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BULLYING IN YEAR 10 GIRLS'  
FRIENDSHIP GROUPS: "I WOULD  
SO NOT GO THROUGH THAT  
AGAIN."

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## ABSTRACT

One of the most common concerns presented to school counsellors by Year 10 girls is friendship problems, some of which have been identified as bullying. A three-stage study including focus groups, a survey questionnaire and individual interviews, undertook to describe the nature and experiences of Year 10 (early middle adolescent) girls' bullying within their friendship groups, according to girls' points of view. The study also sought to discover what girls themselves had found to be helpful in reducing or preventing such bullying. Bullying was found to occur in the majority of friendship groups, but girls often failed to recognise or name it as bullying. Two distinct types of friendship group bullying, large group bullying and triadic group bullying, were found. The majority of observers and helpers were found to experience negative effects from witnessing bullying, while victims experienced significant loss and grief concerns. The findings suggest that the developmental changes in girls which create increased friendship conflict may also contribute to increased levels of bullying as girls learn to manage more highly-developed friendships, and indicate that satisfactory resolution of the bullying is important for girls' developmental well-being. Differences were also found in the recognition of bullying among girls from coeducational and single-sex schools of different decile levels, with girls from middle and high decile coeducational schools recognising all types of bullying more than did girls from single-sex schools of similar decile levels.

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This study has underpinned my work as a counsellor over the past ten years, so that my counselling has been illuminated by my study while my practice has, in its turn, provided the impetus for my research. In the years that I have spent working as a counsellor with adolescent girls, I have been deeply moved by their stories, and by the particular honesty and love with which they strove to understand painful conflicts with their friends. They were meticulous, passionate, and courageous in their search for their truth. I honour their courage and honesty, and I thank them for the privilege of working with them.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For the past seventeen years I have worked as a school guidance counsellor. I began work in this field in a girls' high school and after two years moved to a busy counselling and management practice in a large coeducational inner-city secondary school. During this time, I have worked with thousands of teenage girls as clients. Girls brought many different problems to my counselling room, covering many facets of their adolescent experience, but one problem has always seemed to be presented more often than any of the others.

Day after day, whatever other problems came across the threshold of my room, a steady stream of girls brought their "friendship problems" to me and to my counsellor colleagues in other schools. As part of my accountability, I have kept records of the issues which girls presented for counselling, and the relative time it took to attend to such issues. Every year, issues to do with peer relationships were among the most frequent and the most time-consuming. While girls brought many other issues of major concern, friendship concerns could arise at any time and seemed to be experienced by significant numbers of girls. Many girls could be helped through their problems, but it sometimes proved difficult to support others to find and manage resolutions that left them feeling empowered.

What made it more distressing for the girls was that their friendships were normally marked by their extreme closeness with their best friends. They expected a high degree of support and trust in these friendships, especially when confidentiality was involved. They relished not only their similarities with their friends, but also their differences. Their delight in these close friendships was combined with a sense of surprise that the friendship could even exist, as if they marvelled that such an experience of closeness with another human being was possible.

When conflicts arose in these close friendships, their outstanding characteristic was the distress that the girls experienced. They often endured it for long periods, attributing it to the "friendship problem". These conflicts were consequently regarded by those involved in them as being extremely important, so that girls acted as if their very being depended on a satisfactory outcome. During conflict, girls found it difficult either to concentrate on their school work or to confide in families, and yet were unable to think about anything else. Where friendship problems were concerned, girls would describe in

detail the interactions between themselves and their friend, or friends, and would ruminate, and worry over what had happened or had not happened between them and their friend.

At times, the relationship they described was one which depended on the abuse by the powerful of the disempowered, and appeared to be that of bully and victim, with themselves as the victim. I noticed that if, during counselling sessions, I tentatively gave a name to such conflict by reflecting that “It sounds to me as if this feels like bullying,” the girls who were my clients would respond with a look of relief, and would agree that, yes, it did feel like bullying.

As I witnessed their experiences over the years, and helped girls take action to bring about change in their lives, I pondered about the nature of their friendship relationships, and the pain and powerlessness they experienced. The quality of the girls’ desperation as they wrestled with a painful friendship problem made me wonder whether it might be associated in some way with fundamental aspects of their development.

I continued to wonder about the nature of such friendship problems, particularly their pervasiveness and the profound effect they had on girls’ well-being. I had observed that other adults, such as teachers or parents, tended to speak of girls’ friendship problems somewhat dismissively, as if such concerns were of little consequence, though regrettable because of “girls’ bitchiness”, and yet my own clinical information was that they were of real consequence to the girls themselves. Even when I talked with counsellor colleagues, I found that they considered girls’ friendship issues somewhat trivial, repetitive and time-consuming when compared with serious concerns, such as self-harm or suicidality. Reference to bullying appeared to involve the wider peer group, and was not considered relevant to friendship relationships. Friendship conflicts were also viewed as inevitable. The media appeared to reflect similar attitudes. I frequently heard or saw girls’ conflicts dismissed as “girls’ bitchiness” and the girls themselves referred to as “drama queens” because of the extreme intensity and fervour with which they sought to resolve their conflicts with friends. The observational evidence which I had gathered from those around me tended to be confirmed by a study into school counselling.

Manthei (1999) undertook a two-part study of counsellors’ workload and the nature of their work. From a representative sample of schools, school counsellors reported

the incidence of counselling issues presented by students, and also gave their opinions as to which were the more serious. The study reported that peer conflict was among the more frequently-presented issues, but that counsellors judged it to be one of the least serious concerns that they dealt with, although they viewed bullying as a serious issue. Yet my observation had suggested that girls' friendship problems might have more important implications than were apparent.

A further question posed by my observation of girls' friendship concerns was whether the conflicts were in some way connected with or were affected by, developmental processes. According to informal counsellor and teacher feedback, friendship concerns were attributed to a change from intermediate to secondary school at the start of Year 9, but this did not explain the apparent increase in the number and intensity of such concerns after the start of Year 10. Friendship problems thus might have other causes, springing from developmental changes.

I remained unconvinced that this type of aggression could be viewed as inevitable but not important, when to the girls themselves it was so critical, and began to seek a possible way of making sense of what I had observed. I surmised that a possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the supposed triviality of friendship concerns and girls' intense investment in such problems was that some at least of the conflict in girls' friendships was, in fact, much more serious than was thought by adults, because it was bullying.

The negative effects of bullying have been known for some time. Olweus (1978), in a study of boys' school-yard bullying, first drew our attention to bullying and its negative consequences. Since then, bullying has been widely researched, including its effects on all those who participate, whether as bullies, victims, or onlookers. Direct bullying, such as hitting or punching, and indirect bullying, such as the spreading of rumours, are now widely recognised as serious threats to young people's well-being. At first girls appeared largely as the victims of bullying, but more recent studies (James & Owens, 2005; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000) have painted a very different picture of hidden bullying which uses relationships to hurt.

Interestingly, school counsellors, have tended to perceive girls' relational aggression towards their peers as less serious than other types of bullying, as reported by

school counsellors who responded to an Internet survey conducted by Jacobsen and Bauman (2007). The study contained vignettes describing physical, verbal, and relational bullying. School counsellors not only rated relational bullying (involving friendship) the least serious of the three types, but they also had the least empathy for victims of relational bullying, and were least likely to intervene in relational bullying incidents.

In New Zealand, results have suggested similar patterns of bullying as in other countries. When provided with a definition of bullying as being physical or verbal assault or abuse, or exclusion, close to one-third of secondary school students reported having been bullied at least once in the current year, with seven per cent being bullied at least once a week (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008).

As indicated above, bullying, including relational bullying, has been found to have serious implications for those involved, while friendship conflict has been considered comparatively trivial. However these phenomena, bullying and friendship conflict, might prove to have a closer relationship than has at first appeared. If friendship conflict developed into relational bullying at times, it might not be recognised as such, because it would be viewed as a friendship problem, and friendship has not normally been associated with bullying, but with the wider peer group.

With this in mind, I kept returning to the possibility of bullying within girls' close relationships, and began to wonder if the bullying which I had noticed in girls' friendship problems might in fact be more widespread than was previously thought. It appeared that there might be serious bullying implications in the "friendship problems" which dominate many girls' lives, and it seemed to me that a better understanding of this behaviour could be beneficial to school counsellors, and to others concerned with the welfare of young women.

I therefore undertook to develop a profile of bullying within girls' friendships during this important period of their lives, and how it is understood. A better understanding of the nature and experience of bullying within girls' mid-adolescent friendship groups might, I considered, assist school guidance counsellors and others who work with adolescent girls to better help and support them through their management of such friendship conflict experiences, and would also be likely to prove helpful for girls themselves in their understanding of such conflicts.



Because such an investigation would aim to support the work of school counsellors, it might also be found desirable to explore bullying through the lens of girls' own experiences of their Year 10 friendship conflict, at a time when they would be likely to be undergoing significant developmental change.

Prior to undertaking the project I had in mind, it was important to review the literature relevant to this complex area. The review would involve an exploration of the research into the development of girls in middle adolescence, their friendships, and current understandings of the type of bullying found among the girls and their friends.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In seeking to establish current understandings of friendship bullying among Year 10 girls, it is important to consider several areas. These include the developmental issues for Year 10 girls and their same-sex friendships, because these create the context in which bullying occurs, and what is known about their bullying of one another within their friendship groups. Because girls in Year 10 are aged about fourteen or fifteen, the literature regarding the developmental period of middle adolescence is the most relevant.

The review of literature therefore will focus on three areas, and is presented in three sections. Firstly, it examines what is understood about the normative psychosocial developmental experiences of girls during the period of middle adolescence, and will address the psychosocial developmental changes which they undergo in middle adolescence, such as acquiring a capacity for intimacy and for empathy, that characterise their transition to adulthood. Particular attention will be paid to these developmental changes as they relate to girls' peer groups. The second section in the literature review will explore their same-sex friendships, to discover what is currently understood about the nature of girls' friendships in middle adolescence, since they potentially provide the context for bullying. In the third section, current understandings of the serious issue of bullying will be explored, as bullying has been found to manifest itself among middle adolescent girls.

### Section One: Girls' Development in Middle Adolescence

Research interest into the period of adolescence began in earnest in the mid-fifties (Sullivan, 1953b), with the issues of gender in relation to development emerging during the past thirty years (Gilligan, 1982). While much of the research has concerned both boys and girls, there are aspects of girls' development which are peculiar to them, and influence their interactions with friends.

Girls experience major physical, psychological, and social development in adolescence, which is understood to begin with early adolescence, starting about the age of eleven. This continues through mid-adolescence, at about the age of fifteen, and thence at about eighteen to late adolescence, with adulthood being reached at about the age of twenty-five, as described by Kroger (2007). Both boys and girls experience major changes

during the transition from early to middle adolescence (Kroger, 2007; Stein, 2007). These changes disturb the comparatively stable balance of the individual, which is typical of middle childhood (Kegan, 1982), to a greater or lesser degree, and pose many challenges to the individual when they enter adolescence (Erikson, 1968).

The most obvious change, immediately apparent to girls themselves and to others, is physical change. In early adolescence, girls experience the onset of puberty at an average age of eleven in New Zealand (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006), somewhat earlier than for boys. With maturation and consequent alterations in hormone levels, they are confronted with a range of physical, emotional, and psychosocial changes (Dacey & Kenny, 1997). As they approach mid-adolescence, their bodies continue to change in shape, appearance, and functions, and they find themselves experiencing new emotions that they have not previously felt, or that they experience in different, often more intense, adult ways (Dacey & Kenny, 1997).

Adolescents' way of thinking and making meaning also starts to change in puberty, with the reconfiguration of the brain during adolescence (Stein, 2007). Thus, both girls and boys gradually lose aspects of their old cognitive capacities of childhood and acquire newer and different abilities (Casey, Giedd, & Thomas, 2000; Stein, 2007), with the development of formal operations (Rowe & Marcia, 1980). Consequently, in early to middle adolescence, they are already engaged in the process of developing and integrating adult ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving (Kroger, 2007). The physical changes they experience inevitably impact on their perceptions of themselves and their world and are inextricably linked to their psychosocial development (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005).

As well as sharing some aspects of adolescent development with boys, girls develop in ways which are unique to them. A review of recent research studies which have involved mapping normal brain development through the process of MRI scanning has found differences between girls' and boys' brains, both in the rates of change and the parts of the brain which are affected. These changes indicate that girls are likely to be vulnerable in particular ways during adolescence, and the process of girls' neurological development is likely to be experienced differently from the way that boys experience development (Durstun et al., 2001) .

## *Girls' Psychosocial Tasks in Middle Adolescence*

In considering the changes which take place during normal adolescence for girls, a group of important psychosocial tasks have been identified which appear to be closely connected to, and influenced by, same-sex peer relationships, during the transition period from early to middle adolescence (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968). These tasks, which will be discussed in this chapter, have been the subject of extensive research (Kroger, 1992, 2000), and theories have been proposed to account for the ways in which individuals appear to go about these tasks, the fulfilment of which appears crucial for the attainment of healthy adulthood. The tasks include separation from the family and caregivers, the growth of a sense of a unique and separate self, the acquisition of a capacity for intimacy (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953a), the ability to experience empathy (Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1978), the growth of positive self-esteem (Erikson, 1968; C. R. Rogers, 1957), and the development of moral judgment (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1977). Discussion of these important changes also requires consideration of the developmental processes which are involved, according to what is known, not only about the content of development, but also about its genesis and processes.

A theoretical blueprint of adolescent development has been provided by the seminal work of Blos (1967, 1989) and Erikson (1968). Blos (1967), drawing from a clinical psychoanalytic background, proposed that, in adolescence, a second separation and individuation stage occurs, similar to that of infancy, in which the individual separates from the parental introjects to achieve autonomy as an individual. Successful separation and individuation were seen as necessary for the adolescent to achieve healthy adulthood. Failure to individuate was seen as connected to negative effect such as depression, for adolescents (Milne & Lancaster, 2001). Blos (1989) suggested that the friendships of adolescence allowed individuals the opportunity to successfully rework relational tasks undertaken in earlier life stages. Other empirical research followed, again based on clinical observation, such as that of Kegan (1982), who also suggested that, even if girls' early attachment experiences were less than optimal, the formation of successful relationships with their peer group in adolescence was important, because it might afford individuals a positive "second chance" opportunity for development, through the second individuation stage. More recent research (Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2005) has suggested that

the separation and individuation processes take place simultaneously, with parental influence gradually decreasing and social identity increasing.

Erikson's (1968) work has been a continuing key influence in the understanding of adolescent development. Like Blos (1967), Erikson drew many of his conclusions from his clinical psychotherapeutic practice, which included work with adolescents, and thus constructed his theory of psychological growth occurring through a series of crises throughout the lifespan, with that of youth occurring in later adolescence, preceded by crucial psychosocial tasks in early to middle adolescence. These tasks, according to Erikson, included the development by adolescents of a capacity for intimacy and for empathy, a positive sense of self-esteem, and an increasing sense of themselves as individuals. The fulfilment of these tasks of early and middle adolescence was seen as essential for all adolescents, so that in late adolescence they could go on to achieve identity development, and to prepare for the intimate relationships of adulthood. According to Erikson (1968), development for adolescents requires them to individuate psychologically from their families, achieving a sense of themselves as individuals, founded on, yet different from, their childhood selves. The individual's drive towards self-actualisation gradually was seen as enabling a more complex and flexible self to develop during the journey from infancy through childhood and adolescence, to adulthood (C. R. Rogers, 1957). Erikson further asserted that adolescents' relationships with peers, together with experiences and interactions with others, provide important opportunities for the fulfilment of these tasks, opportunities to which individuals need to respond appropriately in order for optimum development to occur.

However, Erikson's (1968) explanation of adolescent development focused on male identity formation as the norm, with female development seen as dependent on their biological function. Erikson, deriving his evidence from the acceptance in his time of women's traditional roles as wives and mothers, and from an experiment in which he observed children's play with blocks, explained adolescent girls' development as being centred on the creation of "inner space." According to Erikson, young women postponed some aspects of their psychosocial development until their acquisition of a partner in adulthood. He acknowledged the influence of history and the likelihood that the changing political and social context of the late sixties and early seventies would bring changes for girls' and women's psychological development.

Alongside their valuable contributions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the work of Erikson (1968) and others (Blos, 1967), imposed by the gender roles and the socio-political context of the period during which they carried out their investigations and developed their theory. While the contributions of these early thinkers were invaluable, those limitations with regard to the influence of gender and to understandings of normative behaviour, are now apparent. Furthermore, their conclusions and theories, while drawing on general observations, were largely developed from their work with clinical populations, and in Erikson's case, initially from men who had experienced the trauma of war. Therefore, the conclusions which they reached might not be generalisable across the normal developmental experiences of adolescents in the start of the twenty-first century. In addition, as researchers initially sought to test their theories, studies depended largely on the sampling of boys, rather than of girls, in older, more easily accessible later adolescent populations. For example, Orlofsky, Marcia, and Lesser's (1973) study of ego identity, which found support for Erikson's (1968) theory, was conducted with a sample of university-age males. In such a gendered context, research results for males were considered to be the norm, and, if girls were included in a research sample, often the results tended to be contradictory and confusing (Archer, 1992; Chodorow, 1978).

### *The Development of Moral Judgment*

Another major area of adolescent development, that of moral and ethical judgement (Kohlberg, 1977; Kroger, 1992), has been the focus of some controversy in regard to girls' development. Kohlberg's seminal theory has identified a number of successive stages of moral judgement, possessing increasing levels of complexity, and based on ethical principles of justice. Interestingly, it was found that, according to then-current views of moral development (Freud, 1959; Kohlberg, 1977; Piaget, 1932), girls appeared to achieve generally lower levels of moral and ethical judgment than boys did, with somewhat confusing and puzzling responses to situations requiring moral judgement. Kohlberg's research, which appeared to find women less moral than men, has been vigorously challenged (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan has argued that traditional views of morality took men's experience as normative, and that girls and women experience morality differently. According to Gilligan, girls' and women's morality is based on their care for relationship and connection with others, and this

explains their failure to score highly on ethical measures which depend on the application of principles of moral judgment (Kohlberg, 1977) rather than on those of an ethic of care (Skoe & Marcia, 1991). In doing so, Gilligan has challenged “the overriding value psychologists have placed on separation, individuation, and autonomy...To see self-sufficiency as the hallmark of maturity conveys a view of adult life that is at odds with the human condition,” (Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988, p. xii).

Skoe and Marcia (1991), in an influential study, investigated morality centred on caring, in order to test Gilligan’s (1982) theory. They developed a measure of care-based morality which identified five hierarchical stages of ethical judgement, based on the care for others identified by Gilligan. The stages began with self-concern as the sole criterion for making ethical decisions, followed by the questioning of self-concern as the main criterion. The third stage was concern only for the other, followed by the questioning of concern for the other as the criterion, and, finally, at the fifth stage, succeeding to a balance of concern for self and concern for the other. Using this stage-based measure in applying the ethic of care, they undertook a study with girls in later adolescence. The researchers found that there was a positive relationship between care-based morality and identity development, and concluded that, for women, moral reasoning is embedded in their achievement of a mature sense of self.

In a later, related study (Skoe et al., 1999) the same measure of care-based morality was used to compare the moral reasoning of Norwegian girls and boys in early adolescence with data collected from a group of a similar age in Canada. Girls in Canada were found to be more likely than boys to develop care-based reasoning, but this was not found to be so in Norway, where both girls and boys were found to be similar to each other in their moral reasoning. The authors of the study concluded that researchers should be wary of generalising the results of studies from North America to other Western countries, since the socialisation processes involved in developing their gender roles could differ greatly from country to country. A later study (Skoe, 1995) compared different sex role orientations and their use of an ethic of care, concluding that an androgynous sex role was most likely to be associated with care-based morality. While these and other studies have used the same measure of an ethic of care, factors such as those that influenced the results of these studies continue to make generalisation difficult.

Researchers have returned frequently to the importance of relationship and connection in girls' adolescent development and to well-being. A recent study by Cramer (2000) has suggested that, at least in North America, girls' and women's healthy psychosocial development may indeed depend more on connection with others than boys' does. To find out more about the part played by gender, Cramer undertook a study with almost two hundred male and female college students, using reliable measures of identity development associated with well-being (Meeus, 1996; Waterman, 1992) and personality dimensions, to explore the relationship between the achievement of identity and relational concerns. For girls who had committed themselves to a sense of identity, the dimensions of assertion and adequacy were expressed almost entirely within the context of their social relationships, rather than through their sense of achievement as independent individuals. Data relating to the girls who were in the moratorium status (Marcia, 1967), and were thus exploring possible identity areas, were somewhat puzzling and contradictory. Cramer pointed out that the results tended to confirm Gilligan's (1982) contention that girls and women form their sense of themselves through their connection with others. The study also indicates that the process of exploration for girls is highly complex, difficult and confusing. This study reflects the complex and elusive nature of adolescent development, and is somewhat inconclusive, but provides support for Gilligan's view that girls consider the relational context when learning to make ethical and moral decisions.

#### *Attachment and the Development of Intimacy*

Adolescent developmental tasks for both girls and boys include the development of intimacy (Erikson, 1968) and this is associated with their early experiences of closeness (Bowlby, 1958). During the same period when Erikson (1968) and Blos (1967) were engaged in publishing their theories of adolescent psychosocial development, consideration was also being given to the way that adolescents form close relationships as they grow to maturity. While, according to Erikson, adolescents first form an identity and then, in adulthood, go on to discover intimacy in their adult relationships, the capacity for forming intimate relationships begins much earlier, in families (Bowlby, 1958).

Attachment style, or the way in which individuals relate to others, arises from adolescents' early relationships with their families (Bowlby, 1958), and continues to be significant in adolescence because it affects their capacity for intimacy in their close peer



relationships (Weimer, Kerns, & Oldenburg, 2004). Bowlby (1958, 1960), in a pioneering work which continues to be a powerful influence in psychosocial research, observed the effects of hospitalisation on very young children. He discovered that early separation of an infant from the mother figure produced not only anxiety, but also anger, provided the relationship had been one of secure, healthy attachment. Bowlby concluded that the nature of a child's relationship with his or her mother was critical in establishing a secure emotional base for social development. The emotional attachment of a child to the primary caregiver laid the foundation for future exploration of the world and the other relationships it afforded to the individual. Bowlby developed his model to describe different attachment styles which positively or negatively affected later development. Secure attachment in particular predicted self-reliance in adolescence and adulthood. Important in the attachment process was the child's developing ability to regulate her feelings, particularly those of guilt, love, and hate.

Attachment patterns influence adolescent development, and affect young people's relationships with their peers. The style and quality of attachment formed in childhood has been shown to affect girls' adolescent friendships (Kerns & Stevens, 1996). It has been found that secure attachment is necessary for the development of intimacy in girls' adolescent friendships (Dekovic & Meeus, 1997; Weimer, et al., 2004), and contributes to girls' sense of well-being (Matteson, 1993). Weimer et al. (2004) interviewed pairs of same-sex dyadic friends, and discovered that those pairs who shared a secure attachment style were more likely to develop a strong mutual bond. Thus, according to Weimer et al., adolescent girls whose attachment with caregivers has been secure are more likely to be able to develop intimacy in their adolescent relationships. Insecure attachment, on the other hand, has been found to be likely to lead to distortion and vulnerability for girls in their relationships outside the family, as they have become sensitised to the rejection of others, (Bowlby, 1988; Irons & Gilbert, 2005).

Successive researchers have sought to explain the development of the closeness, or intimacy, which marks adolescents' relationships with their peers and others (Laursen, 1993; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Erikson (1968) had referred to the "crisis of intimacy" as taking place in late adolescence. This was because intimacy, in Erikson's view, included both psychosocial, emotional intimacy as well as sexual intimacy, in the counterpointing of individuality and fusion of two separate identities. Sullivan (1953a)

described the need for intimacy in early adolescence as a need “for collaboration with at least one other person,” (Sullivan, 1953a, p. 264). It is clear that both Erikson and Sullivan recognised the drive towards intimacy as part of adolescent development. Their work, however, while significant in drawing attention to this powerful need and outlining many of its features, must be treated with caution, since it resonates with the implications of being grounded in clinical work with non-normative populations, and with certain unhelpful attitudes of the time, such as homophobia.

It was later argued that the development of intimacy, as conceptualised by Erikson (1968), took place earlier in adolescence rather than later, and was therefore connected with identity development processes (Dyk & Adams, 1987) and adjustment, psychological well-being and popularity (Buhrmester, 1990; Townsend, McCracken, & Wilton, 1988). In support of this, a cluster of studies found evidence that the development of intimacy was located in the early and middle periods of adolescence, especially for girls (McNelles & Connolly, 1999; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981).

### *Empathy*

Girls in middle adolescence are also likely to be in the process of developing an emerging capacity for empathy (Nathanson, 1997). A relatively recent concept, with research in this area led by Davis (1994; Davis, Luce, & Kraus, 1994), empathy is defined as the ability to project oneself into the feelings and emotional perspective of another. It appears together with girls’ increasing ability to role-take in adolescence, according to one field of research (Davis, 1994). Empathy must be present in order for girls to develop moral judgement, and is manifested in both affective and cognitive aspects. Affective aspects of empathy appear to be inherited to some degree, unlike those associated with cognitive function, according to a study of empathic responses in identical twins (Davis, et al., 1994). This is especially so for girls (Davis, et al., 1994; Hoffman, 1977; Stein, 2007). The development of empathy is also important for adolescent development, and particularly among girls (Carlson Jones & Costin, 1995).

In a study of dispositional affective empathy with 307 middle adolescent boys and girls, part of a larger, longitudinal study, De Wied, Branje, and Meeus (2007) obtained data through the use of written questionnaires, filled out by the adolescents both at school and again at home with interviewers. Girls were found to be more dispositionally and

affectively empathic than boys, and they used problem-solving, withdrawal, and compliance more than boys did in disputes with their same-sex close friends. While girls' capacity for empathy increases in adolescence, they are not likely to empathise in conflict situations, and this is likely to influence their use of empathy (de Wied, et al., 2007; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2007; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006a).

While the data depended substantially on self-report, others have also found girls to be more affectively empathic than boys are and, while empathy is present in some forms at earlier ages, it is likely to increase during adolescence, particularly in early to middle adolescence (Davis, 1994). While empathy remains of great interest to researchers, the complex definitions and measurements of this comparatively new area of research vary considerably from study to study, making comparisons and meta-analyses challenging. Interestingly, low levels of affective empathy are associated with bullying, but with indirect bullying, the presence or absence of empathy is less conclusive (Kaukiainen et al., 1999). Intervention on behalf of victims is more likely among those who have high levels of empathy (Gini, et al., 2007).

### *The Development of Self-Esteem*

The development of positive self-esteem in adolescent girls is extremely important for their present and future well-being (Choate, 2008; Trzesniewski et al., 2006), and yet girls' self-esteem diminishes as they enter adolescence (Pipher, 1994) and remains low (Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kliewer, & Kilmartin, 2001), unlike that of boys, which increases again at the age of fifteen (Quatman & Watson, 2001). The relationship of self-esteem to adolescent development has been widely researched, in areas such as identity, ethnicity, and physical appearance (Harter, 2000; Marcia, 1967; Phinney & Cobb, 1996).

The peer group plays an increasingly significant role in the development of self-esteem (Prinstein & La Greca, 2002), particularly for girls. Moreover, friends' approval is strongly influential in maintaining the stability of girls' sense of self-esteem (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998; Thomas & Webber, 2001). Harter and colleagues found that the development of girls' self-esteem is strongly linked to others' approval in those areas which are considered important by individual girls. Furthermore, the domains of connection and relationships have been found to be essential for the growth of girls' self-esteem (Cramer, 2000), when compared with that of boys.

In New Zealand, a positive sense of self-esteem for girls has similarly been shown to be connected with their present and future well-being, and with the approval of important others. Self-esteem relies in part on the quality of relationships with peers (Paterson, Pryor, & Field, 1995), and is associated with positive friendship qualities for disabled students (Martin & Smith, 2002). While overseas studies into self-esteem suggest that there are long-term negative effects for girls who suffer from low self-esteem (Harter & Monsour, 1992; Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998; Polce-Lynch, et al., 2001), results have tended to be inconclusive, because of the difficulty in designing studies which are sufficiently reliable. Using data gathered from an ongoing large-scale multi-method longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand, with a high rate of ongoing response, Trzesniewski et al. (2006) were able to obtain a large representative birth cohort sample to explore whether low self-esteem predicted negative real-world consequences. Data were collected at ages 11, 13, 15 and 26, using self-report and three other types of measures. As well as having access to this reliable and triangulated data which had been collected over a fifteen-year period, reflecting real-life effects, the authors of this study were not only able to control for a number of variables which had been found to affect the reliability of previous studies into the effects of self-esteem, but also to include other measures besides self-report. A direct relationship was found between adolescent boys' and girls' self-esteem, and their future psychological health. This study (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006) was both rigorous and large-scale, and confirmed the importance of self-esteem for future well-being. However, it did not discover whether levels of self-esteem remained the same in adult life as they had been in adolescence. Nor, as the authors acknowledged, did its scope include the identification of those defining moments during adolescence which contributed to the presence or absence of positive self-esteem.

While self-esteem appears to be closely linked with positive outcomes for adolescent girls, opinion remains divided and evidence inconclusive (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006) as to the precise part played by self-esteem in paving the way for development. Boden, Fergusson, and Horwood (2008) have identified two important questions relevant to adolescent development. One concerns the nature of self-esteem itself, and whether it is an hierarchical concept, with global self-esteem at the top, and with other domains, such as peer relationships, subordinate to it, or whether all domains exercise equal influence. The second relates to whether low levels of self-esteem cause negative outcomes later in life, or whether self-esteem is, rather, in the nature of a risk indicator, which reflects other

risk factors. Boden and colleagues undertook an intriguing longitudinal study with a birth cohort sample of over 1,000 young people over a period of twenty-five years, to discover whether levels of self-esteem at the age of 15 predicted outcomes in later adolescence, with regard to mental health, interpersonal outcomes, and life satisfaction, when adjustment was made for other risk factors identified at age 15. Associations with mental health and interpersonal outcomes were moderate to weak, the authors suggesting that self-esteem should thus be regarded as a risk indicator, rather than as the cause of risk. Interestingly, girls' self-esteem at age 15 was lower than that of boys, and the study also found a persistent relationship between self-esteem at age 15 and later life satisfaction, attributed by the authors of the study to the universal human need for affiliation, as proposed by Maslow (1962). However, this study measured self-esteem at only one point, age 15, with one birth cohort sample.

### *The Process of Development*

The socioecological processes which initiate or support psychosocial development in middle adolescent girls are important because successful maturation depends on appropriate responses from the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erikson, 1968). Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1980), from a background of child psychology, sought to extend and generate new theory about development, basing his model of human development on ecological theory which was emerging at that time in biological investigative areas. Others followed to adopt, test, and illustrate aspects of Bronfenbrenner's theory. For example, the work of Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1983), from an ecological career development perspective, suggested that career development for adolescents, essentially epigenetic and becoming more complex over time, proceeded from the opportunities afforded to the developing, needs-driven individual from their environment. According to this view, the psychosocial changes which occur for mid-adolescent girls were driven, at least in part, by challenges offered from the world around them, and by the people in it. These challenges or affordances, could be taken up by girls themselves, acted upon, and thus, in turn, became influences on the environment. This bioecological perspective also allowed development processes to be viewed as systemic (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

### *The social context*

In terms of girls' environment, the peer group is an important element in the communication and maintenance of social and cultural expectations and mores for adolescent girls (Geldard & Geldard, 1999). Considerable research, particularly that which arises from a feminist perspective (Brown, 2003; Pipher, 1994), has shown that girls at this age become increasingly vulnerable to peers' social pressures related to gender, such as messages about body image or sexuality (Polce-Lynch, et al., 2001). Sexual identity development, for example, for girls who are attracted to other girls, may be fraught with pressure to conform to the social norm of heterosexuality (Jones & Clarke, 2007). Social pressures also include the type of peer pressure exerted on others to use drugs or alcohol (Flannery, 1994), or to become involved in other risky behaviours, such as violence. Pepler, Craig, Connolly, and Henderson (2002), in a study of almost a thousand adolescents, found that if individuals were vulnerable to peer pressure early in adolescence, they were more likely to become involved in drug use and violent situations. The rise of the Internet, with its virtual world of social sites and blogging (Gross, 2004), exposes individuals to continuing peer pressure twenty-four hours a day. The ubiquity of mobile phones (Campbell, 2006; Smith et al., 2008) underscores the vulnerability of those who are susceptible to this, by making it easier to exert constant pressure. Campbell, in a study utilising interviews with adolescent girls, was able to describe the intersection of the discourses of individuality, style, and friendship which surround young women, and the challenges for them as they attempt to reflect on these, as well as on their parents' wishes and their own desire to be both safe and responsible. They are pressured to respond to the demands of the global community to which they now belong, as described in Luke's (1999) "world kids" portrait of adolescence. According to Luke, diverse ethnic and cultural groups are now subject to the global culture of the young, which all recognise and to which all belong, no matter where they are born, or live.

In considering other environments which afford opportunities for girls' adolescent development, particularly those aspects which involve their peers, a major influence is their school context, where most friendships are experienced (Eccles & Roeser, 2003; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006). In New Zealand, most adolescents move from primary school to intermediate school at about the age of eleven, and then move again to enter high school at about thirteen, on the cusp of their transition from early to middle

adolescence. Such changes are associated with the restructuring of their friendships and the hierarchies of their peer groups, usually with the loss of some friends, so that girls need to acquire new friends as they adjust to the new structures and systems of different schools (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Wylie, Hodgen, & Ferral, 2006). Other authorities have suggested that such loss of friends may have developmental origins (Underwood, 2003). Because the losses apparent in girls' friendships do not always coincide with the external shifts outlined above, such as changes from intermediate school to secondary school, Underwood has concluded that those changes which occur during times of environmental upheaval, may nevertheless be attributable to developmental changes in individuals.

### *The Function of Conflict in Development*

Conflict plays an important role in development for adolescent girls, because healthy psychosocial development in adolescence is viewed as being promoted by increased awareness of, exposure to, and experiences of the challenges afforded by conflict, dissonance, and disequilibrium (Adams & Laursen, 2007; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Kroger, 1993). "The ability to experience rather than repress conflict may be the impetus for structural change," (Kroger, 1993, p. 215). In reporting a study that employed ego identity interviews, Kroger (1993) cited a woman participant who had experienced significant insight and structural change in later life. She suggested that developmental maturation may be initiated by the internal conflict in the discrepancy between recognition of oneself and the expectations of important others, and sustained by the ability to tolerate both the conflict and the guilt generated by rejecting or ignoring the demands of others.

Initially, an awareness of conflict or discrepancy between perceived role expectation and personal desire begin to press for resolution. Outward action begins only at a time of readiness, when sufficient ego strength and ability to address challenge is present to risk both externally and psychically withdrawing from the "props" of earlier role identifications. Such action is facilitated by a significant other, who can bridge both sides of the internal conflict but ultimately meet the needs of the newly emerging self ....The ability to withstand both guilt and fear of death (disintegration) appears central to the successful separation from internalized objects. (Kroger, 1993, p. 218)

Others have concurred that maturity results in the ability to tolerate guilt, which is a form of internal conflict, believed to play a part in development. Bowlby (1979) considered that the aim of maturity was to become capable of regulating that inner conflict:

I believe that a principal criterion for judging the value of different methods of child care lies in the effects, beneficial or adverse, which they have on a child's developing capacity to regulate his (sic) conflict of love and hate and, through this, his (sic) capacity to experience in a healthy way, his (sic) anxiety and guilt.  
(Bowlby, 1979, p. 3)

Winnicott (1965) also saw individuals' accommodation of guilt as emblematic of their growing ability to tolerate the internal conflict of ambivalence between love and hate, the dual emotions which are experienced, often simultaneously, in close relationships.

Conflict appears to be instrumental in the process by which adolescents learn how to determine values and distinguish between different moral issues (Harter & Monsour, 1992; Kroger, 2007). Social-constructivist theory asserts that cognitive-affective morality is created from past and immediate social and relational contexts. A carefully-constructed interview study, conducted with younger children, including participants in early adolescence (Singer & Doornenbal, 2006), examined the part played by conflict in developing cognitive-affective morality. The study suggested that having a personal secret revealed by a formerly trusted friend created awareness of moral dilemmas in regard to the nature of authentic friendship, and the tension between group expectations and individual expression. Interestingly, girls revealed markedly more emotional turmoil about the failure of trust than boys did. It is important to bear in mind that the interview questions focused on a romantic situation, and this may have affected the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, according to the authors of the study, the interview situation itself, with the age group in question, may have elicited somewhat biased responses.

However, both internal and external conflict, necessary for the process of growth (Harter & Monsour, 1992; Kroger, 2007), also induce stress among adolescents (Berzonsky, 1982; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Jew, Green, & Kroger, 1999) and can result in negative effects. This can occur when excess of conflict results in difficulties in mood (Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009) or in physical health concerns (Brendgen & Vitaro, 2008) or inhibits the achievement of a positive sense of self (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997),



particularly for adolescent girls. Furthermore, adolescent girls appear to respond to stress from life events more negatively than boys do (Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009). An important study by Harter and Monsour (1992), one of a succession of related studies, identified particular features of the development of self-concept for girls in mid-adolescence. This study revealed the presence of a type of conflict which particularly affects adolescent girls, and peaks in middle adolescence.

In an investigation into the conflict present in adolescence, Harter and Monsour (1992) argued that discussions about the self have always reflected the philosophical stances of the sociocultural context in which they take place. Thus, in the postmodern age, the degree of social connectedness required has moved beyond ordinary human ability to sustain relationships. Contemporary individuals have therefore acquired the capacity to develop multiple selves, because it has become too difficult to sustain one stable self across so many connections. The individual therefore becomes a social chameleon.

In their study, Harter and Monsour (1992) explored adolescents' conceptions of themselves, with surprising results, particularly for girls. In their investigation, it was found that, in early adolescence, as formal operations began to develop, adolescents could abstract characteristics about themselves in different roles, but they did not worry if they appeared to have opposing personality attributes in different roles, such as being both intelligent and an "airhead." However, by middle adolescence, when young people realised that they might have two opposing attributes as part of their self-concept, they became aware of the contradictory nature of this. The authors of the study attributed this apparent contradiction in the mid-adolescents' self-portrait to their, as yet, lack of cognitive control, so that mid-adolescent girls were not able to integrate the opposing attributes in their self-portraits, to resolve what appeared to them to be contradictions. Thus the mid-adolescent, as a solution to the ambivalence, swung to extremes, adopting an all-or-nothing perspective, so that they saw themselves as one or the other, such as either an "airhead" or a genius. According to this study, girls experienced a significantly greater degree of internal conflict regarding this experience than boys.

In seeking to explain this increase experienced by girls, Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey and Whitesell (1997) have contended that because there is increased social pressure placed on girls in middle adolescence (compared with that placed on boys), girls need to develop many different roles or relationships, thus increasing their potential for internal conflict.

The study's authors also found that adolescent girls may experience conflict between their perceptions of their true and false selves. If girls perceived validation in their relational contexts, they were likely to also experience positive development, including high self-esteem, personal attributes, and development of their true selves. Furthermore, for girls, the self they do not want to be has been found to have a more profound impact on their well-being than the self they aspire to be (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998).

Finally, a more recent study by Harter and Whitesell (2003), has found that the stability of self-esteem differs between individuals. In some adolescents it remains stable, even throughout major changes. In others, who undergo similar changes, self-esteem varies and fluctuates. Thus some girls are more vulnerable to excess conflict than others are, because their self-esteem is already unstable.

This group of studies suggests that girls in mid-adolescence are at risk of experiencing increased developmental internal conflict, and are extremely vulnerable to negative perceptions about themselves. However, in these investigations, little attention was paid to one of the most obvious conflicts, the confrontation between individuals. Moreover, these studies have not considered how girls might therefore be affected by bullying from their friends. Although adolescent girls were found to need affirmation of their true selves from their peers (Harter, et al., 1997), the researchers did not discuss what the effects might be if such validation did not eventuate, or if, indeed, girls were offered ambivalence or criticism.

### *Summary*

Girls in mid-adolescence experience ongoing psychosocial development in the context of their close relationships (Kroger, 2007), and this development is important for their well-being, both as adolescents and as adults in the future. Their adolescent relationships are influenced by their attachment style, formed in their family of origin (Bowlby, 1958). During middle adolescence, girls are likely to be engaged in developing a capacity for intimacy (Erikson, 1968) and positive self-esteem (Choate, 2008), the ability to empathise, and an increasing sense of identity and individuality. Because their developmental tasks are embedded in, and are affected by, the nature of their close relationships with their peers, their social environments create affordances (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) for this development, and their friendships thus provide

important opportunities for the fulfilment of these crucial tasks (Erikson, 1968; Selman & Schultz, 1990).

Paradoxically, development in individuals is also promoted by conflict, both external and internal (Harter & Monsour, 1992; Kroger, 2007). Yet girls in mid-adolescence also experience significant inner conflict, with accompanying anxiety and stress. This makes girls more vulnerable, especially when significant others, such as close friends, are concerned (Berzonsky, 1982; Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009). If relationships with friends are stressful, girls may suffer from poor self-esteem, and yet it may be from their friends that girls need affirmation (Harter, et al., 1997).

Research does not indicate whether there is an optimum level or type of conflict which promotes, yet does not hinder, development. If adolescent girls experience conflict in their interactions with their close friends, it may adversely affect their development. For this reason, it is important to explore how such friendships are currently understood.

## Section Two: Girls' Mid-Adolescent Friendships

As the previous section indicated, for girls the period of their adolescence is marked by considerable change with the development of new attributes and abilities. This change takes place in the context of girls' relationships with others, and important among these are their relationships with their peers, particularly their friends.

The following section summarises what is understood in the literature in respect of the discrete patterns and distinctive features of girls' mid-adolescent friendships, and identifies, explores, and critiques research that has sought to explain the nature of those friendships. There follows an examination of what is understood to be the nature and purpose of the relational dynamics, including the conflict found in such friendships.

### *Patterns and Features of Girls' Mid-Adolescent Friendships*

Firstly, girls' adolescent friendships reveal a characteristic pattern, according to the accounts of investigators. Relationships with peers tend to follow a generally-accepted sequence in adolescence (Bukowski, et al., 1996; Sullivan, 1953b; Townsend, 1992; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). The sequence usually begins with the establishment of a close

same-sex dyad, the “best friend” relationship, in early to middle adolescence and this is likely to be followed by girls’ affiliation with a larger same-sex friendship group (Bukowski, Sippola, & Hoza, 1999) of four or more girls (Furman, 1989). This, in turn, as girls leave mid-adolescence, develops into a group which also includes boys, thereby lending itself to the consequent development of romantic heterosexual relationships. Thus, by mid-adolescence girls usually have one or two best friends, other close friends, and a group of same-sex friends, with some girls also having friends of the opposite sex and/or romantic relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Secondly, girls’ mid-adolescent same-sex friendships are also distinguished by a number of common features. These include intense closeness (Sullivan, 1953b) perceptions of similarity (Selfhout, Branje, & Meeus, 2007), mutuality and reciprocity (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998) and, surprisingly, given the sense of accord and harmony suggested by the features already listed, significant conflict and its resolution (Shulman & Laursen, 2002).

### *Intimacy in Friendship*

Perhaps the most striking feature of middle adolescent girls’ same-sex friendships is their intense closeness, or intimacy. Sullivan (1953b) in his seminal account of children’s friendships, first drew attention to the close friendship that exists in childhood and adolescence between both boys and girls with their peers. “Intimacy is that type of situation involving two people which permits validation of all points of personal worth” (p. 246). Sullivan, a major figure in the exploration of the psychosocial aspects of adolescence, came from the discipline of psychiatry. In a similar vein to other researchers of the time, his research and theory arose out of observation and reflection in his clinical practice with adolescents who were experiencing non-normative difficulties, and so Sullivan’s aim was to facilitate therapeutic change. From this background, he viewed intimacy as beginning in pre-adolescence with same-sex “chums” but undergoing a shift in early adolescence to include the drive to form a close relationship with a member of the opposite sex. When referring to intimacy in pre-adolescence and early adolescence, Sullivan was careful to make a distinction between emotional closeness and the sexual intimacy of middle to late adolescence itself, and stressed the importance of the intimate quality, rather than quantity, of friendship.

While Sullivan (1953b) noted the earlier maturation of girls when compared to that of boys, in their readiness for sexual relationships, he assigned the desire for interpersonal same-sex intimacy in both boys and girls to the “chumship” (p.256) period of pre-adolescence. In Sullivan’s view, the intimacy of adolescent, opposite-sex relationships was similar to that experienced earlier, as the intimacy of earlier pre-adolescent close friendships, but with the added element of sexuality. Interestingly, Sullivan also saw intimate friendship as a potential tool in compensating for earlier difficulties in development, with friendship having some capacity to fill gaps in the emotional lives of children who had been psychologically disadvantaged.

Erikson (1968) while agreeing with Sullivan (1953b) in acknowledging the importance of intimacy, contended that the achievement of a capacity for intimacy was a critical task of the series of life crises which formed the basis of his theory. However, Erikson maintained that the task of intimacy properly belonged to early adulthood, and thus followed, rather than preceded or accompanied, the adolescent period of development. Erikson expressed his concern that society in general did not acknowledge the contribution of the adolescent friendship group to development. “The mutual ‘joinedness’ of adolescent clique behaviour fails to be properly assessed in our concern for the individual adolescent” (p. 164).

While the contributions of both Sullivan (1953b) and Erikson (1968) were of major significance, the sociopolitical gendered context of their epoch shaped both their research and their conclusions. For example, the onset of puberty occurs now, in the twenty-first century, at an earlier age than it did in the nineteen-fifties. Earlier menarche will be likely to be reflected in somewhat different patterns of friendship and romance among adolescent girls. In addition, historically, adolescent girls and boys were confronted by clearer, and at the same time more stereotyped, gender expectations than occur in the current postmodern era (Muuss & Porton, 1998). Boys’ experiences were thus considered normative by researchers such as Sullivan and Erikson, while girls’ experiences were seen as, at best, supplementary, or, at worst, incidental, to that norm. In addition, the researchers’ observations were founded on non-normative clinical populations, whose experience of intimacy was likely to differ from normative, generalisable samples.

Subsequent research into early and middle adolescence girls' same-sex closeness (Besag, 2006; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Shulman, 1993), utilising different designs and methods, and from a different sociopolitical perspective, would suggest a different pattern in regard to intimacy from that proposed by Sullivan (1953b) or Erikson (1968). Intimacy between adolescent same-sex friends has been found to increase with age through early and middle adolescence, and particularly so among girls' friendships (McNelles & Connolly, 1999; Sharabany, et al., 1981). It appears first in girls' same-sex friendships before it appears in their romantic relationships. Intimacy has been found to be important for girls' well-being, and for their perceptions about their competence in peer relationships (Craig-Bray, Adams, & Dobson, 1988; Townsend, 1992). Craig-Bray et al. found an association between older adolescent girls' commitment and well-being and their perceptions of greater quality in their same-sex friendships, suggesting that better quality relationships with their same-sex friends may accompany increased maturity for girls.

Girls' intimacy with their same-sex friends increases as they enter and proceed through adolescence (Claes, 1992; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), and is increasingly valued by them (Buhrmester, 1990). Girls actively promote intimacy with their same-sex friends by talking together, about themselves or about others, so that intimacy is not only maintained, but is also increased over time (McNelles & Connolly, 1999; Weimer, et al., 2004). They also foster closeness and connection within their friendship group networks as well as in their close friendships (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

Close friendship provides adolescent girls with significant benefits, as has been established by a number of large-scale research studies. Substantial support from their best friends increases the sense of self-efficacy for girls in early adolescence, and reduces the likelihood of conflict with friends during this period (Jenkins, Goodness, & Buhrmester, 2002). The closeness which girls enjoy with their friends has been found by some investigators to afford support for girls' adjustment to school, increases in well-being (Townsend, et al., 1988), and support for their academic achievement (Berndt, 1996; Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Positive friendship acts as a protective element for girls, for instance, in guarding against peer victimisation (Fox & Boulton, 2006; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999).

### *Similarity, Mutuality, and Reciprocity in Friendship*

Girls' same-sex close friendships in mid-adolescence are marked, as are those of boys, by similarity (Akers, et al., 1998; Selfhout, et al., 2007; Solomon & Knafo, 2007), mutuality, and reciprocity (Shulman & Laursen, 2002). They choose as their friends those girls whom they see as similar to themselves, especially in the case of their best friend, and this is more marked with girls than with boys. Their initial similarity increases over time (Selfhout, et al., 2007). The mutuality and reciprocity of their friendships stimulates girls' growing awareness of their own and others' individuality, and supports the development of successful conflict resolution skills (Laursen, 1993), trust, and commitment (Meeus, Iedema, & Maassen, 2002; Townsend, 1992). Perceptions of an equal balance of power are important also. "An egalitarian distribution of power seems to be a defining feature of friendships, and not a dimension along which friendships vary – at least, not same-age friendships" (Furman, 1989, p.164).

In such close, interdependent friendships, therefore, girls are able to balance both closeness and individuality (Akers, et al., 1998; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Shulman & Knafo, 1997). The quality of these friendships foreshadows the quality of later relationships with adult peers and romantic partners (Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999).

In New Zealand, researchers have found that mid-adolescent girls' same-sex friendships resemble those described overseas in respect of structure, significance, closeness, caring (Gray, 1988; Townsend, 1992), status (Carroll, Houghton, Hattie, & Durkin, 2001), and connection (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003, 2008; Holdsworth, 1985). For example, the Adolescent Health Research Group (2008) found that, for New Zealand girls, being with friends is the most enjoyable aspect of school, and that almost all girls have at least four friends at school. Another recent large-scale study (Wylie, et al., 2006) found that early adolescent girls who have friends at a new school find the transition a more positive experience, while a lack of friends hinders adjustment. The researchers found that parents of girls starting high school in Year 9 were more likely to mention a lack of friends at the same school than any other factor which made their daughters' transition more difficult.

Both overseas and in New Zealand, researchers have confirmed the beneficial effects of friendship on adolescent psychological health (Adolescent Health Research

Group, 2008; Armstrong, Hill, & Secker, 2000; Giannetti & Sagarese, 2001; Reynolds & Repetti, 2006; Townsend, 1992), and, in doing so, have identified both intimacy and popularity as influential facets of friendship in this regard. In New Zealand, Townsend et al. (1988) undertook an important study of intimacy compared with popularity. They wished to explore whether intimacy or popularity exerted the most positive influence, and to determine whether friendship quality was more important than quantity, as Sullivan (1953b) had asserted. The study was conducted with 255 Year 10 students at an urban-rural high school in Auckland, New Zealand. Peer nomination was employed to establish levels of popularity, with three separate criteria, including self-report, peer report, and a measure of stability, to establish when intimacy was present in at least two dyadic friendships. In order to determine the effects of popularity and intimacy, measures of self-esteem and sex-role, both associated with healthy psychological development, were used. A sample of eighty students was selected from the initial participants, those who met the criteria for popularity and intimacy in their same-sex friendships. Intimacy, rather than popularity, was found to be significantly associated with psychological well-being. Interestingly, the authors also found that the difference in self-esteem between girls who had an intimate friend and those who did not, was greater than for boys. This suggests that close friendships may be particularly important for girls' sense of self-esteem. These findings tended to be confirmed by more recent studies (Berndt, 1996; Bukowski, et al., 1996) which stressed the importance of intimacy for girls' friendships during this period of development. The Townsend et al. study also found that popularity appeared independent of intimacy, though the findings related to the contribution of sex-roles to intimacy and psychological well-being remained inconclusive.

While this study (Townsend, et al., 1988) was a major contributor to understandings about the importance of intimacy in friendship, and the different effects of popularity, it did not seek to discover what the consequences would be for those who did not have such close friendships, or whose close friendships exerted more negative than positive influences. It also failed to consider the perceptions of students themselves about the nature of this closeness. Furthermore, it did not offer a possible explanation for the increased emphasis on intimacy for girls, when their psychological well-being appeared to be involved. While a relationship between self-esteem and intimacy was established, the nature of the association remained unclear.



### *Friendship and the Wider Peer Group*

A number of commentators who have provided accounts of girls' adolescent friendships have contended that girls' close friendships must be viewed in their wider peer group context (Brown, 2003), as adolescent girls are connected to the wider peer group as well as to their close friends (Townsend, 1992; Townsend, et al., 1988). Their close friendships are embedded in their friendship groups, which have clearly understood hierarchies, and are nested in the systems of the wider peer group, to which they are linked by a dynamic network of interactions (Urberg, Degirmencioglu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995). Their friendship groups grow more exclusive as they grow older, and so girls may not be close to all the other girls in their groups (Besag, 2006; Brown, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). Male friends are gradually included, in the second rank of closeness (Poulin & Pedersen, 2007).

Numerous studies have elicited aspects of the considerable and varied influence of the peer group, particularly for girls, in early and middle adolescence (Brown & Klute, 2003; Bukowski, et al., 1996; Carroll, Hattie, Houghton, & Durkin, 1999; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995; Poulin & Pedersen, 2007).

(Adolescents) seem much concerned with faddish attempts at establishing an adolescent subculture with what looks like a final rather than a transitory or, in fact, initial identity formation. They are sometimes morbidly, often, curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day. (Erikson, 1968, p.128)

The hierarchies that exist in girls' peer groups, according to some researchers who have employed a range of designs which have sought to give a broad picture of these social groupings (e.g., Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002), depend on the use of power and status, and are highly influential. A useful observation made by Besag (2006), who conducted a substantial observational study of same-sex friendships with girls in childhood and early adolescence, through an exploration of girls' peer group composition and interactions, is that girls are not necessarily close to all the other girls in their friendship groups, and this is likely to lead to conflict.

An important line of investigation into girls' wider peer friendships has helped to clarify the distinctions between peer group popularity and friendship among girls, with the conclusion that the two serve substantially different functions. Popularity, particularly important among adolescent girls (Duncan, 1996), is a function of the wider peer group (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Bukowski and Hoza, in a study which compared the natures of friendship and popularity, found that popularity was group-centred, and unilateral, in that it centred on the opinions of the group about the individual, while friendship was a mutual dyadic relationship occurring between two individuals. They also found that the intimacy of close friendships offered greater psychological benefits for girls than did the advantages of popularity. They concluded that the individual experiences these two relationships, popularity and friendship, in quite different ways (Laursen, 1993). Adolescent girls find it necessary to fit into their group, because they perceive group membership as a mark of being popular (Mirny, 2001), and yet they also need the benefits, such as intimacy or protection (Brown, 2003), conferred by friendship (Townsend, et al., 1988).

An intriguing previous longitudinal study identified differences with age in the type of influence which adolescent girls perceived their peers to exert on them, and on their self-evaluations (O'Brien & Bierman, 1988). For instance, early adolescent girls, if rejected by their peers, might describe themselves as feeling insecure, but girls in mid-adolescence, if rejected, were more likely to internalise their reference-group, and were more likely to feel that they themselves were to blame for the rejection. Girls were subject to peer influence on their appearance, and their self-esteem was generally more affected by peer opinion than boys were. "Notably, eighth-grade (Year 8) girls felt that peer groups influenced their appearance, and girls, in general, reported a greater impact of peer group reactions on their feelings of personal worth than did boys" (O'Brien & Bierman, 1988, p.1364). The authors of the study suggested that developmental factors might account for the diversity of behaviours and views which were expressed, as well as for the changes in the ways that groups were organised, with increasing "psychological-mindedness" over time.

These studies, while focusing on important aspects of the peer group and close friendships, have not delineated how girls themselves perceive that they manage these two powerful drives, the desire for group membership and popularity, alongside the need for intimacy.

### *Negative Aspects of Friendship*

In seeking to understand the factors which place adolescent girls' well-being at risk, research has confirmed that there are aspects of girls' adolescent friendship patterns which can adversely affect development in mid-adolescence (Berndt, 1996; Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). These are particularly hazardous for girls' well-being (Harter, 1998), because girls' self-esteem, important for their well-being (Harter, 1999) has been found to be associated in complex and positive ways with close friendships (Berndt, 1996; Bosacki, Dane, & Marini, 2007; Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; Way & Greene, 2006), and, conversely, may also be negatively affected (Harter, 1998).

Some of the negative aspects of middle adolescent girls' peer group experiences are likely to be due, in part, to the instability of their adolescent same-sex friendships, and in part, to competition among girls (Sippola, Paget, & Buchanan, 2007). Instability in friendships occurs when friendships break up, or become less close, and therefore deteriorate in quality. While half of girls' close friendships have been found to remain stable during the school year (Degirmencioglu, Urberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1998), their friendships are somewhat more unstable than boys' are (Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002). According to Hardy et al., the stability of girls' friendships appears more subject than that of boys to influence from external changes, such as those concerned with their developing sexuality or with the changing license granted to individual girls by the adults in their lives. For example, girls may undergo changes through development of their sexuality. The result may be that those girls who acquire boyfriends then tend to spend less time than before with their girl-friends, who then perceive them as rejecting. Jealousy may follow, with accompanying high levels of distress (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Friends' competition with each other, particularly where boys are concerned, also makes their relationships tenuous and unstable, as found by Taylor, Veloria, and Verba (2007). Girls' ability to sustain their relationships with boyfriends and same-sex friends and to manage any subsequent conflict grows with maturity and social experience (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). For example, a change which affects the stability of a friendship occurs when one girl's curfew is extended while her friend's is not, and so they start to develop more separate social lives. Interestingly, in slightly younger adolescent girls, stability in their friendships is also associated with greater use of confrontational conflict resolution strategies (Bowker, 2004), with implications for the development of

autonomy and cooperation in friendships. If same-sex friendship should turn to dislike between former friends, the antipathy which may follow has negative effects for adolescent girls' social support, and results in their withdrawal from social situations, and antisocial behaviour, according to a large-scale study (Abecassis, Hartup, Haselager, Scholte, & Van Lieshout, 2002).

Other aspects of girls' friendships which may result in negative effects include relationship differences and perceived social support (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006), unequal relationships (Shulman & Laursen, 2002), and expressed disapproval from friends. Girls are acutely sensitive to any relationship problems among their friends, compared with those among their acquaintances (Harter, 1998; Jenkins, et al., 2002; Whitesell & Harter, 1996). Harter (1998) noted that friends' disapproval may be communicated just as well, but more subtly, by the absence of affirmation, as by the offering of overt criticism.

From these studies by Hardy et al. (2002) and Zimmer-Gembeck (2002) for example, which are well-designed and of at least moderate size, it is clear that girls' friendships are marked by considerable conflict, and this is likely to have negative effects (Harter & Monsour, 1992). However, girls' voice (Gilligan, 1982) continues to be absent from much of the literature.

### *Conflict in Girls' Same-Sex Friendships*

Conflict has been defined as occurring when two parties disagree or when they behave in ways which are oppositional (Laursen, 1993). In middle adolescence, according to Laursen, research indicates that conflict occurs more among friends than with other peers and is particularly distressing for girls.

In girls' close friendships, conflict is accompanied by aggression, distress, grief, competition, status and power concerns, and jealousy (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Conflict with their friends is experienced more intensely by adolescent girls than by boys, and is more likely to have serious consequences for their well-being (Jenkins, et al., 2002). The consequence, according to Whitesell and Harter (1996), appears to be that, though more conflicts are initiated, girls try harder to resolve conflict when it occurs with a friend, and are more committed to its resolution. In short, it matters more. This influences their

attitude to its resolution, and consequently their capacity for resolving differences with friends. In younger children, conflict in their friendships has been found to resonate in other, negative, ways, in the form of peer victimisation from friends (Crick & Nelson, 2002).

An understanding of adolescent girls' responses to conflict, when such conflict is resolved or managed, has formed the focus of one area of investigation, because of the potential of conflict to disrupt close friendships (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). In the field of research into adolescent interactions with peers, it is contended that conflict can become the means of promoting adolescent development through the affording of opportunities for the practice and acquisition of conflict resolution skills (Laursen, 1996). Ironically, research suggests that, if successfully managed and mutually resolved, as described above, mutual conflict results in better, close relationships for girls in mutual friendships (Laursen, 1996; Laursen, et al., 2006). Therefore this type of exchange is an important process in adolescent girls' development (Kroger, 1993).

In a useful and significant study into conflict between close same-sex friends, Laursen (1993), having discovered high levels of conflict among adolescents and their peers, undertook to explore the conflicts between them by focusing on the conflict management strategies used in close relationships during this period of development. This study sought to examine how adolescents managed conflict in their close relationships, and also to discover what the impact of conflict was on those relationships. A two-stage study employed, firstly, a meta-analysis to discover whether the patterns of conflict resolution used in close relationships differed from those used in other relationships, and, secondly, new data were collected, in order to compare the impact of conflict across different types of adolescent relationships. This was accomplished by the administration of a written questionnaire to male and female adolescents with a mean age of sixteen years and seven months, followed by interview data collected by telephone from a sub-sample of 143 adolescents. Data were elicited through the use of a list of conflict topics, with questions about the immediate and post-conflict outcomes. The meta-analysis provided information about three main types of adolescent conflict resolution employed in relationships.

Conflict resolution was achieved through either power assertion versus negotiation, or power assertion versus disengagement, or negotiation versus

disengagement (Laursen, 1993). Furthermore, adolescents' conflict management with close peers differed from the type used in other relationships, in that negotiation and disengagement were significantly favoured as conflict management strategies with close peers. Power assertion was more likely in relationships with parents and other peers.

With regard to the effects of conflict on close relationships, the study (Laursen, 1993) found that, in close relationships with peers, adolescents preferred to avoid winner-loser styles of conflict resolution, or to disturb social networks, or any other negative social outcomes. Conflict with close peers, compared to conflict with other peers, was far less likely to have a negative impact. In seeking an explanation for the reluctance of close peers to use power assertion, Laursen contended that contributing factors were the voluntary nature of the relationships, compared to relationships with, for instance, families, their mutuality, with an even distribution of power, and the types of concerns or activities which initiated the conflict. Laursen asserted that such challenges as organising a social outing with a friend, for example, were more easily negotiated than concerns such as rules, which were a common cause of conflict with parents. "In no other type of relationship does the child learn the delicate art of negotiation and conciliation" (Laursen, 1993, p. 52). Thus this study highlights the unique potential of close peer friendships in supporting individual development in skill acquisition.

The above study (Laursen, 1993) offers valuable insights into the nature of adolescent conflict with close friends, but while it draws attention to the importance of mutual relationships, it does not consider what adverse consequences may occur if close relationships are not evenly balanced in regard to power assertion. Nor does the study reveal whether girls and boys approach these delicate relationship facets differently. Rather, the author advises caution in regard to the results of the meta-analysis, because of the possible presence of variables such as gender, not accounted for in the study's design, and the limited number of studies available for analysis. A later investigation (Shulman, Laursen, Zwi, & Karpovsky, 1997) which involved two closely-related studies of intimacy in adolescent friendship, found that, as adolescents grew older, their close friendships were marked by greater individuality and less conformity and control. Furthermore, girls used more self-disclosure and experienced greater emotional closeness than boys did, both in interdependent friendships and disengaged friendships. Those in interdependent friendships also had more respect for their friend as an individual. This study implies that

conflict occurs less with age, because adolescents become more accepting of differences in their friends.

When girls experience conflict in their interdependent close same-sex friendships, they may balance closeness and individuality through the development of better conflict resolution skills. In order for this to happen, they must make a greater investment in and commitment to the long-term stability of the relationship (Shulman & Laursen, 2002). Shulman and Laursen (2002) suggested that the dynamics and interactions of close friendships may be considered in the same light as family systems, and may similarly promote development. A series of later studies (e.g., Shulman, 1993; Shulman & Knafo, 1997) tended to support this conclusion.

Shulman and Laursen (2002) undertook a study into the nature of the conflicts which occur between interdependent and disengaged adolescent friendship dyads. Using a card-sort task with adolescent friendship dyads from two age groups, early adolescence and late middle adolescence, they found that interdependent pairs of friends tended to act in ways which promoted the welfare of the friendship, even when conflict occurred, using less coercion, or withdrawal from the relationship. This was so, regardless of the age of the participants. Disengaged dyads, on the other hand, tended to allow tension to build up when conflict occurred, and their perceptions of the quality of the friendship varied, according to the current situation. The study also found that older adolescents were more likely to experience conflict with friends about private disrespect, as opposed to public disrespect, which had been a greater cause of conflict for younger adolescents. Interestingly, the rate of conflict was the same for all friendships. The researchers concluded that interdependent friends were able to negotiate and moderate their own goals in order to achieve a mutual goal. They also suggested that certain types of friendship may elicit different trajectories as the relationships develop, and thus different types of friendships would afford different experiences to adolescents. For example, the attachment styles of individuals in a close dyadic friendship may influence how they respond to conflict situations, and this will affect the way that conflict is managed in that dyad. The authors especially noted the concern that disengaged friends who used coercion might not realise that it could have long-term negative effects on a friendship. Because of the design of the above study (Shulman & Laursen, 2002), no effects for gender were found.

This important cluster of studies (e.g., Shulman, 1993; Shulman & Knafo, 1997; Shulman & Laursen, 2002) has depicted an intricate interplay of developmental and systemic change in conflict responses and management for girls in their middle adolescent friendships, suggesting that a systemic approach is useful when endeavouring to understand the friendship process. However, these studies are limited by their design. They consult girls' own perceptions, or "voice" (Gilligan, 1982) only in specific and constrained areas. In addition, the scope of these studies does not include an exploration of the negative consequences of the more problematic types of friendship.

### *Conflict Resolution*

A number of studies have led to the conclusion that conflict in girls' close friendships tends to be resolved with more negotiation, and fewer coercive conflict management tactics than in their other relationships, thereby facilitating their developing ability to identify, negotiate, and resolve conflict (Laursen, 1996). Selman (1980) had asserted that it was not until adolescence that young people became aware of the benefits of successful conflict management, and discovered that it could have positive outcomes for all those concerned. In friendships that are fair and mutual, girls have been found to prefer conflict resolution styles which tend to promote each others' well-being, such as negotiation, and strive for positive resolution. The outcome is then likely to be positive (Besag, 2006; Bukowski, et al., 1996; Selfhout, et al., 2007).

Close friendships are not, however, always fair and mutual (Weimer, et al., 2004). These and other studies of even or uneven conflict resolution tend to omit a consideration of the consequences of conflict when power was not equally shared, or when perceptions of closeness were not well-founded.

Thus, conflict may have positive or negative effects on girls' same-sex friendships. Furthermore, the outcome appears to depend on the quality of the friendship relationship itself as well as on girls' responses to conflict. In a study which explored the association between relationship quality, conflict, and school adjustment for adolescents, support was found for the claim that the quality of friendships may affect the outcomes of conflict. Thus, girls in high quality friendships who experienced low to moderate levels of conflict sometimes experienced better outcomes. Nevertheless, high levels of conflict were never found to exert beneficial outcomes, even in high-quality friendships (Adams & Laursen,



2007). Other investigations into the effects of friendship conflict have found that ignoring conflict can have a negative effect on close friendships. Girls may minimise their conflicts with their best friends, so as not to disrupt the friendship, but this seems to make the friendship unstable over time, suggesting that the quality of the friendship can be damaged (Bowker, 2004). Researchers have found that if girls responded to a breach of trust by breaking off the friendship as a strategic manoeuvre, to punish a friend who had transgressed the code of friendship, they might receive the transgressor back as a friend after a lapse of time (Singer & Doornenbal, 2006). Their response thus acts as a warning, and clarifies their shared values.

It is thus apparent from the literature that girls are concerned to stay connected to others in the face of conflict (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). This may, according to one field of research, arise from a deep biological need (Taylor, et al., 2000). Studies have confirmed that, even in the presence of conflict, girls and women want to retain relationships and to keep the social bonds intact, more than they want to win a dispute (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997).

### *The Function of Girls' Friendships*

According to Erikson (1968) friendship supports adolescents through the internal conflicts caused by the temporary loss of self, and challenges moral development:

Adolescents not only help each other temporarily through such discomfort by forming cliques and stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their enemies; they also insistently test each others' capacities for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable conflicts of values. (Erikson, 1968, p. 133)

Adolescent friendships have been described as forming a new reciprocity in order that both girls and boys may develop moral judgement (Piaget, 1932), providing support for the separation and individuation process (Blos, 1967), or as a training-ground for intimacy (Sullivan, 1953b), a safe background for exploration, a social exchange for meeting mutual needs, or a supportive base from which to explore (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Underlying these newly-developed functions of friendship is the suggestion, from a neo-Piagetian viewpoint, that friendship itself is developmental, and undergoes growth in

complexity in adolescence in order to fulfil a more complex role (Selman & Schultz, 1990).

It has been proposed that, from a moral development perspective, girls need the social context of mutual, equal friendships in order to acquire a sense of fairness, which is important for the development of moral judgment (Piaget, 1932). Their friendship in adolescence must gradually support a different role from that of childhood because the reciprocity norm, sufficient for them in childhood, does not allow them to function as adults. Their adolescent friendships are therefore instrumental in the development of their capacity for moral reasoning. According to this cognitive-developmental view, participation in mutual, egalitarian, and reciprocal friendships with peers, in contrast to respectful relationship with parents as authorities, leads to individuals' developing an internalised morality (Bukowski, et al., 1996). However this view assumes that girls' adolescent friendships with peers are essentially egalitarian, which may not be so.

A second important line of investigation focusing on girls' friendships and their moral development contends that girls' moral development, in connection with their self-esteem, is firmly embedded in relationships, community and connection (Gilligan, 1982). Thus girls' adolescent friendships are important in providing opportunities for developing such a morality. While Gilligan's (1982; Gilligan & Machoian, 2002; Gilligan, et al., 1988) view has not yet been accepted in its entirety (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998), nevertheless, girls' healthy development has been found to be linked to relational and communal elements (Cramer, 2000). Research has suggested the importance for girls and women of social groups and social connection (Harter, et al., 1997), and the principle of caring for others as a basis for moral decision-making in females (Skoe, et al., 1999; Skoe & Marcia, 1991). These studies, however, do not sufficiently explain how girls reconcile the probable tension between the need for connection with close friends and connection with the group, nor the tension between the need for self-actualisation (Erikson, 1968; C. R. Rogers, 1956) and the need for acceptance by peers (Ojanen, Aunola, & Salmivalli, 2007; Simmons, 2002).

Perhaps such tensions may be linked to Blos's view (1967), that girls' adolescent friendships allow girls to complete the major developmental process of separation and individuation, an interpretation supported by other investigations (Levpuscek, 2006; Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2002). The achievement of adolescent individuation

is important for girls' well-being (Blos, 1967; Milne & Lancaster, 2001), and their close friendships offer them an opportunity to complete, or more successfully rework, certain relational tasks initially undertaken in earlier stages, such as the enhancement of self-esteem. In exploration of this, Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, and Engels (2002), in a large-scale longitudinal study, found evidence that girls' peer relationships supported the parallel separation and individuation processes which take place throughout adolescence, suggesting that friendship support is important for individuals' psychological well-being.

Besides the view that girls' adolescent same-sex friendships function as a training-ground, in which girls practise their developing capacity for intimacy in their close same-sex friendships (Sullivan, 1953b), such mutual collaborative friendships also provide the necessary opportunities for adolescents to acquire a range of new or more sophisticated social skills, in a setting which enables the growth of depth of concern for the other person, the hallmark of mature friendships (Buhrmester, 1996; Sullivan, 1953a). Surprisingly, there is little evidence available in the above studies about girls' lived experience of such friendships.

Other investigators support the viewing of girls' adolescent friendships as systemic, through the lens of social exchange theory with its balancing of needs and rewards (Hartup, 1993; Laursen, 1993). According to Hartup and Laursen, because relationships with friends are voluntary and equal, friends become interconnected through cause and effect, as their needs are met through the issuing of rewards, such as closeness or support. Therefore, according to such a view, girls learn in adolescence to take part in new kinds of relationships in order to meet their developing need. Again, this approach does not account for the intense emotional intimacy that develops in girls' close friendships, which suggests that there may also be more fundamental, developmental, drives.

Girls' friendship at this age is also viewed as a supportive base, against which girls may undertake individual exploration and development (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Adolescents' positive friendships, viewed as important, though not essential, contexts for development, provide a buffer zone, in the form of a safe place where adolescents are supported and respected, and can experience intimate, close relationships which provide a stable context to explore the developing self. This enables the individual to make excursions into other contexts and to return to the acceptance and safety of the stable

friendship. From this perspective, friendship thus fulfils for adolescent girls a similar function to that which primary attachment fulfilled in childhood (Harter, 1998).

Another interesting research perspective regards friendship not as a catalyst in development, but rather as subject itself to development (Selman & Schultz, 1990). According to this perspective, there is a need for friendship to grow structurally more complex over time, to fulfil the increasingly complex needs of the developing adolescent, and subsequently to change over the lifespan. Thus, girls' friendship itself must become increasingly complex and sophisticated as girls proceed through adolescence. From this lifespan viewpoint, girls' friendships proceed through a series of mutual, balanced understandings, alternating with new, more complex, relational perspectives and abilities.

From the results of a comprehensive study, based on extensive clinical observation into non-normative populations, Selman and Schultz (1990) outlined what they have found to be the developmental process of friendship, and its place in young people's growth, revisiting in part the cognitive-developmental view of Piaget (1932). Selman and Schultz based their theory on their work in pair therapy with children and young adolescents who were isolated, having been rejected by their peers. Earlier, Selman (1980), from his observation in clinical practice with children, had observed that children's understanding of friendships and relationships with others deepened and became more complex with age. Selman and Schultz found that childhood friendships tended to be exclusive ones, in which third parties were regarded with hostility (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006), but in early adolescence friendship changed to include the mutual perception between friends that trust and jealousy were essential aspects of commitment. As adolescence proceeded, however, according to Selman and Schultz, both girls and boys gradually grew capable of holding a third-person perspective. This enabled them to step back and take another's role, and to see themselves and the other as a system, thus understanding the viewpoint of their friend in a new and quite different way.

In this way, according to Selman and Schultz (1990), girls in middle adolescence come to see themselves as both actors and objects, so that both parties in friendships are able to coordinate their reciprocal perspectives. There is usually an intensely close period for the friendship in this stage. Eventually these mid-adolescent girls move onward to the next level, in later adolescence, which is that of a close, mutual friendship in which girls may recognise and accept each other's need for autonomy and independence.

Nevertheless, Selman and Schultz have warned that successful completion of each stage is not inevitable, and depends on a number of factors.

Thus girls become active, agentic participants (Shulman & Laursen, 2002) in a new, more complex kind of relationship (Selman & Schultz, 1990), which is founded in the playmate experience of childhood, yet lays vital groundwork for later, adult relationships (Sullivan, 1953b), and is qualitatively different from, though not less than, the intimacy of adult romantic partnerships (Townsend, et al., 1988). Distinctive and intimate, it is more flexible and adaptable than previous friendships, and yet foreshadows the romantic attachments to come (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).

### *Summary*

Girls' friendships in middle adolescence, particularly their close friendships, are important contexts and influences for individual development (Harter & Whitesell, 2003). Successful, high quality friendship provides them with support (Jenkins, et al., 2002), a relationship of equals, and a secure base for development (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996), with the closeness between friends promoting intimacy (McNelles & Connolly, 1999). Moreover, friendship itself appears to be developmental in nature, so that girls gradually become capable of establishing and maintaining a more complex type of relationship with close friends (Selman & Schultz, 1990).

The hierarchies and systems of same-sex peer friendships include the wider peer group context. Girls need to be accepted by their peers, as well as experiencing close friendship (Besag, 2006; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Townsend, et al., 1988).

The development of friendships is affected by conflict (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996), which occurs in a context of connection (Gilligan, 1982). Girls consider conflict within their close friendships to be distressing, but if it is successfully managed and resolved, conflict in good quality friendships tends to lead to better friendships (Laursen, 1993; Shulman, et al., 1997). Conversely, failure to confront conflict leads to unstable friendships. Girls prefer constructive conflict resolution strategies and third-party negotiation, and will attempt to retain relationships, rather than to win (Bukowski, et al., 1996; Selfhout, et al., 2007).

The conflict common among Year 10 girls' friendships (Laursen, 1996) has therefore been found to be of major significance, since it supports the development of successful conflict resolution and negotiation skills, and can lead to closer intimacy and stability in relationships. An optimum level of conflict is likely to be desirable for healthy growth (Kroger, 2007), enabling girls to develop a third-person perspective (Selman & Schultz, 1990) and to develop a sense of themselves as individuals (Harter & Monsour, 1992). Correspondingly, there may also exist levels of conflict which provide less than optimum conditions for development. While considerable information has been obtained regarding conflict within girls' friendships, there remain areas of uncertainty, such as how such conflict is resolved when there is a power imbalance between friends, or how widespread such conflict is, or how it affects individual well-being.

The question is then raised as to how girls negotiate this delicate area of friendship. This it would seem important to explore an area of problematic conflict which is known to occur in mid-adolescent girls' peer groups: friendship group bullying.

### Section Three: Bullying Among Girls in Middle Adolescence

#### *Bullying*

As described in the previous section, girls' same-sex friendship changes dramatically in adolescence, undergoing a transformation into a closed, more complex, and more flexible relationship. In this process, a number of factors in girls' peer relationships have the potential to influence their well-being and development, both positively and negatively (Laursen, 1993). One of these factors is the increased conflict which occurs among friends in middle adolescence (Laursen, 1996; Pepler, Craig, Yuile, & Connolly, 2004), and is played out in the context of the wider peer group. If managed well, the conflict is likely to result in higher quality friendships, but if handled unsuccessfully, such conflict is likely to have adverse effects, such as the loss of intimacy (Laursen, 1993), or stress experienced by individuals (Harter & Monsour, 1992).

Bullying is a particular form of interaction which involves conflict and aggression, and pervades the workplaces and other institutions of adult society (I. Coyne, Craig, & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004; Lewis & Orford, 2005; Rigby, 2002). Bullying is also widespread in schools, which form the workplaces of children and adolescents (Olweus,

1978), and which also serve as a major context for their social interactions and their development. Investigations into adolescent bullying have therefore focussed on bullying as it occurs in this setting.

Bullying had not been addressed significantly by researchers until thirty years ago, when Olweus (1978) drew educationalists' attention to school bullying. Since then the different types of bullying that occur, together with the roles identified in bullying processes, and the effects on the participants, have formed a major area of social and educational research. An important branch of this research has included the hitherto mysterious nature of girls' aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1993). The definition of bullying has thus gradually broadened, as further understanding has developed of the more subtle and covert forms of victimisation as well as of the indirect aggression utilised by girls and the reasons for the increase in such aggression during early to middle adolescence (Owens, et al., 2000). A discussion of these issues follows in this chapter, which reviews current understandings of the bullying that takes place among middle adolescent girls and their friends.

It is likely that bullying among young people has been a major problem in schools as long as there have been such institutions. A study of bullying among schoolboys in Norway by Olweus (1978) brought such bullying practices to the notice of educationalists.

Olweus's (1978) study alerted the educational world to the widespread extent of bullying and its damaging effects. He continued to develop the instruments he used, and in 1993 he published the results of a number of studies he had conducted in Norway and in other countries. Together, they provided a comprehensive overview of school bullying, as it was understood at the time, as well as new knowledge about the main roles which had been identified as integral to bullying, those of the bullies, the victims, and the observers (others present when incidents occurred). Olweus (1993) found that the presence of other students was an important feature of bullying, because it provided the opportunity for bullying behaviour to be modelled for others to copy. He drew attention to these onlookers, who were neither bullies nor victims, but nonetheless played their own part in the bullying process. Olweus (1993) also advocated that schools should be free from bullying: "Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large" (p. 48).

Girls were largely identified as victims in Olweus's (1993) studies, whereas boys were identified as the main bullies. Olweus noted, however, that there was a possibility that girls did, in fact, perpetrate more bullying than appeared, but that this may have been conducted in a deliberately underhand way, and therefore would have remained hidden during the study. While girls used fewer direct methods of bullying, they were more likely to use "less visible, and *more 'sneaky' means of harassment* [Olweus's italics] such as slandering, spreading rumours, and manipulating the friendship relations in the class" (p.59). Olweus suspected it was possible that the questionnaire used in his research had not picked up the hidden forms of girls' bullying. A further explanation for the failure of Olweus's research to identify girls' bullying may have been that girls did not recognise certain behaviours as bullying, when perpetrated by friends. They may have dismissed such actions as merely "friendship problems," and therefore perceived them as outside the scope of the study.

Another point of interest raised by Olweus's (1993) research was an apparent decrease in bullying as children grew older. By far the greatest concentration of bullying occurred at primary school. A steady decrease in levels of bullying was observed as children proceeded through school, with 17.5% of boys and 16% of girls reporting being bullied in Grade 1, while by Grade 9 only 6.4% of boys and 3% of girls still reported being victims. In Grade 9, 12.7% of boys and 2.1% of girls identified themselves as bullies.

Olweus's (1978) description of the behaviour of "bullies and whipping boys" was refined through his subsequent research, and the definition he proposed in 1993, while added to and extended, remains substantially the same: "a student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly or over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students." (Olweus, 1993). Such actions include physical or verbal assaults, such as punching or kicking, exclusion, or other negative actions such as an intimidating or derogatory gesture or expression, intended to cause harm, in a situation in which the victim is powerless to defend him or herself. These negative actions are repeated over time, rather than consisting of a single incident.

Initial understandings of bullying had assumed that the weight of the definition lay with the type of actions which were used, and therefore with actions which were easy for adults to identify, such as physical assaults (Lawless, 1986). More recently, research into



bullying has been investigated from the perceptions of those involved in the interaction (Frisen, et al., 2007), so that the identification of behaviours as constituting bullying now depends to a greater extent on the victim's experience of an action as hurtful and disempowering, rather than the actual behaviour itself.

While the intention to cause pain and the repeated nature of a behaviour are accepted as generally necessary criteria for identifying it as bullying (Olweus, 1993), it has been suggested that this conclusion should be viewed with some caution (Rigby, 2008). Difficulties arise with, for example, the need to distinguish between teasing, in which the intention is playful, and taunting, which is intended to inflict emotional pain (Coloroso, 2003; Horowitz et al., 2004). Even when a behaviour is not intended to hurt, if the result is pain, the behaviour may still be considered bullying (Kowalski, 2000). Similarly, a distinction between malign and non-malign bullying has been made by Rigby (2000). Rigby argues that bullying may be intended to hurt (malign bullying) or may not have that intention (non-malign bullying), but the pain inflicted on the victim remains the same, no matter what the intention of the perpetrator may be. It has also been asserted that a single, serious, incident may be defined as bullying (Rigby, 2008).

In the literature, there is agreement that the power imbalance earlier deemed necessary for actions to be counted as bullying has remained as a significant, and perhaps the most important, element which distinguishes bullying from other forms of peer aggression (Adair, Dixon, Moore, & Sutherland, 2000; Goodwin, 2002; Rigby, 2008). Because a victim is powerless, or perceives herself as powerless, she is unable to retaliate, or to extricate herself from bullying interactions (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996).

Two broad types of peer bullying, initially conceptualised by Olweus (1993), are still largely accepted (Marini, Dane, Bosacki, & Ylc, 2006; Vaillancourt, Miller, Fagbemi, Cote, & Tremblay, 2007). Olweus (1993) distinguished between these two types of bullying, because of the different behaviours involved. Direct bullying employs open, either physical or verbal attacks on the victim, such as punching or pejorative name-calling (Olweus, 1993), while indirect bullying is characterised by strategies such as secretly damaging an item belonging to the victim (Geiger, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Crick, 2004).

The challenges that researchers face when investigating the complex and multifaceted nature of bullying include the multiplicity of terms and definitions which have been used throughout the literature to name and describe the behaviour, or its different features (Geiger, et al., 2004). For example, Olweus's (1993) definition of bullying may include a definition of aggression which asserts that "aggression ... may be defined as an act done with the intention to harm another person, oneself, or an object" (Bjoerkqvist & Niemelae, 1992, p. 4). Terms used to refer to general bullying therefore may include such expressions as aggression or aggressive behaviour (Underwood, 2003), peer victimisation (Slee, 1993), peer intimidation (Roberts & Coursol, 1996), or peer harassment (Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007), and, although used in studies that are focused on a specific type of bullying behaviour, are often treated interchangeably in discussing bullying in general (Olweus, 1993; Pepler, et al., 2004). Reference to bullying in this study will respect the commonality of the terms employed, by using them more or less interchangeably, since, as Geiger, et al. (2004) and Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) have pointed out, there is considerable overlap in the definitions used in the investigations into these areas, because they focus on the same broad area of behaviour.

### *School Bullying*

Subsequent to Olweus's (1993) research, school bullying has been explored further, until it is now one of the most widely-investigated areas of adolescent behaviour (Due, Hansen, Merlo, Andersen, & Holstein, 2007; Eslea et al., 2004; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefoghe, 2002). A number of studies have sought to establish whether school bullying is similar across different countries, and have found similar understandings, effects, and differences at different ages (Eslea, et al., 2004). An investigation into definitional understandings of bullying among school children of different ages in fourteen countries (Smith, et al., 2002) found many age-related similarities. A European study (Due, et al., 2007) explored the relationship between bullying and health in twenty-eight countries, finding that, while the proportion of students being bullied varied considerably, with Swedish girls having the lowest concentration of bullying and Lithuanian boys having the highest, physical and psychological symptoms at different ages were similar across all the countries. While cultural variations have been found, levels and effects of bullying have been found to be generally similar to those identified by Olweus (1993) and Eslea et al., (2004). Exceptions

are Australia (Rigby, 2000) and New Zealand, where bullying levels have for some time been significantly higher (Adair, et al., 2000).

In a study of bullying in New Zealand primary and secondary schools, which surveyed more than two thousand students from Years 9 to 13, Adair et al. (2000) found that almost two-thirds of children at primary and secondary schools said they had been bullied. Interestingly, the rate of research-defined bullying was found to be significantly higher than that of self-defined bullying, suggesting that many young victims fail to identify bullying when it occurs. In a small descriptive study of primary school children in New Zealand, Lind and Maxwell (1996) also found significant evidence of bullying, both direct and indirect. A substantial report on safety in New Zealand schools (Carroll-Lind, 2009) used a range of strategies, including students' voices, to gather information regarding the impact of school bullying on children aged up to fourteen, and the ways that schools responded. The study's author concluded that action by some schools, including teachers' fatalistic acceptance of bullying, was ineffective, though others' strategies were found to be successful in reducing such victimisation. In addition, bullying was viewed by the children as worse in intermediate school than at secondary school.

In apparent confirmation of this study, the Youth 2007 investigation (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008), a survey of over 9,000 New Zealand students at secondary school, found that 84% of the students felt safe at school all or most of the time. In spite of this, ten per cent of the students had been afraid, several times in the past year, that someone would hurt or bother them, while six per cent, mostly junior students, reported being bullied weekly or more often. It is possible that relational bullying was not picked up by this study, because the research aimed to obtain a general broad-brush picture of bullying and safety, rather than to focus on particular types of bullying. More recently, a small-scale qualitative study of 23 girls (Browne & Carroll-Lind, 2006) has identified extensive relational aggression among primary school girls.

### *Roles in Bullying*

In bullying among school children and adolescents, those present during an incident tend to take up clearly identifiable roles (Goossens, Olthof, & Dekker, 2006; O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Olweus, 2003). These tend to be maintained over time (Salmivalli, Lappalainen, & Lagerspetz, 1998), and scales have been developed which

clearly identify the roles of the bully, the reinforcers who join in bullying, the bully's assistants, the victim, and the others present, the outsiders and helpers, during bullying incidents (Goossens, et al., 2006; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). Another group, the bully-victims, who share some characteristics of both bullies and victims, has also identified (Rigby & Slee, 1999).

Each role is associated with particular behaviours and interactions (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). The bully initiates the victimisation, in which he or she is supported by the assistants and the reinforcers who do not initiate bullying but join in, encourage and in other ways condone the bully's actions. The victim is the person who is the butt or target of the aggressive behaviour, while the helpers may intervene on behalf of the victim, or otherwise provide comfort or support. Outsiders are present, and notice what is happening, but appear to remain aloof from the incident, neither condoning nor intervening. The bully/victims are those students who perpetrate bullying and yet themselves are victimised by their peers (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). This is a comparatively small subgroup, whose size diminishes as children grow to adolescence, but there remain distinct characteristics and risks for this group (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007).

Opinion is divided as to what causes young people to become bullies, victims, and bully-victims. Genetics have been suggested as exerting the strongest influence (Ball et al., 2008), as children appear to inherit a genetic tendency to participate in bullying as bullies, victims, or bully-victims, although some influence has also been attributed to their environments, such as their family behaviours and systems (Ball, et al., 2008). Harachi et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal study of more than a thousand children through middle childhood to examine the relationship between factors which have been found to influence the development of physically and overtly aggressive behaviour, and the influence of gender. Girls were found to display far less aggression overall than boys did, with a high proportion of girls showing little or no aggression during the period of the study. Nevertheless, more than 10% of girls displayed aggressive behaviour throughout primary and middle school, to Grade 8 (Year 9), and certain factors were found to increase the risk of girls' acting in aggressive ways as they proceeded through middle childhood. These factors included depression, conflict in their families, difficulty with academic achievement, attention problems, and little commitment or sense of attachment to school.

Bullying has also been found to be associated with different individual personal qualities, such as individual tendencies to use reactive or proactive aggression (Roland & Idsoe, 2001; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Aggressive or non-aggressive tendencies have been observed among school children (Pepler, Craig, & Roberts, 1998). Empathy appears to inhibit bullying behaviour in boys (Gini, et al., 2007), though the picture is less clear with regard to girls. Nevertheless, there is general agreement as to the characteristics of those who adopt the four main roles, those of the bully, the victims, the bully-victims, and the helpers/observers (Goossens, et al., 2006; Rigby, 2008; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999).

### *The Bullies*

The bullies, those who initiate bullying, tend to be confident, often fail to recognise their behaviour as bullying, are critical of others, and have friends who support this behaviour (Rigby, 1995). They may be physically stronger, easily angered and impulsive, often defiant towards adults, and choose weaker targets than themselves, for whom they show little empathy (Olweus, 1993). Young people who bully generally have less support at home than those who do not engage in bullying (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). They are also more likely to believe that anti-social behaviour is acceptable (Marini, et al., 2006). When they bully, they are likely to experience anger, and may also experience regret, or indifference (Borg, 1998).

### *The Victims*

The victims of bullying tend to be unpopular, anxious, socially withdrawn and rejected (Olweus, 1993). Opinion is divided as to whether these characteristics are inherent, or are caused or exacerbated by the bullying itself, so that, through the bullying process, the peer group begins to view a victim as deviant, and of little worth (Olweus, 1996; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). A large scale study by Evans and Eder (1993) supported the latter view. Victims are often, though not always, perceived by their peers as “different” in some way, usually with some characteristic which is regarded with disapproval or dislike, particularly in regard to appearance, such as having ginger hair (Frisen, et al., 2007; Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Differences may include being a “nerd” in regard to schoolwork, or having some type of disability (Dubin, 2007; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Victims are likely to have high levels of arousal (Marini, et al., 2006; Woods &

White, 2005) and it has been found that they may also perform poorly in schoolwork (Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009).

### *The Bully-Victims*

Those who engage in bullying as both bullies and as victims, the bully-victims, have a distinctive and disturbing profile (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelae, Rantanen, & Rimpelae, 2000; Solberg, et al., 2007; Wang, et al., 2009), and, although Olweus (1993) found few in this group, a large-scale British study (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000) has revealed that they form one of the four largest groups within bullying-related roles. This group shares some features of both bullies and victims. For example, a large-scale Canadian study which utilised self-report showed that indirect bully-victims agree with the bullies that anti-social behaviour is acceptable, and yet, like the victims, they are more likely to internalise problems (Marini, et al., 2006). As victims, they tend to have high levels of arousal (Woods & White, 2005). According to a recent study, when Internet bullying is considered, bullies may also become targets of victimisation, but victims rarely become bullies, suggesting that cyberbullying may have special features which influence the adoption of certain roles (Wang, et al., 2009).

Followers or reinforcers form a subgroup in bullying, because they do not initiate bullying but join in, or otherwise condone bullying, and have characteristics which are similar to those of the bullies (Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). They may join in bullying actions, or assist a bully, perhaps by holding down a victim or calling out abusive comments (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). A naturalistic observational study of primary school students showed that over half of all peers tend to join in bullying when it occurs in the schoolyard, or otherwise support the bully, by, for example, laughing, or calling out encouragement (O'Connell, et al., 1999).

### *The Observers and Helpers*

In the past few years, the spotlight has turned towards the observers, who may also be helpers (Moore, 2002; Sentse, Scholte, Salmivalli, & Voeten, 2007). This group is the most numerous, with girls more likely to be, and to perceive themselves as, outsiders and observers (Rigby & Johnson, 2006), or else as helpers of the victims (Goossens, et al., 2006; O'Connell, et al., 1999). Those who act as helpers are likely to have high levels of

empathy (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006b), which help them to understand the feelings of the victim (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000). Salmivalli et al. (1996), in developing scales to determine participant roles, have provided detailed accounts of the actions which helpers take, such as comforting the victim, or helping this person by accessing adult support. This study, however, was undertaken with young people in early adolescence at coeducational schools, rather than with those in middle adolescence, or with girls. Middle adolescent girls have somewhat different social groupings (Besag, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002), their groups are tighter, and their interactions are more relationally important, which influences the actions of helpers, making them less likely to intervene (Rigby & Johnson, 2006).

While there is considerable evidence regarding the characteristics of those who participate in bullying, the emphasis on self-reported roles in some studies is likely to have affected the results of research, for example when adolescents failed to recognise their own participation (Monks & Smith, 2006). In addition, some types of indirect bullying behaviour might have remained hidden from the researchers because those involved were not perceived or acknowledged as bullying.

Little reference is made in the literature to the different effects of school type, such as whether schools are single-sex or coeducational, on levels of bullying, or on students' recognition of bullying. Rigby (2008) has suggested that there is little difference between bullying levels at schools of different types. Nor has the effect of socioeconomic factors been widely explored, although girls from high-income families have more highly-developed social confidence (Ralph, Merralls, Hart, Porter, & et al., 1995). Delfabbro et al. (2006) discovered that girls at private coeducational schools were more likely to be bullied than students at other types of schools, while another study found that students from low income backgrounds experience more bullying than students from high income backgrounds (Due et al., 2009). Swearer (2008) has suggested that a broader view of social and cultural factors be considered. Studies in this area are, however, few in number.

While these and similar studies have provided much useful data which help in delineating the roles undertaken by the participants, it is also important to discover what is known about the effects of bullying.

## *Effects of Bullying*

The effects of bullying on all those involved have been found to be extremely damaging (Due et al., 2005). While certain apparent social advantages have been discovered for the bullies, such as increased status (Olweus, 1993), generally the effects for all concerned, including the bullies, are negative (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000).

Those who are regular bullies or victims are most at risk of suffering harmful health effects, whether physical symptoms, such as headaches, or emotional symptoms such as irritability (Srabstein, McCarter, Shao, & Huang, 2006). Bully-victims are at risk of greater internalising symptoms, and poor peer relations (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000; Marini, et al., 2006), and also of becoming victims in cyberbullying situations (Smith, et al., 2008).

The harmful effects of peer bullying are particularly detrimental for the victims, for whom bullying has been found to result in physical and emotional symptoms (Due, et al., 2005), anxiety (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000), loss of self-esteem and well-being, and loss of confidence (Marini, et al., 2006), depression, and suicidality (Coggan, Bennett, Hooper, & Dickinson, 2003; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Roland, 2002). Girls who are bullied suffer more than boys do from both internalising and externalising symptoms, and are more likely to have a co-morbid diagnosis (Menesini, Nocentini, & Fonzi, 2007).

## *Bullying as a Group Process*

An interesting development has been a shift by some researchers from an emphasis on bullying as role-centred, with its main focus on the relationship of the bully and victim dyad, to the investigation of bullying as a group process (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999). According to Salmivalli, Lagerspetz et al. (1996), bullying is always a group, rather than a dyadic process, because there are almost always others present. Most of the children or adolescents who are present when peer bullying occurs, take part in some way. They are also aware of the part they play, and their status, or social approval, in the group is associated with the role they adopt (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). Victims and bullies tend to be rejected, while defenders/helpers are seen as popular by their peers (Goossens, et al., 2006). An ethnographic study of rejection and isolation in



middle schools has revealed that a whole peer group may systematically attack a victim, because he or (almost always) she is seen as being different in some manner, such as being overweight. The victim then gradually comes to be perceived as possessing many flaws, according to peer group norms (Evans & Eder, 1993).

Within a group, girls in particular may even change roles, depending on the situation and their age. Girls are more likely than boys to change roles, and tend to adapt their behaviour with regard to bullying to the social grouping in which they find themselves, rather than basing it on their own previous behaviour (Salmivalli, et al., 1998). Rigby (2008) warns against the automatic labelling of individuals, as in “victims” or “bullies”, asserting that no-one is a bully all the time.

### Girls and Bullying

Intriguingly, as Olweus (1993) noted, girls were absent from the early studies of bullying. A deeper understanding of the nature of girls’ involvement in bullying has emerged, however, which supports Olweus’s suggestion that girls may engage in hidden bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Pulkkinen, 1996; Rys & Bear, 1997).

Initially, research into girls’ bullying was conducted with moderate or large-scale studies which employed scales or standardised surveys, tests, or observations, or interviews which gathered quantitative data (e.g., Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Rigby, 1995; Salmivalli, Karhunen, et al., 1996). This approach provided important information about general trends and characteristics of this aggressive behaviour.

Craig and Pepler (1997), investigating bullying among younger children through a naturalistic observational study of behaviour in school playgrounds, found that bullying was so widespread as to be normative among those in this age group, and that girls engaged in bullying. However, they bullied less than boys did, and were present at fewer bullying incidents. Interestingly, the authors speculated that “Female bullying may be qualitatively different than male bullying. Girls may be more likely to bully when peers are not present. For girls, bullying may be a one-on-one relational experience” (p. 54). Thus, these researchers suggested that girls’ bullying might be a solely female type of aggression which focused on the relationship dyad of bully and victim.

Subsequent research has provided information about the “female bullying” thus referred to by Craig and Pepler (1997). A study of preschool children has identified a distinct form of aggression, named as relational aggression, used by both girls and boys (Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In the past decade, researchers have continued to focus on this form of aggression (e.g., Oesterman et al., 1998; Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Rys & Bear, 1997), with studies tending to confirm that, while girls bully less than boys do overall, when they do bully they prefer particular relational strategies, and are more likely to use these aggressive strategies with their friends (Crick, 1997; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Crick et al., 2001)

This form of bullying is known, among other terms, as relational bullying (Woods & Wolke, 2003, 2004). Woods and Wolke’s large-scale study (2004) of the relationship between bullying and school achievement, referred to the presence of “relational bullying” (Woods & Wolke, 2003, 2004), such as social exclusion, which had positive effects on academic endeavour for its perpetrators and negative effects for its victims. The aim of relational bullying is “to manipulate others’ social interactions so as to cause harm to their peer relationships” (Paquette & Underwood, 1999, p. 243). It seeks to damage peer relationships by such means as threatening to withdraw friendship, spreading an unpleasant rumour about someone in order to hurt their relationships with peers, or isolating or excluding a peer from their group. Other researchers have preferred not to name this behaviour as bullying, and so, although they view it with concern, they employ a range of terms when referring to it. Thus, the type of bullying girls tend to utilise, while referred to as relational bullying (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Woods & Wolke, 2004), is also similarly known as social aggression (Underwood, 2003), indirect aggression (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004), or “girlfighting” (Brown, 2003).

Unlike traditional forms of bullying, relational aggression increases in adolescence (Olweus, 1993), especially among girls, with a significant increase in middle adolescence. A study across three age groups (Pepler et al., 2006) which included middle adolescents, has confirmed not only that girls continue to bully into adolescence, but also that there is a significant increase in girls’ relational bullying when they make the school transition in Grade 9/Year 10. An investigation into aggression and anger in children and young people in early and middle adolescence (Archer & Latham, 2004) confirmed that girls utilise

higher levels of relational bullying, especially in Grade 9, but that bullying appears to decrease in later adolescence (Pepler, et al., 2006).

Girls' relational bullying resembles traditional bullying (Olweus, 1993) in some aspects, but is very different in others (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004). The girls who are present during such bullying tend to adopt the roles of traditional bullying (Wiseman, 2002). Their behaviour is covert, difficult to observe and identify as bullying, rarely acknowledged by those involved, and, potentially, extremely damaging to all those present, particularly its victims (Bjoerkqvist & Niemelae, 1992; Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2002). This type of bullying, which focuses on the relationship between the bully and the victim and derives its power to hurt from relationships, has been found to be extremely psychologically painful, even worse than physical bullying (Rigby, 2008), especially for girls (S. Coyne, et al., 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997). The victims of relational bullying, as with traditional bullying, experience negative symptoms, including emotional pain (James & Owens, 2005; Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2006; Owens, et al., 2000), sadness (Woods, Done, & Kalsi, 2009), and increased risk of loss of self-worth (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998).

In relational bullying, the power differential between the bully and the victim is significant, as with traditional bullying (Olweus, 1993), and is easily constructed within peer relationships. In relational bullying, however, the bully is likely to have access to personal knowledge about the victim.

The child who bullies is in a position of power relative to the victim. This power advantage may arise from many aspects of the relationship power differential, for example, differences in size, strength, age, social status – or through familiarity with the other's vulnerabilities. (Pepler, et al., 2004, p. 90)

One of the difficulties in defining relational aggression is distinguishing it from what is normal behaviour (Geiger, et al., 2004). Relational bullying is usually covert. Olweus (1993) has referred to the hidden and "sneaky" (p. 59) nature of girls' bullying. Other researchers (e.g., Owens, et al., 2000; Simmons, 2002) have also found that bullying of this type is invisible to others (Geiger, et al., 2004). The perpetrators are plausible and pleasant to adults, while girls who are targets rarely complain, for fear of retribution (Owens, et al., 2000; Rigby, 2000; Rys & Bear, 1997). In illustration of this, an

observational study of sixty primary school girls as they engaged in gossip with their friends showed that, while gossip formed a significant part of their conversations, popular and powerful girls gossiped more than other girls, and were most likely to be judgmental in their comments (McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes, Kupersmidt, & Coie, 2007). Sullivan (2000) has commented that the adverse effects of such subtle, indirect bullying on girls are likely to be overlooked because there is no visible damage, and the behaviour is thus not viewed as bullying.

Shock and horror appeared to accompany the realisation that relational bullying was common among girls (Wiseman, 2002). Response was prompt, with some researchers aiming to change girls' social aggression by empowering girls and their families, through publications written for parents and their daughters, and by communicating the results of their research directly to the wider public (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). This resulted in a number of popular books about adolescent girls' aggression being written during the past decade, with the express purpose of reaching the groups who were most affected, namely girls, their families, and those who worked closely with young women, such as teachers and nurses (Besag, 2006; Simmons, 2004; Weaver, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). Simmons (2002), in her book *Odd Girl Out*, recounted the results of the many interviews she had conducted with young women. They narrated their stories of friends' teenage aggression towards them, which still had the power to hurt and shame even after the storytellers had grown up into capable adult women. Wiseman (2002) captured the imagination of many women and was widely quoted in the media for her compelling account of girls' teenage aggression, this time collected from young adolescent girls themselves, and their families. She identified a number of sub-roles within girls' cliques, led by the "Queen Bees" (p. 26).

#### *The Processes, Motivations, and Behaviours in Girls' Relational Aggression*

Girls' peer groups are underestimated as an influence on the development of such aggression, according to some research. Vaillancourt and Hymel (2004) have observed that, in endeavouring to understand the origins of aggression in children, comparatively little attention has been paid to the influence of the peer group, in contrast to the wealth of research into the influence of familial and biological factors. They have noted that, given

the normative nature of aggression in youth, the peer group may in fact serve the function of encouraging and supporting the maintenance of aggression.

In recent years, researchers have focused on understanding the motives for relational bullying (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Crick, Ostrov, Appleyard, Jansen, & Casas, 2004; Terranova, Morris, & Boxer, 2008), and the processes involved (Geiger, et al., 2004; Woods, et al., 2009). One study stands out for the meticulously detailed account it presents of girls' relational bullying. In order to describe the behaviours, motivations, and effect of girls' aggression, Owens and colleagues (2000) undertook a qualitative, detailed investigation of teenage girls' indirect forms of aggression, such as exclusion from the group, or spreading false rumours. Owens et al. argued that it was important to ask the experts in the field, adolescent girls themselves, about their reasons for the aggression, because of the need to understand this dynamic and its effects in order to design interventions, and this was a major strength of the study. They used focus groups, as well as pair and individual interviews, to collect data from 54 girls aged 15 years and their teachers in two girls' schools, to provide clear insights into the nature of teenage girls' indirect aggression, as well as exploring possible solutions and interventions. Vignettes about peer group victimisation were used as a safe way to introduce discussion of this sensitive topic. Through the use of focus groups, the researchers aimed to use the social nature of humans, and teenage girls in particular, so that the groups' interactions would encourage the girls to express themselves, and would then pave the way for the interviewer to probe particular areas.

This study (Owens, et al., 2000) illuminated the behaviour and motivations of the aggressors, the characteristic of their victims, and the nature of successful interventions. It was indeed found that girls used mainly indirect forms of aggression, favouring talking about others and short or long-term exclusion as strategies. Their behaviour had devastating effects on their victims, such as their wanting to leave school: one girl, for example, recalled the period of time during which she was victim as the worst year of her life.

Girls asserted that they engaged in this form of aggression not only because they wanted attention and excitement, but also because the processes involved increased their closeness with their friends and secured connection to their peer group. The study also found that victims shared certain characteristics, were seen as different in some way from

their peers, and were perceived to have brought the victimisation on themselves. Girls were pessimistic about the potential for help through interventions, stating that interference from adults would only make the aggression worse, but the researchers were able to establish that quiet, unobtrusive help from sensitive teachers could be of real assistance to victims. For example, a teacher could subtly help an isolated girl to become part of a group.

While it was not within the scope of the study (Owens, et al., 2000) to identify the behaviour as bullying, it appeared that much of the behaviour described did, in fact, fit the definition of bullying, taking the form of indirect, and, in some instances, direct aggression. The authors referred to those who were more frequently targeted as “victims.” They acknowledged that the study was confined to describing girls’ behaviour in conflict situations, rather than charting how it developed from non-conflict situations, and they did not investigate how such aggression arose, other than to ask girls why they engaged in the behaviour. Nor was it part of the study’s intention to examine whether the behaviour was aimed at friends, although it was implied that this did happen, at least sometimes. By implication, the aggression was generally an integral part of the wider peer group, rather than among close friends.

A factor which was likely to have somewhat restricted the study was the presence of other girls when participants were interviewed about their experience of the behaviour (Owens, et al., 2000). Bullying causes shame and fear of retribution, which inhibits telling the story (Cheung, Gilbert, & Irons, 2004). Thus, the participants were likely to have had reservations about being completely frank about their perceptions and experiences, even if, or perhaps even because, they were paired with a friend of their choice. Boulton et al. (2007) stress the importance of confidentiality when inviting the disclosure of bullying. It would be particularly difficult for girls in the study if they perceived themselves as having been bullied, to then disclose in a pair or group situation.

More recently, an observational investigation revealed the subtlety of hidden relational aggression in a study of mid-adolescent girls’ behaviour towards a newcomer (Underwood & Buhrmester, 2007). It was found that girls were more likely to use facial and body language to deter or exclude a newcomer to the group, and they tended to be covert in their exclusionary tactics, even from the initial approach. Once the newcomer had left the group, the other girls verbalised more strongly their wish to exclude her than

they otherwise would have, perhaps because they had suppressed such expressions while the newcomer was present.

Underwood and Buhrmester (2007) suggested that girls might be compelled by their peer culture and norms to use only body language, and to obey the silent directive to be “nice,” by appearing to support a sense of social harmony and connection. Instead, the girls in their study used gestures which allowed their aggressiveness to “leak into the interaction with the newcomer in a way that minimises the chance of obvious violation of the be-nice norm” (Underwood & Buhrmester, 2007, p. 432). They used subtle forms of exclusion, which would be confusing for a newcomer, who would perceive the other girls as apparently friendly, while also communicating with each other through such body language as rolling their eyes, or making meaningful looks to their close friend. Thus the covert and hidden means used by girl bullies to communicate with close friends, allowed them to avoid direct verbalisation of their wishes when excluding someone. The researchers suggested that for girls, contextual factors could influence the relationship between the nature of the friendship and social exclusion, and that possibly girl friends may pretend more, rather than disclosing their true feelings, when excluding a newcomer, perhaps in keeping with their interpersonal needs for communion and harmony. However, in this study, the interactions took place in an artificially induced situation. While there was careful preparation to increase the probability that the behaviour elicited matched their actual behaviour, it remained a laboratory setting, rather than a real-world context. Furthermore, dyads in the study operated in isolation, rather than in a group. Nevertheless, this study has helped to tease out the hidden subtle mechanisms of relational bullying.

#### *International Research into the Nature of Relational Bullying*

Internationally, researchers have sought to establish whether relational bullying is common among adolescent girls. Relational aggression has been confirmed by Osterman, et al. (1998) as the principle means of aggression among girls across the four nations, ethnic groups, and age groups studied. In Australia, (Rigby, 2008) girls tend to perpetrate more cruel teasing and name-calling (Owens, et al., 2000), and exclusion was found to be the third most common type of bullying experienced by the victims (Rigby, 2000).

In New Zealand, research into girls’ bullying and the factors associated with it has been somewhat limited. Intimacy has been confirmed as more important than popularity

for Year 10 girls (Townsend, 1992), and adolescent girls' well-being has been found to be adversely affected by bullying (Coggan, et al., 2003). Adair, et al (2000) employed a survey, based on Olweus's (1993, 1996) pen and paper survey, to explore bullying behaviour, including several strategies for exclusion, among secondary school students, and discovered that, although boys were the perpetrators of bullying in 76% of incidents, girls reported being socially excluded more than boys did. The study also suggested that bullies did not admit to having perpetrated emotionally hurtful behaviours, though these were the most commonly reported by victims, especially girls. A focus group study of mid-adolescent girls' same-sex friendship group conflict (Lange, Agee, & Dixon, 2005) found that girls' friendships in mid-adolescence were often uncertain, and were characterised by conflict, while the Adolescent Youth Health Project (2003, 2008), found evidence of exclusion, safety concerns, and indirect bullying among girls.

In a small-scale but significant New Zealand study, Browne and Carroll-Lind (2006) explored covert intimidation among Year 5 girls, in order to determine whether girls did perceive themselves as experiencing such threatening behaviour, and to understand how the girls made meaning of their experiences. In addition, they sought to discover the effects of the experience of covert intimidation. A sample of 23 girls was asked to reflect on their experiences, using a survey questionnaire and a worksheet. With the guidance of their classroom teachers, the participants were then divided into five discussion groups, to take part in a semi-structured interview with a researcher, bound by negotiated group rules. The teachers' perspective was then sought, through group interviews. The investigation revealed that covert intimidation was a familiar part of the girls' school lives, and that the relational aggression was located within girls' friendships, but that girls felt powerless to challenge the unjust behaviour. This study has made a positive contribution to understanding relational aggression in New Zealand, but it is limited by its scale, and by the use of groups to discuss such a sensitive topic. Its findings are also confined to pre-adolescent girls.

Difficulties in the study of relational bullying are its resemblance to normal behaviour, its covert nature, and its complexity. Geiger et al. (2004) have summed up the issues which have led to some confusion and conflicting results in studies into relational aggression. These include the variety in the related but separate definitions, the limitations of the diverse methods used to collect data, the failure to attend to developmental



possibilities, and the difficulty of distinguishing relational bullying, or problem behaviour, from normal behaviour. They assert that the definition of relationally aggressive behaviour should include “only those acts that involve the intent and/or the actual delivery of harm” (Geiger, et al., 2004, p. 31). Furthermore, they suggest the identification of maladaptive behaviour or interference in developmental tasks as indicators of problem behaviour in the use of relational aggression.

### *Reasons for Girls' Tendency to Engage in Relational Bullying*

In seeking to understand why relational bullying is most used by girls, researchers have explored the dynamics and attitudes associated with this type of aggression. According to some authorities, the peer group itself socialises girls into relational aggression, through their desires for popularity and for intimacy (Choate, 2008; Geiger, et al., 2004; Moretti & Odgers, 2006).

### *Social Rewards of Relational Aggression*

In adolescence, the need to belong increases (Erikson, 1968; Sutton & Smith, 1999) and as Maslow (1962) suggested, affiliation becomes more urgent, so that adolescents endeavour to enhance their reputation with the peer group (Carroll, et al., 1999). Girls learn social skills and attitudes through the provision of rewards and through the internalisation of powerful and revered role models, whom they perceive as similar to themselves (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). For example, if friends are aggressive, girls themselves become more aggressive, so that they are socialised into aggression. Thus the peer group can become a powerful tool for harm, with relational aggression operating as a major influence (Reynolds & Repetti, 2006). Adolescent girls' peer groups reward those who are indirectly and relationally aggressive with increased status, in the form of popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004), and girls use relational aggression because it is likely to increase their affiliation (Roland & Idsoe, 2001) and popularity with the group at this age.

The relationship between popularity and adolescence may influence girls' increased use of aggression at this age. Popularity is a more powerful influence for middle adolescent girls than being liked as a friend (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). Popularity among adolescents is associated with status and reputation

while being liked is a reflection of a positive affective relationship such as that with close friends (Oldehinkel, Rosmalen, Veenstra, Dijkstra, & Ormel, 2007), and the need for status with peers is important for girls of this age. An illustration of this was when victims of bullying preferred to remain with the group, even when they were victimised, rather than being ignored (van Beest & Williams, 2006). A longitudinal study which included over a thousand adolescents aged from 10 to 14 correlated boys' and girls' attitudes towards physical and relational aggression, in regard to popularity and being liked by their peers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). There was a strong correlation for girls between relational aggression and popularity, and this increased over time. This suggests that girls who use relational aggression are reinforced in their behaviour, because they are awarded increased status as adolescence progresses.

The drawback in using relational aggression to cement one's position in the group is that, throughout middle adolescence, those who engage in relational bullying become less liked, in the sense that friends are liked, by their peers, though they become increasingly popular (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). However, popularity may also be awarded by the peer group to girls who are seen as possessing other attributes of power, such as an affluent home background, and thereby are given social preference by their peers (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006).

The need for intimacy also influences the adoption of relational aggression. Girls who are aggressive are likely to have friends who are also aggressive (Grotzinger & Crick, 1996), and their intimate friendships are characterised by exclusivity and jealousy. They tend to copy the style of aggression of their close friends, so that girls in friendship groups tend to display similar levels of aggression to each other (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003), and they are likely to pick on the same victims. Girls in early adolescence have been found to be likely to show aggression towards others to whom their best friends also show aggression (Card & Hodges, 2006; Werner & Crick, 2004).

#### *Girls' Adolescent Friendship Networks Favour Relational Aggression*

Just as bullying is a group process, so relational aggression is peculiarly suited to girls' groups (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996), because of their close friendship group structure: "Relational aggression typically involves the manipulation of the intimate peer group structure" (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006, p.406). Adolescent girls' likelihood of

engaging in bullying depends more on their current peers' aggressive behaviour than on their own previous behaviour (Salmivalli, et al., 1998). Girls also use social aggression against other girls, rather than against boys, again recalling their same-sex friendship groups. While the leaders of the group are more likely to use social aggression than are those on the fringes of groups (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002), all members of the group play a part in some way and are thus linked by their interaction (Sutton & Smith, 1999).

Several researchers have considered the size of the groupings which are associated with relational aggression in early adolescence. Xie et al. (2002) undertook a study with younger adolescents, and found that social aggression tended to be used when social relationships showed a triadic structure, whereas physical aggression was utilised more within dyads. Besag (2006) also found relational aggression within triads of early adolescent girls.

#### *Reasons for the Increase in Relational Aggression among Girls during Middle Adolescence*

The rise in relational aggression among middle adolescent girls has exercised considerable thought among researchers, as they have sought to account for it. Among the reasons offered for such an increase are those presented in the following section.

#### *Increased Disapproval of Physical Aggression*

Associated with the increase in approval of relational bullying in middle adolescence is the notion that girls at this age also increasingly espouse relational ways of expressing aggression, because their disapproval of physical aggression increases (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). While relational bullying is rewarded by peers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004), the costs of physical aggression continue to be high for girls. Girls who are physically aggressive in adolescence, for example, are more likely to suffer adverse consequences, such as depression (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006).

### *Social Stereotypes Support Girls' Relational Bullying*

Social and media views stereotypes of middle adolescent girls are influential in increasing girls' employment of relational aggression during this period of their development (Brown, 2003; Underwood, 2003). While societal support for such stereotypes is applied at much younger ages, it is especially pronounced in adolescence. According to Brown, society's categorisation of adolescent girls and women as either "nice" or "bitches", neither of which is founded in reality, allows girls' relational aggression to be dismissed or condoned (Meier, 2004), because such stereotypes disguise the seriousness of the damage intended and perpetrated (Waters, 2004). Instead, the bullying becomes normalised. The media depict contradictory beliefs and attitudes about adolescent girls' conflict in friendships, with stereotypes reflected in TV programmes, such as "Friends". Brown notes that such stereotypes enable public opinion to dismiss adolescent girls who relationally bully other girls as the "Mean Girls" (Waters, 2004) portrayed in the movie of that name based on Wiseman's (2002) book, and to accept their behaviour as female "bitchiness" (Bathurst, 2002).

### *Changes in Schools Support Increased Relational Aggression*

The increase in relational aggression in middle adolescent girls has been attributed in part to the change in schools which many undergo at this age (Rigby, 2008), because the transition disrupts their friendships. Nevertheless, the increase in relational bullying has not always been found to coincide with changes of school in New Zealand. Wylie, et al. (2006) observed changes in girls' friendships in Year 9, a probable result of the school transition from intermediate to secondary school, but the authors note that the changes continued to the following year, Year 10, and were perhaps owing to other factors.

### *Developmental Changes Lead to the Increased use of Relational Aggression*

Developmental changes are likely to influence the use of relational aggression in middle adolescent girls (Underwood, 2003). A revisiting of Olweus's original (1978) study, with its emphasis on the misuse of power, suggests that there may be a developmental element present in the increased use of relational aggression among adolescent girls (Pepler, et al., 2004). Pepler et al. (2006) have argued that girls' bullying is both relational and developmental in nature, since bullying takes the form of power and

aggression in relationships in middle adolescence, rather than in its earlier form of physical assault. The power imbalance common between individuals in this form of bullying is therefore exploited and gradually increased through the relationship. This consolidates the roles of both bully and victim.

In further support of the view that developmental factors influence the rise in relational aggression (Pepler, et al., 2006), the type of intense friendship which develops between girls in middle adolescence offers opportunities for the inflicting of intense pain (James & Owens, 2005). Their developing capacity for intimacy and their experiences of intimacy in relationships makes girls more vulnerable to social rejection, owing to the complex social development of adolescence, and the intensity of their emotions (Underwood, 2003). The high levels of trust and intimacy afforded by girls' adolescent friendships thus provide the potential for high levels of pain, while, conversely, the friendship group also provides a protective element and potential for intervention against bullying by outsiders (James & Owens, 2005).

A further explanation founded on developmental factors has been posed, which proposes that girls are particularly aggressive during this period of adolescence because they are in the process of forming their adult identity (Erikson, 1968), and therefore the tensions produced by their developmental process result in aggressive behaviour (Harter & Monsour, 1992). A number of possible arguments have been offered that contribute to this view (Sayer, Hauser, Jacobson, Willett, & Cole, 1995). Besag (2006) perceives girls' aggression as important in identity formation because the ongoing tension in girls' friendship and peer relationships is created by the twin developmental drives towards individuality and acceptance into the group, alongside the competing needs of the individual for communality and agency.

In addition, Underwood (2003) has suggested adopting the view that bullying itself is developmental. According to this view, bullying, as with other development, becomes more complex over time as young people grow through childhood and adolescence, so that, with increased maturity they leave behind the simpler and cruder types of bullying such as physical and verbal assaults, and acquire a sophisticated form of relational bullying to match their more sophisticated social skills, knowledge, and cognitive ability.

### *Relational Aggression in Middle Adolescence Reflects a Cultural Norm Among Women*

As indicated earlier, the closer relationships that girls form with others in adolescence, as they approach womanhood, generate higher levels of aggression and bullying because girls are preparing for adult friendships (Archer & Latham, 2004). Archer and Latham found that women showed high expression of aggression and low instrumentality for both their close family members and their friends. They have suggested that, in adolescence, girls begin to adopt such behaviours, in preparation for adulthood, because of the greater importance of emotional closeness in women's friendships. Adult women also tend to be more indirectly than directly aggressive (Hess & Hagen, 2006). Therefore, adolescent girls' aggression reflects their experience of the aggression in their social contexts (Dellasega & Nixon, 2003), which transmit a culture of hidden aggression among women.

### *Powerful and Unfamiliar Emotions Emerge in Middle Adolescence*

Girls' increased utilisation of relational bullying in adolescence is also likely to be related to changes in the nature of aggression at this age (Roland & Idsoe, 2001). Proactive aggression, importantly, increases as children progress to adolescence. Furthermore, some middle adolescent girls may bully relationally because their aggression is motivated by different factors. Roland and Idsoe (2001) undertook a study which identified two types of aggression, proactive and reactive aggression, among early to middle adolescents, with different motivating factors.

The first type of aggression, proactive aggressiveness, occurred when bullies obtained a pleasurable reward of some kind from hurting others, and, in addition, did not care about the consequences of their aggressive action, such as possible punishment. Interestingly, this form of bullying became more common as age increased from childhood to adolescence. In addition, Roland and Idsoe (2001) found that such proactive aggression was not triggered by anger, but because the aggressor felt two positive emotions, in the feelings of power and affiliation. In relational bullying, they found that this prompted one or more of the aggressors to attack and get pleasure from attacking another girl, probably in the understanding that she had negative attributes which the others did not like. Such affiliation-related proactive aggression probably increases the bullies' sense of affiliation with the group, and promotes a sense of power, thus providing

the dual rewards of pleasure (from the exercise of power, and, possibly, from causing pain), and of affiliation, which is a powerful factor for girls. The bully is also likely to enjoy the attention of the observers.

Reactive aggression tends to occur when individuals feel angry because of a frustrating event, which acts as a trigger. Reactive aggression is found far less in cases of bullying, since frustrated anger may or may not result in attacking others (Roland & Idsoe, 2001). In the light of the increase in relational aggression in adolescence, Roland and Idsoe have suggested that age is likely to be an important factor in determining how proactive and reactive aggressiveness are related to bullying. According to Roland and Idsoe, girls in mid-adolescence are more likely to react in anger to emotional triggers at this age, because they are more moody but less used to controlling unfamiliar, powerful emotions, thus causing an increase in reactive aggression. In addition, proactive aggression was found by the researchers to be far more likely to be connected with bullying at age 14, with affiliation-related proactive aggressiveness a dominating influence for girls. Salmivalli and Kaukiainen (2004) explored physical, verbal, and indirect aggression, and although they concluded that girls were less aggressive than boys both directly and indirectly, nevertheless their study also revealed a group of highly aggressive adolescents, all girls, who use mainly indirect aggression.

#### *Increased Competition with Other Girls*

According to Vaillancourt and Hymel (2004), girls' competitiveness peaks in puberty, and this may account for their increased indirect bullying of other girls. Sippola et al. (2007) have noted that social aggression among some girls emerges as an adaptive response, as a function of their increased feelings of competitiveness towards other girls, particularly for the attention of males, during the transition to heterosexual relationships in adolescence. Girls have reported constant competition with their same-sex peers and friends, with boys the major reason for conflict in an hierarchical social world in which girls are ranked according to their "pretty power" (Artz, 2004). Studies by Pellegrini (2000) and Olthof and Goossens (2008) have also found that girls bully to gain attention or acceptance from boys. Because the peer social system measures social success by having a boyfriend, girls may be determined to have a boyfriend at any cost (Wiseman, 2002). Besag (2006) also links girls' aggression with interest in boys, by suggesting that adolescent girls, as they leave behind best friendships, experience a clash between the

powerful attraction of romantic relationships, and the bonds of girls' friendship: "The lives of girls are enriched by powerful bonds to other girls that later include males, but hidden below these enhancing emotions are the petty suspicions and jealousies that characterise their relationships" (Besag, 2006, p. 164).

### *Evolutionary Origins Contribute to Increased Relational Aggression*

Thus, the relational aggression which girls express, however subtly, could be viewed as adaptive, because it can be seen in some ways as supporting their social development (Hawley, Little, & Rodkin, 2007). Its increase in adolescence has been considered to have evolutionary origins. Hawley, Little, and Card (2008) suggest that, in the context of the evolutionary origins of relational bullying, girls' use both of covert aggression and cooperative strategies allows them a dual advantage of access to resources while maintaining connection with others. Their desire for status and power is therefore a valid one in evolutionary terms. Campbell (2004) also attributes this increase in relational aggression to girls' development towards adulthood, arguing that their competition for the best provider of resources is a result of their greater investment in the role of parent, and the greater reproductive cost to women.

An evolutionary explanation is also suggested by the identification by Taylor et al. (2000) of evidence which supports the existence of a biobehaviourally-based "tend-and-befriend" response to stress on the part of females, which would encourage girls to express anger covertly in a context of community. They have also suggested that the company of a group of female friends may have been important as a protective strategy from an evolutionary standpoint. Taylor et al. argue that, because women's childbearing and childrearing role makes it difficult for them to fight or flee if danger threatens, survival for females depends on their ability to be part of a connected group who can band together to defend each other. This could account for both the close relationships among adolescent girls' and women's friendship groups and their covert, rather than open, expressions of aggression.

### *Summary*

School bullying is a widespread phenomenon, with clearly recognised roles, and serious effects for all those involved, including the bullies, the victims, the bully-victims,



and the observers (Olweus, 1993). The definition of bullying has gradually been extended over time, and bullying may now be viewed as actions or words which are generally intended to cause pain and are exercised from a position of superior power, thus ensuring that the victim is powerless to stop the bullying (Rigby, 2008).

While girls bully less than boys, when they do bully they tend to engage in relational bullying, which uses the relationship to hurt, or aims to damage a relationship (Craig & Pepler, 1997). They use subtle and covert strategies to exclude or hurt others (Owens, et al., 2000). Relational bullying is embedded in girls' immediate peer groups, and extends to the wider peer group (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). It has been found to be more painful for girls than other types of bullying (I. Coyne, et al., 2004).

Girls' utilisation of this type of bullying has been attributed to the social rewards it offers (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004), stereotyping (Brown, 2003), or to its suitability to their friendship group structures (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). An increase has been noted in girls' use of relational bullying in adolescence (Rigby, 2008). While this has been attributed in part to changes in schools (Wylie, et al., 2006), different researchers have suggested other factors which may account for this increase. These include middle adolescent girls' dislike of physical bullying, increased social stereotyping, or factors which arise from girls' adolescent development, such as powerful new emotions, increased competition with other girls, increased desire for status, or reasons which have their roots in evolutionary influences. Bullying itself is also viewed as developmental, so that it becomes more complex over time (Underwood, 2003). or to girls' increased desire for status with the peer group (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004).

Nevertheless, there are areas of girls' bullying which remain unexplored, and these include the occurrence of bullying among friends, in contrast to that which takes place among the general peer group. Whether bullying is largely confined to interactions with less well-liked peers or whether it is common among friends is not clear. If it occurs among friends, then its effects may differ in some respects from the effects of relational bullying from the wider peer group. Nor is the relationship between friendship conflict and bullying delineated in the literature, especially from the perspective of girls' themselves. Such information would help in understanding this phenomenon of friendship group bullying.

This review of literature has emphasised the importance of middle adolescence as a time of psychosocial development for girls, but with much still uncertain about the nature of the specific and delicate friendship conflict processes which support or inhibit their potential for growth, at a time when development is significant.

While conflict with friends increases during this period of girls' lives, and relational bullying also increases, the literature has not established how much bullying occurs among friends. Although a great deal is known about relational bullying among adolescent girls' peer groups, the literature has not identified the nature of this behaviour among girls, especially when it takes place among friends, rather than among peers who are not friends or are viewed as hostile. In addition, particular difficulties have been identified for researchers in investigating relational bullying (Geiger, et al., 2004).

Nor has research provided a full understanding of the processes of such bullying among friends, nor what its effects are on individual girls when it takes place in the friendship group, or its effects on the friendship group. Most importantly, there are significant gaps in the area of literature which seeks to describe this phenomenon from the perspective of girls themselves, including how they view its effects, and what kind of actions and support they find helpful in reducing or preventing this type of bullying.

To help in addressing this elusive and complex problem, a need to better understand friendship group bullying was identified. The study would aim to understand the nature and experiences of such friendship bullying, and to describe the process by which bullying relationships with friends evolve. In addition, it would be important to endeavour to discover what girls themselves have found to be helpful in bullying situations. Both structural and descriptive information would be needed for such a representation.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This chapter describes the methods employed and discusses the issues that needed to be considered in undertaking a study of bullying within mid-adolescent girls' friendship groups. The approaches taken by other researchers to addressing these concerns are reviewed, and the reasons for choosing the design which was finally adopted are explained.

The study aimed to describe the nature of mid-adolescent girls' bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, according to girls' own perspective. Such a description also detailed how bullying develops in the friendship group, and how it affects individual girls, their perceptions of themselves, and their relationships with their friends.

The design of the project needed to take into account the type of data required to answer the research questions. These were focused on descriptions of the nature of girls' bullying in friendship groups, the experience of the bullying, and what helped, according to girls' own views.

### The Research Questions

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

*What is the nature of girls' friendship group bullying?*

*Do girls view it as bullying?*

These questions aimed to provide a broad picture of the nature of bullying among mid-adolescent girls and their same-sex friends, and included how much such incidents occurred and over what period of time. Information was also sought as to whether girls recognised bullying for what it was.

*How do girls experience relational bullying?*

The second aim was to determine how girls experience friendship group bullying, with regard to similarities to other relational bullying and to any distinctive features of such bullying. In particular, the process by which such bullying occurs was of interest, because of its hidden nature.

*What have girls themselves found to be helpful in stopping such bullying, or reducing its adverse effects?*

*To whom do girls turn for support if they are bullied?*

*What kinds of actions, support, or resources help, and how?*

These questions provided the basis for the investigation. Above all, it was important to gain information which reflected the perspectives of girls' themselves, so that in answering the research questions, the study would give a picture of girls' own lived experience of friendship group bullying.

In designing such a descriptive study, there were a number of important decisions to make. These included methodological concerns, together with an examination of approaches adopted in existing research into related areas, consideration of relevant ethical issues, and selection of appropriate data collection methods.

### Methodological Concerns in Researching Girls' Bullying

As identified in the previous chapter there is a consensus in the literature with respect to definitions of bullying (Geiger, et al., 2004; Olweus, 1978, 1993; Rigby, 2008). A hurdle for researchers in this area has been the different definitions, providing researchers with a challenge. Much of the relational victimisation that occurs among girls may not be acknowledged as bullying (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004); conversely, all conflict among girls may be viewed as bullying, as in reactions to the media's portrayal of teenage girls, as gossiping and "mean". "Part of the difficulty in understanding the popular media's presentation of relational aggression stems from different opinions about what constitutes a normative level of gossiping and exclusion, and what is inappropriate and candidate for intervention" (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004, p. 28). Furthermore, girl bullies, like other bullies, are universally reluctant to identify themselves.

One approach taken by researchers to solving this problem has been to ask participants to self-define bullying, and then to provide a check-list of types of behaviour which have been found through research to be associated with bullying (Adair, et al., 2000).

Definitions of bullying also specify the existence of an imbalance of power, which allows the bully to act with impunity, and this presents another difficulty for the researcher into relational bullying. An imbalance of power is comparatively simple for researchers to identify in physical bullying, but there are numerous subtle power imbalances that occur between individuals in close relationships, especially among adolescents with their varying rates of development (Rigby, 2002, 2008), and these also make girls' bullying difficult to detect (Olweus, 1993).

A further concern for researchers is that girls' bullying tends to be hidden and covert even among girls themselves. In adolescence, girls become adept at concealing their negative emotions, such as anger, and their actions, intentions, and responses, from adults as well as from their peers (Simmons, 2002; Underwood & Buhrmester, 2007). They become more skilful too at hiding their negative responses to victimisation, so that all those present collude in its concealment. Those involved are often reluctant to admit it or to discuss it openly, whether they are perpetrators, victims, or potential victims, because of the possible consequences and the shame involved (Cheung, et al., 2004). Adolescents may also resent what they may perceive as adult intrusion into their friendships and relationships. Thus researchers may experience difficulty in accessing participants who are prepared to disclose their experiences honestly and openly.

The area of relational bullying among girls' friendship groups is highly sensitive, making it difficult to research. Open discussion of it is likely to expose participants to some degree of risk, perhaps of retaliation, re-traumatisation, or disruption of friendships. For victims, the act of disclosing information as part of a research project, if not well managed, may easily lead to friendship conflict or further bullying. Thus, to prevent harm to participants, the researcher also has complex decisions to make, regarding the type of study, its management, and the approach to be adopted.

### *Methods Employed in Existing Research into Girls' Bullying*

Traditionally, descriptions of relational bullying and victimisation have been measured with peer report, self-report, and observation, especially with younger children (Crick, 1997). Surveys, which use self-report (e.g., Rys & Bear, 1997) have provided valuable data about broad trends with regard to bullying and can reveal relationships between selected variables. In order to counter the reluctance of those involved in bullying

to identify themselves, surveys which employ peer nomination procedures (Pellegrini, 2004), such as peer rating scales or surveys, have been used to explore female aggression and popularity (Hawley, et al., 2008), or to examine the link between social status and aggression (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006), and to establish who bully others (e.g., Crick & Nelson, 2002). Such studies are useful for exploring the relationship among selected features of girls' aggression across a large population, or generalising some aspect of girls' close relationships to the wider population, but lack the capacity to elicit the type of data required to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Some researchers have used various methods in addition to a survey, in order to explain features of girls' aggression. For example, in exploring the relationship between self-concept, relational aggression, and the experience of being victimised, Paquette and Underwood (1999) used a combination of a structured questionnaire, a self-perception profile, and a structured interview.

Other researchers, particularly in recent times, have used a range of strategies to gather qualitative data. These have included the collection of richly detailed accounts of girls' relationships, by means of inviting them to write about their experiences (James & Owens, 2005), or to take part in group discussions (Simmons, 2002), or individual interviews (Rogers, 1993).

A feminist approach to interviews (Gilligan, 1997; Rogers, 1993) as a research tool urges attentive, respectful listening by the interviewer in order to detect the authentic "voice" of girls, suggesting that, once girls reach adolescence, they learn to hide their true selves, rather than speaking from the heart, or with "ordinary courage" (Rogers, 1993, p. 280). Such interviews allow the use of an approach which minimises as far as possible the hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee, so that the interview proceeds with openness and respect. This is particularly important when the issues touch on young women's views of themselves (Archer, 1992). Oakley (1981) maintains that such reciprocity and trust are vital to provide a sense of intimacy in interviews. Fontana and Frey (1998, p. 65) recommended "the development of a closer relationship between interviewer and respondent, attempting to minimize status differences and doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing". This approach is consistent with principles of respect and mutuality.

Observational studies which have been undertaken of girls' aggression have included those with children (Besag, 2006), in which younger girls were observed interacting in same-sex groups over a long period of time, and similar observations with middle school adolescents (Eder, 2001). Observation of girls' aggression has been another method used in a laboratory situation set up to replicate a setting which would elicit the kinds of behaviour which girls use in natural settings in their friendship groups (Underwood & Buhrmester, 2007). However this raises ethical concerns, since it is likely to require the true purpose of the research to be concealed, and this kind of deception runs counter to the principles underpinning social research.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical concerns must be in the forefront when designing all social research as well as anticipating any ethical issues which might arise during the study, because social research is concerned with people (Punch, 1998), and, in this case, young people. Punch points out that the intrusive and often highly personal nature of data from qualitative research also makes collection in this area more acutely sensitive from an ethical viewpoint. The main issues which are likely to require special consideration in such research, according to Punch, are those of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of the data collected. In addition, Welfel (1998) points out that when mental health professionals undertake research, they should be guided by their own professional ethical codes as well as the ethical principles to which researchers in general should adhere. Welfel reminds researchers that ethical research must also be worth the participants' time, and that researchers should report the results to the participants as soon as the data are ready for distribution.

These ethical considerations are particularly salient when a vulnerable population such as adolescent girls is concerned, because of their youth and the possibility that some of them may have experienced bullying. Research into girls' bullying seeks to better inform school counsellors and others working with young people. Such information may enhance their effectiveness in supporting student clients, and so, for additional guidance, counsellors' professional code is also important. The New Zealand Association of Counsellors' Code of Ethics (NZAC, 2002) specifies the general ethical principles which underpin and inform the Code, and the documents to be read in collaboration with it, the

Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand law. Thus, both the design and the implementation of any research which is undertaken by counsellors should reflect these core values, of respect for human dignity, partnership, autonomy, responsible caring, personal integrity, and social justice.

In addition, the New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics (NZAC, 2002) lays out an ethical foundation for counsellors who wish to engage in research. According to the Code of Ethics, counsellors who engage in research must respect the following principles: the value of the research, including the integrity of its promotion; informed consent, so that permission is freely given or withheld; confidentiality, to protect participants' privacy and ensure safety; avoidance of conflicts of interests, with the priority given to the relationship between researcher and participant; respect for diversity, adherence to the ethical requirements of institutions, such as universities; acknowledgement of the contribution of others who helped or took part in the research, and, finally, fair and accurate reporting of the results (NZAC, 2002).

Most researchers into bullying have used data collection methods which stress confidentiality, because of the personal nature of the data, and because there is a powerful prohibition which exists among children and adolescents against telling adults about bullying (Rigby, 2008). Examples of such methods are those in which material has been gathered through questionnaires conducted in a confidential setting or in which the participants remain anonymous. In other cases, interview, discussion, or observation procedures have been followed which protect individuals' disclosures and ensure safety and privacy (Simmons, 2002).

The group discussion approach used by some researchers (Owens, et al., 2000) allows the investigators to take advantage of the support that comes from the sharing of experiences and ideas in a group. However, while this strategy is useful for indicating trends and directions, such as identifying themes which might be included in a questionnaire, it is unlikely to tap into the more poignant experiences of bullying, or those which involve shame, because it lacks confidentiality and therefore safety for the participants (Rosenblatt, 1995).

An increasing number of researchers have employed a feminist approach to interviewing, in which a less hierarchical relationship is established than is possible in the



traditional interview (Rogers, 1993). Mies (1993) suggests that, in the interests of equity, a researcher may adopt a bias towards participants. Feminist interviewing values mutuality and reciprocity (Mies, 1993); it requires interviewers to share more of themselves and to be more emotionally responsive, while rejecting the traditionally hierarchical view of the interviewer and the interviewee, through such strategies as respectful language which acknowledges the importance of the participant as an expert. “Methodologically, this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and a greater insight into respondents – or ‘participants,’ to avoid the hierarchical pitfall” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 22). Such an approach to interviewing has been used extensively by researchers (e.g., Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Simmons, 2002; Spencer & et al., 1991) to explore adolescent girls’ peer relationships and bullying.

Interviews are mainly described in the literature as structured, or unstructured, and with structured interviews the researcher has the capacity to retain control over the line of questioning that is followed. Unstructured interviews typically follow the individual’s line of thinking without any limits as to the data offered. Fontana and Frey (1998, p. 56) state that “unstructured interviewing...is used in an attempt to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry.” Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore broad areas while also focusing on deeply personal experiences. For the proposed study, a general line of questioning was needed, and a semi-structured approach would facilitate this.

There are further advantages of interviews as a source of qualitative data. One benefit is that participants can provide historical information, an important consideration when studying bullying. Creswell (2003) has reminded us that interviews are useful for gathering data about events or phenomena that cannot be observed, and this is the case with girls’ bullying, which is often hidden. According to Creswell, one feature of interviews is that the information received is filtered through the perceptions of the participants. This was seen as likely to be an asset in this study, since the views of those involved were important in developing greater understanding of the interpersonal dynamics involved in bullying situations. Furthermore, adolescent girls like to talk about their personal experiences, especially in one-to-one encounters, provided they have volunteered to talk (Besag, 2006). Interviewing was thus a method that would be

appropriate to use with adolescent girls (Rogers, 1993), particularly when they were in a safe and confidential setting with an experienced interviewer (Owens, et al., 2000).

### *A Mixed Methods Approach*

A mixed methods approach was proposed for the current project. Such an approach combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, facilitating better understanding of the research problem, while triangulating both “broad numeric trends from quantitative research and the detail of qualitative research” (Creswell, 2003, p. 100).

An understanding of girls’ views of bullying requires both quantitative and qualitative data. Girls’ bullying is a complex, broad-based phenomenon which includes behaviours, responses, attitudes, motivation, effects, and interactions, and these persist often over a long period of time (Rigby, 2008). The choice of methods for this study therefore needed to include both change-sensitive measures and data analysis strategies that capitalised on and sought triangulation across both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both variables from conventional data analysis and “stories” (such as narratives about bullying) were needed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While quantitative data describe trends, providing an overall picture, a more detailed explanation with rich depth of description may be obtained from qualitative data (Punch, 1998). For example, quantitative data could provide information about bullying experience across the general population of adolescent girls, whereas qualitative data would provide a detailed description of the experience of individual victims. Thus, according to Punch, while quantitative data would discover and describe broad trends about bullying which could be generalised across the population of Year 10 girls, qualitative data could suggest explanations as to why and how bullying occurred.

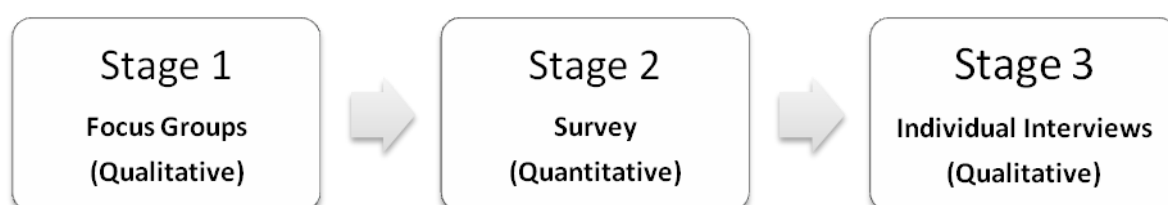
Thus there was a need for a research approach which combined a broad overview of the scope of such bullying, as well as insight into the experiences of girls in their relationships with their peers. The former could be provided by a survey, with numerical data sought through the gathering of quantitative data, while the latter would be afforded by detailed qualitative data that would reveal individual girls’ experiences and interpretations of bullying. For these reasons a mixed methods approach was adopted.

## The Research Design

A sequential design was proposed for the project, enabling both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered separately, through the division of the data collection into separate successive stages (Creswell, 2003).

Creswell (2003) suggests that in a two-stage, descriptive design, the quantitative data should be gathered first. Following this, the qualitative data can be obtained and used to “fill out” and interpret the quantitative results. This method is particularly useful when unexpected results emerge from quantitative data. While a potential drawback of the sequential design is the time it takes to complete the collection stages, this would be countered by the opportunity for one phase to inform the implementation of the next phase.

A mixed methods three-stage sequential design was thus selected, with each stage based on, and arising from, the previous stage. This design included a first stage using focus groups, to confirm findings from the literature and to contribute to the development of instruments for the subsequent stages; a second stage, to gather mainly quantitative data via an anonymous survey; and a third stage consisting of individual interviews to obtain qualitative data to add meaning to the quantitative data. Each stage therefore fed into the next. This design thus provided both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analysed at the end of each stage. Because there was no existing instrument to gather data about girls’ views of bullying of others in their same-sex friendship groups, appropriate instruments needed to be developed. Each stage was undertaken with girls in a natural setting for them at this age, their schools, and in Year 10 when girls are aged approximately 14 years.



*Figure 1.* The Three-stage Research Design

The three-stage project, according to the above design, was then put into place. First, permission was sought and granted for the study from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Because the participants were girls under sixteen, consent to participate in the study would normally be required from their parents and caregivers, and this was sought and obtained with regard to the participants in the focus groups, who would be asked questions about girls' bullying in general. However, for safety reasons, because the research subject was of a sensitive nature, a dispensation was sought from this requirement for the participants in the survey and the interviews, who would be asked to provide more personal details about their experiences of bullying. In addition, girls would not want to openly report their experience of bullying, particularly to adults, owing to the likely adverse consequences of such disclosure among their friends, such as increased bullying, or suspicion of "narking," or loss of friends (Wiseman, 2002). Seeking parental permission for these girls could have put the girls in the unsafe position of forcing them to disclose bullying to parents, who may then have taken precipitate action, such as openly contacting their school. Instead, permission was given for the researcher to obtain consent from each school's Boards of Trustees for the girls at their particular school to take part in the research.

The time frame proposed for the three stages of the study fitted into one year. Stage One was undertaken and completed in the first half of 2005 (February to May). Stage Two took place in the third quarter (May to September), while Stage Three was conducted mainly towards the end of the year (October to December).

### *Setting*

The best place to access girls in this age group was through their school setting. The schools invited to take part in the study were state schools, and included both coeducational and single-sex schools, to provide a range of demographic features. State schools were selected since, in spite of many differences, such as the distribution of students from different cultures represented in the different schools, some factors such as time spent at school and curriculum content tended to be similar among state schools. This would add to the validity of comparisons between schools, since the environment and activities both in and out of the classroom would create similar opportunities for bullying.

A range of schools representing different decile levels was selected. According to the Ministry of Education, decile levels are a way in which the ministry allocates funding to schools:

A school's decile rating reflects the average family or whanau backgrounds of students at the school. There are 10 deciles and around 10% of all schools is in each decile. Decile one schools have the highest proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds whereas decile ten schools have the highest proportion of students from high socioeconomic backgrounds. (Ministry of Education, retrieved 1/3/10)

A range of decile levels was sought for the study because some studies have shown a relationship between factors associated with bullying, and socioeconomic levels (Davis, 1994). As some studies have found levels of bullying to be related to the type of school, such as whether a school is coeducational or single-sex, both co-educational and single-sex schools were represented at each general decile level (Rigby, 1996). The selection of a range of six schools from the wider Auckland area also ensured a spread of different ethnic groups. In selection of the schools, it was also important that the schools supported the project, and were able to assist in its implementation.

### Stage One: Focus Groups

Exploratory focus groups were planned to help with the development of the survey instrument. These focus groups helped to verify the current themes in the literature about the research topic and to identify any additional issues that should be included in the survey questionnaire. Fontana and Frey (1998) suggested that either structured or unstructured focus groups were a useful way to try out a definition of a research problem, or for pretesting questionnaire wording or elements of the research design. Such groups could also be used for triangulation, to check data, or could be used together with other data-gathering strategies. They tended to be comparatively inexpensive and data-rich methods of gaining information. A further advantage of such focus groups was that they were likely to stimulate discussion, while the group process would encourage recall of events and feelings, providing a more complex picture than that of solitary interviewees (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

There were several issues to be considered in the use of focus groups (Fontana & Frey, 1998). In the first instance, according to Fontana and Frey, when focus groups are used, participants may be reluctant to share their views because of the presence of others. Secondly, the facilitator needs to be sufficiently skilled to prevent a group discussion from being dominated by one or more of the group members, and must be able to elicit responses from all of the participants. Thirdly, the facilitator has to manage the dynamics of the group while also retaining control of the process. For example, if there is a script, it must be completed. Thus in the current study the focus groups required careful planning, and an experienced facilitator. This approach was particularly suited to the skills of the researcher who was thus equipped to facilitate the focus groups.

Focus groups with at least six girls in each group were proposed. The groups would thus be small enough for all present to contribute and for all to be adequately heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) while providing a range of perspectives (Fontana & Frey, 1998).

### *Participants*

For the first stage of the study, two schools, one a single-sex girls' school and one coeducational, of similar decile levels, whose counsellors were supportive of the project, were chosen and invited to take part. Six students from Year 10 classes at each of two schools were invited to volunteer to take part in the focus groups. The criteria for selection were that the girls in each group should know each other but not be close friends, should enjoy talking in such a group, and thought they would feel comfortable with the others when discussing bullying among girls. The participants were a mix of different ethnicities, including Maori, Indian, Pacific Island, Chinese, and European. They had volunteered to take part in a group discussion about girls' friendship conflict, were likely to feel comfortable in a group setting, and considered they had knowledge and experience of the topic.

### *Instrument*

A guide was developed for the focus groups, in order to keep the discussion as broad as possible, so as not to miss any important aspects of girls' experience of friendship group bullying. A Questioning Guide (Appendix A) was designed to ensure

that the researcher introduced the relevant areas from the literature to the group (Punch, 1998). This was derived from a review of the literature about the kind of bullying which takes place in girls' friendship groups. The Questioning Guide was based on broad themes which arose from the literature, to find out whether these matched girls' views about their experience of bullying, and if not, what the differences were, and on the researcher's clinical experience of working with girls who had been in bullying situations. This was so as to keep the discussion as broad as possible. Girls were also asked to contribute anything else they wanted to say about friendship group bullying.

### *Procedure*

Application had been made to the University of Auckland Human Participants' Ethics Committee for permission to undertake the three-stage study. Participant Information Sheets were prepared for the Principal and Board of Trustees (Appendix B), the teachers (Appendix C), the parents (Appendix D), and the girls (Appendix E), and Consent Forms designed (Appendices E, F and G), except for the girls in the focus group study for whom an Assent Form was prepared (Appendix H) because they were under sixteen years old. Permission was granted for all three stages of the study, from 13/4/05 for a period of three years (Reference 2005/86).

The two secondary schools were then approached for permission to access Year 10 girls to participate in the focus groups. When permission was granted, the school's guidance staff assisted the researcher in recruiting and providing liaison for the researcher with the school authorities and the students.

The girls taking part gave their personal consent to participate and for the discussion to be audio taped. The focus group discussions, facilitated by the researcher, took place in each school's guidance centre. Snacks and drinks were provided. Once the girls were settled, the researcher introduced the project, and clarified group guidelines for safe discussion. The discussion began with an explanation of the type of bullying that was being explored, and a suggestion that perhaps many girls and women are capable of, or have perpetrated some of this type of bullying at some time, even though they may not have been aware of it at the time. This was illustrated with an example of perpetration of bullying from the facilitator's own personal experience.

The Questioning Guide was then followed to facilitate girls' discussion of their experiences and understanding of bullying. Their opinions were also sought about the wording, presentation, and administration of the proposed anonymous questionnaire, and their advice was noted, so that it could be used in the development of the questionnaire.

During the discussion, the researcher used careful self-disclosure, reflection, clarification, and other listening and facilitation skills, to encourage girls to share their experiences and opinions, thus ensuring that all girls had opportunity to contribute in the group (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

At the end of the group discussion, girls were thanked, and were given movie passes in recognition of the time they had given. They were also given information (Appendix I) about support people whom they could contact if they wished to talk further about anything that had left them feeling distressed or had caused them concern during or as a result of the discussion.

As recommended by Thomas (2006), the focus group discussion tapes were transcribed by the researcher, the data files cleaned (a common format achieved, with the facilitator's comments and questions noted), and the transcriptions analysed.

### *Analysis*

A generalised inductive approach was followed in analysing the data from the focus group discussion. According to Thomas (2006), a general inductive approach to analysis of qualitative data provides "a simple, straightforward approach for deriving findings linked to focused evaluation questions" (p. 246). This allowed the findings to emerge from the raw data, and required a close reading of the text without preconceived ideas about possible emergent themes. It involved identifying data which enhanced, illustrated, expanded, or otherwise informed the review of the literature with regard to the research objectives, as outlined by Thomas. The steps followed in a general inductive analytical approach should include the condensing of the findings from the raw data into a concise summary format, the making of clear links between the findings and the research aims, and the developing of theory or a model regarding the underlying processes. The links made should be transparent, demonstrable, and defensible.



In following this analytical process, a close reading and rereading of the text was undertaken, to gain familiarity with the data and an understanding of the themes, particularly in relation to the research objectives. Tentative themes were elicited, and these were eventually confirmed through reading and rereading. Once these general categories had been elicited, the process of assigning sections of text to the categories was undertaken. As part of this process, subcategories were created, with relevant segments of text allocated appropriately. For example, a theme which was confirmed was the features of girls' friendships, and within this a subtheme was created which concerned girls' desire for similarity with other girls in their friendship group. A sample of the text placed in this subcategory was the following statement: "*Like, if they look pretty, you have to look pretty. They have the coolest clothes, you've got to have the coolest clothes.*" (M)

Emerging themes were thus identified, and the findings from this stage employed in the development of the second stage of the study.

### Stage Two: The Survey

Quantitative data were required to describe bullying patterns across a broad sample of mid-adolescent girls. In addition, it was deemed useful to be able to identify the groups more at risk of bullying within that larger population. It was decided that this could best be achieved by a survey of a large sample, which would enable conclusions to be tentatively drawn (Punch, 1998). Such a survey also allowed data to be collected and analysed comparatively quickly, and would also facilitate the comparison of variables (Creswell, 2003; Punch, 1998). Information derived from the focus groups and the literature was used in the development of the anonymous questionnaire for the survey.

### *Participants*

The participants invited to complete the questionnaire were all the girls in Year 10 at the six selected schools described earlier. 1334 girls took part, with an average age of 14 years and 4 months. The girls identified with a wide range of ethnic groups. More than one-third identified as European.

### *Instrument*

Data from the focus group discussions, current literature, and existing questionnaires about bullying were influential in developing the survey questionnaire (Appendix J), in combination with questions from already existing measures of bullying. Themes from the focus groups included girls' experiences of such bullying, who had been the perpetrators, how it felt for the victims, the types of behaviour used to bully, the effects on others of the bullying, how girls perceived teachers' understanding of such bullying, whether girls told others if they were bullied, and what they had found to be most helpful. For example, the girls in the focus group discussion explained that friends sometimes concealed their negative feelings by being "over-nice". Such behaviour has been referred to in the literature, but this phrase was one employed by girls themselves and so the wording "being over-nice" was used in the anonymous questionnaire.

In addition, some questions were based on material from previous research reported in the literature, such as the use of a checklist of bullying behaviours which girls might have experienced but did not themselves identify as bullying (Owens, et al., 2000).

The questionnaire was prepared as a booklet, designed so that it was small enough to be easily kept private by participants during the data collection process, and was presented in a colour selected as the most attractive by a group of Year 10 girls. With drawings interspersed through the questions, the booklet comprised an Introduction and six sections of questions. An informal trial was undertaken with four girls aged between 14 and 15, who were known to the researcher. As a result, the wording of some questions was clarified.

The Introduction, to be read aloud by the facilitator, included an explanation of the reasons for the study. It affirmed girls' friendships and their commitment to them, while clarifying that the study was focused on bullying among same-sex friendship groups and assured the participants of anonymity. An explanation of girls' bullying was included as part of the booklet, with the instruction that answers should only refer to friendships with other girls in the current year.

Most questions required participants to tick a box to indicate their answer. Some questions also included an open section in which participants could choose to write their

own answer. Some questions offered participants a range of possible answers, arranged in logical order, such as an ascending order of frequency, for example:

Question: How often have you been bullied by girls in your friendship group this year? (Tick one).

Not at all

Once or twice

Two or three times a month

About once a week

Several times a week

Section One of the questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding age and ethnicity.

Section Two of the questionnaire asked the participants to describe their friends and friendship groups, with questions about the size of friendship groups, and the numbers of class or out-of-class friendships which each girl had. While this section sought to describe the context of bullying, it also fulfilled the function of a safe “warm-up” to more challenging questions.

Section Three asked girls directly about their experiences of bullying by friends, including whether it had occurred and how often, what form the bullying had taken, any effects of bullying on the friendship group, and any effects on the girls themselves, including absence from school.

Section Four of the questionnaire asked girls for their opinions about what constituted bullying behaviour, and its possible causes. Questions focused on a range of behaviours identified from the literature and from the focus groups, including the nature and content of verbal bullying, and how girls felt about being the targets of different methods of bullying.

Section Five sought to gather data about girls’ experiences of acting as a bully, including bullies’ opinions about how much they had bullied, their feelings about what

they had done, and who their targets had been. Girls were also asked about their behaviour in the group, as onlookers, bullies or targets.

The final part of the questionnaire, Section Six, consisted of questions about actions, people, or resources which had helped in cases of bullying, and girls were asked to contribute suggestions about what would help to reduce or stop bullying.

Girls were also asked if there was anything further they wished to contribute about girls' bullying by their friends, and the opportunity was provided for them to write their own comments on the questionnaire booklet.

At the end of the questionnaire, a statement was included, explaining to the participants that, because the questions had been personal, they might wish to seek support from a number of trusted resource people, such as their family, a friend, or the school counsellor.

In addition, a separate one-page form was inserted in the questionnaire (Appendix K), inviting girls to volunteer to participate in an individual interview about their experiences of bullying, explaining that only a few would be selected.

### *Procedure*

Ethics permission had been applied for, and was granted for the survey, together with the other two stages of the study, by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Reference 2005/86). Participant Information Sheets about both the survey and the interviews were prepared for principals and Boards of Trustees (Appendix L), teachers (Appendix M) and students (Appendix N), while Consent Forms were prepared for principals and Boards of Trustees (Appendix O), and teachers (Appendix P). Parents were informed about the study through an Information Letter (Appendix Q) provided and through a school newsletter bulletin (Appendix R). Consent Forms (Appendix Q) were provided for the girls who took part in the interviews since permission had been granted for parental consent to be waived for the individual interviews, for ethical reasons, as referred to in the previous chapter.

Six Auckland secondary schools were approached directly by the researcher, with the cooperation of the schools' counsellors, and invited to take part in the study. Copies of

the Information letters and Consent Forms were provided. After consent had been obtained from each Board of Trustees, the researcher visited the school to talk to the principal and the school counsellors and to plan the administration of the questionnaire in accordance with the requirements of the survey (e.g. confidentiality) and the needs of the school (e.g. curriculum delivery).

The researcher met with contact people nominated by each school, who liaised with other staff, including the Year 10 Deans and form tutors, as well as teachers. Liaison was shared in each school by a deputy principal and a guidance counsellor. The staff were given information letters, and parents were informed about the study through the school newsletter. Consent was obtained from the Year 10 classes' form teachers. All Year 10 girls were then addressed by the researcher as part of a normal assembly in each school, during which the purpose and requirements of the study were explained by the researcher, and girls were invited to ask questions if they wished to, by contacting the researcher directly, or through the guidance counsellor. It was made clear that participation was voluntary, that the questionnaire would be anonymous, and that while the staff involved knew who the participants were, any information they provided would be confidential. In addition, the participant information sheets, which explained this and the procedures involved, were distributed to each girl at the end of each assembly.

After the assembly and distribution of information sheets, a period of at least two weeks was allowed, so that students who wished to ask any questions about the study, either of the researcher, the guidance counsellor, or their form teachers could do so, and to give the students time to decide whether to participate or not. After two weeks, the questionnaires were administered, in careful consultation with each school, to ensure both standardisation of the process and respect for the anonymity of the questionnaire data and safety for participants.

In two schools the researcher administered the questionnaire to all the Year 10 girls at once: in the first school this took place as part of an extended assembly in a large assembly hall, assisted by form teachers and the guidance counsellor, and in the second school in the gymnasium during a timetabled Health period, with the assistance of the school's guidance counsellor and Health teachers. In both these settings, there was ample room for girls to find a private space in which to complete the questionnaire.

In the other schools, form tutors or Health teachers were given detailed information to enable them to facilitate the administration of the questionnaire safely. These teachers were chosen because of their special training in working with personal concerns, and their understanding of the need to ensure that the questionnaire was conducted in conditions which respected the confidentiality of each student's data, because of the personal nature of the topic. Communication with these teachers was undertaken by each school's guidance counsellor at special meetings, so that there was an opportunity for the teachers to ask questions.

The questionnaires were completed during Health classes in two schools, and in Form time in the remaining two schools, with desks separated to help ensure participant privacy. