Hailey et al’s (2005, p. 64) criticism, that HRPs are “siding with management, and largely neglecting relations with employees”, particularly in manager-to-employee claims. Whilst HRPs have developed a ‘business language’ for discussing the issue of bullying with managers, this appears to be more motivated by protecting the organisation from financial and legal risk. This apparent lack of employee advocacy will be further explored when the impacts of the HRPs’ interpretive mechanisms for bullying claims are discussed. At this point, however, it is appropriate to summarise the discussion thus far, because it has established the context, the explanatory backdrop, for HRPs’ constructions and interpretations of bullying claims.

7.3.5 A Summary of The Context for Examining HRPs’ Constructions of Bullying Claims

The HRPs’ accounts of their organisational fields suggest that target-driven and performance-managed organisational cultures have become a taken-for-granted part of organisational doxa, along with the organisational practices that perpetuate increased management control and intensified employee performance-management. This seems to be unquestioned by the HRPs. They appear to draw on both this and the CIPD’s professionalisation discourse to position themselves as a partner to managers,

and they appear to have constructed a role that prioritises supporting and protecting the organisation and management over employee interests. This role and its purpose appear to have become incorporated into professional habitus, which seems as taken-for-granted as the organisational doxa to which it aligns. However, it appears this is not without its problems for HRPs and, thus, may not be reaping the benefits of increased status and credibility promised by the CIPD's professionalisation project. Despite their management alignment, it appears that HRPs' relative capital may be low, evidenced by the apparent dominance of the manager's voice and perspective in bullying claims, which appears exacerbated by the seemingly reactive and more passive position created for HRPs by organisational policy.

Against this backdrop, the next section will examine the HRPs' constructs of peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims. The findings in Chapter 5 suggest that, when an employee walks through the HRP's door with a new claim of bullying, the crucial piece of information that determines what will happen from that point onwards is *who the bully¹⁸ is*: the target's peer or manager. The mechanisms that might account for this finding will be examined in greater detail when we discuss how the HRPs *interpret* claims of bullying; first, we consider how HRPs *construct* bullying claims, beginning with peer-to-peer claims.

7.4 HRPs' Construction of Peer-to-Peer Bullying Claims

When the alleged bully is hierarchically equivalent to the target, a peer (including manager-level peers), the HRPs appear to interpret the claim within a construct of 'interpersonal conflict'. The HRPs consistently interpreted these peer-to-peer claims as unresolved 'personality clashes' or 'bickering'; that is, interpersonal conflict over *work-related* issues. The underlying *cause* is interpreted as work-related, such as a difference in opinion over a task or lateness for a meeting, which has then escalated and given rise to the bullying claim. HRPs' responses tend to be mediation or negotiation; and the HRPs frequently involve the manager in resolving the conflict between the employees. In these situations, the HRPs perceive that the manager of the target and/or perpetrator is partly culpable for failing to step in and 'nip it in the bud'.

¹⁸ As with Chapter 5, in all uses of the word 'bully' in this chapter, the word 'alleged' is assumed.

This peer-to-peer construct parallels both the dominant academic definition of bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003) and organisational definitions (e.g., ACAS, 2009a; CIPD, 2009a), examined in Chapter 2. As with these definitions, HRPs are constructing these claims as an escalating individualised and interpersonal ‘problem’. However, in stark contrast to these definitions, the HRPs do not perceive this as *actual* bullying, unless the situation meets the strict criteria of ‘genuine bullying’, which will be examined subsequently.

Perceived *intent* and the focus of the perpetrators behaviours appear crucial at this point: these peer-to-peer claims appear not to be interpreted as an *intention* to bully within this construct because the cause is *work-related*, even if the claim results in a disciplinary process to address the perpetrator’s behaviour. ‘Fairness’ and ‘reasonableness’ also appear important; not from the target’s subjective perspective, rather whether the perpetrator’s behaviour is ‘reasonable’ and ‘understandable’ in light of the underlying cause. That is, can the bullying claim and the reported behaviour be ‘rationalised’ to an ‘understandable’ work-related issue? For example, PSM6 (p. 152) rationalises a peer-to-peer claim as a “*misunderstanding*” over who can ‘work the fastest’. Moreover, even behaviour that becomes ‘unreasonable’ and *personal*, as in PSM3’s account of “*screaming and shouting and name-calling*” (p. 152), appears to be accommodated and rationalised within this construct *if* there has been a previous critical work-related incident that the HRP interprets as an ‘understandable’ reason. That is, even though the perpetrator’s behaviour might require addressing, it can be ‘rationalised’; thus, the issue of ‘intent’ appears nullified in this construct. However, if this underlying work-related cause is absent, it appears that the personally-targeted behaviour then becomes interpreted as ‘unfair’, ‘unreasonable’ and as *intending* to cause harm, because a work-related justification is missing and it can no longer be rationalised. We return to this differentiation in the nature of intent when the construct of ‘genuine bullying’ is examined in the next section.

This finding, that HRPs appear to construct peer-to-peer claims as ‘interpersonal conflict’ and not bullying, is an important contribution to the academic literature. It appears that HRPs are not following either academic definitions of bullying (e.g.,

Einarsen et al., 2003) or the guidelines from ACAS (2009a). The latter highlights the importance of target subjectivity by stating, “*those making a complaint usually define what they mean by bullying or harassment...whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition*” (p. 1). Furthermore, in line with the guidelines from ACAS (2009a) and CIPD (2009a, p. 2), an anti-bullying policy should include examples of ‘bullying behaviours’, which include the “shouting” and “personal-insults” described by PSM3 earlier. The findings suggest that when the HRP perceives that there is a work-related ‘understandable cause’ for the claim, they do not considering the targets’ subjectivity, even when a target is describing these types of behaviours. Thus, the HRP’s response is unlikely to match either the targets subjective experience or their expectation that the HRP will respond *in accordance with policy*. Thus, we have a second disparity for the target: whilst the policy defines the target’s experience of negative behaviours as bullying; it appears that the HRP is unlikely to concur. Therefore, these findings suggest that, if there is a work-related cause in peer-to-peer cases, the targets may perceive inaction, denial or a response that is inconsistent with policy from HRPs, as suggested by previously published research on targets’ experiences (e.g., Ferris, 2004; Keashly, 1998; Sheenan et al., 2004).

Thus, it appears that a *work-related cause* is essential for this peer-to-peer construct; it provides the ‘understandable’ reason for the HRP. This reason then becomes the focus, rather than the impact of the behaviours, even if they are personally-targeted and perceived as detrimental by the target. If there is no apparent work-related cause, it appears that the situation can no longer be accommodated within the construct of ‘interpersonal conflict’: it is then that HRPs appear to consider whether the behaviour might be *intentional* and *personal*, rather than work-related. This brings us to the construct of ‘genuine bullying’.

7.5 HRPs’ Construction of ‘Genuine Bullying’

It emerged that personally-targeted behaviour and deliberate intention to cause harm were critical for HRPs’ interpretation of ‘genuine bullying’. This, again, is in stark contrast to both academic and organisational definitions; both include work and personal behaviours. ‘Intent’, on the other hand, is a thorny issue for academics,

particularly in terms of ‘proving it’; hence, it is excluded from the dominant academic definition (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003). ACAS (2009a, p. 1) is ambivalent on the issue: whilst ACAS argues that the target determines what bullying is, its guidelines also include the phrase “through means intended to” cause a detrimental impact, a phrase also adopted by CIPD (2009a). There appears to be no such ambivalence for HRPs: they were consistently clear that ‘genuine bullying’ involves *intent to bully*. Hence, the emphasis on personal behaviours and intent differentiates the HRPs’ construct of ‘genuine bullying’ from academic and organisational definitions and represents a further contribution to both academic and practitioner knowledge. Furthermore, as the next section will discuss, the issue of intent is also crucial, but for the opposite reason, in manager-to-employee claims.

Whilst these two criteria, intent and personally-related behaviour, appeared essential for ‘genuine bullying’, they were not sufficient: the findings suggest two other critical factors. The *impact* of the behaviour on the target must be interpreted as significant and negative. If the HRP perceived the behaviour to be trivial, it seems that the perpetrator might be cautioned, but the claim would not be considered bullying. Crucially, it appears that the target must also be perceived as ‘trustworthy’, ‘believable’, ‘genuine’ and ‘non-complicit’. If the HRP did not believe that the target was *genuinely* distressed and negatively impacted by the behaviour, they would question the target’s motives and the HRPs would seek an alternative explanation to bullying. Hence, it appears that (dis)trust is an important factor in HRPs’ response to bullying claims. Whilst distrust appears to be related to HRPs being ‘burnt’ by previous experience of ‘untrustworthy’ targets and criticism from management regarding their responses to bullying claims, as previously discussed, the nature and development of this ‘distrust’ would be an area for future research.

Thus, it seems that these findings have provided an answer for the first research question: for the HRPs in this thesis, ‘genuine bullying’ is behaviour that occurs between peers of equal hierarchical level; it is *intentional* and *personal* behaviour that has a *significant* negative impact on a *trustworthy* individual and, as a result of the behaviour, a power imbalance has been created: the target is unable to ‘fight back’. Of critical importance within this construct is that the target must be perceived as non-

complicit, believable and genuinely impacted by the behaviour. Furthermore, there appears to be an interesting dynamic between work-related and personally-related perpetrator behaviours: it appears that ‘interpersonal conflict’ peer-to-peer claims can involve both types of behaviours if there is a work-related incident interpreted as an ‘understandable’ cause for the situation. However, from these interviews, it appears that ‘genuine bullying’ only comprises personally-related behaviour.

This finding, of the criteria necessary for ‘genuine bullying’ in the eyes of HRPs, is a significant contribution in addressing our limited understanding of HRPs’ bullying-related practice. It has implications for research and practice, because of the disparities between the HRPs’ consistent construct for ‘genuine bullying’ within these findings and the academic and organisational definitions of bullying. It appears that the HRPs’ construction of ‘genuine bullying’ is describing *deliberate* harassment, which is clearly and legally defined in the UK (see ACAS’ (2009a) definition in Chapter 2, p. 39). The inclusion of the word ‘deliberate’ is important: legally, harassment need not be deliberate; it is the nature of the behaviour that is crucial. That is, harassment discriminates against someone on the basis of, for example, gender or age. For HRPs, ‘genuine bullying’ is similarly targeted but *intentional*, in sharp contrast to practitioner and academic bullying definitions (e.g., ACAS, 2009a; Einarsen et al., 2003). It also creates our third apparent disparity for targets: whilst organisational policy ‘tells’ them that it is their subjective experience that matters, not the intent of the ‘bully’, it seems that this is not the response from HRPs. It seems that ‘bullying’ for HRPs has to be intentional and that target subjectivity appears not to be a defining criterion. This finding, again, may provide some explanation for the HRP responses that targets report within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Thus, whilst intent may be a thorny and unmeasurable criterion for academics, it appears to be an essential ingredient for practitioners. For HRPs, the crucial nature of intent suggests that very few bullying claims would ever be considered as ‘genuine bullying’ because peer-to-peer claims are interpreted as work-related ‘clashes’, not as ‘intention to bully’. Furthermore, most claims HRPs handle are manager-to-employee and, as the next section will discuss, HRPs do not appear to accord intent to managers’ behaviour.

7.6 The Construction of Manager-to-Employee Bullying Claims

It appears that this manager-to-employee construct of ‘performance-related claims’ is automatically applied to interpret the claim *because* the alleged bully is the target’s manager. Consistently, in these situations, the HRPs’ response was “*there is always something else in the mix*”, and this was interpreted as the target’s under-performance, which had necessitated the manager’s attempts to performance-manage the target (p. 160). This was concisely described by FG3 as “*allegations of bullying as appeals against performance work*” (p. 156). Within this construct, the actual *claim* was typically interpreted as the target’s misunderstanding or dislike of this process, which in some cases was exacerbated by the manager’s poor performance-management skills. Thus, it appears that the claim is interpreted as a *symptom* of the performance-management process, not as a case of ‘genuine bullying’. These claims were not labelled as ‘bullying’, *regardless* of the manager’s behaviour; behaviour that, in many of the cases described, such as PSM4’s “*crap manager*” (p. 171), would have met the generally-accepted organisational or academic definitions of bullying (e.g., ACAS, 2009a; CIPD, 2009a; Einarsen et al., 2003).

Thus, the HRPs drew upon the discourse of market managerialism in organisational doxa and professional habitus, evident within their narratives, to justify intensified performance-management; manager-to-employee bullying claims are then constructed as employees’ reactions to this intensification. For these HRPs, it appears that it is not the economic focus of organisations and the resultant performance-management practices that are ‘causing’ the bullying claims; it is the employees’ inability to meet these high performance requirements that ‘cause’ the bullying claims. Previously published research has suggested that employees construct organisational practices, such as ‘unfair’ performance-management and appraisal, as ‘organisational bullying’ (e.g., Liefoghe, 2003; MacKenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). The findings in this thesis suggest that HRPs do not hold a similar construction; HRPs do not appear to construct practices relating to performance-management as ‘bullying’; rather, these practices are perceived as legitimate and necessary by HRPs. Instead, the HRPs’ construct of ‘genuine bullying’ suggests that only a very specific and limited form of behaviour, in peer-to-peer situations, will be deemed as ‘bullying’ by HRPs. Hence, in comparing the findings from this thesis with previously published research on

employee and target accounts of bullying, it appears that HRPs and employees hold very different constructs of bullying.

Two caveats are required before discussing this manager-to-employee construct further: although the HRPs did not label manager-to-employee situations as *bullying*, it cannot be assumed that they did not privately consider them to be so. The second caveat is that the HRPs may be ‘right’: perhaps the majority of bullying claims are situations of employees reacting negatively to the intensified focus on performance. An important inconsistency in the interview data challenges this interpretation: the HRPs frequently described management behaviour that met the definition of bullying (e.g. ACAS, 2009a), yet interpreted it as ‘performance-management’. When asked by the interviewer how they would describe such behaviour, the HRPs admitted that it ‘could be perceived as bullying behaviour’. How this discrepancy might be explained will be discussed when we examine the HRPs’ interpretive mechanisms.

