

On the Unfriendly Side of the Mountain:  
Prince Edward Island Secondary Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Bullying

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island

Paula McHugh-Grudich  
Charlottetown, PE  
March, 2004

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*ISBN: 0-612-93881-6*

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On the Unfriendly Side of the Mountain\* ;

Prince Edward Island Secondary Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Bullying

Paula McHugh - Grudich

University of Prince Edward Island

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada

\*"Beneath them, on the unfriendly side of the mountain, the drum-roll continued. "  
from Lord of the Flies, by William Golding, p.48

To those who inspire me:

My wonderful parents, Ann & Gerald McHugh,

My husband, B. Michael, and precious children, Jenny, Mikey, and Jamie:

May your world be one of peace, serenity, and tolerance.

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### Abstract

Bullying is a serious problem in today's schools, and its impact is far-reaching and devastating. Peer victimization occurs in every school, and educators have a responsibility to address it. This study investigated secondary students in Prince Edward Island, Canada, who identified themselves as having been significantly affected by bullying. In analyzing how the students in the study experience and perceive bullying, as well as the degree to which they feel they can effect change, several implications for educators emerge. Upon analysis of the participants' stories, the following themes are identified and discussed:

- 1.) Experiences as a Target – Commonalities and Anomalies;
- 2.) The Targets' Perceptions of the Bullies in Comparison with the Literature;
- 3.) Coping Strategies and Survival Mechanisms;
- 4.) Remedies: Pessimism versus Optimism ; and
- 5.) The Perceived Failure of the School.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### Context and Background

Upon the brink of the new millennium, the Decade 2001-2010 was proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World” (United Nations, 2003). This remarkable initiative calls for innovations and improvements in curricula, pedagogy, inclusion practices, and the promotion of physical education, sport, and wellness to promote a world-wide culture of peace. Safely ensconced in our relatively peaceful Western world, it is tempting to infer that this landmark declaration applies only to the war-scarred countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, El Salvador, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Guatemala and the Philippines. There is no denying that the victims of war, especially the children, need the world’s compassion and action, and must be of utmost concern to all global citizens. However, educators everywhere must face the difficult reality that many of the children we teach also face a war, except it is a more covert conflict that thrives in secrecy, and where the casualties are broken in spirit and mind. This war is sanctioned by a tacit accommodation of “typical” childish misbehaviours, where “boys will be boys”, and “that’s just the way girls are.” This is the war of interpersonal violence in our schools, and it falls under the relatively innocuous, indeed, even benign term of “bullying”.

Educational practices are constantly evolving. The days in which teachers concerned themselves with simply transferring knowledge, are, hopefully, on their way to being relegated to memory. Now, many effective teachers and schools are interested in a holistic approach to education, where the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the student is deemed to be just as critical as intellectual growth and academic achievement. It is widely recognized that schools

must foster the development of a secure, non-hostile, and accepting environment if all children are to be given the opportunity to succeed and to thrive in the school setting. Glasser's Theory of Choice develops the concept that all people need a sense of belonging, freedom, power and fun (Glasser, 1969). Yet, despite the general acceptance of this truism, peer rejection and violence continue to taint our schools. Each day, targeted students suffer at the hands of their peers. Bullying is a heinous but seemingly inescapable element of school life. Traditionally, bullying was perceived as a normal part of growing up. Through increased awareness, education, and research, society has experienced a shift in attitude, and bullying is deemed harmful and unacceptable.

Schools are as much social institutions as they are halls of learning. Schools are often viewed as microcosms of society, where children acquire social skills which enable them to function as responsible members of society. The relationship skills which children develop throughout their years in school become vitally important to them. Indeed, acceptance by peers and freedom from unresolved conflict is of vital importance to students from kindergarten to senior high. Educators want students to perceive school in a positive light, not merely because students who like school often demonstrate higher academic achievement, but because there seems to be a correlation between liking school and interpersonal relationships. It is not surprising to note that one study illustrated that relationships with classmates are *extremely* important in determining children's feelings of acceptance at school (Krappmann et al., 1993). For even the youngest students, there is a correlation between the number of mutual friendships and an increase in school liking (Ladd & Coleman, 1997). Older students who experience cooperative peer relationships in school also demonstrate a deeper desire for learning, and seem to show greater

satisfaction with the school experience (Singh, 1995). Schools must be attentive to fostering greater acceptance among students and to helping students cultivate skills which help resolve inevitable interpersonal conflict.

It is commendable that schools and communities have responded to the problem of bullying in the school by implementing one of the many models available to teach peaceful conflict resolution skills. Peace Education is a significant vehicle through which schools can promote understanding, tolerance, and dignity for all students. It is rapidly emerging as one of the most significant philosophical developments in education (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Peace Education is described as curricula which encompass such constructs as conflict resolution, cooperation and interdependence, social and ecological responsibility, and global awareness (Johnson, 1998). For example, in Prince Edward Island, many schools have become charter members of The League of Peaceful Schools, a program supported in the past by the prestigious Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Centre. Other schools in Prince Edward Island are offering conflict resolution programs such as *Second Step*, *PALS*, *Sunburst Curriculum*, and *Hands Off* (CIF Canada Inventory: Schools and Conflict Resolution Across Canada). There is a proliferation of other models in schools across the country. In Canada, a National Strategy was implemented in May 2002, under the auspices of the federal Ministry of Justice, to raise public awareness about bullying (Canada Anti-Bullying, 2003).

Global Education, along with Peace Education, is creating a growing awareness of the interrelatedness of all peoples and places, and practitioners and advocates of Global Education try to facilitate learners in the acquisition and development of the requisite skills in critical thinking which are fundamental to helping students, teachers, and all citizens to learn to co-exist peacefully

and work towards a global citizenship. Noted Global Educators Graham Pike and David Selby explain that:

Education...has a role to play in the development of young citizens who demonstrate respect for people of other cultures, faiths, and worldviews, who have an understanding of global issues and trends, and who commit to acting for global peace and environmental /social justice.

( 2000, p.139)

In presenting the idea to students that "their perspective on any issue is but one among many" (Pike & Selby, 2000, p. 141), Global Education can and does contribute to the "absorption" and assimilation of attitudes that promote tolerance and "world-mindedness", a commitment to the principle of one world where the needs and concerns of all countries and cultures are considered from the perspective of what is best for the planet (Pike & Selby). Clearly, such a perspective cannot help but elevate the level of peace in the classroom.

All these initiatives are laudable. However, the literature supports the frightening reality that bullying continues to be a very disturbing reality for many students, and, perhaps, a disproportionate amount of attention is being directed at the plethora of available Conflict Resolution programs, to the detriment of the safety and security of the targets of bullying.

It is irrefutable that bullying is widespread and serious. O'Connell et al. (1997) surveyed a group of 4,743 Canadian students and found that 15 per cent of them had been victimized more than once or twice in the preceding 6 weeks. Whitney and Smith (1993) investigated a group of American school children and reported that 27 per cent of them claimed to have been victimized at least sometimes, with 10 per cent victimized at least once a week. Vail reports that each day in

the United States, 160,000 students stay home from school because they are afraid of being victimized (1999, p. 37). In Britain, Glover et al. (2000) found that, in a school of 1000 students, 70 of them are likely to experience physical or verbal bullying in any one week. Clearly, bullying is an entrenched element in our schools, and its incidence cannot be ignored. Wendy Craig and Debra J. Pepler, two leading Canadian researchers with York University's LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, point out that, for the good of society, bullying must not be ignored because school bullying may be a predictor of future violent behaviours ranging from "sexual harassment, date violence, gang attacks, marital abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse" (2000, p. 5).

Students in the primary, elementary, and junior high school levels often have greater access to advocacy and intervention from teachers and parents; secondary students are often deemed capable of "fending for themselves." A survey of the literature suggests that much research on bullying has focused on the primary, elementary, and junior high grades, but little research has treated the phenomenon of bullying in high schools. It seems fitting, and, indeed, pressing to investigate how secondary students are affected by threats of, or experiences with, violence.

It is, therefore, a concern with, and interest in, Prince Edward Island secondary students' experiences with, and perceptions of, bullying that is the basis of this thesis. This study investigated the following questions: *How do secondary school students experience and perceive bullying in the school? How do these students describe their experiences as a target for bullying? What are their perceptions of the power they have to effect change?*

It would be efficacious at this point to attempt to identify a definition of the phenomenon of bullying. Dr. Dan Olweus is widely regarded as the pioneer of the study of bullying, and in his

seminal work *Bullying At School – What we know and what we can do*, Olweus offers a definition which, while not universally accepted, is the one most often adopted by researchers in their study of bullying (Borg, 1999).

A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. ... Negative actions can be carried out by words (verbally), for instance, by threatening, taunting, teasing, and calling names. It is a negative action when somebody hits, pushes, kicks, pinches, or restrains another...It is also possible to carry out negative actions without use of words or physical contact, such as ...intentionally excluding someone from a group, or refusing to comply with another person's wishes.

(Olweus, 1993).

Olweus goes on to explain the imperative role played in the bullying scenario by an imbalance in strength, "an asymmetric power relationship" (p. 10). He submits that bullying can be either *direct*, which is an "open attack" on the victim, or *indirect*, an equally heinous form of bullying which manifests as "social isolation or intentional exclusion from a group" (p. 10).

Building on the work of Olweus and others, Myron-Wilson and Rowan (1999) identified the various roles played in the bullying scenario. They are: 1.) the primary bully, 2.) the reinforcer, 3.) the assistant, 4.) the defender, 5.) the uninvolved outsider and 6.) the victim or target. It would appear that bullying is a highly complex phenomenon dependant upon the assumption of clear social roles, much like a drama with its players. Regrettably, some of the actors in this tragedy are very much reluctant ones.

### Significance of Study

Bullying is certainly not a novel phenomenon, for both overt and covert aggression in our schools seems to be omnipresent, and educators and parents have struggled to deal with this social scourge. While there are myriad programs aimed at conquering the malaise of bullying, no school seems immune to it. In recent years, bullying has even been dealt with in the civil and criminal courts with serious consequences for the perpetrators, and yet it persists. Even previously immutable school boards are no longer unassailable when it comes to accountability for student safety as was demonstrated in a case which came before the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal on April 8, 2002. In this landmark case, the complainant, student Azmi Jubran, successfully sued the Board of Trustees, North Vancouver School District no. 44, for compensation for "the injury to his dignity, feelings and self respect" because he suffered harassment in school (Jubran v. Board of Trustees, 2002). In Canada in 2000 - 2002, there was a much-publicized series of adolescent suicides which were found to be directly linked to victimization by bullying, and the regrettable term "bullycide" entered the resultant public lexicon (Building Safer Communities). The suicides of students Hameh Nastoh, Westminster, British Columbia, Dawn-Marie Wesley, Mission B.C., and Emmet Fralik, Halifax, Nova Scotia devastated not only their families and friends but shocked and outraged much of Canadian society. These tragedies indicated that the problem is more deeply-rooted and malignant than had been imagined. Many students have reported that they do not feel safe at school, and when it is noted that children and adolescents spend most of their waking hours in the school, it becomes readily apparent that this situation is, indeed, tragic.

It is a misconception that schools in smaller cities are less violent than those in larger urban centers (Pithrow-Stith and Quaday, 1996), and smaller provinces such as Prince Edward Island are just as apt to struggle with bullying as are provinces with large populations. Olweus submits that town and school size are negligible factors in bullying (p.24). Therefore, it is vitally important that a culture of vigilance is nurtured in schools in this province, for it is well known that bullying thrives in every imaginable milieu and it gathers strength in secrecy. It is critical that educators ensure that students are protected from victimization. In dealing with issues that relate to students' safety, knowledge truly is power, and educators have a duty to arm themselves with the most relevant and current information on the subject of bullying.

Prior to this research study, there has not been a comparable investigation into how secondary school students in Prince Edward Island are affected by bullying. Indeed, in perusing the literature, there has been little attention or resources aimed at bullying in the secondary school at all. This gap in the literature is glaring and global. This thesis was designed to partially address this deficit by gathering information from the research literature, and then by collecting data from secondary school students who have been significantly impacted by bullying as targets of bullies. Certainly such data has the potential to increase awareness, to bring the reality of bullying out of the shadows, and to possibly effect an improvement in the quality of the school experience for all students, especially those whose days are marred by teasing, taunting, and intimidation.

An exploration of high school students' experiences with, and perceptions of, bullying could yield information that would be significant to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and, indeed, society. Students could benefit from this study, for students who are bullied or who witness bullying report feelings of anxiety, over-cautiousness, insecurity, and low self-esteem (Banks, 1997.) Most parents have a deeply-rooted interest in knowing that their children are

developing and learning in a welcoming, supportive, and respectful school environment. The increase in awareness is significant to teachers, for the teacher is a key figure in creating the peaceable classroom environment and modelling peaceful attitudes and behaviours (Hintz, 1995). Administrators may be motivated by this proposed study to reflect on their own contributions to developing a culture of peace and tolerance in the schools, and this is critical, for strong leadership from administrators is crucial if that culture is to thrive in a school.

It is noteworthy to point out at this juncture that, in embarking upon this study, the researcher was told by many teachers in the school system that “bullying simply isn’t a problem in island (Prince Edward Island) schools.” Among teachers who acknowledged that bullying does, indeed thrive in Prince Edward Island, some asserted that they simply did not have the time to address bullying. Perhaps this thesis will compel front-line school personnel to dispense with such harmful misconceptions.

In a preliminary analysis of the literature on peer rejection and bullying, there seems to be a gap in research aimed at secondary students’ experiences of bullying. Because the incidence of bullying seems to peak between grades 6 to 8, much of the research has been directed at this group. This may be the result of a tacit understanding that high school students should be able to fend for themselves, as they are nearly young adults. This attitude is supported by the reality that parental involvement at the high school level is extremely limited. However, as they strive to achieve autonomy and mastery of their world, high school students are at a critical stage in their development where they are particularly susceptible to rejection. Bullying can be devastating for these students, because, unlike their younger counterparts, they are often expected to simply “take it” when they are bullied.

Interpersonal conflict is an unpleasant but unavoidable experience whenever humans interact for prolonged periods of time. In developed countries, children spend a great deal of their childhood and adolescence in school. It is inevitable, therefore, that students must deal with conflict on a regular basis. Conflict can actually be positive in that it teaches students how to negotiate mutually beneficial solutions (Johnson et al., 1996) but, for many students, interpersonal conflict is often left unresolved.

Many students are subjected to interpersonal conflict in the form of peer rejection or bullying. Borg (1998) found that as high as 20% of all schoolchildren are *deeply* affected by bullying, either as victims or as perpetrators of bullying. The fall-out from bullying cannot be ignored by educators, for the results of victimization seem to be deeply felt. Children who are victimized early in life remain victims for a long time (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). In a study which investigated the effects of bullying on self-declared victims, one out of every three victims reported a desire for revenge, and their level of satisfaction at school was seriously impeded by feelings of extreme anger and self-pity (Borg, 1998). The most disturbing finding of Borg's study was that one-quarter of these victims felt helpless to change their situation or to get any relief from the victimization. It seems that all levels of school, from primary to senior high school, are forums for bullying and the accompanying victimization. Bullying rears its ugly head in primary school, increases throughout elementary school, increases substantially during junior high, and gradually declines during high school (Banks, 1997). For the victims, school becomes a place to be feared, and most educators will concur that this scenario is lamentable at best, horrific at the worst. If our students do not feel physically and psychologically safe at school, learning is compromised, positive experiences are marginalized, and self-actualization becomes impossible. It is clear that a student who feels intimidated will not thrive in the school setting. To protect the

students' rights to learn in an encouraging and safe environment, schools must develop a culture that refuses to tolerate any act of aggression, whether physical or psychological (Garrity et al., 1996).

Our schools are responsible not only for the duty of educating our children, but must also take very seriously the privilege of providing a safe and caring environment. Our schools have a duty of stewardship.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### The roots of aggression: What does a bully look like?

The existing literature makes it very clear that bullies do not comprise a homogeneous, readily identifiable group. It is misleading to infer that all bullies are impelled to act aggressively for the same reasons, and that there is a rigid standard that might be applied in ascertaining precisely who is, or will become, a bully. While some research submits that it is possible to identify the emergence of future bullies as early as primary school, as child psychiatrist Dr. Stephen Scott (1998) maintains in *Aggressive Behaviour in Childhood*, there remain children whose bullying behaviour is confounding in its unexpectedness. The medical community refers to the phenomenon of aggressive, anti-social behaviour in children as “conduct disorder.” Conduct disorder is the most common psychiatric disorder of children, and it manifests in older children in the form of bullying, substance abuse, running away, truancy, arson, and stealing. Not all bullies will embody all of these behaviours. However, there are certain characteristics that may mark bullies. In general, bullies are children who start fights, tease, pick on, and dominate other children (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying behaviour is undeniably anti-social, and therefore it must be viewed in the context of functional social interaction. Existing research looks at risk factors for the emergence of potential bullies according to individual traits, upbringing, and peer and school risk factors.

### The Bully and Conscience

The notion of *empathy*, or lack thereof, plays a critical role in discerning the identity of the bully. The bully may typically fail to understand the feelings of others and tend to see bullying events from his or her own perspective; the point of view of other players in the episode is either discounted or misunderstood (Hazler, 1996). In fact, some bullies appear to derive satisfaction

from the pain they inflict upon their targets, and will express little remorse or shame (Banks, 1997). Bullies may rationalize that the target was “asking for it”, and received exactly what he or she deserved. In fact, aggressive children tend to perceive ambiguous social interactions as actually being attributable to deliberately hostile acts, therefore justifying any aggression on the part of the bully (Bernstein, page 7, 1997). Some researchers have identified provocative targets who do, in fact, appear to instigate a bullying episode. These individuals, referred to as “bully victims” as contrasted with “passive victims” (Fleming et al., 2002), tend to be a smaller subset of victimized children. However, most targets are not provocative other than in embodying certain traits which tend to act as a “red flag” when bullies zero in on their quarry.

#### The Bully's Need for Control

Bullies tend to have impulsive, dominant personalities, and have a need to subdue or control others (Olweus, p.35). They may be defiant towards authority figures and demonstrate hostility towards their environment, and a bully may often be seen breaking rules and behaving in other anti-social ways. Bullies tend to view violence positively, and, when compared to their non-victimizing peers, score lower on measures of cooperation and pro-social conduct (Haynie et al., 2001).

#### Bullying and Gender

While girls tend to bully their peers as well, more bullies are male. Olweus found that male bullies were responsible for the victimization imposed upon more than 80% of the male targets and more than 60% of the female targets (1993). Whether this fact is attributable to biology or socialization is worth considering, but for the purposes of this study, a salient point is that it seems that more males bully than do females. Isernhagen and Harris (2002) found that when boys bullied, there was more physical violence, while girls tended to tease, exclude, and

name-call. According to Moretti and Odgers (2002), these gender differences in aggression may be attributed to fundamental differences between boys and girls in terms of social goals. That is, boys' social goals may be seen to focus on physical dominance, while girls are typically more concerned with interpersonal issues. When compared to boys, girls as young as age three display a significantly higher degree of aggressive behaviour that is relational in its scope (Crick et al. 1997). This begs the question if boys actually do bully a great deal more than do girls, as relational violence tends to be covert and clandestine, while physical aggression and bullying tend to be overt and more disturbing to witnesses. With violent crime increasing at twice the rate for female youth as compared to male youth over the last decade (Statistics Canada, 1999), it would be worthwhile to continue monitoring the incidence of bullying and aggression according to gender.

Olweus (1993) has noted that male bullies tend to be physically larger than their victims, and have greater-than-average physical strength. It is this combination of physical power and aggressive reaction patterns when faced with interpersonal challenges that render bullies so very frightening to the targets they torment.

#### The Bully and Reported Self-Esteem

Perhaps one of the most dominant perceptions surrounding the psychology of the bully is that he or she is anxious and insecure. As Olweus and others have noted, there is little evidence to support this view. In fact, some studies point to the opposite conclusion. Hoover and Jule (1993) found that bullies actually have a favourable self image, and actually tend to enjoy a moderate measure of popularity. The popularity of the bully does not begin to decline measurably until junior high (Ma et al., 2001). It is unclear whether the positive self-concept is a result of an abysmal lack of self-awareness, or is the result of the reinforcing rewards of bullying in terms of

power, status and material gains. Whatever the catalyst, bullies report that they have a relatively easy time making friends (Olweus, 1993) and they do not appear to feel more negatively about themselves than do their non-bullying peers. Using the Peirs-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Salmivalli (1998) found that adolescents who tended to victimize others reported a high social and physical self-concept. However, this positive self-concept did not extend to perceived academic achievement, for bullies do tend to demonstrate a negative view of themselves in terms of their abilities as learners. However, despite their self-assessment as being weak academically, the scholastic performance of bullies is not necessarily inferior to that of other students (Rigby & Slee, 1991). Thus, the stereotype of the bully as unintelligent is shattered.

Johnson and Lewis (1999) aimed to study the self-concepts of bullies identified by responses to a checklist which identified bullying behaviours. In this survey of 245 male and female grade 10 students, the researchers found that the adolescents exhibiting bullying behaviours had "average to good self-esteem; average to good perceived social competence, and below average perceived scholastic competence" (p. 673). These researchers report that the bullies in their sample scored highest out of all the groups in their study in terms of global self worth. In considering this work, however, one must ponder whether the bully would actually admit to low self-esteem, or if the self-esteem of the bully is actually enhanced by the very act of bullying.

#### Bullies and Nature versus Nurture; The Parents

There is a growing body of research which treats the controversial subject of the contribution of parenting and the home environment in the development of bullies. In other words, many studies suggest that bullies are clearly created by parental maltreatment, neglect, or otherwise discordant and dysfunctional home environments. The powerful and pervasive

influence of parenting on children's social skills, self-esteem, and general mental health is widely recognized. Much of the research is focused on boys.

The home environment of the bully is often quite harsh, with one or both parents over-reacting to minor misbehaviours through violent verbal or physical discipline (Roberts & Walter, p. 4). Bullies' parents may use sarcasm, put-downs and ridicule, and praise and humour may be more the exception than the rule (Greenbaum et al., 1989). These parents also may not provide sufficient supervision, and the needs of their children may be neglected. It is not surprising that children raised in such an environment may lack the skills required to solve conflicts respectfully and peacefully, for children are great imitators, and parents are powerful role models, whether positive or negative. In other words, bullying behaviour may be learned from the parents, as bullies imitate the aggressive behaviours they have witnessed at home. Ineffective, punitive parenting may well set the stage for the development of children who are socially inept and harsh in dealing with other children. In an investigation which spanned twenty-two years, it was found that aggressive children with aggressive parents grew up to display the same violent and hostile behaviours that their parents had displayed when these children were in elementary school (Lefkowitz et al., 1977).

#### The Hand that Rocks the Cradle - Mothers of Bullies

The role of the mother in raising boys who will bully was examined by Curtner-Smith (2000), who found that these mothers reported feeling easily angered and frequently depressed. These mothers shared few leisure activities with their sons and had few friendly discussions with them. The boys who had high bullying scores had mothers who reported dissatisfaction with their marriages, used inappropriate and inconsistent forms of discipline, and lacked supportive relationships with family and friends. Conversely, the mothers of boys who had low bullying

scores reported feeling angry infrequently, engaged in shared leisure activities with their sons, and enjoyed friendly conversations with them. These mothers also reported that they encouraged their sons to have friends over, while the mothers of the bullying boys did not like their sons to have friends over to visit.

Chang et al. (2002) investigated the relationship between harsh parenting and emotion regulation, and found that punitive fathers may cultivate aggression in their male children. Chang and his co-researchers noted that the effects of harsh parenting by fathers was a strong predictor of bullying and aggressive behaviour in sons, but not in daughters. Perhaps the reason for this phenomenon is that children often identify more closely with the parent or caregiver of the same gender.

Olweus (1993) discerned that the emotional attitude of the parents, especially the primary caregiver, is critical in determining the degree of risk that a child will behave with hostility towards others. A primary caregiver, typically the mother, who is cold and uninvolved, may be seen to increase the child's chances of bullying other children.

### Today's Bully; Tomorrow's Inmate? Bullying and Future Criminal Activity

While the bully seems to enjoy a certain amount of social prestige, achievement of short-term social or material goals, and an elevated sense of the self, the research demonstrates clearly that he or she will suffer in the long run. In his earlier Swedish inquiries, Olweus (1993) found that students who are bullies early in life also tend to continue to be aggressive much later. According to many investigations, the prognosis for both male and female bullies is quite discouraging. Lefkowitz et al. (1977) followed the lives of a group of children identified in grade three as aggressive bullies, and found that by the time these children had reached thirty years of age, they were much more likely than their non-aggressive fellows to have been convicted of crimes, to have abused either or both their spouse and children, and to persist in displaying anti-social, conduct-disordered behaviour. Eron and his co-researchers (1987) found that one out of every four aggressive boys who had participated in his study had a criminal record by age thirty, while among non-aggressive boys in his study, the proportion was 1 in 20. Besides being involved with the law, bullies tend to suffer from depression and other mental health problems. Male bullies abuse alcohol more than do their non-bullying peers. There is even evidence to support the hypothesis that bullies have problems with employment and will suffer economically because of their weak conflict resolution skills and abusive behaviour (Rutter & Giller, 1983.) In a Finnish study begun in 1968 that traced children at ages 8, 14, 27, and 36, a link between aggression in childhood and long-term unemployment was established (Kokko & Pullkkinen, 2000). The researchers examined “whether childhood aggression begins a cycle of mal-adaptation,” and found an indirect relationship between childhood aggression and a chain of events that included “poor school success, lack of interest in school work, punishments at school, truancy” (p. 465). All of those factors, in turn, affected long-term employability.

Socio-economic status seems to have no bearing on why some children become bullies (Olweus, p. 42). Bullies come from all socio-economic backgrounds

Whether bullying can be explained by power-based theory, where the major mechanism is control and power, social learning theory, which explains bullying as a learned social behaviour, or theory of mind, which examines the possibility that bullies cleverly employ their mind skills to manipulate and control their victims, it is clear that the predicament of the bully is bleak, surpassed only by the plight of the target or victim.

#### Bandura's Theory of Aggression - The "Bobo Doll" Experiments

An investigation into the profile of the bully is incomplete without at least a cursory treatment of the origins of human aggression according to the social learning theorists. Why do some children become violent and aggressive, habitually victimizing their peers, while other children demonstrate egalitarian behaviours? Social learning theories abound, but one of the more compelling experiments aimed at understanding the impetus for aggressive “resolutions” of problems may be viewed in the work of noted Canadian psychologist and learning theorist, Albert Bandura. While Bandura has many studies and publications to his credit, he is perhaps best known for his famous "Bobo doll" experiments, in which he studied the effects of aggressive behavior among young children. These studies, which took place in the 1960's (Bandura et al., 1961) explored how children readily exhibited aggressive behavior observed in an adult model in the presence of the model as well as in the absence of the adult model. The sex of the children involved in the experiment was also an important factor, as Bandura hypothesized whether sex would influence the responses of the children.

The subjects in Bandura's 1961 Bobo doll experiment were an equal number of boys and girls enrolled at the Stanford University Nursery School ( Bandura et.al. 1961) One experimental

group observed aggressive adult models attacking an inflatable "Bobo doll," a second observed inhibited non-aggressive models, and subjects in a control group had no prior exposure to the models. In this experiment, Bandura found that subjects who observed the non-aggressive models, especially the subdued male model, were less aggressive than their control group counterparts. In conducting many variations of this experiment, Bandura was satisfied that boys exhibited more imitative aggression than did girls, males were more inclined to imitate aggressive male models than aggressive female models, females imitated the behavior of female models, and, generally, children exposed to either actual or vicarious models tended to imitate what they saw, while children who had no exposure to models were unaffected. In conducting his Bobo doll experiments, Bandura found himself at the centre of controversy, defusing claims that he was unethical in exposing some of his participants to potentially damaging psychological conditions such as teasing and exposure to extreme aggression. However, the value of his work is irrefutable. He is lauded as a pioneer in the study of aggression and the influence of significant family relationships in modeling violence and abusive behavior.

The aggressive behaviour of bullies is, undoubtedly, cause for great concern, and there is no doubt that effective intervention is required, for sake of victims and bullies. It is evident that bullies, despite their frequent bravado, also suffer, and their pain must not be ignored.

#### The Target: Why Are Some Children Victimized?

If the plight of the bully is cause for alarm and consternation, an analysis of the literature discussing the circumstances of the victim is even more disconcerting. While the bully seems to be disadvantaged in many ways, at least he or she has some *choice* in deciding to initiate or perpetuate bullying behaviours. The target, it seems, is plunged into a scenario where there are

few choices. It is as if the target is held hostage and is, even temporarily, at the mercy of the bully. Most observant teachers can recall incidents where a child is excluded on the playground, or peers refuse to sit next to a maligned student, or a child is the butt of recurring, hurtful remarks and actions. These events are painful to observe, and one can only surmise how very hurtful they must be to experience as a target of rejection and ridicule.

It is critical to note that, for the victims of bullying, especially frequent bullying, the fear, humiliation, and sadness elicited by the events are extremely disturbing and have a deep and lasting impact. Yet, there is a tendency to ignore bullying. The reality is that class sizes are often unwieldy, teachers and administrators are often overworked, and the idea that they must be ever-vigilant about ensuring a safe learning environment is often lost in the maelstrom of struggling to meet curricular outcomes, attending meetings, planning lessons, and attending to the other implicit expectations teachers face. However, teachers must be mindful of how devastating bullying can be for children. In New Zealand, a group of boys and girls ranging in age from 11 to 13 were asked to list the worst things that had ever happened to them (Maxwell & Carroll-Lind, 1997). The most frequently identified events were having someone close to them die, being physically or emotionally bullied, watching adults fight, and experiencing the separation or divorce of their parents. In other words, being victimized can be as traumatic as any major source of trauma. Educators must never lose sight of the impact bullying can have on children.

#### The Two Classes of Victimized Children

As high as 10% of school age children can be classified as being frequently and repeatedly victimized (Olweus, 1993), and these children fall into two categories. The first class is made up of children who are passive, do not defend themselves, rarely if ever behave aggressively, and may be rejected by some of their peers. A second, smaller group of victimized children is highly

aggressive and tends to provoke attacks in others, and children who comprise this group are the most rejected of children (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). No matter to which category of victim they are assigned, there is little doubt that all rejected children suffer tremendously from loneliness and a sense of alienation. Because they tend to be socially isolated, victims of bullying may find themselves unable to seek the support they need to deal with the victimization, and a vicious circle becomes readily apparent.

#### The Target: Anxious and Insecure, or Cooperative and Peaceable

Researchers have sought clues into why some children are victimized in school, and have ascertained that there seem to be certain “markers” which distinguish victimized children from their peers. Olweus (1993) submits that the “typical” target or victim is “anxious, insecure, and cautious” (p.32). Parents of these children report that this over-cautiousness manifests at a very early age, suggesting that this hesitant temperament may be determined at birth. This child may be sensitive, quiet, and has a negative attitude towards solving conflicts through violence. Ironically, sensitivity, quietness, and a desire to reject violence are undeniably virtuous traits, and yet, children who exhibit these traits often stand to be picked on by their peers. This is possibly a reflection of the values which dominate our society, where the media inundates people with messages about the desirability of competitiveness, might, and the notion of survival of the fittest. Passivity is deplored, and individuals who lack backbone are ridiculed and dismissed. Our schools may be contributing to this attitude by focussing on being the best on the sports field and in the classroom. Students are acculturated to believe that the most worthy among them are the high academic achievers or the most skilled athletes.

Because of their passivity, deferential behaviour, and acquiescence to the demands of the bully, the victim actually rewards the bully, whether it is by their frightened or tearful

countenance, surrender of material possessions, or inadvertent bolstering of the bully's ego.

According to Atlas (1994), victimized children "reinforce their aggressive attackers by displaying signs of distress and vulnerability. It seems that "victims...are not selected arbitrarily by bullies," (Floyd, 1985, p.10) but are deliberately chosen because of their behaviour. Therefore, it becomes likely that the victim will be targeted again and again, as the bully seeks the absurd reinforcement of bringing a peer to his or her knees. Like a shark circling its prey, it is as if a bully can smell the blood of the victim.

Research suggests that slightly more boys than girls tend to be bullied, with boys experiencing more physical abuse in the early school years (Perry et al., 1988). This physical abuse declines with age, but verbal abuse appears to remain consistent throughout school. This is supported in the work of Rani and Thomas (2000), who also assert that more boys than girls are victimized. Craig et al. (1998) reports that at all ages, a higher percentage of boys compared to girls is involved in bullying, but more girls aged seven to nine reported being victimized. For both genders, victimization increases with age.

#### Physical Attributes and Victimization

One might conjecture that physically less attractive children or students with unconventional mannerisms would be more frequently picked on in school. This does not seem to be the case, for the research, admittedly limited, suggests that victims and non-victims are more alike than different. Olweus (1978) showed that physical disabilities or anomalies, obesity, skin colour, appearance, personal hygiene, posture, facial expression, and dress were all unrelated to victimization. One study indicated that victims do tend to be clumsier and have poor motor coordination (Besag, 1989). In addressing the possibility that traits such as weak physical skills or ineffectual physical presence project a vulnerability which attracts bullies, a fascinating work by

Hobin (2000) explored using Physical Education as a tool in overcoming victim behaviour.

Hobbin suggests that by shifting the focus in Physical Education from competitive, skills-based to fitness-based, non-competitive, victims may have a chance to develop confidence, strength, and self-esteem, thereby making them less susceptible to bullies. This is certainly worth considering, for it seems reasonable to infer that many victims of bullying possibly shudder upon recalling their school experiences in the gymnasium or on the sports field.

While Olweus does assert that victims are not markedly different from their peers, Davis et al. (2003) found that children who stutter were more often nominated by their peers as “bullied”, were significantly less likely to be popular and much more likely to be rejected than their non-stuttering classmates. This is surprising given the prominence of inclusive practices in education today which, presumably, result in greater integration of students with exceptionalities. It seems that inclusive practice may not extend to the schoolyard.

Another example of the effect of physical differences can be viewed in work by Voss and Mulligan (2000) who studied ninety-two physically short (below the third centile) adolescents ranging from ages 13.4 – 15.7 and found that they were victimized far more frequently than the control group of students. These short pupils were more than twice as likely to be victimized as the control group and more likely than the control group to report that they were upset by the bullying. As well, more short pupils said that the bullying started in junior high. It appears that students may become more concerned with appearances in junior high as they begin their preliminary foray into the world of dating, and this may explain this occurrence.

### Homosexuality, Perceived Homosexuality, and Victimization

Grappling with issues of sexual identity, dating and “pairing off” is fraught with awkwardness and self-doubt for many heterosexual students in an era where a hallmark of “normalcy” is being straight, so one can only surmise how anguished gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered students may be when they find themselves coming to terms with their sexuality during their school years. Many institutes and researchers are attempting to understand what the school experience is like for a gay student in a world which remains largely homophobic. Uribe and Harbeck (1992) found that many gay and lesbian students suffer greatly in school, for they are far more likely to face abuse in all of its repugnant guises. Gay-bashing is a reality in many schools, and to be even suspected of being gay imperils a student. With the literature informing educators that 10% of the population is, statistically speaking, gay, teachers and administrators have a duty to provide a supportive and safe environment for gay students, but yet many gay students find attending school emotionally excruciating and physically dangerous. One of the most common verbal putdowns in our junior and senior high schools is the epithet, “That is so gay,” or, “You are gay,” where the usage of the word “gay” is intended to be denigrating and humiliating. This underscores the hostility that gay individuals face. Thus, the gay student must be included in a discussion of why some students are victimized.

Closely related to the hostility that gay students face is the rampant homophobia that victimizes students who may not be gay but are mis-perceived to be homosexual. In examining random school shooting in American schools between 1982 and 2001, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) found that most of the shooters were boys who were mercilessly teased about their masculinity. The researchers submit that there is a clear line between “adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence” (p. 1439).

### Targets of Bullying and the Parental Relationship

In contrast with bullies, whose relationship with parents may be less than idyllic, some researchers have concluded that victims tend to have closer contact and more positive, nurturing relationships with their parent(s) (Olweus, 1993). This may, however, be interpreted as over-protectiveness, and one can only conjecture whether this perceived over-protectiveness is the cause or result of the victimization. Whether it is an antecedent or a reaction, over-protective parenting can be harmful to the child, for it is correlated with difficulties in establishing healthy autonomy, independence, and a sense of mastery over one's environment. At odds with work which suggests that victims come from warm, if not overly-attentive homes, are other studies which indicate that victims may actually come from environments where there are few positive interactions, insecure attachment, and poorly managed family hostility (Craig, Peters and Konarski, 1998). Again, there is a strong indication that deeper enquiry is required if the predictors for victimization are to be clearly understood.

### The Suffering of the Target

Regardless of just what predisposes a student to being victimized, there is a disturbing body of literature that underscores how victims suffer intensely, for long periods of time, and experience serious mental and physical health consequences. This fall-out ranges from not enjoying school, being depressed, suffering low self-esteem, experiencing anxiety, sleeplessness or irritability, engaging in substance abuse, to reporting suicidal ideation, actually committing suicide, or, more rarely, committing revenge-motivated homicide. Bond et al. (2001) submit that the effects of bullying on mental health status is clearest for girls, but there seems little doubt that the health of males and females is compromised wherever there is oppression and rejection.

Riittakerttu (2000) found that girls who were victims of frequent bullying reported a higher rate of depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms (including headaches, stomach aches, dizziness, and nervousness) than did girls who were not victimized. These targets also reported that they experienced eating disorders and abused substances other than alcohol. In the same study, the researcher found that victimized boys tended to drink alcohol to excess, possibly as a way of numbing their pain.

Rigby's (2000) work supports the finding that "students who report being bullied frequently, and have low social support appear to be at most risk of poor mental health." Greater exposure to bullying was positively correlated with a higher number of physical or psychological symptoms in students involved in an investigation by Natvig et.al. (2001), who found that secondary students who were victimized often complained of sleeplessness, aches and pains, anxiety, and general malaise, while students who reported no or little victimization seemed to enjoy better health. Natvig and his co-researchers noted that the victimized students reported feeling overwhelming sad. With younger students, there is an association between being bullied and bedwetting, feeling very sad, and having problems sleeping. In fact, victimized students may experience such intense feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and hopelessness that they may find themselves thinking about the "suicide solution." Students who feel that they are rejected by their peers report higher rates of suicidal ideation, or fantasizing about killing themselves, than do those who feel accepted by their peers (Prinstein et al., 2000).

While the targets of bullying undeniably experience great pain as they struggle in the present, the long-term effects are also notably disconcerting. In their study *Adult Recollections of Name-calling at School*, Crozier and Skiopidou (2002) found that participants who recalled being very hurt by name-calling in school rated their current feelings about the name-calling as more

negative than participants who reported being less hurt by name-calling while in school; in effect, even as adults, they reported feeling emotionally injured. Basically, these adults had not forgotten the negative experiences and continued to experience feelings that were unpleasant when they recalled the name-calling. In a follow-up study of victims, Olweus (1993) found that, as young adults, former victims were “more likely to be depressed and had poorer self-esteem...than their non-victimized peers” (p.33). Because there may also be the possibility that peer-rejected children are at a heightened risk for dropping out of school (French & Conrad, 2001), some victims of bullying may find themselves living with the economic and social disadvantages of early school leaving. It is probably safe to infer that victims of frequent bullying may eschew that rite of passage, the high-school reunion, for these individuals often carry memories of not liking school and of looking forward to the day when they leave the school, the arena for torment, behind them.

At the extreme end of the spectrum, victims of frequent bullying have exploded into the public consciousness when they have sought retribution through violent retaliation. The now-notorious Columbine massacre was orchestrated by two adolescents who, according to their peers, had been incessantly harassed, ridiculed, and tormented by the elite athletes in their school. In Tabor, Alberta, a young man reportedly acted out his rage at being an outcast by shooting and killing a student at his former school. Meloy (2001) investigated a sample of adolescent mass murderers (median age: 17) in the United States and found that, while 17% of them had a history of bullying others, 43% of the group had been frequently bullied. The point of including these highly deviant and rare examples is not to inspire fear, nor to sensationalize the phenomenon of victimization, but to point out that the consequences of bullying may potentially manifest in a wide range of consequences, ranging from mildly upsetting to appallingly abhorrent. Clearly, bullying is dehumanizing.

### Where does Bullying Thrive? The School as the Setting, and the Teachers as the Silent Witnesses

Students should feel safe at school, and yet many of them report that they feel insecure at school. It seems that bullying typically occurs in parts of the school that should be well supervised, suggesting that teachers either are oblivious to bullying incidents, don't take them seriously, are uncertain how to respond, or otherwise lack the will to act.

The playground and the classroom are the two places where bullying is most likely to take place (Borg, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Given that these are areas where the teacher is, or should be, a visible and omnipresent authority figure, this is a disturbing finding. If children are not safe under the watchful gaze of the teacher, how might isolated parts of the school imperil them? Students are also bullied on the way to and from school, as well as in the school corridor, but to a lesser degree than the playground and the classroom (Olweus, 1993).

A major consideration in combating bullying is the teacher's ability to identify the bullies and the victims. Unless a teacher is aware that specific students are picking on others, and that others are being tormented, the victimization is not going to be challenged or defused by that teacher. Leff and Kupersmidt investigated the competence of teachers in identifying peer bullies and victims, and found that teachers in the elementary school were frequently accurate in their nominations of both bullies and victims, but teachers in the middle school were less apt to identify those involved in bullying (1999). (Obviously, teachers and peers have substantially different interaction with children in school, but this does not excuse the importance of teachers accessing the skills they need to interpret interactions between children.) In the end, the reasons are not clear, but perhaps it is worth investigating whether older bullies become more skilled at clandestine bullying and are therefore more difficult to pinpoint.

It is also important that teachers are competent in assessing which scenarios are actually bullying situations and which are not. For example, teasing can be a powerful and stinging tool used to verbally harass a student, but some forms of teasing are actually deemed harmless. Shapiro et al. (1991) submits that teasing is actually “an important feature of the social life of children” (p.459), while Miller (1982) asserts that dealing with teasing can actually help children learn how to assert themselves. Teachers, therefore, must learn how to differentiate between “normal” teasing and inflammatory, damaging teasing. Hyper-vigilance can be as damaging as dereliction in supervising and guiding students. Physical interplay is also a part of children’s interaction, and yet adults tend to misdiagnose physical confrontations as bullying when they are not (Hazler & Miller, 2001). This misidentification can lead to inappropriate interventions, such as punishing children for “fighting” when they were actually, for example, scrimmaging for the rugby ball during recess. Too, many adults perceive physical bullying as being much more serious than emotional or psychological bullying, while psychological abuse can actually have longer-term negative effects.

### High –Tech Bullying

In an age where many students have access to that ubiquitous, deceptively entertaining tool known as the Internet, bullying has taken on a new and sinister medium. *The Globe and Mail*, Canada’s respected national newspaper, recently ran a story on how a 15-year-old Quebec student, Ghyslaine Raza, was so humiliated by a video posted on the Internet showing him mimicking a Star Wars character, that he dropped out of school and is now under “psychiatric care for an indefinite time”(Globe and Mail, April 22, 2003, p.A1). The video was voluntarily and privately filmed by Raza, later dubbed the “Star Wars Kid”, but it was subsequently stolen by four classmates, who then digitalized it and posted it on the Internet in April, 2003. The

classmates invited people to make derogatory remarks about the video, which has been downloaded millions of times from several websites. The parents of this victim of “cyber-bullying”, are suing the parents of the alleged perpetrators, seeking \$225,000 in damages for the harassment and derision which Ghyslain has suffered. This incident demonstrates how the weapons of oppression and victimization available to the bully may become more sophisticated, more destructive, and more potentially devastating, so that humiliation moves from “just” the playground, cafeteria, or classroom to the virtual world. Some adolescents report that their cell phones are also used to victimize, as bullies use “text messaging” to harass and intimidate. In the United Kingdom, one in four children has been bullied or threatened through their computer or cell phone (Ó hAnluain, 2002).

As the literature review is concluded, it is time to make the transition to an overview of the research design. It is through this design that three secondary students in Prince Edward Island were given the opportunity to share their experiences as individuals who have endured bullying. It is the fervent hope of the researcher that this design will prove effective in imparting the essence of these experiences so that parents and educators are compelled to acknowledge the seriousness of bullying.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine how secondary school students in Prince Edward Island experience and perceive bullying in the school, how they describe their experiences as the targets of bullying, and how they view the power they have to effect change. This chapter will outline the research design implemented for the study and the rationale that impelled the researcher to focus on specific areas of interest. As well, the selection process for both the participants and the sites will be discussed, including a brief treatment of the onerous process which marked the recruitment of participants. Data collection and analysis, the researcher's role, confidentiality, and the unanticipated role of systemic apathy and, indeed, hostility towards the focus of the research will also be addressed.

### Research Design

Qualitative research methods are liberating and expansive in that they enable the researcher to "study selected issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 1990). In seeking to illuminate student's descriptions of bullying in high school, I planned to focus on the students' descriptions of how they experience and make sense of the phenomenon of bullying in their school; in other words, I purported to focus on the question, "What is the structure and essence of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990). As a researcher in Education, I was primarily concerned with understanding the complex social phenomenon of how students perceive and experience bullying at school. While quantitative genres are valuable, my interest rests in deriving "ways of knowing" that only qualitative inquiry can explore. This is expressed succinctly and lucidly in the assertion of Dr. Blye Frank who submits that "all knowing is partial, fragmented, and fluid" (Dr. Blye Frank, personal communication, February 8, 2001). The

qualitative process allows researchers to be submerged in the reality of the world inhabited by a study's participants by delving into the beliefs, opinions, thoughts, perceptions, and memories which mark their understandings.

The research sample was secondary students in Prince Edward Island who have been significantly affected by bullying in the secondary school setting. The data collection strategy was founded on a series of three in-depth interviews which could potentially encapsulate the "deep meaning of experience in (the participant's) own words" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.61). Because the participants self-identified as having been deeply impacted by bullying, the data afforded through in-depth interviewing could provide rich, meaningful information and insight into the reality of the target of high-school bullying. In designing the Interview Protocol, I diligently set out to plan and utilize questions that were truly open-ended so as to "minimize the imposition of pre-determined responses when gathering data" (Patton, 1990, page 295).

I will concede that, in the formative stages of designing this study, supplementary methods of data collection were considered. Upon careful consideration, these methods were rejected, as they would not be as useful in fully plumbing the depths or illuminating the subtle nuances of the phenomenon of students' experiences and perceptions of bullying in the secondary school. Specifically, surveys and questionnaires may have been less onerous in terms of implementation, but they would have most likely provided only a limited and superficial treatment of the complex phenomenon of being bullied by peers. As well, Participant Observation was considered, but it was deemed unsuitable because of the potential for creating an intrusive, humiliating, artificial, and possibly even dangerous scenario for the participants. As a result of considering all available methodology, I deemed it most efficacious and promising to conduct a series of progressively

revelatory in-depth interviews so that the participants would be afforded an opportunity to share valuable insights, perceptions, beliefs, experiences, and feelings.

### Site and Population Selection

Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, has a school system which is comprised of three distinct school zones, divided geographically into the Eastern School District and the Western School Board, and linguistically into the French School District. Combined, the three districts serve approximately 24,000 students. These three districts include 12 secondary schools, with 6 in the Eastern District, 4 in the Western, and 2 in the French. The provincial government administers the school system through a centralized Department of Education.

Because of the emotionally intense, highly sensitive nature of the subject of the proposed study, I determined that it would be humane and advantageous to recruit participants from secondary schools in which the researcher had established a trusting rapport with the student population, the staff, and the administration. Originally, it was determined that five participants from grades 10, 11, or 12 from a single secondary school could provide the rich data which might furnish the valuable understandings sought by the study. However, despite diligent, conscientious efforts to recruit five participants, I was compelled to expand the recruiting efforts to a second high school, with the result that two participants from one school and a third participant from a second school volunteered to take part in the study.

I was pointedly aware of the ethical considerations posed by this proposed study, and was prepared to meet with reservations on the part of the school board I selected when access to

students under its stewardship was requested. Access to the schools involved a two-step process, with the first step involving meeting with the Director of Instruction/ Program Services for the school board, delivering a verbal description of the proposed study, and providing the Director with a written request for access. This letter (Appendix B) provided a brief but lucid description of the nature of the proposed study, the projected procedures for data collection, the site in which participants would be recruited, and the educational significance of the research. As well, a copy of the requisite Letters of Consent and Information (Appendix C) were provided for the Director's perusal and consideration.

This step was conducted with a clear understanding of the importance of observing proper protocol, professional courtesy, and a poignant recognition of the potential reservations which the school board might ascribe to the proposed study. Indeed, throughout the planning and execution of the study, I was constantly aware of the necessity of dealing with the study's subject matter in a spirit of deep respect and prudence. After the request for access to the school was given approval, it was then necessary to contact the administrator of the originally selected high school. This was also undertaken through the form of a letter supplemented by copies of the Letters of Consent and Information. These documents were hand-delivered to the principal of the school, who met with me and asked a number of salient questions before granting permission to recruit participants and conduct interviews on school property. It is relevant to note that this administrator was encouraging, interested, and supportive of the proposed study. (As was explained previously, it became necessary at a later date to recruit participants from a second high school, and so the administrator of this school was also met, provided with an explanation and overview of the

proposed study, given a written description of the research, and provided with the Letters of Consent and Information. This administrator was also supportive.)

The next step in the process of recruiting participants was the posting of written advertisements outlining the scope of the proposed study and inviting students who have been significantly affected by bullying in high school to share their stories. These posters were posted throughout the school in January 2002. By March 2002, only one student had come forward to express interest in participating. With the permission of the administrator, the researcher opted to visit each classroom in the school to explain the study and to invite students to participate. The administrator was unwaveringly encouraging and offered assistance if needed. These classroom visits were conducted on March 4, 2002. Despite having been given advanced warning of these classroom visits through a letter from the principal, two teachers were unwilling to admit the researcher into their classroom, and were quite terse in informing the researcher that they were of the opinion that such a study was neither useful nor significant. This attitude was unexpected, and in light of the subject of the research, the adversarial stance adopted by these teachers assumes a very ironic dimension. Three other teachers admitted the researcher somewhat reluctantly. Indeed, one teacher commented that, "We don't have a problem with bullying in Prince Edward Island." Coy (2001) notes that "many teachers see bullying as a normal, natural part of growing up and are therefore indifferent when they see it occur." Birkinshaw and Eslea (1998) found that "teachers must be made more aware of the consequences of bullying" if they are to be effective in recognizing its effects.

The remainder of the staff was cordial, helpful, and enthusiastic when they admitted me into their classrooms to address the students. Each student was given a small card or leaflet with

the title of the proposed study, assurances of confidentiality within the law, and contact information. This campaign resulted in the recruitment of one more participant. This process was repeated at the second high school, and the result was that one student contacted the researcher to volunteer taking part. This resulted in the commitment of three participants from two high schools. It is relevant to note at this point that I have not discovered any research where individuals who have been bullied have agreed to in-depth interviews, so I was extremely grateful to have access to three willing participants. As well, I was prepared to meet with obstacles and challenges in the recruiting process because of the intense, highly personal and possibly disturbing nature of the subject matter.

### The Researcher's Role

I was the sole researcher in conducting this study, and therefore was responsible for every component of the study. It was with the utmost respect for the experiences of the participants and a deep reverence for the willingness of the participants to share their experiences and perceptions as targets of significant bullying that the in-depth interviews were approached. The Interview Protocol was specifically designed to attempt to foster trust and comfort as well as to protect the well-being of the participants while, at the same time, gleaning data that was rich and meaningful. By explicitly stating a concern with "building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms of reciprocity, and sensitively considering ethical issues" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.85), I made it clear to the participants that their well-being was of paramount importance. It was made clear that I would respect the right of the participant to refuse to answer any questions, that he or she could withdraw from the study without prejudice, that all reasonable steps would be taken to protect the privacy and security of the participants, and that psychological counselling and support would be available to any participants who were distressed by their participation in the study.

Indeed, I was quite disturbed by the poignancy of the participant's stories, and in field notes articulated my concern with being the catalyst for the recalling of troubling and hurtful memories. This empathy actually served to facilitate the interview process, as the frank admission of concern on my part seemed to render the participants more at ease in the interview scenario.

My role as researcher was further defined by a sincere professional and personal interest in the problem of bullying in the school because of my role as a "front-line" stakeholder as a teacher. I have always held, and have tried to demonstrate, a deep interest in such issues as peer rejection, pro-social interaction, and justice in the school and throughout society. This interest is that of a parent as well as an educator. Therefore, I had to be careful to temper this pervasive, at times utterly all-consuming interest in the issue of bullying with an awareness of the importance of being able to collect data in a professional, productive and as efficient as possible manner. This was achieved by adhering to a carefully compiled Interview Protocol (Appendix G). This protected the researcher from the potential risk of being "emotionally side-swiped" by a particularly moving or disturbing response from the participant. This also helped ensure the cultivation of an interview culture which would allow the participants to fully express their thoughts and perceptions in a calm and structured environment.

I was conscientious in designing a study which was explicit in its intent and purpose, and was adamant in fully revealing the purpose of the study to the participants. The participants entered into the study with the benefit of complete and full disclosure, and I was able to answer any questions or address any concerns posed by the participants in taking part in the study.

Finally, I was diligent in avoiding the pitfalls of "parachuting" into the lives of the participants without regard for the emotional and psychological implications of participating in a study on how those participants have been affected by bullying. This was something to which I devoted a great deal of thought. Thus, my final role as researcher was in functioning as a resource person who was capable of directing participants to Mental Health/Counselling practitioners who would be able to assist in the event of emotional upset or dismay as a result of taking part in the research.

### Ethical Considerations

I firmly believe that all researchers are entrusted with a sacred duty when a participant agrees to share his or her understandings and perceptions. Thus, the researcher has a responsibility to protect the security and dignity of the participants. In adherence to the principles of the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island, I took steps to ensure the ethical and dignified treatment of the participants.

Before the data collection began, each participant was informed verbally and in writing of the purpose of the study. Each participant was then provided with a clearly-worded Letter of Consent which pointed out the purpose of the study, that each participant could withdraw from the study at any point, that he or she had the right to refuse to answer any questions, that all data would be held in strict confidence, and that confidentiality within the law was assured. There was a separate Letter of Consent for Parents, in accordance with the requirements of the school board, but this Letter was carefully worded so that the parents or guardians were not expressly told that their child was a target of bullying, for it was decided that some students would not want their parents to be informed. It may be relevant to note that, when the study was being designed, it was

felt that perhaps parents and guardians should not be informed or given the opportunity to furnish their consent because of the nature of the subject matter. However, the school board would not permit access to the students without parental consent.

I was able to secure confidentiality by setting up interviews in a private and secure room at the schools about which only the school's Guidance Counsellors were informed. The participants and I agreed to meet only in that secure meeting room and did not traverse the hallways or classrooms of the schools together. The interviews took place well after the end of the school day, so that there was less of a chance that the researcher and the participant would be seen together. It was essential that these participants be protected in this way, as there was a remote possibility that he or she could be in physical jeopardy if bullying peers learned of the participation in a study on bullying. As well, following the transcription of the interviews, I provided the participants with transcripts and requested that the transcripts be carefully read and, if appropriate, approved for accuracy as well as comfort. The names of the participants do not appear in the study, nor are the schools identified. The participants are referred to as Mary, John, and Susan, very common names in this part of Canada. All of these steps are essential in guarding the privacy, integrity and security of the valued participants.

Finally, it was deemed critical that all participants were fully informed that there was counselling and assistance available to them if they were upset because of their participation in the study. This was stressed upon each meeting.

### Data Collection

While qualitative researchers have several methods available through which data might be gathered, I elected to gather information through a series of three in-depth interviews with each of the three participants who had indicated that they had been significantly affected by bullying in their careers as students. This data was collected using an interview protocol based on a paradigm offered by Patton. According to Patton, there are basically six types of questions which can be asked by the qualitative interviewer. They are:

- Experience/behaviour questions
- Opinion/values questions
- Feeling questions
- Sensory questions
- Background/demographic questions
- Knowledge questions

(Patton, 1990, p. 292)

These questions may be asked about the past, present and future, and while there are no fixed rules about sequencing, Patton submits that it makes sense to begin with non-controversial questions and then proceed to questions that will elicit opinions and feelings. These interviews provided an excellent forum in which the participants of the study could impart the meanings they assign to their experiences with, and perceptions of, bullying. The Interview Protocol was designed to utilize questions which would "minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data" (Patton, 1990, page 295). The Protocol was written and revised with attention to the importance not only of the content of a question, but to the sequencing of questions as well. The questions used in the research were posed in a series of three interviews. The first interview posed questions designed to inspire trust and comfort while still affording

valuable data. The second interview posed questions of greater depth and intensity, and the third interview concluded the data collection process.

The interviews were designed to explore how the participants have experienced being the targets of bullying in a high school setting, how they perceived those experiences, and to what degree, if any, they felt empowered to effect change in the bullying scenario. Questions were carefully composed to elicit rich data and to enable each participant to articulate their experiences and perceptions. While each participant was asked the same questions, they were each afforded the opportunity to respond to each question in a deeply personal and meaningful way.

Indeed, the Interview Protocol was carefully and thoughtfully compiled in order to elicit meaningful data founded on the unique insights and experiences of each participant.

The data was collected in the school setting, where it was critical to be unobtrusive and discrete. Interviews were audio-taped in a private setting after each participant was given the option of not being taped, but of having notes taken manually. Each participant expressed agreement to be taped, and all audiotapes were carefully secured in the researcher's home office. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and the resultant transcripts were coded and securely stored. Four copies of the data were created and secured to ensure safe data management.

The value of conducting interviews that are *truly* in-depth cannot be overstated. Data gathered through in-depth interviewing may be incredibly rich and illuminating. Clearly, such interviews allow the researcher to come to a clear understanding of how the interviewees assign meaning to their world. In order to implement interviews that were in-depth, I realized the importance of taking time to establish a trusting rapport with each of my participants. Certainly, the subject matter of the interviews I conducted could not be handled effectively without mutual

respect and trust, and I was careful to try to impart a sense of the genuine empathy with which I approached the topic of bullying. In interviewing my participants three times, with each subsequent interview going into greater depth than its predecessor, I was afforded a privileged glimpse into the incredible world of the child who has been bullied. Had the interviews not unfolded into in-depth conversations, I would possibly have accessed a view of the participants' experiences that was, at best, superficial. Thus, the impact of taking time to empathize, develop a strong rapport, and of meeting with the participants several times cannot be overestimated.

### Data Analysis

The analysis of data brings the researcher on a journey of discovery that is at once revealing and enigmatic, for it is marked by both predictability and epiphany. It is the part of the research process where the researcher hopes that apparent disorder will evolve into structure, and ambiguity can be supplanted by clarity and purpose. During this stage, the truth as perceived and presented by the participants emerges and is set forth in an organized and accessible manner. Marshall and Rossman (1999) characterize this stage as one that is "messy,... time-consuming, creative and fascinating..." (p.150), for it is a foray into an uncharted territory.

The interviews were transcribed within twenty-four hours of their completion. The valuable data gathered in the interviews was then organized and compiled into a form that was easily accessible to the researcher. The verbatim responses were appended by editorial notes which identified potentially relevant affective cues such as vocal sighs, hesitation and pauses, perceived vocal timbres such as sadness or anger, raising or lowering of the voice, and other pertinent affect or body language.

In analyzing the data, I proceeded inductively, watching patterns and meanings emerge by reading and re-reading the data, reflecting upon it, and reading it yet again in the pursuit of salient motifs. The data was considered line-by-line and was analysed according to the six steps of data analysis articulated by Marshall and Rossman (1999): “*organizing the data, generating categories, themes, and patterns, coding the data, testing the emergent understandings, searching for alternative explanations, and writing the report*” (p. 152). These processes called for strong interpretative skills as well as a willingness to challenge patterns that seemed apparent. The researcher had to be always cognizant of being open-minded and flexible so that possible alternative meanings to those that might have been identified could also be considered.

### Data Management

As MacMillan and Schumacher astutely declare with more than a touch of understatement, in Research in Education (1997), “qualitative studies are known for having ‘mounds’ of data” (page 526). Perhaps a more fitting descriptor would be “voluminous”. Without a systematic and organized data management approach, the researcher may be in jeopardy of being overwhelmed by the undeniably precious but potentially capacious data.

There are basically three approaches to qualitative data management: manual techniques, general software programs such as *The Ethograph*, *Nu-Dist*, *Wordstat*, and *ATLAS/ti*, and general software programs that can be adapted to suit the needs of the qualitative researcher.

I elected to use a combination of manual strategies which included colour-coded index cards, a “theme” gallery where evolving motifs were organized on a large bulletin board (installed in a locked, private home office) for ease of manual organization and manipulation, and general computer software programs such as Microsoft Word. With these simple tools, the researcher was able to organize, label, and store the data so that it was at once easily accessible and secure.

In addition to the data gathered in the interviews, I organized the collection of articles and books which were accessed as sources of information and were used in the compilation of the literature review. These articles and books were organized according to topic, such as “victim”, “bully”, “school and teacher”, “parents”, “media and violence”, “strategies and interventions”, and so on. These works were carefully read, notes were synthesized and organized in computer files, and the articles were filed for further reference if required.

Supplementary documents such as the Consent Forms, Interview Protocol, Research Board Ethics Approval, Participant Recruitment materials such as a poster, researcher contact information card, and communiqués to principals and teachers were gathered and stored in both hard and soft copies.

All of the above noted material *except* for the interview tapes, which were destroyed in June, 2003, in accordance with the agreement, will be securely stored as part of the researcher’s personal archive. As the researcher is deeply interested in and committed to further exploration of the topic of bullying and students, future research on the topic is anticipated, and therefore the information and data gathered for this study shall be stored for as long as it is deemed useful and relevant. Even as newer information emerges, the information used in this study may be important in establishing context and elucidating theory.

### The Timeline

I quickly learned the efficacy of heeding Patton’s gentle admonition that qualitative research design must be flexible. This necessity for a rather fluid approach to the research design overflowed to include adaptability in altering the original timeline to accommodate the realities of actual fieldwork. For example, the researcher had originally anticipated that the recruitment of

participants would take approximately 6 weeks. Instead, this process lasted for over five months, as the researcher learned the difficulties inherent in finding students who were willing to discuss such a profoundly sensitive topic with a veritable stranger.

Ethical Approval of the Research Proposal was granted by the Research Ethics Board, U.P.E.I., in mid-December, 2002. The school board was contacted shortly thereafter. The initial contact with the student population was made through a poster campaign in early January 2002. This was followed up by a letter to selected school principals seeking their assistance on February 16, 2002, followed by a second appeal on April 3, 2002. All interviews were concluded on May 24, 2002. The final debriefing session with a participant took place on May 25, 2002.

While transcription of the data gathered through the interviews took place at the end of each interviewing day, the analysis began in earnest in September 2002. The writing process began in January 2003 with the development of an outline. Throughout the winter and into the summer of 2003, the researcher has been immersed in an ongoing process of “incubation”, analysis, writing, revising, and continual reflection. Truly, the development of a thesis is a journey that is at once exhilarating and liberating but also ponderous and enervating, as are most valuable pursuits. It is this journey that, ideally, leads to an “elegant...interpretation” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152) of the “ways of knowing” shared by the participants.

## Chapter 4 – Findings

### Introduction

The impetus for the research and the data collection which “gave birth” to this thesis was an interest in discerning how significantly bullied secondary school students in Prince Edward Island have experienced this phenomenon, how they describe their experiences, and how they perceive the power, if any, they have to effect change. Interest in this topic is an abiding one for the researcher. The guiding principle behind this investigation is the hope that the insight provided in this work will add to the growing body of literature on the topic of bullying so that students in Prince Edward Island and, indeed, children and youth everywhere, might benefit. In this section, the data collected from three in-depth interviews conducted with each of the three participants is presented. This thorough analysis of responses to more than forty carefully wrought questions affords invaluable insight into the thoughts and understandings of three students who have lived through bullying in the school system of Prince Edward Island. The perceptions, thoughts, observations, and insights of these students are presented according to the themes, motifs, and patterns which merged in the data analysis process.

Before proceeding to the findings, it is important to differentiate the three participants by assigning a pseudonym for each of them. Participant “Mary” was a Grade Ten, female student at the time of the data collection, participant “John” was a Grade Twelve, male student, and participant “Susan” was a Grade Eleven, female student. These names have been selected to protect the identities of the participants and are in no way similar to their actual names. “Mary” responded to a classroom visit made by the researcher in recruiting participants, “John” responded to a poster and requested that his school’s Guidance Counselor contact the researcher, and “Susan” called the researcher’s home after having read an information poster posted in class.

In attempting to analyze and present the data, the researcher was poignantly aware of Marshall and Rossman’s (1999) rejoinder that, as an analyst and reporter, “writing your truth is an

assertion of power and can violate earlier assertions about working ethically and sensitively with participants “ (p.159). In other words, care was taken to distinguish between the researcher’s interpretations and the data’s unmodified revelations.

“Description and quotation are the essential ingredients of qualitative inquiry” (Patton,1999, p. 430). Specifically, qualitative analysis “presents thick description” (p.430) which is rich with details, feelings, relationship, and voice. Because “the skilled analyst is able to get out of the way of the data to let the data tell its own story” (p. 393), I was diligent in providing both sufficient description and salient *verbatim* quotations.

Instead of presenting the findings of the research in the form of question-and-answer, I decided to create “portraits” of each of participant by synthesizing the responses to the questions into three distinct narratives. ( The actual questions used in the interviews may be viewed in Appendix G.) This resulted in a more fluent and, hopefully, lucid representation of the individuals who are at the heart of this thesis. While the narratives are separate, they are woven with common threads. The narratives address the issues in the following order:

1. General statement about the participant to establish context.
2. Elementary school experiences with bullying.
3. Junior High school experiences with bullying.
4. Secondary school bullying experiences, including types and frequency.
5. Effects of the bullying on the participant’s health and grades.
6. Coping strategies.
7. Identifying the most common locations of the bullying.
8. Discussion on the profile of a bully.
9. An attempt to understand; "Why am I picked on?"
10. Facing the bully versus fleeing.
11. The role of administrators and teachers.
12. Final thoughts

Each of the three narratives was organized to deal with the data in the order outlined above.

### Yesterday and Today; Past and Present Experiences with Bullying

*Why Me?*

*Who am I?*

*I don't know; can you tell me?*

*I used to know, but now I am not sure.*

*I used to know what I stand for, but now I couldn't tell you!*

*I used to know what to do*

*And how to act*

*But now I am confused*

*I used to know how to help other people*

*But now I don't even know how to help myself*

*I used to be confident, but now I am not.*

*...But I know why...*

*It is because of you people...*

*You can't find what you are looking for,*

*So you choose to bring me down with you.*

*Can I ask you something?*

*Why me?*

*Why do you choose to hurt me everyday?*

*I didn't think that you would have an answer.*

Written by "Mary", Research Participant, 2002

### Towards Establishing a Context: Describing Bullying

In gathering and presenting qualitative data, the importance of clarity cannot be over emphasized. One way of ensuring clarity is by avoiding the use of imposed labels and of taking care to use words that reflect the respondent's worldview (Patton, 1990) instead of that of the researcher. "Without sensitivity to the impact of particular words on the person being interviewed, an answer may make no sense at all" (p.312.) Thus, one of the first significant questions asked in gathering the data for this glimpse into the world of students who have been victimized in school by their peers clearly had to be, "What does the word 'bullying' mean to you?" In recruiting participants, materials posted in the school provided a broad definition of

bullying in order to establish a framework for the prospective participants. However, in the earliest stages of the interview process, the participants were invited to share their understanding of what “bullying” means, and this formed the foundation for the dialogue which followed. The word “bullying” is undoubtedly a well-used term in today’s vernacular, but it was critical to avoid imposing a definition on the participants so that they were able to establish their own truth.

Mary explained that, to her, bullying is “basically getting picked on for no reason...just because they want to make themselves feel better, or just because they don’t think you’re good enough.” She ascribes most bullying to jealousy on the part of the aggressor. John asserted that bullying manifests in different arenas, for “the government can be a bully in a way; rich people can be a bully in a way; anybody with power over somebody else, and abuses it...that’s a bully.” He stated that most bullying happens to people who “stand out in some way.” Susan acknowledged the complexity of bullying by stating that “bullying can be many things; it can be words... it can be ignoring somebody, it can be refusing to admit to yourself that that’s a person, too.” She attributed bullying to people’s unwillingness or inability to accept differences in others, saying that bullying typically happens to “somebody who decides that they don’t wanna be like everybody else, because they wanna show that they are themselves.”

These definitions reflect the perspective of each speaker, but they share a commonality in explaining bullying as a reality that is founded upon the dehumanization of others through an imbalance of power and the resultant abuses of people’s rights.

Mary's Narrative – *I think there will always be bullying*

Mary's Past

Mary was a fifteen-year-old student mid-way through the second semester of grade ten when she agreed to participate in this research. She spoke softly and carefully throughout each the interviews, her sentences punctuated by gentle laughter.

Mary began by explaining that she was interested in taking part in the research because she was being harassed almost daily by a group of girls from her school. She said that she found it helpful to talk about her experiences and she wanted to help people understand how it felt to be bullied.

(Getting rid of bullying) is one of my biggest wishes, and if I could do something, I would. (Mary)

Her victimization had started in elementary school, which she described as “not a very good experience” and “kinda rough”. She explained that she didn’t have many happy memories of her elementary school days. She had moved several times during this part of her life and was always the “new kid”, and she explained that she often felt lonely and left out. Her family configuration changed during her grade two year, and she recalled feeling that she was faced with an enormous adjustment in accepting the marriage of her mother to her step-father.

(In elementary school) I was more quiet and I just kept to myself but whenever I wasn’t by myself, I was more...mean and stuff ...just out of...I was an angry type person, so everyone started teasing me, I don’t know...it hurt me some but it didn’t affect me too much because I just kept to myself anyway.

By contrast, junior high school was “great” for Mary, for she was very popular, was a part of the “right” groups and felt secure in school. In explaining what she meant by “the right

groups”, Mary explained that in junior high, kids are not concerned about material things as much as they are with just “hanging out and having fun,” so all of the different groups are “cool.”

Well, in junior high there’s kind of bigger groups, there’s probably only about, like, four or five groups, and the biggest group is the popular group.

The researcher’s interpretation of Mary’s description that the biggest group in junior high was the “popular group” is that this social structure possibly allowed more students to fit in, as opposed to smaller, “elite” cliques which excluded large numbers of students. Mary held that few people were left out in junior high because people tended to socialize in large groups.

#### Mary’s Present – Living with Bullying

The transition from one school to another can be difficult, but Mary had very positive expectations for her high school experiences. She knew that her circle of friends would probably change but she was amenable to making new friends. She had been content in junior high and had no reason to assume that her world would change drastically when she entered the hallowed halls of her new high school. Interestingly, Mary said that high school had *many* cliques which included the following:

There’s like, the “Dirts”. I guess they don’t have the right clothes. Well, they probably have stuff like Fubu ( a popular brand name) and stuff like that but they’ll wear them a lot. (There are) the Potheads, and then there’s the “Preps”...and then there is one that is like...the Bitches ...They just think that they are on top. ...A lot of hockey players hang out together. ...A lot of rich people that live around the school or whatever...tend to hang out together.

It was quite a shock to Mary when she found herself the target of two girls who bullied her relentlessly during her first year of high school. She said she had not expected high school to be that way, and had been anticipating being a high school student with great excitement.

It’s (high school) supposed to be like...you just do your own thing, just leave everybody alone; that’s what I think, anyway. It’s supposed to be a safe place, a safe environment, where you’re free to do whatever you want as long as it’s not causing anybody harm.

She explained that she had observed a change in her former peer group in that these students, who had been popular in junior high, resorted to teasing and name-calling now that they were in high school. Therefore, she moved away from this group, citing a rejection of the groups' apparent altered values system. Her understanding was that her decision to break away from her former group made her vulnerable to verbal abuse, as her former friends soon targeted her by denigrating her appearance in front of other students. For her, the bullying is a daily event:

I experienced bullying at lunchtime today. They just...there were a couple of girls that don't get along with me because I hang out with the guys that they hang out with, and that used to be kind of their turf and they don't like the fact that I hang out with them...and ...sometimes when I walk by they'll say stuff. I just laugh at them. Like today, they called me "Javex" because I dye my hair, not that nobody else does or anything...but they'll say, "Oh, I think it's time to dye your hair" and all this stuff, even though they're (dyed) blondes. I just kind of laugh. But you get kind of intimidated, and if you are by yourself,...I get scared, because they usually have both of them. ... If I run into them when I am by myself it makes me scared, and it hurts me when they say it....I just stand there; I don't even walk away now, I stand there because they will just yell it down the hall, and I don't want anyone else to hear the things that they are saying. ... They will call me a whore and a slut, and I have no reason to be called that at all.

Mary explained that she had skipped individual classes and sometimes the entire school day because she was afraid of the bullies. She would sometimes seek refuge in the washroom in order to hide from the girls. She noted that her grades had gone down "a lot" since she began attending secondary school. She sometimes had to forego opportunities to socialize with her friends because of her fear of the bullies.

Yeah, there was actually a big party at one of my good friend's houses, and I don't mind too much missing a good party but I kinda wanted to go to this one just for the fact that it was my friend, and I knew a lot of people who were going, but I knew that the people that pick on me would be goin' too, so I decided not to go, because I knew that they'd be on drugs, and if I even like, tried to defend myself, if they ever did

anything and I kicked them or something, it wouldn't affect them at all, so I just decided not to go.

Mary said that not only did she adapt her socializing plans to deal with the victimization, but she felt her mental and physical health were being undermined. She listed a number of psychosomatic symptoms which plagued her, and she demonstrated an awareness that her psychological well-being was possibly being affected. She said that she had struggled with *anorexia nervosa*, but she wasn't sure what the trigger was for her eating disorder. Mary had also felt depressed often since entering high school.

I've gotten sick lots of times, had headaches, ...an upset stomach ... sometimes I'll cry all night instead of sleeping. I've not eaten for a couple of days before, just because I didn't want to. ... I had a very, very high self-esteem, and I still do have a pretty good self esteem, but it does go down when people are yelling stuff at you and calling you a slut for absolutely no reason, and it just starts to affect you.

Mary acknowledged that the verbal or relational bullying she experienced was, in her perspective, exerting a damaging impact on her self-concept.

Even if people tell me I look good or something, I always think negatively about myself because of how many times I've been put down and stuff, and like, even if people are always giving me compliments, I still look at the negative side. I can see the positive side for everybody else, but for myself I always think negatively.

While many individuals prefer to place a low value on the importance of physical attractiveness, it is undeniable that many people in our society who are deemed "good looking" may enjoy privileges and attention because of their looks. While this may seem shallow, today's culture bears many of the hallmarks of one that is beauty-obsessed. Attractive people are viewed more positively in several aspects than are unattractive or average-looking people. For example, attractive people are deemed to be more pleasant and competent (Kennedy, 1990), and physical attractiveness, independent of behaviour, is associated with peer acceptance in both young and

older children (Hanna, 1998). It is in this cultural context that it becomes relevant to note that Mary is a physically attractive girl who embodies many of the traits we have been “trained” to perceive as attractive through the mechanisms of anthropology, sociology, biology, or simply through popular culture and the media. Despite her pleasing physical appearance, she does not hesitate to say that she struggles with her concept of herself. Whether this is the result of the bullying or if she is like so many other adolescent girls who suffer from a distorted body image, one can only surmise. Undoubtedly, if she is predisposed to feeling negatively about herself, the bullying will exacerbate things.

The notion that there were unsafe places in her school seemed to be accepted by Mary as one of the harsh facts of high school life. She matter-of-factly explained that while she did feel safe in the classroom when the teacher was present, she avoided both the school cafeteria and the library.

I don't usually go to the cafeteria because all the people that usually pick on everybody sit at the top of the stage and they just kinda yell things at everybody.

As for the library, she said that the librarian did not make her feel welcome, and she was not comfortable in that part of the school. Another area of vulnerability was the hallway, because she was usually by herself as she walked through the various hallways of the school between classes. She said that the school definitely did not feel like her “turf”, and she did not take pride in being a student at this school because there was no sense that she was cared for by the adults at the school, whom she described as being oblivious or even apathetic to the suffering of bullied students.

...there's so many things that go on like, that they have no clue about, and ...I find they try and hide it up, they hide it and stuff. They found

out about bullying with me twice! And they still tell people that there's no bullying, and that's two cases with me alone, and I know there's been many with other people, but yet they still try to tell people that there's no bullying.

Mary believed that the administration was guilty of this cover-up, and she expressed her exasperation that her reality as a target was so cavalierly dismissed. She felt that there was a lack of knowledge about how to help bullied students.

If you say, "Oh, that person is bothering me", they'll just say, "Oh, just ignore it" or stuff like that. But it's pretty hard to just ignore it.

This brings us to the challenging topic of just which adults both in and out of the school are perceived to care enough to assist students like Mary when they face victimization. Mary said that she "wouldn't want to be a rat" because there are undesirable repercussions to reporting bullying, such as being teased by people who don't even understand the situation. She was confident that she could confide in her parents but she would not want them to initiate a scenario where the bullies were confronted. She also believed that some of her subject teachers would be approachable if she wanted to discuss her concerns, but she was emphatic that she would never confide in the Guidance Counselors.

If I maybe let it slip or something it's probably their responsibility to go to the office and report it, whereas these teachers I consider kind of friends and I think they would not tell unless I gave my permission, unless they thought I was at risk to do something to myself or somebody else.

Generally she expressed more faith in the tendency of female teachers and administrators to take bullying seriously, and Mary noted that there were some teachers, mostly female, who had reputations for caring about whether students treat each other with respect. In an earlier section of this document it was noted that some teachers in the Prince Edward Island secondary school system expressed disdain for the usefulness of the proposed study, and some students not

involved in the study reported hearing this.. It is troubling to acknowledge that this mind-set exists. Teachers are powerful role models, and if a person in such a position of influence is, albeit tacitly, persuading students that it is trivial to confront the effects of bullying, it is not difficult to imagine the implications that has for disclosure, counseling, and assistance. Interestingly, Mary is able to identify teachers who are, in her opinion, enlightened and empathetic, a fact which will hopefully mitigate the damaging influence of teachers who might suggest that concern for bullying is but trifling.

In responding to questions about just why bullies victimize other, and why some students find themselves in the regrettable role of target, Mary's answers reflect the findings in the literature. She asserts that dominating others makes the bullies "feel better about themselves somehow." She states that she suspects bullies don't feel guilty – "They probably don't give it a second thought" – and she realizes that her peers have difficulty speaking up to the bullies out of fear of being the next target. "People won't stand up to them because they don't want to get on their bad side." She acknowledges that, as much as she is angered by this, the bullies are, in a rather incongruous way, powerful. And she declares that bullies are, unfortunately, ubiquitous: "I'd say there's a bully in every single group I've encountered." She felt that many of the bullies in her school were from a higher socio-economic stratum, the "rich kids" who felt "like they were on top."

In her role as a target, she is adamant that she won't confront the bullies because she is convinced it would be counterproductive. She says that challenging the bullies would cause more problems for her.

I think it would cause more problems, because if I did it in a nice way ...and asked, "Why'd you pick on me?" they might be like, "What a loser", but if I called them, like, a whore, then ... they'd get all their

friends after me, so I find it better just to be quiet. And if you get them in trouble, then everybody else would be mad at you. I always want to say something back, but I never do because , for one, I don't wanna hurt anybody's feelings, and, two, because I don't wanna get into big arguments when everyone ends up crowding around.

When I am being bullied, I just stand there; I don't even walk away now, I stand there.

I'll come home and cry, but I'll never say anything back to the people.

This attitude is backed up by the literature as being typical of targets. By displaying submissive behaviour, the target continues to be bullied. Also, victims tend to hold a negative view about handling disputes through aggression, and Mary is unwilling to engage in even an argument, as she feels it would be pointless to do so. Mary explains that she feels powerless to stop the bullying, and asserts that she feels she simply has to cope as best she can until she graduates and is free.

You can't tell about bullying. You can't. ...I'd never give their names; I wouldn't do it. There is no way for the teachers and administrators to find out unless they see it for themselves.

Even after she had been psychically assaulted by one of the bullies who continued to torment her, she is adamant that she would rather remain in the shadows and simply tolerate the abuse.

She used to always push me into...other people's lockers and one time at a dance I was bent down helping one of my friends with her dress, and the bully had army boots on, and she kicked my butt as hard as she could, and I got a big bruise, really bad. And the cops ended up getting involved with the bully because she threatened to kill one of my friends, and a teacher heard it. ...But I didn't, like, wanna go to court because I didn't want anybody else to know, because that would be embarrassing to me.

The literature suggests that victims of bullying are often low academic achievers, not because they are less intelligent, but possibly because they are so worried about being picked on that it interferes with concentration and participation in class. Mary spoke of how her grades had been affected.

They went down a lot. My grades dropped a lot this year. I was pulling high honours all through junior high. I am still passing but I have no marks in the 80's; they are all in the 60's and 70's, so they dropped a lot.

Many students who have been bullied report a desire for revenge, and Mary seemed to be conflicted by her hopes for retribution. On the one hand, she reported that she actually felt some empathy for the girls who bullied her, but on the other she was filled with negative feelings about them.

I do feel bad for them ...(drugs) have messed up their heads. I think they're both really pretty and stuff. Like, I want revenge, but if anything were to happen to them, I'd feel bad. I want revenge on them; it doesn't sound good – it makes me sound like a psycho...but...I hate them.

Mary had some very definite feelings about how the teachers and administrators in her school are less than effective in helping the student population deal with bullying. She said that most of them ignore bullying and the few that do address it do so ineffectively. When asked if she was aware of any formal policies or programs that the school had adopted to combat bullying, she said that was unaware of any, for it was never mentioned in the school. The school board which oversees the operation of her school actually does have a lengthy and detailed policy aimed at dealing with bullying. This policy is directed at combating violence in the schools, and contains

clear procedures in addressing abusive behaviour in both students and staff. Mary was unaware that such a document existed.

The collection of the data for this thesis coincided with intense media attention to a number of national and local bullying cases. For example, on March 25, 2002, the day preceding the second interview with Mary, CBC Prince Edward Island aired an interview with the family of a girl from Englewood School in the small community of Crapaud, PE. The family spoke of how the girl had been systematically and incessantly victimized for eight years. On the national stage, the media was flooding the public with reports of school-aged children who were affected by extortion, death threats, suicide, and even murder. The coverage was so intense that it was practically impossible to miss. It would have seemed fitting if not natural for teachers to raise the issues so vociferously highlighted in newspaper, on television and radio, and on the Internet. The media was creating the circumstances that were more than conducive to that “teachable moment” so cherished by educators. Mary spoke of how one of her teachers did raise the topic of bullying in class.

In my Law class, we talked about it, and the teacher said, “Do you think there’s a lot of bullying in this school?” But nobody would really say anything, and I think a lot of the victims in our school don’t even realize they are being bullied. I didn’t wanna say, “Yeah, there’s a lot”, cause that kind of puts the focus on me. He should’ve asked us to write an assignment on it, but he already told us that his personal opinion is that he does not think there is bullying in this school. So what’s the point of asking us?

This response illustrates clearly that teachers must set aside their biases and preconceptions. They must empower themselves and their students by learning the dynamics of bullying and they must accept that bullying happens in every school.

In schools where there is adequate supervision, bullying incidents are less common (Olweus, 1993). Mary suggested that the level of monitoring behaviour in her school was deficient.

If they monitor the halls more, I'm sure they'll see a lot.

An unambiguous approach to dealing with bullying demands clear consequences for inappropriate behaviours. Mary suggested that her school was inconsistent in dealing with bullying. For example, some teachers would pretend not to see incidents of bullying, even if they were blatant.

One teacher ...he didn't pay any attention, cause I was sitting, like, right by the door, and they started slamming lockers and calling me a whore, like really loud. If a teacher doesn't really care, they don't do anything.

As for the administrators of the school, Mary suggests that they adopt a tough stance. Her message to the principal and vice-principals is emphatic:

At the first sight of bullying, suspend them. Don't have any tolerance with it, because it's not something you can have tolerance with. One remark is going to stick in that person's head. If (the principal) can suspend someone for physically abusing somebody, why can't you suspend them for mentally abusing somebody?

While "zero tolerance" policies often translate into "zero thinking" scenarios, Mary's suggestion clearly indicates her frustration with the *status quo* and her desire for things to improve in her school. Mary estimates that about 50% of the students in her school are involved in bullying as victims, with equal numbers of boys and girls involved, and she explained that she is unhappy that she and others simply have to put up with the undignified treatment they suffer at the hands of their peers.

#### Researcher's Field Notes

Like many targets of peer victimization, Mary demonstrates great empathy for others, is adverse to using violence to solve problems, and acknowledges that she was fortunate in having a mother who “brought her up” to resolve problems “without yelling, being mouthy, or violent”.

Upon completing the interviews with Mary, I recorded the following personal thoughts:

*I've completed my interviews with my first participant...and the feeling that I have right now is one of frustration...I feel helpless, I feel that I sort of parachuted into her life and wasn't able to help her in any way. She did tell me that talking about her experiences was helpful to her, but I just have this overwhelming sense that she is suffering, and I know she is suffering, and I have a duty to help her, but I really can't think of any way that I can do that. It's a terrible feeling. This girl is so courageous, and she is hurting. I feel conflicted because her pain is inextricably linked to my treasured data. Detachment is difficult.*

These field notes underscore the ethical struggle which perhaps cannot be avoided in dealing with such an emotionally-charged issue.

John's Narrative –That's what you gotta do to survive

John's Past

*A hellhole.*

These are the words John unhesitatingly chose when asked to describe his perception of his junior high school environment. John was in Grade 12 when he volunteered to take part in the research. Like Mary, there was nothing about his appearance that would indicate that he would be a likely target, as neither his attire, demeanour, or affect seemed provocative in any way. This, of course, is one of the great enigmas about victimization.

In recalling his earlier peer interactions, John explained that, because elementary school was so pleasant for him, as he recounted that he “had an excellent time”, he was truly unprepared for the horror of his junior high years. He recalled that he was picked on “everyday” in grades 8

and 9, and after reporting what was happening to his teachers, whom, he feels, “covered it up”, the abuse continued. Therefore, he learned to say nothing, and suffered tremendously. He declined to describe the type of bullying he had endured in junior high, explaining that it was “too personal” and “hard to talk about”, but said the experiences left him feeling “depressed, suicidal, and angry.” After seeking intervention and feeling rebuffed by those who should have been able to help him, he coped by assuming classic “victim” behaviours.

I became quieter, more submissive, because the more submissive you were, the much less worse it would be.

Like many victims, he felt there was something wrong with him, and therefore rationalized that it was understandable that he was picked on. He said he was “a quiet kid, kinda laid back, kinda nerdy; didn’t really fit in.”

He is really not sure why he was picked on by his peers, but he does acknowledge that the experience may have, in some ways, scarred him.

I kind of feel detached from people. I always get this really lonely feeling, always fear being rejected by people. I just kind of want to be left alone. ... I felt hate for a while, but then I realized, what’s the point? Might as well let the hate go. But when I think of it I feel angry, very, very angry.

Like Mary, John’s anxiety about being bullied manifested in psychosomatic disorders.

The following excerpt is particularly disturbing when it is noted that these symptoms were endured by an individual who was just 14-years-old when the bullying reached an intolerable pitch.

I became an insomniac, couldn’t sleep at night, used to get headaches and have anxiety attacks so bad I would shake and vomit. This went on for a year. I was depressed, really, really depressed, and I became cynical.

Not surprisingly, John's grades were impacted by the violence he endured, and while he was often tempted to feign illness, he pushed himself to go to school each day.

There was a severe drop off (in marks). I used to do well but I started to do poorly because I couldn't concentrate. ...I was scared.

#### John's Present-Taking Back the Power

While John used the survival mechanism of assuming a submissive stance in junior high school, he became more assertive in high school, and, as one might conjecture, the bullying that emerged again in Grade ten gradually tapered off until it ceased when the bullies realized that John would refuse to be a passive victim.

Yeah, I chucked a desk at a guy. Another guy I beat up in the hallway. He got physical, so...I did, too. ...Bullies are cowards at heart. Some might react really violently if they are really dangerous, but a lot of them back down. It's like, "Whoa; this guy really does have a backbone." They'll pick on those who are weaker.

John feels reasonably certain that he can deal with the bullies he encounters now, for now he's "got lots more friends" and is "more confident". However, he remains deeply affected by peer aggression, and becomes very upset when he either experiences peer maltreatment or witnesses others being mistreated. He explained that whenever he witnesses another student being bullied, he reacts so intensely that he becomes ill.

I get sick to my stomach; I get the shakes; it's almost like, hey, I try to say something, but I am powerless, really.

Understandably, John's experiences have been very traumatic, and he asserts that he is deeply affected because he understands how it feels to be oppressed by a bully. The interesting thing about John's response is that, at beginning of the first interview, he minimized the bullying he had endured. He also initially claimed that there was little violence at his school and that he had not

been bullied at all since he started high school. This bravado soon gave way to a frank discussion of how the school was not a very secure place, and how he was affected by violence in the school.

He recalls a disturbing incident that he observed in his school's cafeteria on Valentine's Day:

I witnessed verbal bullying...I was sitting at this table and a dude just sat there and he said he was going to ask the ugliest girl in the cafeteria if she would be his Valentine. And I witnessed this. I watched people laugh.

In contrast with bullies, victims tend to demonstrate a higher level of empathy, and John exemplified this.

For the victims, I feel a lot of sympathy, because I have been in their place. Because...no one deserves that, no matter what you did.

When asked to describe what bullying actually looks like in the secondary school, John explained that it is more indirect than in junior high, where it tends to be more physical. He believes that about half of the school's population is bullied by rejection, for him, a particularly insidious manifestation.

It's covered up, because bullying in high school is different, it's more indirect. Kind of like, "Oh, we don't like you, so we won't talk to you, or, we're going to talk about you behind your back". It's rejection; in high school, it's rejection. You know, they (the bullies) wonder what's up with your clothes, and make fun of you for your worldly goods. A big term around here is...they call the poor kids the "dirts". You're *dirt* because you live on the wrong side of town, maybe in the trailer park. In my opinion, that's wrong. I think what makes a person popular in high school is their looks, who they are, where they come from, how much money they have, if they drive a car. It's very superficial, on-the-surface types of things. So, the people who get picked on in this school don't have those surface things. They are not incredibly good-looking, they don't have name-brand clothes, they don't have money, they don't drive a cool car, stuff like that.

John said that he felt that bullies were just as intelligent as non-bullies and that they obviously didn't feel guilty about how they mistreated their peers. "If they felt guilty, they wouldn't do it." He contended that bullies "are bright; really, they know what they are doing; they just choose to act like morons." He perceived bullies as people who possessed a "sixth sense", a kind of radar where they could detect weaknesses in their peers. He stated that most bullies at his schools were "rich, pampered kids."

Like Mary, John was convinced that the teachers and administrators in the school were ineffectual in dealing with bullying. He had a negative impression of his school's current administrator, asserting that the principal was "fixated with drugs" and made that more of a priority than dealing with bullying. In the following transcript, the researcher has replaced the actual names of the administrators referred to by John with the names "Principal A", the former administrator, and "Principal B", the current principal. The transcript has also been edited to conceal the gender of the principals.

(Principal A) – like, would deal with bullying. (Principal B) doesn't punish, is not intimidating, so it doesn't work even if (Principal B) does step in. Like, (Principal B) is known to have a fixation with drugs. And, (Principal B) is a bully! The first day of school, (Principal B) came into an assembly and said, "I DEMAND respect from all students". That's authoritarian, very much a bully. And (Principal B) either over-reacts or under-reacts.

(Principal A) was good; fair. (Principal A) would sit down and talk to you, but, I mean, if you tried to pull shit or tried to bully people, (Principal A) would just show you the door.

John assessed the bullying situation at his school as "serious", the worst he had witnessed in his three years at the school. He said that when Principal A was at the school's helm, fighting would invariably take place in the parking lot, as the students were scared of Principal A. Now, fighting was taking place in the hallways, the library, and even in front of the office.

Yesterday there was four-on-one; one guy got beat up by four others. And the other day, two guys got it on in the hallway, and another guy got a bottle busted over his head. There was a fight every day last week. Some people thought it was hilarious but some people thought it was pretty bad. There's also damaging people's things, stealing people's things, leaving people out...

In John's appraisal, the worst form of bullying attacks the psyche and not the body.

The worst form of bullying...is leaving people out. Because you get depressed, and...nobody wants you. Nobody wants anything to do with you. ...At least if it's physical, somebody wants *something* to do with you, even if it's just a fist in the face.

He felt that the female bullies could be "crazier" than the male bullies, and that they tended to attack the reputation of their targets, especially regarding their sexual conduct. He spoke of how girls commonly call other girls "a 'ho', or a 'skank'", denigrating terms which invoke the unfortunate legacy of the sexual double-standard to indict the target as an indiscriminately promiscuous and licentious individual. In John's estimation, male bullying combined elements of physical and verbal antagonism. He felt that most bullying took place in the parking lot, the cafeteria, and a rather secluded wing of the school where few teachers ever ventured.

As a student whose school experiences had been tainted by bullying, John had some very forceful suggestions for dealing with students who were caught victimizing their peers. He directed his initial comments to the current principal:

Get your ass out in the hallways and fix it yourself. Show the students that you're gonna put your foot down, and show them you respect them, and they'll respect you back. Don't hide in your office.

And for the bullies? Expulsion. I'll tell the principal, "expulsion"; that's it. They took away someone's right to learn, so you should take away the bully's right to learn. They're expelled, not allowed back in school, and now they have to get their own (school) work. Not allowed back in, ever. No.

John seemed to be expressing his impatience with what he perceived as incompetence on the principal's part in dealing with violence in the school.

In discussing the role of empathy in bullying, John explained that he felt that a big part of the problem was that our society "doesn't value empathy at all". He said that bullies either had a "rough" life or they came from homes where they were praised and had their egos inflated by over-indulgent parents. As a boy growing up, he recalls being taught how to handle problems by parents whom he describes as "good role models" .

Upon completing the final interview, John echoes the sentiments of Mary in saying that bullying would never be eradicated.

The following notes recorded in my field notes upon completion of the third and final interview with John provide illumination into how John's story affected the researcher.

*As John walked away after our final interview today, I again find myself feeling troubled, wondering if I am helping my participants in any way or if I am actually harming them. To know how these students suffer is almost unbearable when I realize that I must step back, allow them to deal with their situations in their own way, and move on. I am thinking, "This is a person, a human being, not a source of data!" Perhaps I should have conducted an anonymous, short survey where I wouldn't be reopening any old wounds.*

Again, the dilemma is to be expected.

Susan's narrative – *Because everyone is a person*

#### Susan's Past

Susan was in Grade 11 when she volunteered to take part in this research. The researcher's initial impression of Susan was of an energetic, cheerful, and effusive young person. Her earliest school experiences were positive, but during her Grade 5 year, she found herself reeling as she was compelled to deal with particularly cruel and vicious bullying. Susan, like

Mary, had attended two different elementary schools, including one where she was in the racial minority. For Susan, the year during which she attended this school was memorable in that she was on the receiving end of overt hostility, and she recounted that she was beaten up twice every day, suffered tremendous fear and pain, and often begged her parents not to send her to school. She said that in looking back, it didn't bother her "too much", for

...things that have happened in the past are sort of like a book that you've read; it's like, "Hey, that couldn't have happened to me", but it did. ..I don't have any scars to prove it; I don't have any bruises that stayed on...it's just within memory, so it's almost like a story, a fiction.

Susan was able to transcend her memories of bloodied noses and said that she had learned a lot during that year and still had some fond memories of the community and the people. She was able to glean the positive from a situation that had some significant challenges. This was quite remarkable.

Susan indicated that, while she had a few good friends in junior high, it "was tough," for "group work and stuff just never worked for (her). (She) would be the last person to be picked for anything, for groups...(she) would just sort of sit in the corner like, 'can I *please* do it by myself?'" Susan said that she felt very much in the social periphery in junior high, and she feels that her peers viewed her as insignificant, "sort of the person hanging around in the background."

Of course, I had a few friends; we got along really well. And then, there were my friends' friends, who just sort of thought of me - I presume they sort of thought of me - as just sort of the kid who hangs out with their friends... I was just sort of the person hanging around in the background with a ...maybe a smart comment every once in a while.

Other than explaining that she sometimes felt “invisible”, and acknowledging that group work was very problematic, Susan felt that junior high school, while not wholly satisfying, was not nearly as difficult as Grade 5 had been for her. Her experiences with being left out in junior high may be interpreted as examples of relational bullying, but she did not seem to be overly concerned or saddened by them as she considered them in retrospect.

### Susan's Present

As a high school student, she felt that she was in an environment where she was treated with respect by the adults with whom she came into contact.

I'm treated like I am a person here, not just sort of somebody to be looked down at, but an actual person who has ideas.

By way of illustration, she explained that participating in this research enhanced her awareness that she was being treated as “somebody” in her school. However, she explained that she had sometimes felt mistreated, more in some classes than in others, and this was, naturally, problematic for her.

Well, I can talk about last year, at the beginning of last year, we had mandatory Phys. Ed. Now, if the Phys. Ed. course was offered, I would take it. It was wonderful. But mandatory Phys. Ed. means that there are people there who don't necessarily wanna be there, and...(long pause) in that class - my friends took the other class - so I didn't really have anybody to sort of talk to, to be in a group with, like, so when we'd do badminton, volleyball, they're group sports, you need partners, and, again, it was sort of a reminder of elementary school again. It was like, *"Do I have to go with her?"* It's like, *"Hey, that makes me feel so wonderful; thank you!"*

It seemed that Phys. Ed class was a forum where Susan felt victimized on a regular basis. She spoke of a girl who would tease her because she was usually among the last to be chosen as a partner.

She's just plain nasty; she still is, in general. She still takes the seats on the bus, and , every opportunity, she would make fun of me.

She'd be on me; just words, but it hurt.

Susan explained that she grew accustomed to the rejection that she felt in her Phys. Ed. class, and decided that she would simply make the best of things. She ended up befriending a Special Needs student in her gym class, a girl with Down Syndrome.

There was somebody with Down Syndrome who also normally didn't have a partner, so me and them, we'd play badminton back and forth. It would be a wonderful time.

In terms of how frequently she was picked on, Susan said her biggest problem had been her daily Phys. Ed. class, because she had developed a mind-set which would not permit her to feel victimized and so she was able to ignore other annoyances such as being teased on the bus. Thus, frequency wasn't an issue for her at all. She was able to joke about being bullied and said that, while there were many times that she felt upset or annoyed at people who teased, rejected, or attacked her, she "got stronger" and "learned how to run".

The extent of her feelings about being bullied were eloquently expressed in a collection of writings she had composed. These writings were in the form of essays, short stories, and poetry, each thematically linked in the treatment of motifs such as rejection, bigotry, oppression, and the power each of those constructs has to break the human spirit. When I requested permission to include excerpts of those writings in this thesis, Susan explained that she would have to refuse because she was aware that credit for authorship could not be accommodated because of the conditions for confidentiality and anonymity. She stated that she was very proud of her writings and felt that they would be diminished by being published anonymously. While the inclusion of her texts might have enhanced the "portrait" of Susan, her refusal may be a healthy indication of her willingness to set boundaries.

Many students who have been significantly impacted by bullied complain of a variety of ailments. Susan explained that sometimes she would become saddened and depressed by people's inability or refusal to accept individual differences. However, perhaps fortified by her elementary school bullying experiences, she made a conscious decision to take back the power that bullies tried to wrest from her. She elaborated on this by explaining that there were days in school when she simply felt like "prancing down the hallway." When people made fun of her for what they perceived to be unorthodox behaviour, she ignored them. So instead of internalizing her pain, she somehow managed to escape the headaches, depression, and anxiety that bullied students often experience.

The reason I can do that is because I've been picked on in and out of school, but I'm not afraid of people bullying me anymore, because I have defined the limits of who I am , and nobody is going to cross those barriers.

In making a conscious effort to cultivate a healthy self-esteem, she was empowering herself while disarming the bullies who tried to victimize her. In other words, she ceased to be a victim in the truest sense. Stephen Biko, founder of South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement summed up this truth in his statement that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Princeton Language Institute, Ed., p. 320).

Susan explained that, from her perspective, the student who is typically identified in school as the target is one who stands out, possibly because he or she is developing and emerging as a person at a different rate than are other students. She described this person as "somebody who got their personality a little sooner or a little later than everybody else." This interesting comment lends itself to interpretation.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Susan decided to reject the label of "victim" despite having been excluded and misunderstood was that she believed that the administrator and some

staff members of the school she attended were not only cognizant of bullying but were willing to tackle it. She explained that the principal was a very supportive individual who would not tolerate bullying. She was able to identify a number of teachers who, she felt, would be proactive in combating bullying.

I think maybe in Band and English, the teacher goes on one of those rants about some topic or another, and bullying would have been one of those topics, because that would have been something (the teacher) would have been very opposed to, and if (the teacher) saw something happening, (the teacher) would be right on it.

She declared that, from her perspective, bullying affects everyone when it touches the life of even a single individual within a group or institution.

Everybody is always affected by bullying. If even one person is bullied, everybody is affected by it. So the percentage? 101%. And that includes the teachers, too. I mean, if the teacher is not affected by it, then they shouldn't be a teacher here.

As the school placed a high priority on the inclusion of a very visible group of Special Needs students, Susan suggested that this commitment to including students with exceptionalities spilled over into other aspects of the school culture. She identified the value of "integration" as one that was very highly placed within the culture of the school.

In attempting to explain why some peers bully their fellow students, Susan framed her response around the perspective that bullies operate from a position of weakness.

(Bullies) think that it is necessary for them to try and prove their worth... It may be that they have been told they were worthless, and maybe they have very low self-esteem, or they just wanna feel better about themselves so they make other people feel worse. (It's) weakness. People in weak situations have a tendency to create power, and once they have power, or what they define as power, they want more.

Unlike Mary and John, who perceived bullies as feeling rather omnipotent, glorying in the "power over" others they enjoyed, Susan suggested that bullies were, in some sense, misguided, broken

spirits who also suffer. This may account for the inordinately munificent perspective she seemed to ascribe to in trying to see things from the bully's point of view. Again, as with many students who have tasted the bitterness of bullying at some point, Susan was able to draw upon her deep reserve of compassion, and her ability to rationalize seemed to help her deal with any residual feelings about the girl who had bullied her in Phys. Ed class. Instead of feeling hatred for the girl, Susan actually felt "pretty indifferent." Somehow, Susan had succeeded in distancing herself from the embarrassment and hurt she had suffered at the hands of the bully to actually feel a sense of pity for all bullies she recognized in her school.

I felt sorry for them, sorry that they felt so insignificant that they had to belittle somebody else. Sort of frustrated, too, because I thought that we'd gotten beyond that...through things like growing up, maybe? I was really disappointed.

Susan's words also revealed the interesting possibility that, unlike many victims of bullying, she was completely unwilling to concede that she was in some way responsible for the victimization.

Instead of confronting bullies in an aggressive way, Susan stressed the crucial responsibility of assuming an empathetic stance.

A bully may not necessarily know that they are a bully. I mean, it's what they do, but they don't necessarily know that they are doing anything wrong. So, instead of just telling people, "You are bullying" – they'll just feel cornered or attacked - ... "So what's the trouble here? " Are they in a stressful home situation? Are they being pressured by their friends? Are they going through some difficulty? Are they a little stressed out because of their lives? Do they need some help or something? Find out what the problem is, and fix it, 'cause instead of trying to focus on the individual victims, ...well, it is too focussed on the victims, with pity, but not really knowing what to do. So, we only have half of the sum here.

While she was still exploring her thoughts on what motivates a bully to attempt to dominate others, Susan demonstrated no reticence in identifying the form of bullying that she deemed to be the most destructive.

Rejection. Broken noses can fix, hearts stay broken forever.  
If you are told that you are no good, that nobody likes you,  
and nobody wants to be with you, or somebody punches you  
in the head, which are you going to remember more? Somebody  
who paid enough attention to you to bother hitting you, or  
someone who doesn't pay attention, who just doesn't care if they  
like you or not. Like, I wouldn't mind an opinion; like, if someone  
really hates my guts, or if somebody really likes me, okay,  
but if someone doesn't care enough to have an opinion...it  
hurts to be ignored.

And while she expressed an incredible amount of patience for the bullies who targeted her, she had no such restraint when it came to sharing how she feels when she witnesses others being tormented.

Furious; Absolutely furious. If they're making fun of me, it's  
almost a feeling of relief, cause if they are picking on me,  
they're not picking on anybody else.

As with Mary and John, Susan said that she would have no reservations in reporting that another student was going to be victimized in an incident of violence, but she would not offer any information to authority figures within the school if she was the intended target. She indicated that going to speak with the Guidance Counsellor was not really an attractive option, because it probably wouldn't be all that helpful. She explained that she would probably confide in her friends, and if she did find herself face to face with a student who was bent on victimizing her, she would most likely refuse to back away.

I don't walk away, 'cause that would be demeaning. But I never did.  
I usually just sort of...it's more at the point where they say something

and I come back with a really good comeback. Maybe at times I probably should have (walked away) but I never did and never do. I don't think that skipping out on confrontations really helps you get over it. I think it just sort of encourages it, so I may have gotten a little more bullying... because of it, but I think it made me stronger.

Her way of dealing with the bullies is supported in the literature as the most effective way of throwing off the victim mask, so her status as a victim is confounding. She seems to be well on her way to actually severing that strangely symbiotic relationship between victim and bully. She demonstrates a sound knowledge of effective conflict resolution.

Like Mary and John, Susan expressed her belief that the administrators and teachers in her school have a sacred duty to provide a safe learning environment for all students. She suggested that bullying be talked about more openly in school, as it seemed to be a taboo topic with many teachers. She hypothesized that a strong presence by teachers throughout the school, so that student behaviour could be monitored, might help students who were being picked on or rejected.

In closing, Susan shared her conviction that, while bullying will always be part of the school experience, its effects can be mitigated through awareness, the development of a culture of tolerance, and ongoing dialogue. She also stressed her perception that empathy is built on as much a worldview of open-mindedness as it is founded on compassion. Like Mary and John, she attributed up-bringing as the most important factor in imbuing people with empathy, and credited her own family with helping to shape her into a non-judgmental, peaceful human being.

It's like a new vegetable; I've always been taught to try something new. I don't care if it smells funny; try something new! So it's the same with people. I was brought up to look at somebody and think, what is that person like, who are they, really? Because everybody is a person, and that's really amazing, 'cause we're all different.

Susan was also very pragmatic in her assessment of the possibility that bullying can be eradicated. Her response clearly illustrates that she views the roots of peer aggression as stemming from a basic lack of respect.

You can't ever get rid of bullying; it's not something that can be measured, because, I mean, there is always gonna be somebody who is not in the *In* crowd. You can't force someone to respect somebody. It's impossible.

The completion of the interview and debriefing cycle with Susan evoked the following thoughts as recorded in my field notes:

*Teachers are fond of the term "resiliency". Susan's responses suggest that she works very hard to cultivate that remarkable way of viewing and coping with the world. In spite of the interpersonal challenges she has faced, and continues to experience, her sense of humour and refusal to be downtrodden prevail. It is as if she has found herself cast into a role which simply isn't acceptable to her, and, while others keep trying to foist that role upon her, it seems that she is saying, "I'd rather be a different character; I don't like this part". But the casting agents keep ignoring her, and so she finds herself wearing a costume that simply doesn't fit. It would be fascinating to explore her reported responses on a deeper level.*

The purpose of this research was not to tabulate the incidence or form of bullying events among secondary students in Prince Edward Island, but to attempt to come to a deeper understanding of how some secondary students in this province experience bullying, how they perceive that reality, and to what extent they feel able to effect change. The data collection was executed against the cultural backdrop of a pastoral, agrarian Canadian province with a largely homogeneous, predominantly Caucasian population of less than 140,000. The findings clearly demonstrate many of the trends and patterns in peer victimization identified by Olweus and those who have followed him. In a small province where it seems that everybody knows everyone else, where citizens proudly trace their genealogical backgrounds and pride of origin is a defining

feature of the culture, it seems hard to accept that our students might feel less than at home in their schools. Bullying seems strangely incongruous in such a place.

However, the reality of bullying is clearly elucidated by the words of Mary, John, and Susan, and their shared experiences make it clear that educators and parents must provide stewardship in providing a safe environment for all children in our society. In the final section of this thesis, the revelations of these three students will be considered in light of their implications for all stakeholders in the secondary school system, indeed, in the entire school system of Prince Edward Island.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion of Results

### Introduction

In his inspiring work Moral Leadership – Getting to the Heart of School Improvement (1992), Thomas Sergiovanni explores the notion that successful schools are staffed by people who share a deep commitment to a covenant. According to Sergiovanni, a covenant is based on a deep and abiding commitment to ideas, values, and goals. Upon sharing in the stories of the participants in this study, it is hoped that all educators will begin to share in a covenant based on the belief that all students must be included and nurtured in our school system.

This study attempted to explore the following questions: *How do secondary school students experience and perceive bullying in the school? How do these students describe their experiences as a target for bullying? What are their perceptions of the power they have to effect change?* The design was not concerned with statistical measures of bullying in Prince Edward Island secondary schools, for, while extremely valuable, the statistics may obscure the faces of those whose lives are affected by victimization. The purpose of this research was to unveil those faces so that the students' perceptions of bullying might provide a basis for understanding. It is hoped that the findings in this study might, even in some small way, improve the circumstances of our students.

The data was collected through three in-depth interviews. These interviews were structured around a series of planned questions which focussed on how the participants have lived the experiences that can only be truly understood by those who have been targeted for aggression. The questions were designed to share insight into how students perceive their world as targets. As the participants shared their stories, certain themes and motifs emerged. In this chapter, those themes will be discussed. As well, an acknowledgement of possible limitations which may detract

from the findings will be included. In summary, there will be an exploration of the implications posed by the results, which a specific focus on how the results may influence future investigation in this realm of study, and how they may exert an impact on the philosophies which underpin our schools.

The data were carefully reviewed in relation to the pre-determined questions which shaped the three in-depth interviews. In planning these questions, it was anticipated that the participants would be able to provide a portal into the world of the student who has experienced bullying. For example, many of the questions were designed to assess how the participants' experiences and perceptions share commonalities with other students in other parts of the world so that students in Prince Edward Island might plausibly benefit from the previous research. For example, other researchers have attempted to quantify the phenomenon of bullying by identifying how often it happens and how many students find themselves pulled into the quagmire. It becomes evident that bullying is pervasive and is so devastating in its pervasiveness that it cannot be ignored (Banks, 1997; Borg, 1998; O'Connell et al., 1997; Vail, 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993; and Glover et al., 2000). Other investigators have devoted their work to plumbing the depths of the bully's mind, and have determined that a bully has a great need for power, lacks empathy, is favourably disposed to using violence as a means of dealing with conflict, enjoys a surprisingly favourable self image, may have been harshly parented, and will suffer consequences in terms of mental and physical wellness. (Olweus, 1993; Haynie et al., 2001; Hoover & Jule, 1993; Ma et al., 2001; Salmivalli, 1998; Johnson & Lewis, 1999; Roberts & Walters, 1998; Greenbaum et al., 1989; Curtner-Smith, 2000; and Chang et al., 2002). Still other researchers have offered valuable insight into why some children are targeted to have violence imposed upon them, and have suggested that a target is passive, submissive, negatively disposed to using violence as a way of

handling conflict, is unusually quiet, often lacks confidence, may be physically smaller, and suffers incredible emotional and physical scarring because of the aggression they try so hard to deflect (Maxwell & Carroll-Lind, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Bernstein, 1997; Perry et al., 1988; Rani & Thomas, 2000, Craig, 1998; Besag, 1989; Hobbin, 2000; Voss & Mulligan, 2000; Riittakerttu, 2000; Natvig et. al; 2001; French & Conrad; 2001). A further body of research treats the role of the school in creating a safe environment, and researchers have found that teachers and administrators can be the instruments of peace if they learn to recognize the hallmarks of bullying, take steps to protect children from situations where bullying can thrive, and learn how to handle bullying when it is inevitably manifested in the classroom or playground (Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Shapiro et al., 1991; Miller, 1982; Hazler, Miller, Carney & Green, 2001).

Upon consideration of the body of knowledge offered by the literature on bullying as well as the insight provided by the participants in this research, the following themes were identified: 1.) Experiences as a Target – Commonalities and Anomalies; 2.) The Targets' Perceptions of the Bullies in Comparison with the Literature; 3.) Coping Strategies and Survival Mechanisms; 4.) Remedies: Pessimism versus Optimism ; and 5.)The Perceived Failure of the School. While these are the motifs which seemed to emerge from the literature and the interviews, each theme will be further broken down to treat additional ideas and premises. These themes merge to furnish an illuminating portrait of what it may be like to have experienced peer victimization and its accompanying violence. The categories will provide a picture of the world of the student who has suffered in the very place he or she should feel very much at home: the school. As a starting point, it might be relevant to note that Mary and John share many commonalities in terms of how the bullying was experienced and perceived by them, while Susan's experiences, perceptions and reactions were more anomalous in relation to the literature.

### Experiences as a Target – Commonalities and Anomalies

As the Interview Protocol illustrates, many of the questions posed in the data collection were aimed at learning how the participants made sense of the ongoing drama as a target of a bully or bullies.

In analyzing the responses of the three students, a number of interesting commonalities emerged, and these commonalities could also be viewed in the literature. For the purposes of this study, a commonality is an event or phenomenon shared by at least two of the participants. These commonalities were an experience of bullying in the past, in either elementary school or junior high, a deleterious effect on the mental or physical health of the target, a desire for revenge, an impact on school liking, a sense that the target in some way may have elicited the bullying, a refusal to condone violence as a way of dealing with conflict, and a negative effect on academic performance.

All three participants reported that they had been bullied before they entered secondary school. Mary and Susan had been picked on as elementary school students, while John had been victimized in junior high to such a degree that he was unwilling to discuss the details of the events. As was alluded to in the Literature Review, many victims of bullying are victims over a lengthy period of time, so the implication is that teachers must be more vigilant in tracking early victims and bullies in order to try and break the pattern. Not only had each of the three participants been oppressed by peers in earlier grades, but they seem to have been deeply affected by it, even years after the fact.

The health impact of bullying is widely recognized, and both Mary and John explained that they suffered great psychological anguish and degradation of their physical health because of the anxiety of being fearful at school. Their descriptions were graphic and disturbing as they

spoke of depression, insomnia, psychosomatic ailments, suicidal ideation, and loss of appetite. Each of these symptoms of deeply-rooted distress is supported by the literature as being “typical” reactions to bullying, so in this way John and Mary fit the profile of the target as extrapolated from the literature.

It is quite common and expected for a target of bullying to desire to exact revenge upon the transgressor, and in this area both Mary and John expressed deep hatred for the bullies and a yearning to see them hurt or punished in some way. They also expressed feeling somewhat conflicted about this desire, explaining that nobody deserved to be maltreated.

John and Mary admitted that school wasn't really their favourite place to be, both because of past and present experiences. They spoke of “dreading” attending school at times, saying that their friends made an otherwise negative situation tolerable. Educators need to consider the possibility of bullying when truancy is a problem, and yet most teachers and administrators may confess that this possibility is often ignored.

As with many victims of bullying explored in the literature, Mary and John accepted part of the blame for the bullying they had experienced, with Mary admitting that she was invading the “turf” of the girls who picked on her by associating with certain boys, and John suggesting that his “nerdiness” in junior high may have precipitated the bullying he endured. Susan also stated that she recognized some of her behaviours such as “prancing down the hallway” may have been like a red flag to the bully.

All three of the participants were staunch in their refusal to condone violence as a remedy in dealing with conflict. While John said that he was involved in physical altercations, he explained that it was by way of self-defence, and he did not advocate solving problems with fists. Mary explained that she would not fight back nor tell, no matter how serious things became, and

Susan said that she believed the best way to solve conflicts was not by walking away or ignoring things, but by finding a peaceful solution. This promotion of the ideal of finding the peaceful way of working things out is a hallmark of the “typical” target.

All three students asserted that their grades were less than stellar, and this is often found in children who are bullied. Mary and John said that they were often anxious and couldn’t concentrate, while Susan shrugged off questions about her grades by quickly acknowledging that, while she wasn’t passing with “flying colours”, she was not in danger of failing.

The commonalities then, are many, and the three participants share traits that have been reported throughout much of the literature.

In terms of anomalies or findings that are at variance with the literature, Susan’s story flouts many of the conventions in the study of bullying and victimization behaviours. While she acknowledged that bullying had been a constant in her life since elementary school, her words show that she is unlike many of the victims who have been investigated in the past. She does not fit the mould as it were. For example, she reports that she is not submissive, she is highly empathetic towards the bullies, she reports no serious health effects, and she does not present herself as being disempowered in any meaningful way. She does all of the “right things” in standing up to the bullies, and yet they persist in teasing, excluding, and ridiculing her.

#### The Targets’ Perceptions of the Bullies in Comparison with the Literature

If perception is, indeed, reality, the image of the bully through the eyes of the participants is menacing, as a Gorgon-like creature imbued with impressive powers emerges in the targets’ descriptions.

In terms of the literature, the picture painted by both Mary and John seems to be consistent with the research. John and Mary astutely refuse to excuse the behaviour of the bullies on the basis of substandard intelligence, for they assert that the bullies are anything but intellectually weak. Instead, John perceptively states that he feels that bullies are as smart, if not smarter than, other non-bullying students.

Both John and Mary assert that the bullies do not suffer the twinges of a healthy conscience, explaining that they feel that the bullies are aware that what they are doing is wrong, but they simply do not care, nor do they suffer remorse.

Susan, on the other hand, explains that perhaps bullies are not very bright, and therefore they do not really understand the impact of their actions upon other students.

Consistent with the literature yet again, all three participants accord a great deal of power to the bullies, power that the bullies, in actuality, do not possess. Susan's assessment of the bully's power is somewhat divergent in terms of both the literature and John's and Mary's perceptions, for she espouses the belief that a bully operates from a position of weakness but curiously manages to translate that weakness into strength. Consistent with the literature, John and Mary express their belief that the bullies have a great deal of power and they are difficult, if not impossible, to vanquish.

While both Mary and John suggest that most bullies are spoiled, pampered, and rich, Susan does not impose any such criteria.

### Coping Strategies and Survival Mechanisms

In the research which predated this study, targets of bullying implement a number of strategies to cope with the bullying they experience. These mechanisms include ignoring the

bully, behaving passively, crying, skipping school, changing the routes taken to and from school, sitting quietly in the classroom, avoiding parts of the school where bullying is likely to occur, avoiding social situations where the bully might be present, and suffering in silence. John and Mary indicated that they have employed most of these strategies in order to cope with the day-to-day demands of having to attend the school where the tormentor lies in wait. Susan, on the other hand, states that she knows she probably should be less direct, but she prefers to simply face the bullies and deal with the abuse before moving on. Again, her response is atypical.

Susan and Mary revealed that they coped with the loneliness and frustration of being oppressed through writing. Again, many victimized students report the value of writing in a confidential journal or of creating written or visual art to express their confusion and pain.

One of the most common survival mechanisms is to keep the bullying a secret, and all three participants explained that they would probably not tell their parents if they were being victimized, for they felt the consequences of being a “rat” were too high a price to pay. All three said that they would tell a good friend, but would probably never tell the Guidance Counsellor.

One of the more common methods of coping is by clinging to hope that bullying will fade with time, and, again, all three participants expressed the belief that, with time, bullying naturally ceases.

Mary explained that she would sometimes decline invitations to attend social functions because the bullies would be in attendance. Altering one’s social life in order to deal with the bully is a very common strategy.

All three participants, at some point, admitted to suffering in silence, and this seems to be very much the exception as opposed to the rule in bullying situations. Susan was the most likely

to have disclosed, but even she sometimes just put up with the abuse and did not disclose her dilemma.

### Remedies: Pessimism versus Optimism

As Olweus (1993) reports, many targets of bullying felt helpless to effect positive change in their circumstances, and many targets will endure a great deal of humiliation and degradation simply because they feel that they are helpless to stop the oppression. This may actually be an example of learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is a condition in which individuals who have experienced a great deal of failure simply give up trying to succeed. In a study by Settle and Milich (1997), the researchers investigated the role that persistent social failure played in developing learned helplessness in either Learning Disabled children or non – Learning Disabled children. Settle and Milich found that persistently failing was a very strong predictor of children actually giving up trying to connect socially with their peers.

Mary and John were extremely pessimistic about the power they had to effect any change in their circumstances as targets. Mary expressed her belief that the only relief she could look forward to was when she finally graduated from the school. Given that she was only in Grade 10 at the time of the data collection, the level of discouragement she is probably experiencing is regrettable. John believed that, while he would be willing to defend himself if he were physically attacked, there was little that he could do if a bully chose to harass him. If somebody was bent on subjecting him to habitual ridicule or humiliation, he felt that the best solution available would be to confide in his close friends but other wise say nothing. They both felt that the school was unable to provide any relief, and in fact, involving the administrators would compound their problems, for then they would incur the wrath of the bully as well as the bully's friends.

While all three participants reflect the trend found in the literature in that they enjoy positive relationships with their parents, and all evaluated their parents as being understanding, caring, and loving, none of them believed that their parents would be able to help them deal with a serious bullying issue without compounding their woes. They all expressed the fear that their parents would demand that the bully be dealt with, or that they would involve the police, thereby causing the targets great public humiliation mixed with fear of reprisal. In other words, they assessed parental involvement as ineffective and even dangerous.

Generally, the three students were pessimistic about the possibility for a positive resolution of the problems they had with the bullies, about the potential for any person or agency to help resolve the conflict, and about the chances that bullying itself would ever be less of a problem than it is today. In fact, John expressed his fear that bullying was actually getting worse, and he illustrated his concerns by alluding to school shootings in both the United States and Canada. He had experienced a spate of bomb threats as a student and this caused him to wonder if, one day, somebody would plant an authentic bomb.

In summary, the students concurred that “you can’t tell,” “(bullying) will always be a serious problem,” and “we are helpless to curb it.” They expressed their greatest frustrations towards the school system, insisting that school personnel were basically in the dark about the issue, possibly did not care about bullying, and could be counted on to *mishandle* complaints about bullying.

### The Perceived Failure of the Schools

According to the research, many teachers are unable to consistently differentiate between serious bullying activity, either physical or relational, and harmless teasing or “horseplay”. Students often

interpret teacher's obliviousness to bullying as a signal that they simply do not care. In this research, Mary recounted the story of being harassed while her teacher was mere metres away. John spoke of how he believed his principal was a "chicken", unable to provide the student population with the reassurance that their personal safety was in capable hands. Two of the participants were unable to recall even a single incident where a teacher in the school had effectively dealt with the theme of bullying in the classroom through information sharing or dialogue. None of the participants was aware of any official school policy which specifically addresses violence, and none of them were able to identify the name of an anti-bullying initiative used in the schools in Prince Edward Island. They felt that interpersonal violence was dealt with arbitrarily, and that they had few people to turn to in the school if they were feeling intimidated.

When asked about the values that they felt their schools represented, the answers varied from "integration" to "competition" to "prestige/good reputation" to "athletic superiority", an indication that these students possibly did not see any evidence to suggest that values such as respect, dignity, or caring were pivotal. This is important, because the literature indicates that schools which clearly articulate a commitment to respect, tolerance, and equality experience fewer bullying incidents. If our schools expect little from our students, the schools are certain not to be disappointed.

Teachers and administrators must ask themselves if they truly know how to deal with bullying incidents. They have a responsibility to scrutinize the literature, to keep abreast of current programs which purport to counteract bullying, and to stay attuned to the subtle nuances in school culture which provide cues about the relationships within that building. Bullying truly does thrive in secrecy and neglect, and school personnel must make it their business to know what is going on in the classroom, the cafeteria, the library and gym, and even the washrooms, for some

particularly insidious forms of bullying such as spreading rumours and implementing destructive graffiti campaigns are particularly well-suited for the washrooms. The students who took part in this research revealed that there are parts of their schools that they prefer to avoid, because they fear that their safety could be compromised. These students say that they feel let down to some degree by their schools, and this is simply not acceptable.

The public school system has made a grievous error in confusing character education with Religious Education. Character education aims to teach students the critical skills they need to make the most ethical and responsible life choices. Teachers are expected to be sound role models. Positive role modelling includes providing good examples through word and deed. Thus, teachers should be encouraging students to debate philosophical and ethical issues. In questioning principles, students may find themselves becoming more confident in rejecting harmful or negative ideologies. The students who participated in this research said that they would welcome it if a skilful teacher would address ethical issues such as the need for tolerance and respect in society in general. Schools must reach out beyond the “Three R’s “ to embrace the “Three C’s of Safe Schools” : cooperation, conflict resolution, and civic values (Johnson et al.,1997). In their description of a philosophy of stewardship which has transformed schools in Edina, Minnesota into “safe havens”, the authors stress that it is the articulation of a set of common goals and values that help define a community and promote appropriate behaviour. The students in this research expressed their perceptions that their schools were primarily concerned with academic and athletic pursuits, and that other issues were brushed aside.

The participants expressed disappointment with the lack of visibility in the school on the part of their principals. Futrell (1996) has examined the relationship between high principal visibility and the behaviour of students, and asserts that a highly visible, interactive principal

encourages good behaviour and a sense of community. The principal is exceedingly important in influencing the culture of a school, but if students have little or no interaction with the principal except to be disciplined, the principal becomes a symbol of punishment. Susan said that she knew her principal would not tolerate bullying, but perhaps it would encourage students to behave more appropriately if the principal was actually seen walking through the halls, visiting classroom, taking to students and teachers, and generally behaving less like an administrator and more like the “principal teacher” (Hopkirk, personal communication, October 12, 2000).

In summation, the schools, lead by the administrators and teachers, must make a greater effort to convince all students that they are cared for and that, in return, students are expected to care for their community.

#### The Limitations of the Study

While the debate on the legitimacy and value of qualitative research as opposed to quantitative enquiry seems to be waning in many scholarly circles, it is still critical to establish the credibility of qualitative research. Patton points out three elements which must be considered when considering the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research. They include rigour in gathering and analyzing high-quality data, the credibility of the researcher, and a fundamental conviction that naturalistic inquiry and holistic thinking are of great value (Patton, 1990). Patton goes on to point out that this rigour does not nullify the highly creative aspect of qualitative enquiry and interpretation.

Trustworthiness issues include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

I acknowledge that the issue of transferability must be addressed so that the findings of this research will be useful to others who will treat “similar situations, with similar research

questions or questions of practice” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This study was limited to one school district in Prince Edward Island where three students agreed to participate. The theoretical parameters of the study specified that any participants would be secondary students who have been significantly bullied. However, the researcher would caution against concluding that the experiences and perceptions of the study’s three participants are representative of all secondary students in Prince Edward Island who have been significantly bullied. Despite this limitation, it is hoped that prospective users of this research will be able to establish its usefulness within the context of the body of literature on bullying. It is important to note that, in most instances, the experiences of the participants was consistent with the literature. Some general understandings and conclusions about bullying in the secondary school can certainly be drawn from this study.

Another limitation of the study addresses the issue of a demonstrated lack of interest, cooperation, and encouragement on the part of some teachers during the recruiting phase. Given that the topic is quite sensitive, perhaps the negative attitude of these teachers may have affected both the number of students who stepped forward as well as whether these students felt "silenced" by the teachers negativity.

Finally, another limitation that must be acknowledged is the possibility only a certain “type” of victim of bullying, possibly a more confident individual, would come forward.

### Possibilities for Future Research

It is difficult for a school community to acknowledge that some of its students are not well-served by that school. It is extremely difficult to grant that some of these students might actually be suffering as they go about the business of getting an education. This research has

found that in Prince Edward Island's secondary schools there are students whose quality of life is seriously degraded because of their experiences with bullying and the way they perceive those experiences. In the findings, it was suggested that many of their teachers were unhelpful in dealing with bullying.

In light of this, it would be interesting to conduct an investigation into teacher's awareness of and attitudes toward bullying. If, as the findings of this study might suggest, many teachers are either perceived as not caring or actually do not care about bullying in the schools, it would be useful to explore this. Perhaps such an investigation would prompt well-meaning but extremely busy teachers to reflect upon how they contribute to the creation of a safe environment for their students, and how they might improve upon their practice.

Another study revolving around the role of the teacher and administrator is suggested. In this study, the participants were most emphatic in saying that they would most likely never speak to the Guidance Counselor about being bullied. As the Guidance Counselor is an excellent connection to the community resources bullied students might need, such as counseling, legal advice, and so on, this is, indeed, quite unfortunate. The participants also indicated that there were few teachers they would confide in. Thus, it seems important to explore the conditions under which a bullied student will seek help from the school.

The effectiveness of the parent in dealing with bullying seems to be stymied by their children's refusal to involve them. Assuredly, if one's child is being victimized, one would be moved to resolve that problem. Therefore, it might be interesting and useful to investigate the role of the parent of the target in dealing with bullying. In studying the role of the parent, one might gather useful information to assist parents or guardians in helping their children resolve a bullying scenario.

I am quite intrigued about the dichotomy illustrated by this study in terms of how Mary and John coped with the bullying in one way, and Susan chose to cope in a divergent way. One might infer that Susan has assimilated an understanding of assertiveness, and she has put that knowledge into practice. Even though she is still teased, she refuses to run away, prompting the hypothesis that, were she more submissive, the bullying might be more intense. Therefore, it might be interesting to conduct a study in which a credible assertiveness training program is implemented in a school, with an eye to assessing how the implementation of a quality assertiveness training program impacts on the incidence of bullying.

#### Educational Implications

I am most fortunate in having lived and taught in a number of Canadian provinces, and to have observed school children from Canada's west to the east. As a teacher of English, Drama and Theology, disciplines which are conducive to developing very close relationships with individual students and entire classes, I have often been in situations where students felt safe enough to disclose their fears and frustrations about bullying-related issues such as peer rejection and aggression. It was in this milieu that I developed a poignant awareness of just how devastating it is to children when they feel alienated in their schools. Therefore, the interest in conducting this study has been incubating since my teaching career began in 1986. This study also coincided with a chapter of life which saw my own three children enrolled in the elementary school system of Prince Edward Island, and the stories of the schoolyard dramas they observed and participated in only served to further pique my interest in investigating bullying. Upon beginning to read the literature about bullying, I became even more interested in the phenomenon and embarked upon this study. While this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of

three Prince Edward Island students who have been significantly affected by bullying, the implications of this research for education are far reaching.

### Increased Awareness

The literature provides a picture of the tenacious grasp that bullying holds in schools around the world. It is known that every school, to some degree, harbours bullies. In a small province like Prince Edward Island, where people take great pride in a culture of neighbour-helping-neighbour, it is tempting to believe that bullying is a big city problem. It is hoped that this study will increase awareness of the reality that bullying is a problem in Prince Edward Island, and all educators have a responsibility to be vigilant in exposing bullying and sensitive in dealing with the victims of bullying, including the bullies themselves. Even one student who is being bullied is one student too many. As this study indicates, the teacher, administrator, and counselor are often the last people to be approached for help by a victimized child, and therefore it is important to articulate to the students that help is available and that they are cared for. Schools need to address the fact that students are reluctant to disclose problems about bullying to school staff, and this perception must be challenged and addressed. Perhaps the school could provide a resource outside the school where students might feel more comfortable seeking assistance.

### Discernment and Articulation of Values

As this study and previous research indicate, there is often a deficit in schools in terms of the clear articulation of core values which establish a school as a safe place to be for students and staff. In this study, two of the three students could not identify the core values of their schools. The one student who did recognize some core values declared that, with the exception of one value, "integration", the values revolved around competition. When schools are emphatic in making values such as respect, appreciation for diversity, compassion, and peaceful coexistence

central to the culture of the school, all the stakeholders benefit. Many schools post a “mission statement” in a visible location in their school, but it is not enough to simply post a lofty statement of ideals. Values must be articulated explicitly and implicitly. Students need to know just what their school stands for and what is expected in terms of not just measurable behaviours but unquantifiable attitudes and philosophies. Therefore, the researcher urges leaders in the schools to dedicate some time, in cooperation with all stakeholders, to reflect upon the values that are important to the school and to explore how those values can be articulated and authentically lived.

### Knowledge

There is a plethora of information about bullying, and it can be confusing. With numerous programs available to “bully-proof” a school, and an even greater number of “experts”, the school finds itself confused about where to turn for support. It is suggested that schools and school boards assume the responsibility of staying as current as possible with trends in Peace Education, Global Education, and Conflict Resolution. By staying current with the research and the practice, schools are better able to make decisions about what might be most effective for students and staff. It seems that bullying does thrive in ignorance and therefore knowledge becomes an essential tool in defeating it. The impact of knowledge cannot be overstated.

### Beware the Pendulum

It is widely accepted that in Education the pendulum truly does swing between ideologies, pedagogies, and philosophies. For example, which is better; Whole Language or pure Phonics? Is Inclusion more compassionate than Streaming? This openness to new ideas is one of the most admirable traits of this discipline, but teachers must beware of a “bandwagon” mentality. The

climate in Education today is such that many schools are enthusiastically taking part in anti-bullying activities which include professional conferences, implementation of anti-bullying programs, improved supervision, and other related activities. Currently, it is looked upon very favourably to be seen engaging in these activities, and the public is pressing schools to take such steps. However, teachers are cautioned that one day the topic of bullying may lose its currently high-profile status. The researcher urges schools to keep this topic on the agenda.

It is comforting to envision a world where all children thrive in schools where they feel safe and accepted. Schools are to be lauded for the work being done to come closer to that ideal. However, it is more than clear that much more must be done to ensure the safety and happiness of our children. Our schools must be sanctuaries for all children.

In the dystopian novel *Lord of the Flies*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author William Golding presents a disturbing glimpse into a world of unimaginable adolescent savagery, where bullying and victimization forever mar the lives of the children presented in the story. Parents, teachers, students, and all of society have an obligation to ensure that the frighteningly “unfriendly side of the mountain” where bullies dwell must never be permitted to gain a foothold in our schools and playgrounds. It is my fervent hope that all children may one day feel welcome and safe at school, and that schools will become friendly places where the dignity of all students is preserved.

**General Assembly**

29 November 2000

**Appendix A**

Original: English

**Fifty-fifth session**  
**Agenda item 33**  
**Culture of peace**

**International decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world (2001-2010)**

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* the Charter of the United Nations, including the purposes and principles contained therein, and especially its dedication to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,

*Recalling also* the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization which states that, since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed,

*Recalling further* its previous resolutions on a culture of peace, in particular resolution 52/15 of 20 November 1997 proclaiming 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and resolution 53/25 of 10 November 1998 proclaiming the period 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World,

*Reaffirming* the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace contained in General Assembly resolution 53/243 of 13 September 1999, recognizing that it serves, inter alia, as the basis for the observance of the Decade and convinced that effective and successful observance of the Decade throughout the world will promote a culture of peace and non-violence that benefits humanity, in particular future generations,

*Taking note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World,<sup>1</sup>

*Recalling* Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/66 of 26 April 2000, entitled "Towards a Culture of Peace",<sup>2</sup>

*Emphasizing* the particular relevance of the Decade for the special session of the General Assembly, in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children, to

<sup>1</sup> A/55/377.

<sup>2</sup> See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 3 (E/2000/23)*, chap. II, sect. A.

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be held in New York, and for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in South Africa in 2001,

*Taking into account* the Manifesto 2000 initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization promoting a culture of peace, which has so far received over sixty million signatures of endorsement throughout the world,

1. *Recognizes* that the objective of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World is to strengthen further the global movement for a culture of peace following the observance of the International Year for the Culture of Peace in 2000;

2. *Notes with satisfaction* the engagement of Member States, the United Nations system and civil society during the International Year for the Culture of Peace at the national, regional and global levels and, in this context, recognizes the role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as the focal point during the year;

3. *Invites* Member States to place greater emphasis on and expand their activities to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, in particular during the Decade, at the national, regional and international levels and to ensure that peace and non-violence is fostered at all levels;

4. *Welcomes* the establishment of more than two hundred national committees and national focal points in over one hundred and sixty countries in the context of the observance of the International Year of the Culture of Peace and stresses the importance of their continued close involvement in furthering the objectives of the Declaration<sup>3</sup> and Programme of Action<sup>4</sup> on a Culture of Peace and in the effective observance of the Decade;

5. *Designates* the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as the lead agency for the Decade with responsibility for coordinating the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as liaison with the other organizations concerned;

6. *Recognizes* the important role of relevant United Nations bodies, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund and the University for Peace, in further promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, particularly by means of special activities during the Decade;

7. *Requests* the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to disseminate widely in various languages the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and related materials, in particular throughout the Decade;

8. *Calls upon* the relevant United Nations bodies, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, to promote both formal and non-formal education at all levels that inculcates a culture of peace and non-violence;

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 53/243 A.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution 53/243 B.

9. *Invites* civil society at the local, regional and national levels to widen the scope of their activities to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, engaging in partnerships and sharing information, thus contributing to a global movement for a culture of peace, and encourages civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to further the objectives of the Decade by adopting their own programme of activities to complement the initiatives of Member States, the organizations of the United Nations system and other global and regional organizations;

10. *Stresses* the importance of the media and of the new information and communication technology in further promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, especially among children and young people;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session in 2005 a report on the observance of the Decade at its mid-point and on the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action, taking into account the views of Member States and in consultation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and other relevant bodies of the United Nations system;

12. *Invites* civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to provide information to the Secretary-General on the observance of the Decade and the activities undertaken to promote a culture of peace and non-violence;

13. *Decides* to devote one day of plenary meetings at its sixtieth session to the consideration of the item, including a review of the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, as well as the observance of the Decade at its mid-point, with the participation of all relevant actors;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of the present resolution to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session;

15. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-sixth session the item entitled "Culture of peace".

## Appendix B

December 18, 2001

94 Edinburgh Drive  
Charlottetown, PE  
C1A 3G4

(Address of contact)

Dear (Name of School Board Contact)

I am a graduate student in the M.Ed. program at U.P.E.I. I have recently received approval from the Research Ethics Board, U.P.E.I., to commence data collection for my thesis which will address the topic of bullying in the secondary school.

I respectfully request permission to contact the principals of high schools within this school district to seek permission to recruit participants for this valuable research.

I have written a parental consent form to procure the permission of parents of students who will take part in my proposed qualitative study on bullying in the secondary school. The form is attached for your approval.

If everything is in order, may I respectfully request that you send a letter to the Administration of (name of school) advising the relevant stakeholders that I have sought and received permission from the School Board? Then, I will contact the principal, vice-principals, and Guidance Counselors to explain my data collection strategy and methodology.

If all goes as planned, I would be grateful to begin my confidential interview process in January. Therefore, I would be most grateful if the school might be informed by your office before the Christmas break.

I am looking forward to conducting my research. I feel that this study will provide students, teachers, administrators, and society in general with invaluable insight into the experiences and perceptions of the "targets" of bullying.

Thank you very much for your kind assistance. Upon approval of my thesis I shall forward a copy to you.

Sincerely,

Paula McHugh-Grudich, B.A., B.Ed.

## Appendix C

April, 2002

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The topic of bullying is an important one in our schools today.

Your son/daughter has expressed interest in taking part in research on bullying in the secondary school. This topic is of interest to many students.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of UPEI. The Eastern School District has given the researcher permission to interview the participants.

Your son/daughter will participate in a series of three, thirty-minute long, confidential interviews with the researcher. The researcher is enrolled in the Master of Education program at U.P.E.I. This research is being conducted to enable the researcher to complete the thesis/research component of the Master of Education program.

The interviews will take place outside of class time. Your son/daughter may withdraw from the study at any time. Neither the identity of the participants nor the identity of the school will be revealed in the final report.

Please sign below to give your consent and have your son/daughter return the form, in confidence, to the school.

---

I consent to allow \_\_\_\_\_ (student's name) to participate in research on bullying in the secondary school.

Name of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

For further information, please call Mr. Leo Broderick, Vice Principal, Colonel Gray High School, or Mr. Michael Connelly, Guidance Counselor, Colonel Gray School, at \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

**Consent Form for Participation in a Research Project on Bullying in the Secondary School**

This research is being conducted by UPEI graduate student Paula McHugh-Grudich. Dr. Graham Pike is the supervising Faculty member.

This research is being conducted to fulfill the research requirement for the Masters of Education degree program at UPEI. The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of secondary (high school) students in Prince Edward Island as individuals who have experienced significant bullying by a peer or peers. It is hoped that this research will help increase an understanding of how bullying affects some students. The research will consist of a series of three interviews which will be conducted with care to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

As a participant, your identity will be kept confidential and your real name will not appear in my thesis. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any point in the study without prejudice. All records and transcripts would then be destroyed immediately.

As the sole researcher, I, Paula McHugh-Grudich, am the only person who will have access to the data. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet.

Your participation in this research is **completely voluntary**.

Please complete the following:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree or consent to take part in the research of UPEI graduate student Paula McHugh-Grudich. This research is on the topic of bullying in the secondary school. I agree to participate in a series of three interviews which will be recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. I understand that my real name will not appear in the final document. I understand that all tape recordings will be destroyed within one year. I also understand that I am not required to take part in this research, but I agree to do so of my own free will. I may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice.

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

January, 2002

Dear Principal:

I am enrolled in the M.Ed program at UPEI. I have completed all of my coursework, and have submitted my thesis proposal to the Research Ethics Board at the university. My proposal has been approved and I received my Ethics Certificate in December, 2001.

I am conducting a qualitative inquiry into *Bullying in the Secondary School in Prince Edward Island*. I hope to conduct some of my research at your school. I feel that this work will be valuable to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and society in general. I will focus on students who have been targets of bullying. I hope to conduct in-depth interviews with five students. Of course, neither the identity of the school nor the identities of the participants will appear in the thesis.

Please let me assure you that the Research Ethics Board at UPEI compels all researchers to conduct all inquiries with an eye to both scholarly rigour and the highest ethical standards. I realize that it would be a great privilege to have students at your school share their stories. Of course, confidentiality, within the law, is assured, and students will be aware that their participation would be voluntary and, if so desired, may cease at any time. All interviews would be scheduled outside of class time.

I am enclosing a copy of my research proposal, the written communications I hope to use to recruit my participants, parental and participant consent forms, and a copy of my Ethics Certificate of Approval.

I appreciate your consideration of my request. You may . . . My advisor is Dr. Graham Pike, Faculty of Education, UPEI. He may be con . . .

If you choose to grant me permission, I hope to begin recruiting my participants as soon as possible by posting information posters throughout the school. These posters would outline my purpose and give contact information. I am aware that the students at your school are now writing exams, so I would be sensitive not to approach students during this time.

If you wish to call me please contact me at

I appreciate your consideration of my request.

Thank you.

Paula McHugh-Grudich

**Appendix F****Research on Bullying in the Secondary School**

To: All Home Room Teachers

From: Paula McHugh-Grudich, Graduate Student, UPEI

Please read the following to your students during Home Room.

Bullying is a serious problem affecting students from Kindergarten to Grade XII. Students who are bullied are affected in many ways.

Students at this school are invited to take part in a research project on the topic of bullying in high schools. This research will be conducted by Paula McHugh-Grudich, a graduate student at UPEI. The purpose of this research is to understand how people who have been bullied are affected. If your life has been **significantly affected** because you have been bullied, and you wish to take part in this research, please submit your name to the Vice Principal or to the Guidance Office. There is no guarantee that all students who volunteer for this study will be chosen.

It is hoped that this research will help all of us understand more about bullying, with the hope that, one day, bullying will no longer be an issue in our schools.

This study will be confidential. Neither your real name nor the name of this school will appear in the research. Participants will take part in three interviews, each lasting no more than 45 minutes. These interviews will be held outside of class time.

A bulletin will be posted on our school's bulletin boards giving further information.

Thank you for considering this request to participate.

## Appendix G

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

While there are many advantages to the Informal Conversational Interview, in that it allows flexibility and a high degree of responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes (Patton, p. 282), I have decided to use the Standardized Open-ended Interview approach. Because time spent interviewing my participants may be limited, and especially in consideration of the fact that I am planning three interviews with each participant, this strategy may be useful in helping participants focus. As well, this approach will help ensure that I ask the same questions of all participants. This may be very helpful in the organization and analysis of the data I hope to gather.

According to Patton, there are basically six types of questions which can be asked by the qualitative interviewer. They are:

- Experience/behaviour questions
- Opinion/values questions
- Feeling questions
- Sensory questions
- Background/demographic questions
- Knowledge questions

(Patton, p. 292 )

These questions may be asked about the past, present and future, and while there are no fixed rules about sequencing, Patton submits that it makes sense to begin with non-controversial questions and then proceed to questions that will elicit opinions and feelings. Patton also contends that it is wise to save "boring" questions about demographics until the end. I do not concur with this, as I feel that innocuous questions about age, grade, and so forth will enable the participants to relax at the beginning of the interview cycle.

In organizing the questions for my three proposed interviews with each participant, I divided my questions according to three "levels". Level I Questions are those which I feel are non-controversial and which will help to create a familiarity and the groundwork for comfort and trust. There are many "safe" questions about demographics, for example.

Level II questions are questions of greater depth, seeking participants' opinions, values, and feelings.

Level III questions will build on the relationship established in Level II. It is hoped that during this third interview, participants will feel safe enough to engage in dialogue on very meaningful, information-rich themes related to bullying and their experiences with bullying.

All three levels include the different "types" of questions according to Patton.

---

### INTERVIEW I

(Welcome participant, verify name, and remind participant that he/she can refuse to answer any question if they so choose. Explain that the interview will be taped. Explain that this is the first of three interviews. Ask why bullying is of interest to him/her. )

1. How old are you, and what grade are you in?
2. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

3. How long have you attended this school?
4. Where did you attend Junior High ( grades 7-9 )? How was Junior High for you?
5. Where did you attend elementary school? What kind of an experience was elementary school for you?
6. We are going to talk about bullying. What does the word "bullying" mean to you?
7. Is this school a safe place for you? If so, how?
8. What kinds of things make this school feel unsafe for you at times?
9. Have you heard about any programs being used at this school to help get rid of bullying?  
Can you name this ( these ) program (s)?
10. How interested do you feel that teachers or administrators ( vice-principals, principal) at this school are in ridding the school of bullying?
11. When was the last time a teacher or other authority figure here spoke about bullying in one of your classes or assemblies? Please put into your own words what that teacher had to say about bullying.
12. How serious a problem is bullying at this school? What makes you say this?
13. Estimate in terms of percentage (%) about how many students in this school have been affected by bullying.
14. Describe the "typical" bully, if there is such a thing.
15. Why do you think bullies pick on others?
16. Describe the typical "target" of a bully.
17. Why do you think bullies pick on these "targets"?
18. What are the most commons forms of bullying at this school? Of this, which is the most harmful, and why?
19. What are the differences, if any, between male bullies and female bullies?
20. Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in other people's shoes, to really understand how they feel. How do you think empathy develops in people?
21. Where are the most common places for bullying to take place at this school?

Thank you for your responses. Everything you have said is confidential. I look forward to our next interview. (Confirm next interview time.)

**End of Interview I**

## **Interview II**

Is there anything you would like to say before we begin our taped interview? How are you feeling about taking part in this study? Are there any concerns you have?

When we last met, we talked about bullying in fairly general terms. I would like to talk more about *your* experiences today.

1. When was the last time you experienced or witnessed an incident of bullying, either involving yourself or someone else? Please describe what happened.
2. Describe, as best you can remember, the first time you were bullied. Why were you bullied, and how did you react?
3. Give two or three words to describe how you feel when you are bullied.
4. How do you feel when you see someone else being bullied?
5. What are some things you have done to protect yourself or friends from being bullied?
6. How has fear of being bullied affected your feelings towards school?
7. Why do you think you are a target of bullying?
8. How do you feel about the person(s) who bullies ( bully) you?
9. Has being bullied affected your physical or emotional health in any way? Can you please explain how?
10. If you knew that you or someone else was going to be the victim of an after-school bullying incident, would you report it? If so, to whom? If not, why not?
11. How long have you felt victimized by bullying?
12. Is being bullied becoming more of a problem for you, or is it less of a problem? Can you explain why?
13. Are the bullies at this school powerful? Why or why not?
14. What is the most extreme action you have taken to avoid being bullied?
15. Do you feel that you can confide in a parent, teacher, or other adult to talk about your problems with bullying? Why, or why not?
16. Has being bullied affected your grades or your attendance? Please explain.
17. In your opinion, how should the teachers, vice-principals, and principal at this school deal with bullying? How do they actually deal with it?
18. If you look at your entire "career" as a student, how much has bullied affected your life as a student?
19. What do you feel you can do to stop the bullying in your life?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much. **End of Interview III.**

### **Interview III**

This is our final interview. I have really appreciated your participation.

1. What makes a person popular in high school?
2. Why are some people picked on in high school?
3. If you could say anything to the bullies who bother you, what would you say?
4. Do you feel at home at your school?

- 5 Are you proud of your school?
- 6 Do you feel that most bullies are as intelligent, less intelligent, or more intelligent than other students?
- 7 When you disagree with others, how do you work things out?
- 8 What do you think will happen if you stand up to the bullies who pick on you?
- 9 Is there anything that you could do to stop the bullying?
- 9 How do you think people learn peaceful and respectful ways of dealing with others?
10. Values are deep beliefs about what is really important in life. These beliefs guide our choices and our behaviour. What do you feel are the three most important values of your school?
11. How hopeful are you that schools will one day get rid of bullying? Why do you feel this way?
12. Can you suggest some ways that we can learn to be more accepting of others, especially of others who are "different" in some way?
13. Why do you think bullies pick on others? How can bullies be taught to stop bullying?
14. Do you feel that bullies feel guilty? Why or why not?
15. If you could give advice to both a bully and a target of bullying, what would you say to each person?
- 16 Imagine that you have a chance to advise the principal to do something to get rid of bullying. What would you tell him?

**End of Interview III.**

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