Thus, whilst acknowledging the exploratory nature of this thesis, the consistency of the findings suggest that the three bullying constructs that emerged from these data might be used within a multi-staged decision process when HRPs are presented with a new case of bullying, which is represented in Figure 6. In the first instance, when an employee brings a new bullying claim to the HRP, it appears that *the nature of the bully* might determine the construct used by the HRP to interpret the situation and establish their subsequent response. The findings suggest that the construct of ‘genuine bullying’ may only be considered if a peer-to-peer claim does not have an ‘understandable’ work-related cause. Crucially, from the data in this thesis, the construct of ‘genuine bullying’ was never explicitly applied to manager-to-employee claims because, through the use of a range of interpretive mechanisms, it appears that intent was not accorded to managers’ behaviours. This creates a fourth apparent disparity for the target: despite what the policy says, if targets report a claim against their manager, it appears that their expectations are unlikely to be met and their subjective experience is unlikely to be acknowledged. The HRPs’ search for “something else” may help to explain why targets often report that HRPs side with, or are manipulated by managers when they raise a bullying claim (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Tracy et al., 2006; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007).

Therefore, it appears that the HRPs' opening comments in the interviews are correct: through their eyes, these HRPs do not handle many *bullying* cases; they predominantly deal with manager-to-employee *claims*. Because these claims were interpreted within the 'performance-related' construct, it seems that the claims did not meet the essential criteria of the 'genuine bullying' construct. It appears that, as a likely result of the pressures and management-alignment of the HRPs' professional and organisational contexts, intent is not accorded to managers' behaviour. This finding represents a significant contribution in furthering our knowledge of HRPs' bullying-related practice and has significant implications for targets, bystanders and the organisation, and for the continued reported prevalence of bullying, which will be discussed in the conclusions of this thesis.

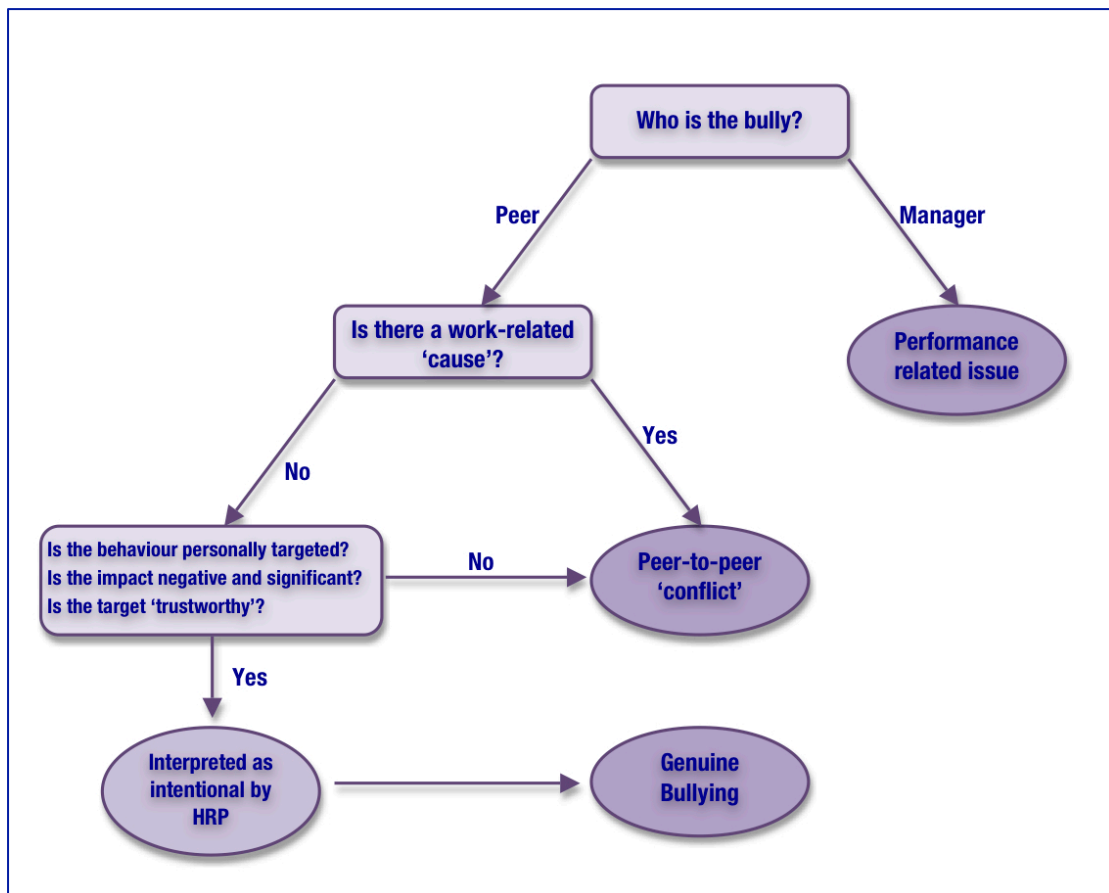


Figure 6: Proposed Decision Process for New Bullying Claims

However, it seems that HRPs' response to bullying is not simply a definitional issue. The discussion thus far in this chapter suggests that HRPs legitimise and rationalise the need for intensified performance-management by drawing on economic and organisational discourses. This focus on performance appears to have become part of organisational doxa and the HRPs' role in supporting the managers in this practice appears part of their professional habitus. Within this context, HRPs consistently interpret the underlying causes of manager-to-employee claims (poor employee performance) and the managers' behaviours in these claims (improving employees' performance) as work-related, even when the manager's behaviour is described as described as "*crap*" (p. 171), or equated to "*child abuse*" (p. 176) or involves "*chiller chats*" (p. 174). Why is such behaviour not interpreted, or even considered as potential 'bullying' by HRPs? Why, instead, do HRPs appear to use numerous mechanisms to rationalise management behaviour and, thus, not accord intent to these situations? It is to these questions that the next section turns by examining the mechanisms that HRPs use to interpret bullying claims.

7.7 HRPs' Interpretive Mechanisms

The findings suggest that HRPs use a range of mechanisms when interpreting new bullying claims that serve to attribute 'blame' to the target and legitimise the perpetrators' behaviour. In doing so, HRPs appear to individualise bullying, focusing on the behaviours involved whilst apparently diminishing the targets' subjective experience of bullying. We begin by discussing the HRPs' target-related mechanisms.

7.7.1 Interpreting the Target's Behaviour

Across the interviews, for both manager-to-employee claims and peer-to-peer claims, the HRPs used a range of interpretive mechanisms that served to attributed 'blame' for the bullying claim to an aspect of the target, such as targets' "*misunderstanding of bullying*" or inability/unwillingness to "*accept feedback*" (p. 165). The HRPs appeared to consistently interpret the target as the 'problem'; question the 'trustworthiness' of the target's account; and did not appear to consider the target's subjective experience. This finding has significant implications because it supports previously published research on targets' perceptions that HRPs 'blame' them for the

bullying situation (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Keashley, 2001; Lee, 2000; Vickers, 2006). From the HRPs' perspective in this thesis, the findings suggest that HRPs do appear to 'blame' the target for the bullying claim.

Given the level of involvement HRPs have in resolving bullying claims, and the importance of their response in determining how targets cope with their bullying experience (Keashly, 2001; Lewis & Rayner, 2003), this is a significant finding. Furthermore, in addition to the consistent 'target blaming' found, several of the HRPs discussed how difficult it was for employees to access the organisation's anti-bullying policy, either because it was not transparent or by restricting access. Again, this is important, because previous research suggests that targets raise their claims with HRPs because they believe that will help their situation (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Ferris, 2004; 2009). From a Bourdieusian perspective, HRPs could be considered as a more powerful organisational group in comparison to employees: typically, it is HRPs that provide employees with access to anti-bullying policy and the grievance process; how transparent and fair this process is resides in the hand of HRPs and managers. Thus, these findings suggest that HRPs might be subjecting employees to symbolic violence by restricting access to policy, by not responding to claims according to policy, and, as we examine in the next section, by consistently interpreting managers' behaviour in bullying claims as legitimate. But why would HRPs consistently attribute blame to the targets in bullying claims? Before providing a potential explanation, we first need to discuss the HRPs' manager-related interpretive mechanisms because it will be argued that, together, these target- and manager-related mechanisms appear to serve a purpose for the HRPs.

7.7.2 Interpreting the Perpetrators Behaviours

It appears that the HRPs use a range of discrete but related mechanisms for interpreting, legitimising and rationalising managers' behaviour in manager-to-employee claims in conjunction with the target-related mechanisms. That is, within these data, HRPs appear to simultaneously 'blame' the target whilst legitimising the managers' behaviour. These manager-related mechanisms, described in Chapter 6, were 'insensitive company managers', 'poor managers', 'old school managers', and 'untouchable managers'. Paradoxically, within these mechanisms, the HRPs often

described these managers as “*really good*” or “*technically brilliant*” even when they were exhibiting behaviour that would be defined as bullying within organisational policy (p. 172-174). Thus, it appears that HRPs are evaluating ‘good management’ in terms of the manager’s ability to meet organisational targets rather than people-management ability. Again, this suggests the dominance of economic and performance organisational discourses in HRPs’ bullying-related practices and the HRPs’ apparent acceptance of the legitimacy of managers’ performance-management practices. Furthermore, the HRPs’ accounts suggest that they do not openly discuss the managers’ behaviour as ‘potential bullying’ with the ‘accused’ manager when an employee raises a claim. Instead, the HRPs discussed avoiding the term ‘bullying’ with both the targets and the manager, supporting my earlier findings (Harrington, 2005).

Before examining why HRPs might interpret and respond to bullying in this way, another comment is appropriate at this juncture: by examining the HRPs’ interpretations of management behaviour, I am not suggesting that all manager-to-employee claims are ‘genuine bullying’, nor that all behaviours exhibited by managers that might meet the definition of bullying are intentional. However, based on the HRPs’ accounts in these data, they appeared not to consider either possibility when interpreting new manager-to-employee claims. Why this might be the case is the focus of the next section.

7.7.3 The Purpose of HRPs’ Bullying-related Constructions and Interpretive Mechanisms

As discussed, HRPs appear to have taken the performance imperative of organisational doxa and a management-aligned role into their professional habitus. Their primary, seemingly unquestioned, objectives are to protect and support the organisation and management; yet, in comparison to managers, the HRPs’ symbolic capital and position in the organisational field appear weak when responding to bullying. Against this backdrop, it appears that constructing manager-to-employee claims as ‘performance-related’ and the associated target- and manager-related interpretive mechanisms may serve a purpose for the HRPs. The construct and mechanisms appear to provide the HRPs with a means of meeting their management

and organisational objectives whilst managing the inherent conflicts, management pressures and power imbalances they discussed in relation to responding to bullying claims. By problematising the target and legitimising the manager the HRPs appear to individualise the bullying, locating the issue the target and the manager involved in the claim, rather than as a broader organisational issue. In doing so, it seems that the HRPs are able to fulfil their main objectives: supporting the manager, protecting the organisation and contributing to organisational performance.

Support for this assertion is drawn from the findings on the nature of the HRPs' interpretive mechanisms and their 'repackaging' of bullying, presented in Section 6.4. The HRPs discussed how labelling managers' behaviour as 'bullying' would be "*counterproductive*" because of the pressures to protect managers, and to avoid negative publicity, reputational damage and litigation for the organisation. Thus, the HRPs appear to 'repackage' bullying, epitomised by PSM7's comment that she tends to "*wrap things up as inappropriate management behaviour rather than labelling it as bullying*" (p. 181). This 'repackaging' also appears to be influenced by two further factors. Firstly, the HRPs desire to protect their relationship and alignment with managers. HRPs talked about the difficulty of discussing a bullying claim with the alleged bullying manager, and how this can damage the HRP-manager relationship. Secondly, it seems that the HRPs' apparent lack of capital in comparison to managers makes it difficult, potentially impossible, to have this conversation with the accused manager, particularly if the alleged bully was a senior manager. In these situations, the manager appears to be perceived as 'untouchable' by virtue of his/her seniority, such as PSM3's "*child abusers*" (p. 176).

Within this 'untouchable manager' interpretive mechanism behaviours that were described as "*significantly serious...bullying behaviours or inappropriate conduct*" were 'bypassed' or 'accepted' because of the seniority or "*bank balance*" of the manager (p. 175). Hence, this mechanism is somewhat different to the other manager-related mechanisms: whilst it also serves to legitimise management behaviour, it appears to result in *no action* from the HRP. Within the other mechanisms, the HRPs typically respond by 'coaching' or 'advising' managers on their performance-management practices. Thus, whilst there is no *direct* acknowledgement of bullying,

the HRPs appear to *indirectly* address the behaviours through this ‘coaching’ and ‘advice’. This does not seem to be the case for ‘untouchable’ managers: their behaviour appears to remain unaddressed.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s framework to integrate these findings, it seems that HRPs’ constructs and responses to bullying claims might be a *symptom* of the context within which HRPs are positioned. HRPs’ interpretations and responses appear to be outcomes of the conflicting nature of HRM roles, created by their professional field; the apparent lack of symbolic capital of both HRPs in comparison to managers, and HRM in relation to management; and the apparent dominance of the ‘market managerialism’ and ‘performance’ discourses within HRPs’ organisational fields, which appear to have created performance-management practices aligned with organisational and management interests rather than those of the employees. This context appears further exacerbated by the complex and ambiguous nature of bullying, and the management-focus of anti-bullying policies. However, what might be the implications of HRPs’ constructions and responses to bullying? It is to this that the next section turns. Firstly, we consider the implications for employee advocacy and, thus, targets before considering the broader organisational implications.

7.8 The Loss of Employee Advocacy

Bourdieu argues that, together, doxa and habitus make certain ‘ways of perceiving’ possible, and other less available, or even ‘unthinkable’ (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). The findings suggest that the HRPs’ constructs and interpretive mechanisms may have given rise to a limited set of roles and practices when responding to bullying within their organisational and professional contexts. These are summarised in Table 10. With targets, the HRPs appear to predominantly act as a ‘mediator’ in peer-to-peer claims and as a ‘clarifier’ in manager-to-employee claims, to ‘correct’ the target’s ‘misunderstanding’ of the performance-management process or the meaning of bullying. With managers, the HRPs main roles appear to be a ‘support’, ‘advisor and ‘coach’. In both peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims it appears that the target-related mechanisms, which serve to problematise the target, might negate the need for HRPs to consider the target’s subjectivity and act as an employee advocate. That is, because the HRPs appear to attribute the ‘cause’ for the claim to the

Table 10: The Positionings and Practices made available by the three Bullying-related Constructs

Construct	Interpretation	Positioning	Practice
Performance-related Claim	Employee has a performance issue and has raised a claim of bullying. The manager's behaviour is legitimate given the performance issue.	<p>HRP: support, coach, advisor and partner to the manager; problem-solver; mediator; negotiator; clarifier.</p> <p>Target: the naïve or malicious 'trouble maker'</p> <p>Perpetrator Manager: the deserving benefactor of HRPs' support</p> <p>Line Manager: the responsible problem solver; the decision-maker/verifier; discipliner</p>	<p>By constructing the claim as a performance issue, it is policy on performance-management, and disciplinary and grievance processes that will be used rather than bullying policy. Actions are likely to involve those that will improve the targets understanding of the performance-management process, and remediate the performance issue.</p> <p>As part of this process, the HRP may act as a coach for both the line manager, and for the perpetrating manager in developing his/her skills and addressing 'inappropriate' behaviours. Actions as an employee advocate are likely to be perceived as unnecessary and, hence, less available because the target's own performance and misunderstanding is perceived to be the problem.</p>
Personality-related Claim	Work-related issue has caused a personal clash between two employees	<p>HRP: support and advisor to the manager; problem-solver; mediator; negotiator.</p> <p>Target: the culpable 'trouble-maker'</p> <p>Perpetrator: the provoked aggressor</p> <p>Manager: the responsible problem solver; the decision-maker/verifier; discipliner</p>	<p>By constructing the claim as a interpersonal conflict, it is disciplinary and grievance policy that will be used rather than bullying policy.</p> <p>Because the manager of the target and/or perpetrator is viewed as responsible for 'nipping this behaviour in the bud' and resolving the conflict, the HRP is likely to act as a coach or support for the manager, and a mediator for the target and perpetrator. Actions as an employee advocate are likely to be perceived as unnecessary because this is perceived to be an interpersonal issue between two individuals who share culpability.</p>
Genuine Bullying	The claim meets the essential criteria for genuine bullying	<p>HRP: support and advisor to the manager; investigator; problem-solver; mediator; negotiator; judge and jury.</p> <p>Target: genuine but problematic victim</p> <p>Perpetrator: the bully</p> <p>Manager: the responsible problem solver; the decision-maker/verifier</p>	<p>By constructing this as a genuine case of bullying, the HRP would instigate the bullying policy and become involved in the investigation, even if it is the line manager's responsibility to do the investigation.</p> <p>The HRP will provide support and advice to the line manager responsible for resolving the issue. Actions as an employee advocate are likely to be perceived as appropriate and necessary, hence more available, because the target is interpreted as a genuinely impacted victim.</p>

target (e.g., misunderstanding, over-sensitivity or underperformance), the target's subjective experience of 'being bullied' appears to be perceived as 'wrong', thus negating the need for support and advocacy.

However, would it not possible for HRPs to accept, or consider, that the target might *feel bullied* even if the HRP does not believe the target has a case to answer? The findings suggest that HRPs appear not to consider this option; they seem not to 'put themselves in the targets' shoes'. Moreover, they were quite explicit that they were not "*social workers*" and could not be both "*gamekeeper and poacher*" by supporting managers and employees (p. 186). It appears that the managers' interests may take precedence for the HRPs, as exemplified by PSA12: "*we are not here as a welfare system for employees, we are not here to be an adviser to employees. We are predominantly here to support management*" (p. 146). HRPs admitted that they were sometimes "*two faced*" or duplicitous in their approach to targets, appearing sympathetic to the target and then subsequently discussing performance-management with the manager (p. 186). Whilst this 'sympathetic face' might be beneficial for the target at the time of raising the claim, previously published research has shown that if HRPs do not take obvious action based on the target's account, the target may experience further negative impact because they do not receive the 'expected' response from the HRP (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010). Hence, the data suggest that the apparent strong management-alignment within HRPs' professional habitus may be diminishing their ability to engage in employee advocacy, supporting previously published research with HRPs (e.g., Keegan & Francis, 2010).

However, the data in this thesis suggest that there may be another factor, beyond the apparent strength of HRPs' management-alignment, which might be preventing a more target-focused approach to bullying claims. The findings in Chapter 6 suggest that contemplating the targets' perspective and subjectivity might create tensions and challenges for the HRPs. To do so would entail considering that a manager may be bullying an employee, and this appears fraught with difficulties for the HRP: they would be required to challenge rather than support the manager; and the acknowledgment of management bullying would have potential legal and financial ramifications for the organisation. Conversely, the outright rejection of the target's

account and subjective experience in favour of the manager's is likely to be emotionally and cognitively costly for the HRP. Research on the self-conscious emotions of guilt and shame (e.g., Kemeny, Gruenewald & Dickerson, 2004; Tangney, Mashek & Stuewig, 2005) suggest that such feelings can result from responding to another's situation in a manner that is incongruent to one's perceived self-identity, and that to mitigate this discomfort individuals tend to externalise the blame for the situation onto 'the other'; in this case, the target.

To acknowledge the target's subjectivity when the HRPs appear powerless to challenge the manager's behaviour might, therefore, result in feelings of guilt and shame for the HRPs, particularly if this violates part of the HRP's self-identity; for example, as a 'caring and empathetic' person. Returning to Bourdieu's assertion that self-interest motivates social practice, in conjunction with the HRPs' apparent 'distrust' of targets' bullying accounts, it may be that self-interest also underpins the HRPs' target-related mechanisms. From these data, it appears that HRPs' bullying-related practices may be influenced by their relative lack of capital, symbolic violence from senior management, fear of criticism from line managers and the need to protect their management relationships. By attributing the 'cause' of the claim to the target, the HRPs do not need to consider whether the manager is bullying. Furthermore, it appears that casting doubt on the 'truthfulness' of the target's subjectivity may serve to negate the need to consider the target's subjective feelings of 'being bullied' or engage in employee advocacy. Thus, it appears that HRPs may be protecting themselves from both management criticism *and* the dissonance and self-conscious emotions that would be associated with not responding to the target's subjectivity.

Further support for these assertions is drawn from the striking similarity between the HRPs' responses in this thesis and research on the tendency of 'observers' to attribute blame to targets and rationalise perpetrator behaviour in rape cases (e.g., Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Krahe, Temkin, & Bieneck, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995) and sexual harassment (e.g., Collinson & Collinson, 1996; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009; Roth, 2007). As already noted, the interpretive mechanisms identified in this thesis, which appear to problematise the target and legitimise the manager, were not local phenomena: they were consistent across the interviews, and were used in both

performance-related and personality-related claims. It appears that these mechanisms may be more widely associated with how individuals make sense of the ‘targets’ and ‘perpetrators’ of negative acts. The process of individualising and externalising the blame may serve to protect the individual from responsibility to act and the likelihood of experiencing similar negative behaviours. In the HRPs’ case, it is proposed that this attribution of target blame may serve to mitigate HRPs’ responsibility to the target and protect their obligations to the manager.

Arguably, openly acknowledging, challenging, remediating or disciplining bullying behaviour from managers would actually be in the organisation’s best interests because of the significant damage and cost of such behaviour (e.g., Einarsen & Gemzoe, 2003; Giga et al., 2008). However, the data in this thesis suggest that this course of action might be almost impossible for HRPs within their current organisational and professional contexts, which are characterised by powerful economic and performance discourses, management alignment, lack of relative power and pressure from senior management. Whilst this discussion may have provided some understanding of the HRPs’ bullying-related practices found within these data, what are the implications for the targets? During these interviews, the HRPs discussed how they believed that employees did not trust ‘HR’ and might perceive HRPs as “management lackies”. Thus, it is appropriate to return to the issue of (dis)trust, because it appears to be important for HRPs’ response to targets, as discussed, and potentially for targets’ experiences of raising bullying claims.

7.8.1 (Dis)trust in Bullying Claims

Based on the trust literature (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Searle, et al., in press), when an individual places their trust in another, it puts them in a position of vulnerability. Willingness to do so is predicated on the belief that the ‘other’ will respond fairly and transparently. If this does not happen, the individual’s vulnerability and trust may be violated, resulting in distrust (Six & Skinner, 2010). Thus, if we consider the HRPs’ ‘burning’ experiences, if an HRP trusts the target’s account, they are placed in a position of vulnerability by assuming that the target’s side of the story is ‘true’ and acting accordingly. If it subsequently transpires that the target’s account is unfounded or malicious, or contradicted by the more powerful account of management, distrust

of targets may result from the violation of vulnerability and trust experienced by the HRP. This distrust is likely to be applied to subsequent targets, because of the similarity to the initial 'burning' experience, particularly if the HRP experienced negative emotions, such as anger, from this 'burning' experience (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Six & Skinner, 2010).

From the employees' perspective, if they are to feel confident in raising bullying issues, targets' need feel there is a genuine opportunity to air grievances (Baptise, 2008), and that the manager or HRP can be trusted to consider the employee's welfare, rather than an alternative agenda, such as business targets (Harrington & Rayner, In press). The target's willingness to be vulnerable and their reliance on the HRP to respond with fairness, care and transparency are, again, central to this trust. The behaviour of the HRP is particularly important because the economic nature of the employment relationship may provide sufficient reason for employee distrust rather than trust (Godard, 2004). Thus, perceived HRP trustworthiness may be seen as a sign of the organisation's commitment to employees (Baptise, 2008; Weaver & Trevino, 2001). This requires an alignment between the espoused values of an organisation, such as its anti-bullying policy, and the response experienced by the target (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2006). That is, for employee trust to develop and perpetuate, it appears important for employees to perceive that procedural justice is delivered through HRM practices, whether by managers or HRPs (Searle, et al., in press); that these practices are consistently applied (May, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003); and that the employees' interests are being considered and protected (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

However, the findings in this thesis suggest that HRPs' responses to bullying claims may be breaching these requirements for employee trust: the HRPs' accounts of responding to bullying claims appear to accord with the previously published research that suggests targets perceive HRPs' responses to bullying claims as inaction, denial, 'target-blaming' and 'siding with management' (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Tracy et al., 2006). Whilst the findings in this thesis also suggest that HRPs may have little choice but to respond in this manner, the potential impact is three-fold: employees witnessing these responses to targets are unlikely to feel

confident in raising a claim if they were to be bullied; hence, bullying may be under-reported. Secondly, for those who do raise a claim, from the findings in this thesis, managers' and HRPs' responses appear to be breaching targets' sense of procedural justice and, therefore, trust; a proposition that supports Parzefall & Salin's (2010) recent theorising on the central role that justice might play in bullying, discussed in Chapter 2. Thirdly, "*inaction is not a neutral response*", and targets' perceptions of HRPs' apparent lack of action or inconsistency with policy can also be perceived as supporting the bully (Rayner, 2005, p. 69, emphasis in original). Perceptions of injustice may then go beyond the individual HRP, instead being attributed to the organisation, resulting in the employee exiting (Rayner et al., 2002).

Therefore, the findings in this thesis on how HRPs appear to construct and respond to bullying may help to explain why few targets report bullying to HRPs, often citing the reasons of fear, that 'bullies get away with it', and that 'nothing will be done' (Rayner, 1999; Rayner & McIvor, 2008; UNISON, 2009). The experience of not being listened to or believed by HRPs can also be perceived as further bullying by the target, because the lack of voice and validation can be seen as additional unfairness or injustice (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2003; Vickers, 2006). The findings in this thesis, whilst from the HRPs' perspective, suggest a lack of employee voice in bullying claims: the very organisational process that should be providing employee voice in situations of bullying, the grievance process, instead appears to be muting the target's account through the apparent inaction, denial and management complicity found in these interviews. Whilst this finding warrants future empirical scrutiny, it represents a further contribution to academic knowledge in relation to the potential implications of HRPs' bullying-related practices. Furthermore, this proposition, that employee voice may be muted in bullying claims, has been similarly concluded from previously published research on employees' bullying experiences within the critical academic approach to bullying (e.g., Keashly, 2001; Liefoghe, 2003; Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). It is this perspective that the next section now discusses.

7.9 The 'Organisational Bullying' Debate

The critical academic perspective argues that, in addition to interpersonal bullying at the individual level, 'organisational bullying' may exist within the power structures and organisational practices comprising organisations, privileging the perspective and position of management and muting the voice of employees (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2010a; Liefoghe, 2001; 2003; Rhodes et al., 2010). In support of this perspective, previously published research has suggested that employees construct depersonalised organisational practices, such as performance-management and appraisal, as 'organisational bullying' because they are perceived as unfair and unjust, regardless of the intent of the manager enforcing the practices (e.g., Liefoghe, 2001; 2003; Mackenzie Davey & Liefoghe, 2003). Furthermore, research with targets suggests that these organisational practices of performance-management and appraisal underpin many bullying claims (Hutchinson et al., 2005; 2010a; Lee, 2000; 2002; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Whilst no evidence was found in this thesis that HRPs might hold a construction of 'organisational bullying', the consistent association between performance-management and bullying claims in the HRPs' accounts is worthy of further discussion in relation to the 'organisational bullying' debate.

Drawing together the findings from this thesis, from the HRPs' perspective, the majority of the experiences they discussed were employees raising claims within the grievance process against their managers because the targets perceived their manager's performance-management practices as 'bullying', although the HRPs did not. Secondly, rather than questioning the manager's approach or the need for performance-management, the HRPs appeared to consistently assume that the target's underperformance was the 'cause' of the claim. Thirdly, the HRPs appeared to consistently rationalise and sanitise managers' performance-management practices, even when these included serious 'bullying behaviours', such as the "*child abusers*" and "*chiller chats*". Thus, these HRPs' accounts suggest that the grievance processes in these HRPs' organisations may not be providing voice to the employees who raise bullying claims, and that, in some claims, HRPs appear to legitimise managers' 'bullying behaviours' as 'performance-management'.

Whilst there was evidence of tension in some of the HRPs' accounts, the apparent muting of employee voice and legitimatisation of management behaviours were consistent findings across the interviews, suggesting that HRPs' bullying-related practices might themselves be a form of symbolic violence on employees by restricting the voice targets have through the grievance process. It is at this point that we return to Hutchinson's concept of 'networks of alliances'. The findings suggest that the HRPs may themselves be members of these "circuits of power", because they appear to be complicit in ignoring or denying bullying; thus, reinforcing the 'untouchableness' of managers and the ability of these alliances to 'corrupt' organisational practices for their own protection (Hutchinson et al., 2009; 2010a, p. 38).

The apparent taken-for-granted nature of these doxic 'performance-management' discourses and practices for HRPs parallels Brodsky's (1976) construct of the 'organisational unconscious'; that is, the organisational structures, practices and language within which, he argues, bullying is embedded. Similarly, Rhodes et al. (2010, p. 106) argue that bullying may have become a rationalised and normalised management practice within the "institutional unconscious" to achieve increased performance from employees in the name of profit maximisation. Whilst the role of individual or interpersonal factors is not discounted within this perspective, it argues that the power of dominance is inherent in organisational practices rather than invested in the individual (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006; 2010a). Within this approach, the 'misuse' of organisational practices by networks of alliances, such as performance-management, may be tolerated and/or rewarded by the organisation if these practices result in economic benefit (Hutchinson et al., 2010a; Rhodes et al., 2010).

Before examining HRPs' bullying-related practices within this context of the 'organisational bullying' debate, we need to revisit the differentiation between the industrial relations approach and the critical academic perspective in relation to the role of organisational practices in bullying (examined in Chapter 2, p. 43). *Choice* appears to be the differentiator: in the industrial relations framework, the argument is that, within organisations characterised by market managerialism, managers may

choose to use practices such as performance-management instrumentally to control or remove employees, and/or for personal advantage (e.g., Beale & Hoel, 2007). Within the critical perspective, the argument is that the power structures and practices of organisations are inherently unjust and exploitative, regardless of how individuals choose to use them (e.g., Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2010). In light of this differentiation, the question is, do HRPs have a *choice* in how they interpret managers' performance-management practices, execute grievance processes and respond to bullying?

Within the Bourdieusian framework of this thesis, it appears that HRPs have no choice. Through their apparent lack of capital, it seems that HRPs occupy field positions from which they appear powerless, against the dominance of management, to prevent the 'corruption' of these organisational practices. Instead, HRPs appear subject to symbolic violence from senior management to respond to bullying in a manner that protects other managers and the organisation. Furthermore, as Bourdieu would predict, the HRPs seem unaware of this symbolic violence, because they appear to have incorporated the capitalist imperative of profit maximisation, and the resultant work intensification and performance-related practices of organisational doxa into their professional habitus. Consequently, their role alignment and practices, and the dominance of management appear taken-for-granted and unquestioned by the HRPs. To do otherwise appears to be 'unthinkable' for these HRPs; it would be too costly for the HRPs' own position and credibility, and they may risk the same behaviour that the targets are reporting. Bourdieu argues that doxa provides individuals with a "sense of limits", constraining the ways an individual has of seeing and behaving in the field (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164); and that habitus and relative capital provide the individual with a "sense of one's place" in relation to the other field members (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 5). For these HRPs it appears that, together, organisational doxa, professional habitus, their relative field position and capital, and the symbolic violence from management may be serving to deny HRPs a choice in how they construct, interpret and respond to bullying.

Thus, from this Bourdieusian analysis of HRPs' bullying-related practices, two related propositions are suggested. Firstly, on the basis of the HRPs' apparent lack of

power and choice, it appears that their bullying constructs and interpretive mechanisms are ‘useful’ and ‘beneficial’ for the HRPs within their professional and organisational contexts. Together, their constructions of manager-to-employee claims and ‘genuine bullying’ seem to serve a purpose for the HRPs: these constructs may enable HRPs to protect themselves from the negative feelings of dissonance and self-conscious emotions, whilst allowing them to interpret and respond to bullying claims in a way that protects managers and the organisation, because the constructs and mechanisms appear to remove the possibility that managers could ever bully in the eyes of HRPs.

Secondly, within the organisational and professional contexts of these HRPs, the nature of symbolic violence found within this thesis appears to equate to the construct of organisational bullying. From the HRPs’ accounts, there appear to be three forms of symbolic violence, and all appear to involve the, arguably, unfair ‘misuse’ of organisational practices by more dominant field members, by virtue of their relative capital and field position in comparison to less dominant members:

- The pressure exerted by senior management on HRPs to speed up or ignore bullying claims; thus ‘corrupting’ the grievance process to protect managers.
- The ‘target-blaming’ and management legitimisation in HRPs’ bullying-related practices, which appear to deny employees a voice through the grievance process.
- The use of ‘bullying behaviours’ by managers under the auspices of performance-management, described in these HRPs’ accounts, to increase employee performance.

Viewed through the lens of these HRPs’ accounts, all three forms of symbolic violence seem to be unquestioned and accepted. These practices appear to be embedded within the HRPs’ organisational doxa and professional habitus, perpetuated by the discourse of market managerialism and the power imbalances between different groups of field members. Thus, whilst the HRPs do not appear to hold a construction of organisational bullying, the findings suggests that the symbolic

violence exerted through performance-management and grievance practices appears to reflect employees' construct of 'organisational bullying', examined in Chapter 2 (e.g., Liefvooghe, 2001; 2003). This Bourdieusian analysis of HRPs' bullying-related practices appears to support Rhodes et al's (2010, p. 100) recent argument that "organizations are not just places in which bullying occurs, but are also composed of sets of institutionalized practices, some of which may well include or encourage bullying". Furthermore, in support of Lewis & Rayner (2003), the findings in this thesis suggest that, as a result of the multiple forms of symbolic violence, the bullying-related practices of management-aligned HRM might be a form of bullying.

Before concluding this thesis by drawing together its implications and contributions, the next section will provide a critical evaluation of its limitations.

7.10 Limitations of this Thesis

Firstly, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, I acknowledge that the sample size is small and that the nature of the analysis was exploratory and inductive. These factors place limitations on the generalisability of the findings. There are likely to be many other individual and organisational factors influencing the participants within this thesis that were not explored. However, confidence in these findings is suggested by two factors.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 4, within discursive qualitative analysis it is not so much the number of participants that is important; instead it is the number of discursive instances of the phenomenon under study that determines the 'sample' size (Coyle, 2007b). Within this thesis there were 554 pages of single-spaced transcription data, all of which focused on the subject of bullying. Within this 'sample', saturation was reached after the fourteen interviews and one focus group, supporting Guest et al's (2006) observation that saturation is typically reached after approximately twelve interviews with a theoretically-defined purposive sample. The HRPs who contributed to this thesis comprised such a sample: they all occupied HRM roles that involved dealing with bullying claims. Furthermore, following the recommendations in the methodological literature, the iterative analysis of the data, concurrent with ongoing data collection, determined the need for additional interviewees (e.g., MacDougall &

Fudge, 2001; Wood & Kroger, 2000). The themes emerging from the data in relation to the research questions for this thesis appeared saturated after the seventeen participants described in Appendix 1.

Secondly, the findings presented in this thesis were remarkably consistent across the interviews: the constructs and interpretive mechanisms were not local phenomena. This is an important point, given the maximum variation within the sample: the HRPs worked in a range of different organisations, in both the private and public sector. If we consider William's concept of *moderatum* generalisation, discussed in Chapter 4, he argues that there must be consistency between the research 'site' and the 'site' of generalisation, which would be other organisational fields for this thesis (Williams, 2000; 2002; Payne & Williams, 2005). The diversity of the HRPs' organisational fields, the research 'sites', within this thesis is shown in Appendix 1. This suggests that it is possible to draw *moderatum* generalisations to other organisational fields, and that the exploratory findings presented in this thesis provide a solid basis for future research.

A further limitation of this thesis emerged from the HRPs' experiential data: there was only one case of 'genuine bullying' provided by the HRPs. This was unexpected, despite the findings from Harrington (2005) that suggested that HRPs were reluctant to label bullying behaviour as 'bullying'. In part, the aim of this thesis was to explain the possible reasons for this reluctance; I had not anticipated that it might be because HRPs do not construct such behaviour as bullying and would, therefore, not provide experiences of 'actual' bullying. Thus, the construct of 'genuine bullying' established in this thesis has emerged from analysing the way the HRPs discussed bullying claims and Sally's vignette (Box 1 on p. 106), rather than the HRPs' descriptions of *actual* cases of 'genuine bullying'. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, this finding is significant in itself: that across seventeen HRPs, only one case of 'genuine bullying' was provided from a cumulative total of 255 years of HR experience. In hindsight, as this finding emerged from the concurrent data analysis, the focus of my questions should have incorporated this finding to a greater degree. Whilst I did ask the interviewees what actual bullying was in their eyes, I should also have followed this question up by asking them for specific examples of cases that met their own

definition of bullying. This is definitely an area for future research; that is, focusing on the specific construct of ‘genuine bullying’ by asking HRPs what bullying means to them, and subsequently asking for examples of cases that have met this definition.

Nonetheless, accepting the lack of ‘genuine’ cases, the analysis of the HRPs’ verbalised definitions provided the basis for the construct of ‘genuine bullying’, and the subsequent iterative analysis of the HRPs’ narratives on peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims yielded consistent findings on the importance of the four criteria that appear to determine ‘genuine bullying’ for HRPs: intent, significant negative impact, trustworthy target and peer-to-peer personally-targeted behaviour. In particular, the significance of perpetrator intent and the ‘trustworthiness’ of targets for ‘genuine bullying’ were reinforced by their *absence* in the constructs of peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims. Therefore, whilst I acknowledge the lack of ‘genuine’ cases provided by the HRPs, I would contend that the rigorousness of the analysis and the consistency of the findings have established this construct as a sound basis for future research.

Further limitations emerged from the exploratory and emergent nature of this thesis. Because the importance of intent and the nature and impact of the HRPs’ ‘burning experiences’ emerged from the data, it is not possible to determine how these might have developed. Nor was it possible to examine how and when HRPs might lose their trust in targets’ accounts. Whilst the findings from this thesis have established that these factors are important in determining HRPs’ interpretation and response to bullying claims, and potential explanations have been proposed, future research would need to examine how and when these factors develop.

Moreover, I acknowledge that aspects of these data may reflect the HRPs’ position-taking in the *interview* as a means of impression management with the interviewer, and that my own stance and questioning style was an integral part of the specific interaction in each interview (examples were discussed in Section 4.12). However, in acknowledging the co-constructed nature of these research interviews (e.g., Rapley, 2001), I would argue similarly to Griffin (2007), that my active involvement in these interviews gave rise to valuable data that might not have emerged without my

engagement. For example, my questioning of the HRPs' own meaning of bullying and the apparently lost perspective of target subjectivity, which resulted in instances of hysteresis or 'sticky moments' (Riach, 2009). Thus, in accepting these inevitable limitations of qualitative interviews, in accordance with Willig (2008a), I would argue that semi-structured interviews were a valuable and appropriate form of data collection for examining the exploratory research questions underpinning this thesis.

Finally, I acknowledge that my interpretations of the data are but one 'picture' that could be painted by these data; that another researcher may have drawn different conclusions from these interviews; and that no data are ever truly saturated because of the infinitive number of nuances in individuals' experiences (e.g., Wray et al., 2007). However, again I return to the analytic rigor and the consistency of the findings in suggesting that, in accordance with CDA methodology, this thesis has presented cogent and justified interpretations that are well-grounded in the data (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Furthermore, as suggested by Swartz & Zolberg (2004), Bourdieu's theory of practice has provided a valuable 'set of thinking tools' for guiding this research, and the next section will discuss the methodological contribution of this thesis in relation to the extended use of Bourdieu's theory.

7.11 Methodological Contribution: Organisational Practices at the Inter-section of Fields

Chapter 4 described how this thesis was providing a methodological contribution by extending the application of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Firstly, in light of previous criticisms, this thesis has applied the multiple constructs of Bourdieu's theory to provide a holistic and multilevel framework for examining the social, organisational and individual factors that might influence HRPs' construction, interpretation and response to bullying (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005; Swartz, 2008). These constructs provided the 'thinking tools', and the analytical and interpretive framework for this thesis (Dobbin, 2008). In conjunction with CDA, this Bourdieusian framework has allowed the consideration of organisational fields as sites of power struggles and how the HRPs' discursive constructions might serve a purpose for them within this context (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It has

provided the means for examining the subjective and socially related nature of bullying, whilst positioning the HRPs' bullying-related practices within their socio-historical, organisational and professional contexts (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2005).

In doing so, I have extended Emirbayer and Johnson's (2008) recent theorising on the 'organisation-as-field', to focus on HRPs' bullying-related practices at the intersection of 'profession-as-field' and 'organisation-as-field', reflected in Figure 1 (p. 10). The constructs of habitus, field, capital, doxa and symbolic violence have provided a useful framework to exploring the influence of both the organisation and professional fields of HRPs, and the role and influence of power in HRPs' bullying-related practices. Furthermore, by examining the taken-for-granted nature of the constructs and mechanisms that consistently emerged from the narratives within this thesis, it appears that these practices may be embedded within a shared professional habitus; and that this professional habitus appears to be strongly influenced by organisational discourses and doxa, and the HRM professionalisation discourse.

I would, therefore, contend that this extended application of Bourdieu's theory has shown the value of this multilevel and holistic framework, and that Bourdieu's Tool of Practice would provide a useful foundation for future research. That said, I acknowledge that the extension of his theory within this thesis may have broadened the application of Bourdieu's constructs beyond his original intention. However, I would argue that I have simply accepted Bourdieu's own invitation: that is, "to think with Bourdieu is of necessity an invitation to think beyond Bourdieu, and against him whenever required." (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. xiii-xiv).

The final concluding section of this thesis will draw together the contributions, implications and future directions for academics and practitioners.

7.12 Conclusions and Contributions of this Thesis

We begin this concluding section by firstly returning to the rationale that underpinned this thesis:

1. Virtually nothing was known about how HRPs construct, interpret and respond to bullying despite the level of involvement HRPs have in bullying claims and the apparent importance that their response has in determining how targets cope with their bullying experience (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Ferris, 2004; Lewis & Rayner, 2003; Salin, 2008; 2009).
2. HRPs appear to be very reluctant to label bullying behaviours as 'bullying' (Harrington, 2005).
3. Targets report that HRPs' responses to their bullying claims often appear as inaction, denial, target-blaming or management complicity (e.g., Keashly, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003).
4. Taken together, the last two points suggest that HRPs may hold very different constructions of bullying to employees.

Furthermore, the qualitative, critical and interpretive methodological approach of this thesis has addressed two specific calls within the bullying literature: it has provided an examination of the role of power in bullying, and explored whether bullying might be a means to "elicit wanted behaviour from employees and increase productivity within systems of domination" (Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2003; 2010; Salin, 2003a, p. 1227); and it has considered the interaction and relationship between individual, organisational and broader socio-historical factors (Hoel & Beale, 2006).

From the analysis of the empirical data at the centre of this thesis, the findings have contributed to our knowledge on HRPs' bullying-related practices in the following ways:

1. *The organisational and professional context of HRPs*: It appears that the dominant economic and performance-imperative discourses of contemporary

organisations and HRM's professionalisation project have become incorporated into doxa and the HRPs' shared professional habitus. The need for and legitimisation of intensified performance-management practices by management appears unquestioned by HRPs, who appear to construct their role as a 'partner' to management in the quest to 'improve' employees' performance.

2. *The context of bullying for HRPs:* Against this organisational and professional backdrop, it seems that bullying is a particularly difficult issue for HRPs to deal with. Firstly, the HRPs appear to experience symbolic violence from management, as a result of the HRPs' apparent lack of symbolic capital and the dominance of management within organisational fields, evidenced by the pressures HRPs report experiencing from senior management. This appears further compounded by the lack of capital invested in HRPs by management-focused anti-bullying policies. The findings suggest that this may have given rise to a set of relatively passive positions in relation to bullying, shown in Table 10 (p. 228), because the HRPs seem to have no choice: they appear not to have the capital or field position from which they would be able to explicitly challenge managers on their potentially bullying behaviours.
3. *The nature of the bully:* It appears that the nature of the bully (the target's manager or peer) may be an important and immediate factor that shapes HRPs' constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying. If the alleged bully is the target's manager, it appears that the HRP searches for 'something else', and they appear to assume that this is the target's underperformance. Manager-to-employee claims then appear to be subsequently interpreted and responded to by the HRPs within this framework of 'performance-management'.
4. *Target 'trustworthiness':* It appears that HRPs may have developed a more 'distrusting' attitude towards targets' accounts in bullying claims as a likely result of being 'burnt' by previous experiences of unfounded claims or managers' criticisms of the HRPs' responses. This is a new and significant finding; in conjunction with the HRPs' apparent construction of 'genuine bullying', it appears that this 'distrust' may result in very few bullying claims 'qualifying' as 'bullying', because target 'trustworthiness' appears to be an essential criterion.

5. *Constructs and Interpretive mechanisms*: As a consequence of the organisational and professional contexts of HRPs' bullying-related practices, it appears that HRPs have developed constructs for peer-to-peer and manager-to-employees claims that may enable them to fulfil their management and organisational objectives from a position of relative powerlessness by attributing 'blame' to the targets and legitimising management behaviour. Whilst these findings appear to be a negative indictment of HRPs, these data suggest that this may be the only means they have of protecting their positions. Furthermore, it appears that HRPs are able to indirectly address the behaviours relating to each individual claim by mediating between peers and coaching managers on their performance-management practices. Whilst this may not address the potential causes of bullying claims at an organisational level, these may be the only routes available to HRPs within their current context because of the dominance of the management voice in performance-management and grievance processes.
6. *Organisation Bullying*: It is this dominance of management, evident in the HRPs narratives, which suggests that organisational practices may constitute bullying, not just for employees as previous research suggests, but also for the HRPs themselves. The findings suggest that the apparent management complicity and lack of consideration of the targets' subjectivity may be a result of the symbolic violence exerted on HRPs by management, which in itself, may be a form of bullying. Furthermore, as a consequence of this, the findings suggest that HRPs may, in turn, subject employees to symbolic violence by limiting the voice that targets have via grievance processes. Thus, as Lewis & Rayner (2003) contend, it appears that management-aligned HRM may itself be a form of bullying.
7. *Genuine Bullying*: Finally, for HRPs, it appears that 'genuine bullying' must comprise *intentional* behaviour between peers that is *personally-targeted*, and which causes *significant negative impact* on a *trustworthy* target. This is a significant contribution for two reasons: it addresses the gap in our knowledge regarding how HRPs construct bullying, and it goes some way in explaining the research with targets experiences of reporting bullying claims. By restricting the behaviours that 'qualify' as bullying, it appears that very few claims may ever be constructed, interpreted and responded to as bullying by HRPs. Instead, from the

HRPs' own perspectives in this thesis, it appears that their responses may resemble those reported by targets: inaction, denial, 'target blaming' and management complicity. However, given the professional and organisational contexts of HRPs' bullying-related practices, it appears that this construction of 'genuine bullying' may also serve a purpose for the HRPs: the nature of this construct means that intent is unlikely to be accorded to management behaviour. Thus, the HRPs appear able to fulfil their main objectives of protecting management and the organisations. However, in doing so, there are significant implications for the continued prevalence of bullying, and for organisations, observers and targets because, in the eyes of HRPs, it appears that managers can never bully.

It is to the implications of the findings from this thesis that the next section turns, beginning with those for academic research.

7.12.1 Academic Implications and Future Directions for Research

For academic research, there appear to be two main implications from this thesis. Firstly, HRPs construct of 'genuine bullying' is fundamentally different to the mainstream academic definition (Einarsen et al., 2003): academics and HRPs appear to be talking about different phenomenon when they use the word 'bullying'. The importance of intent for HRPs and their differentiations between work-related and personally-targeted behaviour, and between peer and manager bullies appear to be three clear disparities in comparison to academic and practitioner definitions. Contrary to the industrial relations framework of bullying (e.g., Beale & Hoel, 2007), these HRPs did not appear to consider that managers use performance-related practices deliberately or instrumentally for personal gain. Furthermore, within the manager-to-employee construct, these HRPs appear to exclude the possibility that managers can bully, which is very disparate to the findings from prevalence studies with employees, where frequently the manager is the alleged bully (e.g., Lewis, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002).

Thus, the HRPs' construct of 'genuine bullying' appears very different to both academic and practitioner definitions of bullying, and to employees' reported

organisational constructs of bullying (e.g., Liefvooghe 2001; 2003). I am not suggesting that this calls for multiple academic definitions of interpersonal bullying; however, the findings from this thesis suggest that HRPs hold different constructs of bullying depending on the perpetrator, and that the nature of the behaviours and intention appear to be defining characteristics of ‘genuine bullying’. There is the possibility that managers and employees might also make similar differentiations. This presents a challenge for determining a definitive operationalisation of bullying within academic research that permits accurate measurement of the prevalence and nature of the phenomenon. The data in this thesis support previous assertions that the current survey-based measures may be failing to capture the complexity and extent of bullying (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Parzefall & Salin, 2010).

Furthermore, as with the industrial relations framework (e.g., Hoel & Beale, 2006), the findings suggest that explanatory models of bullying need to include broader socio-economic factors and, in support of Salin (2003a), that an examination of the nature and role of power within organisations may be crucial for understanding bullying. This, again, poses challenges for explanatory models that focus at the level of the individual (e.g., Coyne et al., 2000) or on factors relating to the work environment or job design (e.g., Baillien et al., 2009; Hauge et al., 2007). Whilst empirical associations have been found between such organisational factors and the occurrence of self-reported bullying, the findings in this thesis suggest that these relationships should be considered within their broader social and organisational contexts, and, in particular, the power structures of organisations. Taken together, these findings on HRPs’ constructs of bullying raise important questions for future research with HRPs, managers and targets:

HRPs

- What specific factors might influence the development of the HRPs’ constructions, interpretive mechanisms, and how might they develop over time? For example, what role might the CIPD’s accredited training courses and practitioner-targeted publications play in their development? Do HRPs learn these constructs and mechanisms from talking to or observing other HRPs?

- What is the role and nature of the ‘burning experiences’? For example, do HRPs need to experience ‘untrustworthy’ targets or ‘management criticism’ themselves before such experiences might influence their responses to bullying, or are these experiences communicated via shared professional habitus from experienced to junior HRPs?
- When and why does the issue of intent become so important for HRPs?
- What are the roles of individual and professional habitus? For example, how and when does professional habitus develop; how might HRPs’ training, other HRPs and organisational experience influence the development of professional habitus? What is the relationship between and relative strength of professional and individual habitus in terms of their influence on HRPs’ bullying-related practices?

These questions suggest longitudinal qualitative research with HRPs, exploring how their constructions, interpretations and responses to bullying might change as they progress through their accredited training and gain more experience of handling bullying claims in organisations. It would, thus, be possible to examine the critical incidents that might significantly influence HRPs’ bullying related practices.

Managers

- How do managers construct bullying? Do managers also differentiate between peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims, and are their responses to targets influenced by the type of perpetrator?
- How do managers construct their own roles and those of HRPs in responding to bullying? Do they see HRPs as ‘partners’? Has the CIPD’s HRM professionalisation project increased the value and benefit of HRM and HRPs in managers’ eyes?

These questions are important for understanding how managers might respond to employees who raise bullying claims and what role managers might play in comparison to HRPs in responding to bullying. Understanding managers’ responses would also provide another lens to explore the power imbalances that appear to be

inherent in organisational practices, particularly performance-management and grievance processes. Furthermore, such research would help to examine the previously published research on targets' experiences of raising bullying claims from the managers' perspective, particularly the 'retaliation' reported by some targets (e.g., Keashly, 2001; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009).

Targets

- Does the type of perpetrator influence the target's subjective experience of bullying? Lewis and Gunn's (2007) research using the NAQ, discussed in Chapter 2, suggests that the negative behaviours reported by targets differ between peer and manager perpetrators. Does the nature of the perpetrator influence how the target perceives negative behaviours and, therefore, whether the target perceives themselves as bullied (self-labelling). If so, it may be that checklist surveys, such as the NAQ, are not fully capturing the nuances of targets' subjective bullying experiences.

A second implication for academic research from this thesis relates to the ongoing 'organisational bullying' debate: the findings suggest that the nature of symbolic violence found within these data might equate to the construct of 'organisational bullying' (e.g., Liefoghe, 2001; 2003). The HRPs' accounts suggest that performance-management practices may have become a taken-for-granted and unquestioned aspect of doxa for intensifying the performance and output of employees, and that the grievance process may not provide employees with the opportunity to voice their concerns if they feel bullied by these practices. Thus, the HRPs' accounts within this thesis appear to reflect employees' construct and experiences of 'organisational bullying' (e.g., Keashly & Harvey, 2005; Liefoghe, 2003; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009). In acknowledging that bullying is *also* an interpersonal issue, influenced by a range of individual factors, the findings of this thesis suggest that the construct of organisational bullying would be a fruitful area for future research, particularly the roles of power and justice, and the issue of choice.

From the employees' perspective, this could involve a further examination of what practices they perceive as organisational bullying and why. Two aspects of the

manager's perspective are suggested: firstly, as with the HRPs in this thesis, are managers subject to symbolic violence, or organisational bullying, from more senior managers, through the discourse of market managerialism, to meet economic imperatives? Secondly, how do managers use performance-management and grievance processes, and what is the nature of their power and choice in using these practices? For example, do managers use such practices instrumentally within the pressures of their organisational contexts, as suggested by Beale & Hoel (2007)? For HRPs, again a longitudinal approach would be useful; for example, do HRPs ever consider performance-management practices as 'unfair' or 'bullying'; does this change over time, and what might be the influence of HRP training and organisational experience?

These are important questions, because the findings in this thesis suggest that HRPs' constructs and interpretations of bullying claims may have developed because of the dominance and symbolic violence of management and the context of their organisational and professional fields. In turn the HRPs' constructs and mechanisms appear to have severely limited the behaviours that 'qualify' as bullying when employees raise a claim. Thus, it appears that HRPs may have the power to determine what does and does not constitute bullying in an employees' claim.

This accords with Liefoghe & MacKenzie Davey's (2010) recent proposition that the individualised and interpersonal discourse of bullying has itself become a structuring process within organisations, with the power to bully by determining what behaviours are and are not bullying. They argue that by locating bullying at the individual level, enacted through interpersonal processes, organisations construct individual 'bullies' and 'victims'. Rhodes et al. (2010) have suggested that this may locate the consideration of ethics at the level of individual behaviour, rather than an examination of whether organisational practices are ethical and what role they might play in bullying. Whilst academics have argued that bullying is an ethical issue and should be considered within this framework by HRPs (e.g., LaVan & Martin, 2008; Wornham, 2003), the lack of an ethical discourse within this thesis suggests that 'ethics' is not a useful language for HRPs, particularly when discussing bullying with managers.

There was only one HRP that spontaneously framed bullying as an (un)ethical issue, and several explicitly discussed the lack of value of ‘talking about ethics’. The apparent absence of an ethical discourse in these findings suggests that it is an area for greater examination in future research with HRPs. For example, do HRPs privately consider the ethics of bullying, but choose not to use such language publicly? What factors might influence HRPs’ consideration of ethics? For example, is this a language that becomes less accessible as a result of HRP training and organisational experience? What is the relationship between the HRPs’ values within individual habitus and the role constructs, language and practices within professional habitus, and how might HRPs manage this relationship? Thus, it is suggested that both ethics and the concept of organisational bullying through organisational practices are fruitful areas for future research, and that Bourdieu’s theory of practice would provide a useful framework for doing so.

7.12.2 Implications for HRM and Organisational Practice

Turning to practical implications for organisations, we first consider prevalence and prevention of bullying. Whilst the HRPs recognised that the pressure of work intensification may be contributing to the conflicts and ‘performance-issues’ underpinning peer-to-peer and manager-to-employee claims, both types of claims were not interpreted as ‘bullying’. That is, there appears to be no explicit acknowledgement that the behaviours involved, however motivated, might be perceived as bullying by the target. The risk, therefore, is that the broader underlying causes of bullying claims, such as increased aggressive behaviour between peers or misplaced, over-intensive or badly executed performance-management practices by managers may not be addressed at the broader organisational level. Beyond the impact to the targets raising the claims, the risk is that observers may be less likely to come forward if they feel bullied having witnessed the response to other targeted employees. A further risk is that managers, witnessing HRPs’ responses to bullying claims, may perceive that bullying behaviours are an acceptable, or at least a ‘non-punishable’ means of managing employees. This has significant implications for organisations because of the cost of bullying to organisations (e.g., Giga et al., 2008) and the high exit rate amongst targets and observers of bullying (Rayner et al., 2002).

Beyond the prevalence and prevention of bullying, what are the implications for organisational anti-bullying policies and the role(s) of HRPs? These findings suggest that organisational anti-bullying policies are, at best, ineffective and, at worst, damaging for targets. It seems that policies are often management-focused, and that they may be difficult for employees to access or insufficiently explicit on bullying. Moreover, the HRPs discussed anti-bullying policy from the perspective of meeting employment law requirements in order to protect the organisation, rather than the aspects of policy that emphasise the target's subjectivity. Instead of providing a neutral route for raising bullying claims, these data also suggest that organisations' grievance processes might actually be part of the problem by restricting the voice available to employees. More fundamentally, the HRPs constructed their role as one to support managers and were explicit that they were not there for employee welfare and support: they no longer consider their role as "*tea and sympathy*".

This has significant implications for employees and HRPs' bullying-related practices, because the HRPs acknowledged that employees still expect HRPs to provide support in situations of bullying. These data suggest that targets' expectations may be unmet, potentially exacerbating their bullying experience (e.g., D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010). Within the context of organisational fields presented in this thesis, it raises the question of who could and should provide an objective, neutral and supportive role for targets in bullying claims? Where is the employees' 'safety net' and source of support and advocacy? If it is not HRPs, should this be communicated to employees to prevent their unmet expectations when raising bullying claims? These are important questions, because unless employee support roles are clearly defined and available, it seems unlikely that organisational anti-bullying policies will be effective. Whilst the findings from this thesis suggest that, currently, HRPs may not be in a position to provide neutrality and employee advocacy in bullying claims, the alternatives appear limited. Occupational Health departments are not widespread in the UK and, if available, would they experience similar power imbalances and management pressure that HRPs appear to experience? Trade Unions are one source of support for targets of bullying; however, as previously discussed, only 27% of UK employees are members of a union (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2009). Some organisations engage the services of external mediators in grievance

situations, paid for by the organisations. How these mediators might construct bullying and how the financial contract with the organisation might influence their responses to bullying grievances would be an area for future research.

In the absence of a widespread and effective alternative, the more fundamental question is, what *should* HRPs' role be in bullying claims? Should HRPs be providing employee advocacy, support, and voicing employees' interests to management? Given the demise of Trade Unions in the UK, I would suggest that these should be aspects of an HRP's role, both generally and specifically in relation to bullying. However, the findings from this thesis suggest that a multifaceted reinforcing dynamic may be perpetuating HRPs' apparently management-aligned role in bullying claims. From these data, it appears that both the CIPD's professionalisation project and the managerialist research contributing to this project may be shaping the HRPs' professional habitus and practices, potentially reinforcing the dominance of the economic and performance discourses that appear to influence HRPs bullying-related practices. This suggests that the management-alignment and apparent lack of employee advocacy in bullying claims, found in these data, may be systemic and, thus, potentially difficult to change.

One potential avenue for change is at the individual level. There was some evidence in these narratives that individual HRPs may be able to balance their management expectations with supporting employees. For example, by virtue of her position on the board, PSA16 was able to support employees by framing bullying in an economic language with senior managers. Furthermore, as discussed in the reflexive section of Chapter 4, there were moments of Bourdieu's hysteresis when I questioned the HRPs on whether targets might feel bullied by management behaviour, suggesting that HRPs may recognise the nature and impact of more negative management behaviours on employees. How might HRPs be supported and encouraged to explicitly challenge poor management behaviour? In his research on HRPs' responses to people-related dilemmas, Macklin (2006) found that HRPs with a high level of moral courage were more likely to challenge management behaviour. In fact, 'courage' is now included as a competency for HRPs within the CIPD's new professional standards; that is, the courage and confidence to speak up, challenge and "take a highly visible stand to

progress a disputed issue or ethical dilemma” (CIPD, 2009e, p. 1). However, the findings from this thesis suggest that HRPs may not have sufficient power to exercise such courage and challenge managers’ potentially bullying behaviours. It appears that individual level changes are unlikely to have a significant impact without more seismic and fundamental changes within the HRM profession, particularly the nature and content of the CIPD’s professionalisation project. Here, I would argue that both the CIPD and academics have a responsibility for effecting such changes.

The CIPD’s current approach appears firmly embedded in the Michigan school of HRM, discussed in Chapter 3. Within this approach, employees are considered as an ‘asset’ to be managed in order to achieve organisational profit and the associated HRM practices are deemed to reside with management (Fombrun et al, 1984). Given the influence of the CIPD, suggested by both the literature in Chapter 3 and the HRPs’ narratives in this thesis, it seems unlikely that HRPs’ bullying-related practices will change whilst the CIPD’s approach remains economically and management focused, reinforced by the managerialist research on the HRM-performance link. However, *because* of its influence, it is arguably within the CIPD’s power to instigate more systemic changes that *would*, potentially, change HRPs’ approach to bullying. By rejuvenating the more employee-focused and humanistic Harvard approach to HRM (Beer et al., 1984), the CIPD may be able to rebalance the interests of employees and management within HRP roles.

However, in order to effectively balance employee and management interests within such an approach, the findings from this thesis suggest that HRPs may need greater power in organisations. Given the economically focused organisational and professional contexts that emerged in this thesis, how might the CIPD help HRPs to increase their power whilst adopting a more employee-focused role? One option may be for the CIPD to reclaim the responsibility for executing HRM practices, such as grievance processes, back from managers. This may be a first step in rebalancing HRPs’ power in relation to management. Furthermore, through its accredited training and publications, the CIPD could help HRPs to develop the requisite ‘tool kit’ for both challenging and coaching management behaviours. For example, CIPD training could incorporate a specific focus on ethics, training HRPs to recognise the ethical

implications of many people-related dilemmas and helping practitioners to gain the skills and courage required to challenge unethical behaviour within organisations. Furthermore, whilst it appeared that the HRPs in this thesis attempted to increase their power and influence with managers by adopting an economic ‘business language’ when talking about bullying, this language was based on the *cost* of bullying for organisations. Potentially, the CIPD could create an equally powerful economic argument for HRPs to use with managers, based on the organisational *benefits* of enhancing employee well-being through positive management and fair HRM practices. To do so, I would suggest that the CIPD would need to be more critical in its evaluation of the managerialist HRM-performance link findings, and should broaden its consideration of academic literature to include published research on the associations between both management style and HRM practices and employee outcomes, such as well-being, trust and employee performance (e.g., Baptise, 2008; Boselie et al., 2005; den Hartog et al., 2004).

In the meantime, the situation appears paradoxical. Whilst the CIPD’s professionalisation project aims to increase the power and influence of HRM in organisations, the findings from this thesis suggest the opposite. By emphasising economics and management, and reducing the focus on employee advocacy, it seems that the CIPD may have created a position for HRPs in organisations where they appear to have insufficient power to either challenge management behaviour or support employees in bullying claims. These data suggest that unless this power imbalance between HRPs and managers is addressed, very few bullying claims raised to HRPs are likely to be interpreted and responded to as ‘genuine’ bullying.

Against the backdrop of these conclusions, and in accordance with the self-reflexivity of the critical methodology and approach within this thesis, I conclude with a more personal reflection.

7.12.3 Concluding Reflections

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the reasons that motivated this thesis was my MSc study: I wanted to explain the findings from Harrington (2005). I believe I have done so. If I reflect back on the six vignettes that I presented to the HRPs in that study, five were manager-to-employee situations and one was peer-to-peer. Although this peer-to-peer vignette contained personally-targeted behaviour, it described a work-related issue: the lack of knowledge and experience of the target. The findings from this thesis would predict that none of the vignettes would be constructed as ‘genuine bullying’. Instead, the first five vignettes would be interpreted as ‘performance-related’ issues and the sixth as ‘interpersonal conflict’. On returning to the transcripts, I would concur with these predictions, and feel I confident that this thesis has provided a plausible explanation for my earlier study (Harrington, 2005).

In writing the concluding section to this thesis, I am left with a sense of hopelessness. The findings suggest that the target and employee accounts from previously published research are ‘right’: organisational practices appear to be ‘unfair, unjust and bullying’ and, from their own accounts, HRPs appear to ‘ignore, deny or blame’ the targets. However, this thesis suggests that this is not through the HRPs’ choice: because of the dominance and power of management, the capitalistic discourses of organisations, and the resulting symbolic violence, the HRPs’ bullying-related practices appear ‘understandable’. However, these findings also suggest that interventions that seek to provide HRPs with the means of ‘tackling bullying’ would be potentially futile until the role of power is made explicit and rebalanced. Arguably, both academics and the CIPD have a responsibility in achieving this. Finally, it is appropriate for this thesis to close through the voice of the HRP:

“Bullying...to be totally honest with you is just not a nice subject. It’s not a nice subject to manage; it’s not a nice subject to investigate. It exposes a lot of failings in everybody’s personalities. And that includes the investigator because there will always be something that you know you won’t pick up on and you think maybe I should have done, so you know, it’s just not a very nice subject.” PSM6

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Appendix 1 Interviewee Demographics

Phase	HRP Code	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Job Role	Years in HRM	CIPD Membership Level	Organisational Sector	Organisational Bullying Policy
1	PSA11	F	36	White British	Head of Human resources	15	Chartered	Public (FE)	Yes
1	PSA12	F	32	White British	Senior HR Advisor	10	Chartered	Public (Council)	Yes
1	PSA13	M	48	White British	Interim HR Manager	25	Graduate	Public (HE)	Did not know
1	PSA14	F	26	White British	Senior HR Officer	5	Chartered	Private (Financial)	Yes
1	PSA15	F	33	White British	Personnel Advisor	10	Chartered	Public (HE)	Yes
1	PSA16	F	45	White British	HR Consultant/Interim HR Manager	24	Unknown	Public (Services)	Yes
2	PSM1	F	58	White British	HR Health & Well-being Consultant	24	Associate	Private (Financial)	Yes
2	PSM2	F	38	White British	Head of Human Resources	18	Chartered	Public (FE)	Yes
2	PSM3	F	35	White British	HR Business Partner	12	Graduate	Private (Financial)	Yes
2	PSM4	M	48	White British	Service Director	29	Fellow	Public (Council)	Yes
2	PSM5	F	34	White British	HR Advisor	10	Chartered	Public (HE)	Yes
2	PSM6	M	39	White British	HR Business Partner	<1	No	Private (Distribution)	Yes
3	PSM7	F	37	White British	Group Personnel Manager	13	Graduate	Private (Retail)	Yes
3	PSM8	M	35	Indian	Employee Relations Manager	12	No	Private (Retail)	Yes
3	FG1	F	33	White British	Personnel Manager	10	Unknown	Private (Retail)	Yes
3	FG2	F	59	White British	Personnel Manager - Capability	12	No	Private (Retail)	Yes
3	FG3	F	47	White British	Head of Personnel	25	Fellow	Private (Retail)	Yes

Appendix 2 Interviewee Consent Form

Consent form for participation in PhD Research Project: Interpersonal Situations through HR's Eyes.

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my participation is completely confidential and anonymous, and that my name will not be used in any written material arising from this research. I understand that the input I provide will be used for this research project and potential publications arising from this research project.

I agree / do not agree to the interview being taped (*please delete as applicable*)

I understand that I have the right to ask for the digital recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

If you would like to discuss this research after today please contact me on sue.harrington@port.ac.uk or my supervisor, Professor Charlotte Rayner, on charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk.

Appendix 3 Interviewee Demographics Form

Anonymous Identifier:

Date:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Level of Education: GCSE O Level / A Level / BSc or BA / Post-graduate

HRM Training/Qualifications:

CIPD Membership Level:

HR Experience: _____ years _____ months

Current job title:

Does your organisation have a bullying policy: Yes/No

Does your organisation have a harassment policy: Yes/No

Does your organisation have a dignity at work policy: Yes/No

Does your organisation have a diversity policy: Yes/No

Appendix 4 Interviewee Information Sheet

PhD Research Project: Interpersonal Situations through HR's Eyes.

Researcher: Sue Harrington, University of Portsmouth; E-mail: sue.harrington@port.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Charlotte Rayner; E-mail: charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk

This research is being conducted as part of my PhD at Portsmouth Business School, University of Portsmouth. The aim is to explore how HR professionals assess and make sense of difficult interpersonal situations at work. Before starting today's interview please would you read through this information sheet and the consent form. Once you are happy that any questions or concerns you may have been answered and you are willing to continue please sign the consent form. You will be given a copy of both forms to keep.

Please note that you may ask questions about the study and your participation at any time.

The interview will involve you reading through a short story and telling me everything that comes to mind as you do so. You will be provided with an instruction sheet to explain this in more detail before you begin. After the story I will also be asking you to describe a similar situation you have encountered in your role as a human resource professional. However, you need not discuss any personal experience if you do not wish to. I will also be asking you a series of questions regarding your thoughts on the story you read. This is not a test of knowledge or experience and there are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your thoughts as you read these stories. With your permission, I will be recording the content of our conversation for later transcription.

The content of this interview is completely confidential and your participation is anonymous. None of the content of this interview will be discussed with either your organisation or any other participant. You and your organisation will not be identifiable in the final thesis.

You may turn off the digital-recorder at any point if you wish to, and you may decline to answer any particular questions without explanation. Likewise, you may withdraw your participation from this study at any point. If you decide to withdraw after today, you may contact me on the e-mail address above.

After the interview I will be transcribing the content of the recording into written text so that I can look for recurring themes across multiple interviews with other HR professionals. The recording will then be erased. Your name and the name of your organisation will not be recorded in any of the written material. You are recognised only by a unique identifier and therefore the transcript of your interview will not be identifiable as yours. The transcripts will be password protected. If you wish to check the transcription from your interview I will be happy to send you a copy.

The anonymous data and results from this study will remain the property of the University of Portsmouth, and will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The analysis will be written up as my PhD thesis and a copy will be available for within the library at the University of Portsmouth. If appropriate, the results may be submitted to an academic journal for publication and/or presented at academic conferences. No individual or organisation will be identifiable from any report, publication or presentation.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Appendix 5 Phase 2 Interviewee Information Sheet

PhD Research Project: Understanding HR's approach to bullying.

Researcher: Sue Harrington, University of Portsmouth
E-mail: sue.harrington@port.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Charlotte Rayner
E-mail: charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk

This study is being conducted as part of my PhD research at Portsmouth Business School, University of Portsmouth. The aim is to explore how HR professionals handle situations of workplace bullying, and to explore the sorts of things that may have influenced this approach. Before starting the interview please would you read through this information sheet and the consent form. Once you are happy that any questions or concerns you may have been answered and you are willing to continue please sign the consent form. You will be given a copy of both forms to keep.

Please feel free to ask questions about the study and your participation at any time.

I would like to assure you that the content of this interview is completely confidential and anonymous. None of the content of this interview will be discussed with anyone in your organisation or any other participant. You and your organization will not be identifiable in the final thesis.

The interview will use a series of questions to explore how you approach cases of workplace bullying, and how your experiences and other factors may have influenced your approach. I will be asking you for examples of your experiences at work, but you do not need to discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. I do not expect you to provide specific details of any individual or organisation and you may anonymise any examples as much as you wish. This is not a test of your knowledge and there are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your thoughts and experiences.

With your permission, I will be recording this interview for later transcription. You may turn off the digital-recorder at any point if you wish to, and you may decline to answer any particular questions without explanation. Likewise, you may withdraw your participation from this study at any point. If you decide to withdraw after today, please contact me on the e-mail address above.

After the interview, the recording will be transcribed by a research transcriber, who has signed a confidentiality agreement, into written text so that I can look for similarities and differences across multiple interviews with other HR professionals. The recording will then be erased. Your name and the name of your organisation will not be recorded in any of the written material. You are recognised only by a unique identifier and therefore the transcript of your interview will not be identifiable as yours. The transcripts will be password protected. If you wish to check the transcription from your interview I will be happy to send you a copy.

The anonymous data and results from this study will remain the property of the University of Portsmouth, and will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The analysis will be written up as my PhD thesis and a copy will be available within the library at the University of Portsmouth. If appropriate, the results may be submitted for publication and/or presented at conferences.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Researcher: Sue Harrington, University of Portsmouth
E-mail: sue.harrington@port.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Charlotte Rayner
E-mail: charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk

Appendix 6 Phase 2 Pre-Interview Preparation

Thank you for agreeing to meet up for my PhD research. As we discussed on the phone, before we meet I would like you to spend some time thinking about the experiences you have had in dealing with cases of bullying in your HR roles. I would like you to think about the specific cases that you have handled – how have you approached them, what sorts of things have influenced your approach, and how have you felt in these situations?

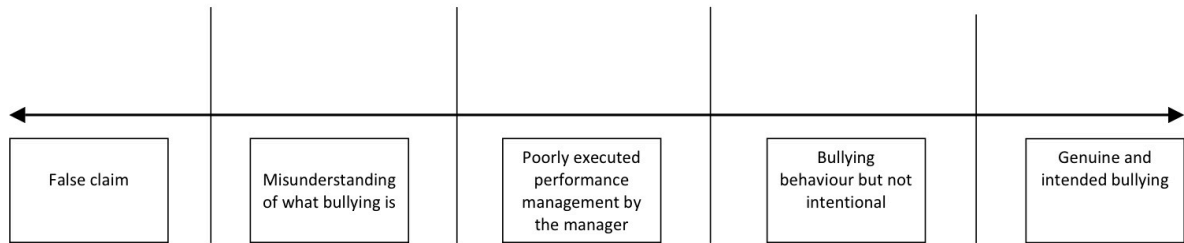
I would also like you to think about the bullying situations that you have found particularly difficult or challenging to handle. What was it that made these situations different and more difficult? Likewise, please think about those bullying cases that you feel had an optimum outcome or resolution. Why was it that you felt this?

Finally, I would like you to think about the first case of bullying that you handled and the most recent. Please consider how your approach, thoughts and feelings may have changed and why this might be. Have there been any particular cases or situations during your career that you feel have influenced your approach?

When we meet, I would like to talk to you about your experiences and how you personally handle situations of bullying. I am not so interested in the actual policy and procedure; I am interested in your personal experience of what it is like to handle cases of bullying in organisations, and how your experiences may have influenced your approach. So I would like you to consider things like the high and low points of your experiences of handling bullying cases, the value you add when dealing with these situations, the difficulties or pressures you may face, what you believe your responsibilities are in cases of bullying, and what you might do differently if you could.

Please remember that this interview is completely confidential, and when you talk about your experiences you do not need to include any details of names or organisations.

Appendix 7 Phase Three: Scale of Bullying Behaviour



Appendix 8 Phase 3 Supplemental Quotes

First Set of Quotes

If I'm honest, my primary consideration will be protecting the organisation's interests and I'm picking up the employee stuff afterwards.

In my HR role, my remit is to make sure that managers don't do anything that's going to land the organisation into trouble.

When it comes to bullying, I think our role is in training and coaching and supporting and advising and working with the manager, but not being the line manager.

When it comes to bullying investigations, as HR I would be facilitating, helping the manager through the interview. And it is getting them ready and making sure they've got their questions, but you really do have to spoon feed them in terms of making sure that they ask the right things.

Second Set of Quotes

The individual coming to see you expects you to be able to deal with the problem and solve it for them

People have the expectation that they can come and dump everything. You know and say, "Right, what are you gonna do to sort this out for me?"

We've got a lot of managers who are getting paid a lot of money to be managers. And as soon as a managerial problem arises it's "let's get HR to sort our problem out".

Third Set of Quotes

The minute that you start talking about bullying we tend to find that there are other issues going on with the people who then raise bullying allegations and that there is other stuff, be it poor performance or something else.

Fourth Set of Quotes

I think if someone came to see me because their direct manager was bullying them... actually I haven't had anything like that... it would just be somebody's lack of awareness in their personal style.

Appendix 9 Transcription Mark-up Language

Code	Representation
(4)	The number in brackets indicated the length in seconds of a pause
<u>Text</u>	Underlining with a straight line indicates that the interviewee stressed particular parts of the words
↑ or ↓	An upward arrow indicates a rising intonation on this word; a downward arrow signifies a decreasing intonation.
<u>Text</u>	Underlining with a wavy line indicates that the interviewee was speaking faster
(Text)	Text in brackets indicates that the interviewee was speaking more quietly
<u>Text</u>	Underlining with a dotted line indicates that the interviewee was speaking more slowly
<u>Text</u>	Double underlining indicates louder speech
.hhh	A row of hs prefixed with a dot indicates an intake of breath
hhh	A row of hs with no dot indicates an exhalation of breath
[laughter]	Additional non-verbal utterances are shown in square brackets.
y::es	A double colon represents prolongation of a word.

Adapted from Silverman (2005, p. 376) and Sims-Schouten et al., (2007, p. 123)

Appendix 10 Ethical Application and Approval: Phase One

Ethical Review Checklist

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (PhD students to have DoS check) and sent to Sharman Rogers who will coordinate Ethics Committee scrutiny.

No primary data collection can be undertaken before the supervisor has approved the plan.

If, following review of this checklist, amendments to the proposals are agreed to be necessary, the researcher must provide Sharman with an amended version for scrutiny.

1. What are the objectives of the research project?
 - To conduct a preliminary pilot study to explore alternative interview questions and methods prior to the main study.
 - The aims of the interviews are to examine how human resource practitioners interpret scenarios of workplace bullying; whether they decide to interpret these situations within a framework of bullying or an alternative framework such as management style or performance management; how and why they make this decision; whether previous personal experience influences this decision; whether personal or professional ethics influence this decision; and whether they consider bullying to be an ethical issue.

2. Does the research involve *NHS patients, resources or staff*? If so, it is likely that full ethical review must be obtained from the NHS process before the research can start.
No

3. Do you intend to collect *primary data* from human subjects or data that are identifiable with individuals? (This includes, for example, questionnaires and interviews.)
Yes

4. What is the *purpose* of the primary data in the dissertation / research project?
 - To conduct a preliminary pilot study to test out alternative interview questions and method prior to the main study. The aims of the pilot study are listed below.
 1. To examine the differences and benefits of presenting the participants with vignettes of workplace bullying (positioned as situations of interpersonal conflict) compared to asking for personal experience of similar situations.

- A vignette will be presented to the participants and they would be asked to interpret the situation and to describe what they believe is happening and why. The vignette that will be used is attached.
 - Participants would be asked to similarly describe a situation comparable to the vignette that they had experienced in their role as a human resource practitioner.
2. To check the validity of the vignette to ensure it is salient and representative of the participants' experience of conflict situations at work. This will be specifically asked at the end of the interview.
 3. To examine how human resource practitioners interpret a scenario of workplace bullying; whether they decide to interpret this situation within a framework of bullying or an alternative framework such as management style or performance management; and how and why they make this decision. This will be done by subsequent analysis of the transcriptions. (Prompt questions will be used during the interview if these do not emerge as the participants talk through the vignettes).
 4. To examine whether previous personal experience influences this decision. This will be done by asking participants for a similar situation they have experienced, and then asking them if this experience has influenced their interpretation of the vignette and how.
 5. To examine whether personal or professional ethics influence this decision. This will be done by asking the participants after their interpretation, if it has not emerged explicitly as they talked through the vignettes.
 6. To examine whether human resource participants perceive bullying to be an ethical issue. This will be done by explicitly asking the participants at the end of the interview if it has not specifically emerge during their interpretations.
 7. To examine the use of personalising the issue by asking whether their interpretation would be different if the situation was personal, by asking them to imagine that the "victim" in the scenario was someone they cared about, e.g. partner, mother, father, brother, sister, close friend. This would be asked after their initial interpretations of the vignettes.
 8. To examine the use of publicising their interpretation by asking whether their interpretation would be different if their decision was to be made public. This will be done using a "disclosure question" used in ethical decision making research, e.g. "how would you feel if your decision was about to be published in a People Management or a national newspaper". This would be asked after their initial interpretations of the vignettes.
 9. To explore whether Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is an effective theoretical framework for analysing the data from the interviews.
5. What is/are the *survey population(s)*?

The participants will be human resource professionals who are CIPD qualified and whose role involves direct involvement with situations of workplace bullying.

6. How big is the *sample* for each of the survey populations and how was this sample arrived at?

Six. This is a pilot study, and based on my previous MSc research using similar methods and interviews, I believe six interviews will be sufficient to explore the alternative methods and questions described in questions 1 and 4.

7. How will respondents be *selected and recruited*?

This will be a snowball sample, initially beginning with two ex-colleagues who are unaware of the focus of my research.

8. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of *informed consent* will be met for those taking part in the research? If an Information Sheet for participants is to be used, please attach it to this form. If not, please explain how you will be able to demonstrate that informed consent has been gained from participants.

- A participant information sheet will be provided to each participant before the interview commences (attached).
- Participants will then be asked to read and sign the consent form (attached).
- Participants will then be provided with an instruction sheet explaining what is required of them (attached).

9. How will *data* be *collected* from each of the sample groups?

- Via face-to-face (one-to-one) interviews.

10. How will *data* be *stored* and what will happen to the data at the end of the research?

- The interviews will be digitally recorded, subject to signed consent from the participants.
- The recordings will be transcribed into MS Word and will then be deleted.
- The MS Word files will be named with a unique identifier and will have no record of the participant's name. Any use of the participants name during the interview will be replaced with a pseudonym in the transcript.
- The MS Word files will be password protected and stored on my personal laptop, which is protected by a biometric password.

- The MS Word files will also be backed-up onto a memory stick, which is password protected.
 - The anonymised transcripts will be retained after the research for as long as necessary to conform with research auditing and ethics.
11. How will *confidentiality* be assured for respondents?
- Confidentiality will be maintained to the level described in the consent form (Q8) and the process described in Q10.
12. What steps are proposed to safeguard the *anonymity* of the respondents?
- Anonymity will be safeguarded by the process described in Q10.
13. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) *to respondents* that may result from taking part in this research? If so, please specify and state what measures are proposed to deal with these risks.
- There are no reputational risks to the participants or their organisation because of the level of confidentiality and anonymity described in Q10 and the consent form.
 - Bullying can be a sensitive issue for some people and there is a small risk that a participant may find discussing the issue of bullying or their response to specific situations of bullying distressing. Participants will be reminded that they do not need to discuss any personal experience if they do not wish to, and that they may withdraw their participation at any point if they wish to. I will re-emphasise the confidential and anonymous nature of their participation. I have a Preliminary Counselling Skills certificate and three years experience as a trained Samaritan's volunteer and feel I have the necessary sensitivity and empathy to conduct interviews on this sensitive topic. I also spent two years delivering workshops on workplace bullying within organisations and have experience on discussing this issue with victims, their managers and HR practitioners. I will also be able to provide participants with the details of a range of resources and support available to them, e.g. any occupational counselling or Employee Assistance Programme within their own company, BACP, their GP and the Andrea Adams helpline if they, or someone they know, have been bullied themselves.
14. Will any *data* be *obtained from a company* or other *organisation*.
- No

15. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) *to the researcher or to the University* that may result from conducting this research? If so, please specify and state what measures are proposed to manage these risks¹.

No

16. Will the proposed research involve any of the following (please put a \checkmark next to ‘yes’ or ‘no’; consult your supervisor if you are unsure):

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| • Vulnerable groups (e.g. children)? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Particularly sensitive topics? | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Access to respondents via ‘gatekeepers’? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Use of deception? | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Access to confidential personal data? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Psychological stress, anxiety etc? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Intrusive interventions? | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

See Q17 for addition comments for those I have ticked “yes”.

17. Are there any other ethical issues that may arise from the proposed research?

- As discussed in question 13, there is the possibility that participants may experience anxiety or stress when discussing bullying. Every effort will be taken to ensure that this does not happen by using the steps described in Q13.
- It could be argued that there will be some deception. When the participants are presented with the scenario they will be positioned as “difficult interpersonal situations at work”. The scenario will contain bullying behaviour, as defined in the academic literature and organisational policy. The aim of the interviews is to examine if bullying emerges as an interpretation of the scenarios. If the situations were described as bullying it would prime this interpretation and hence it would not be possible to examine when and how this interpretation emerged. The data from the interviews will also be analysed within a framework of bullying. I have previously conducted 20 interviews for my MSc research that followed this procedure and there were no adverse reactions to the method and positioning of the vignettes.

¹ Risk evaluation should take account of the broad liberty of expression provided by the principle of academic freedom. The university’s conduct with respect to academic freedom is set out in section 9.2 of the Articles of Government and its commitment to academic freedom is in section 1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2004-2008.

Please print the name of:

I/We grant Ethical Approval

student Sue Harrington supervisor Charlotte Rayner

Signed:

(student) 22/9/07 (supervisor) _____

Date _____ Date _____

AMENDMENTS

If you need to make changes please ensure you have permission before the primary data collection. If there are major changes, fill in a new form if that will make it easier for everyone. If there are minor changes then fill in the amendments (next page) and get them signed before the primary data collection begins.

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port.ac.uk https://webmail.port.ac.uk/gw/webacc?action=Item.Read&User.context=fjcjndUf3nw7gjbCud&Item.drn=1369z96z0&merge=msgitem&Url.Folder.
Mail Message

Reply Read Later

Mail Properties

From: Sharman Rogers
To: Sue Harrington
Subject: Fwd: Re: Case ref E35: Bullying - labelling of situations by HR managers: Sue Harrington
Wednesday - 3 October, 2007 11:16 AM

Dear Sue

- taking account of David's comment below, your application has been approved.

Best wishes,
Sharman

>>> David Whitmarsh 01/10/2007 17:51 >>>
Sharman

The replies I have received so far have been very positive, and accordingly my recommendation is that the application be approved. It was felt, however, that the 'anonymising' of written reports should also extend to any third parties (e.g. names of work mates) who might be mentioned by respondents. Please could you ask Sue to ensure that this safeguard is built into the research design.

Thanks
David

>>> Sharman Rogers 26/09/2007 13:05 >>>
David

LCM rota doesn't start until October, so I am circulating Sue's application to all committee members for consideration and comment - are you happy to collate comments and let me have a response in due course, please?

Thanks
Sharman

>>> Sue Harrington 24/09/2007 15:09 >>>
Dear Sharman,

Further to Charlotte's e-mail, please find attached the ethical review checklist and supporting documents for the pilot study for my PhD research.

Please let me know if you also require a signed hardcopy, or any further information.

Best wishes,
Sue

Done

Appendix 11 Ethical Application and Approval: Phases Two & Three

Ethical Review Checklist – Staff and Doctoral Students

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (PhD students to have DoS check) and sent to Sharman Rogers who will coordinate Ethics Committee scrutiny.

No primary data collection can be undertaken before the supervisor and/or Ethics Committee has given approval.

If, following review of this checklist, amendments to the proposals are agreed to be necessary, the researcher must provide Sharman with an amended version for scrutiny.

1. What are the objectives of the research project?

- To conduct the second stage study of my PhD following the analysis of my pilot study.
- The aims of the interviews are to examine how human resource practitioners approach situations of workplace bullying that are reported to them; what factors they consider (e.g. training, policy and procedures, organisational stakeholders, personal values, etc.); the effect of their identity as an “HR professional”; and how their previous experience of handling cases of bullying may have influenced their approach to new situations.
- The difference in the approach to this study, compared to the pilot study, is that I will be asking the participants to directly discuss their own experiences of dealing with bullying at work, rather than providing a vignette of a fictitious bullying situation. The analysis of the pilot study has informed this development: the data indicate that specific previous experiences have influenced the way that HR practitioners approach new situations of bullying and the identity(s) they assume when approaching these situations (e.g. as HR professional, as “the organisation”, as management support, as employee, as “self”). Hence, the study aims to explore the nature and impact of these personal experiences because they will be more informative about the interpretive processes they engage in than the vignettes.

2. Does the research involve *NHS patients, resources or staff*? NO

If YES, it is likely that full ethical review must be obtained from the NHS process before the research can start.

3. Do you intend to collect *primary data* from human subjects or data that are identifiable with individuals? (This includes, for example, questionnaires and interviews.) YES

If you do not intend to collect such primary data then please go to question 14.

If you do intend to collect such primary data then please respond to ALL the questions 4 through 13. If you feel a question does not apply then please respond with n/a (for not applicable).

4. What is the *purpose* of the primary data in the dissertation / research project?

To conduct the main study of my PhD on the factors that influence the way HR professional respond to situations of workplace bullying. The data will be qualitatively analysed in order to examine the following questions, which have emerged from the analysis of my pilot study:

- How do HR practitioners use policy and procedure in situations of bullying?
- How do HR practitioners use their training in situations of bullying?
- How do HR practitioners balance their own personal thoughts and feelings with their other responsibilities in dealing with bullying?
- How has previous experience shaped their approach to bullying?
- How do HR practitioners balance their multiple identities when dealing with bullying?

5. What is/are the *survey population(s)*?

The participants will be human resource professionals who are CIPD qualified and whose role involves direct involvement with situations of workplace bullying. The participants will be recruited via a snowball sample, as discussed in Q. 7. It is anticipated that there will be approximately 30 participants (see Q. 6). They will be recruited via a range of measures: predominantly organisational contacts, HRM forums, CIPD groups and ex-students from relevant MSc courses. The analysis of the interview data will be at the individual level to examine the interaction between individual, situational and organisational factors. Hence, as discussed in Q. 7, the actual organisation is not the level of analysis and therefore it is not important for the participants to belong to the same organisation. What will be examined are the particular organisational factors that the participants draw on in their narratives. Hence, for a sample of 30, it is possible that each participant may belong to a different organisation and, therefore, a maximum of 30 organisations may be involved. Recruitment of participants will commence once ethical approval has been given.

6. How big is the *sample* for each of the survey populations and how was this sample arrived at?

Up to 30 individual participants. The actual size of the sample will depend on the concurrent analysis and the point of saturation.

7. How will respondents be *selected and recruited*?

This will be a snowball sample, using a range of organisational and training contacts. The analysis of the pilot study indicates that the actual organisation is only one of the influences, and that personal experience is much more salient. Therefore, the actual organisation is not the important consideration in the study (see Q. 5).

8. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of *informed consent* will be met for those taking part in the research? If an Information Sheet for participants is to be used, please attach it to this form. If not, please explain how you will be able to demonstrate that informed consent has been gained from participants.

- A preliminary phone call will take place with each volunteer to ensure that they are comfortable with discussing their previous experience, and to discuss whether their role is suitable for the research (individuals in specialist areas of HR, such as payroll/benefits may not have the appropriate background).
 - An interview preparation email will be sent to each participant, outlining the topics of the interview, and the areas I would like them to consider before the interview (attached: Interview Preparation Instructions).
 - A participant information sheet will be provided to each participant before the interview commences (attached: Participant Information Sheet).
 - Participants will then be asked to read and sign the consent form (attached: Consent Form).
 - Participants will then be provided with an introduction prior to the interview (attached: Interview Introduction).
9. How will *data* be *collected* from each of the sample groups?
- Via face-to-face (one-to-one) interviews (recorded with permission).
 - The questions that will be asked during the interview are attached (attached: Final Interview Questions). These have been developed using both relevant theory and the results of the pilot study analysis. The questions have been through an iterative process of development, with advice from my supervisors at each stage of their development. (In the attached Final Interview Questions document the questions in bold are the main questions. Those in italics are prompt questions to be used if necessary to develop the participants' answers).
10. How will *data* be *stored* and what will happen to the data at the end of the research?
- The interviews will be digitally recorded, subject to signed consent from the participants.
 - The recordings will be transcribed into MS Word and will then be deleted.
 - The MS Word files will be named with a unique identifier and will have no record of the participant's name. Any use of the participants name, or the names of other people during the interview will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcript.
 - The MS Word files will be password protected and stored on my personal laptop, which is protected by a biometric/fingerprint password.
 - The MS Word files will also be backed-up onto a memory stick, which is password protected.
 - The anonymised transcripts will be retained after the research for as long as necessary to conform to research auditing and ethics.
11. How will *confidentiality* be assured for respondents?

- Confidentiality will be maintained to the level described in the consent form (Q8) and the process described in Q10.

12. What steps are proposed to safeguard the *anonymity* of the respondents?

- Anonymity will be safeguarded by the process described in Q10.

13. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) *to respondents* that may result from taking part in this research? YES

If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to deal with these risks.

- There are no reputational risks to the participants or their organisation because of the level of confidentiality and anonymity described in Q10 and the consent form.
- Bullying can be a sensitive issue for some people and there is a small risk that a participant may find it distressing to discuss the issue of bullying or their response to specific situations of bullying. Participants will be reminded that they do not need to discuss any particular personal experience if they do not wish to, and that they may withdraw their participation at any point. I will re-emphasise the confidential and anonymous nature of their participation.
- I have a Preliminary Counselling Skills certificate and three years experience as a trained Samaritans volunteer and feel I have the necessary sensitivity and empathy to conduct interviews on this sensitive topic. I have now had experience interviewing participants on the subject of bullying for both my MSc thesis and my pilot study (approximately 40 interviews in total).
- I also spent two years delivering workshops on workplace bullying within organisations and have experience of discussing this issue with victims, their managers and HR practitioners. I will also be able to provide participants with the details of a range of resources and support available to them, e.g. any occupational counselling or Employee Assistance Programme within their own company, BACP, their GP and the Andrea Adams helpline if they, or someone they know, has been/are being bullied.

14. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) *to the researcher or to the University* that may result from conducting this research? NO

If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to manage these risks¹.

15. Will any *data* be *obtained from a company or other organisation*. NO

For example, information provided by an employer or its employees.

If NO, then please go to question 18.

16. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of *informed consent* will be met for that organisation? How will *confidentiality* be assured for the organisation?

¹ Risk evaluation should take account of the broad liberty of expression provided by the principle of academic freedom. The university's conduct with respect to academic freedom is set out in section 9.2 of the Articles of Government and its commitment to academic freedom is in section 1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2004-2008

17. Does the organisation have its own ethics procedure relating to the research you intend to carry out? YES / NO (please circle).

If YES, the University will require written evidence from the organisation that they have approved the research.

18. Will the proposed research involve any of the following (please put a \checkmark next to 'yes' or 'no'; consult your supervisor if you are unsure):

- Vulnerable groups (e.g. children) ? YES NO
- Particularly sensitive topics ? YES NO
- Access to respondents via 'gatekeepers' ? YES NO
- Use of deception ? YES NO
- Access to confidential personal data ? YES NO
- Psychological stress, anxiety etc ? YES NO
- Intrusive interventions ? YES NO

19. Are there any other ethical issues that may arise from the proposed research?

None that are foreseen, based on experience of conducting similar interviews.

Details of applicant

The member of staff undertaking the research should sign and date the application, and submit it directly to the Ethics Committee. However, where the researcher is a supervised PhD candidate, the signature of the Director of Studies is also required prior to this form being submitted.

	Name	Signature
Researcher	Susan Harrington	
Director of Studies	Professor Charlotte Rayner	
Date	8 th August 2008	

Approval by Ethics Committee

I/We grant Ethical Approval

FREC

Date

AMENDMENTS

If you need to make changes please ensure you have permission before the primary data collection. If there are major changes, fill in a new form if that will make it easier for everyone. If there are minor changes then fill in the amendments (next page) and get them signed before the primary data collection begins.

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port.ac.uk https://webmail.port.ac.uk/gw/webacc?action=Item.Read&User.context=fjcndUf3nw7gjbCud&Item.drn=2958z37z0&merge=msgitem&Url.Folder.type=Folder.UNIVERSAL

Mail Message

Reply Read Later

Mail Properties

From: Ashraf Labib
To: Sue Harrington
CC: Sharman Rogers
Subject: Re: Ethics approval application E77: Sue Harrington/Charlotte Rayner

Friday - 12 September, 2008 4:23 PM

Dear Sue,

Your application is fine. It was just very minor clarification and I understand that you have responded to all points raised. I am copying in Sharman for confirmation.

Best wishes,
Ashraf

Ashraf Labib
Associate Dean (Research)
Professor of Operations and Decision Analysis,
Department of Strategy and Business Systems (SBS),
Portsmouth Business School (PBS),
University of Portsmouth,
Richmond Building, Portland Street,
Portsmouth,
United Kingdom PO1 3DE.
Tel: +44 (0) 23 9284 4729
Fax +44 (0) 23 9284 4037
e.mail : ashraf.labib@port.ac.uk

>>> Sue Harrington 12/09/2008 09:26 >>>
Dear Ashraf,

I wondered if there was any update on my ethical approval application please since I supplied the additional information?

Thank you for your help.

Best wishes,
Sue

>>> Sue Harrington 13/08/08 10:06 AM >>>
Dear Ashraf anf Judy,

Thank you for your comments on my ethical approval application, which Charlotte forwrded to me to address. I have added the extra word to the Interview Introduction and have attached an updated application form, which expands on Q. 5 and hopefully answers your concerns.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further clarification.

With best wishes,
Sue

Done

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Mail Message

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From: Charlotte Rayner
To: David Whitmarsh
CC: sue.harrington@port.ac.uk
Subject: Re: Quick question

Tuesday - 23 June, 2009 6:20 PM

Thanks!!!
C

Charlotte Rayner PhD
Professor of Human Resource Management
Portsmouth Business School

email: charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk
>>> David Whitmarsh 23/06/09 4:44 PM >>>
Hi Charlotte

Quick answer - This looks to be part of the existing research, and I do not think it necessary to re-apply for ethical approval. Feel free to go ahead.

Kind regards

David

Professor David Whitmarsh
Department of Economics
Portsmouth Business School
University of Portsmouth
Portsmouth
U.K. PO1 3DE

Tel: +44(0)2392 844084

>>> Charlotte Rayner 23/06/2009 13:43 >>>
Hi Dave
Sue Harrington received ethical approval to undertake interviews asking HR people about their role as they interview someone who is telling them about a bullying incident.

She has just had some HR people from a large supermarket who have asked to do this as a group.

The question focus would be the same, but naturally its not an individual interview. Effectively it would be a mini Focus Group. We have discussed the situation and think it would be rather valuable to try this.

Are you OK she does not need to reapply for ethical approval? - Naturally she will do so if you want her to. I am just conscious of not over-loading the committee.

Best wishes
Charlotte

Charlotte Rayner PhD
Professor of Human Resource Management
Portsmouth Business School

Done

Ethics for Focus Groups: addendum

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From: Charlotte Rayner <Charlotte.Rayner@port.ac.uk>
Date: Monday, 30 August 2010 17:44
To: sh219@leicester.ac.uk <sh219@leicester.ac.uk>
Subject: Ethics for Focus Groups: addendum

Dear Sue

Further to our discussion on Friday, I said I would provide a further email on the verbal discussion between Prof Dave Whitmarsh (Chair of PBS Ethics Committee) regarding the permission for these groups.

In our short exchange I was very clear that with Dave the groups may use 'quotes' from either the preceding interviews or a preceding FG to stimulate discussion. These 'quotes' would all be sanitised such that no individual nor their employer would be identifiable. I put parentheses as I did suggest that it was quite likely actual statements might be cut/ adapted as well, hence not even be true quotes.

David was completely happy, with confidentiality naturally being his only issue. I reminded him I had used the identical method in the DTI study I had done which had also received approval from the ethics committee. Your approach reflects this - using brief snippets which cannot be attributed, but which are good to get a reaction and a conversation going in an FG.

Many thanks
Charlotte

Charlotte Rayner PhD
Professor of Human Resource Management
Portsmouth Business School

email: charlotte.rayner@port.ac.uk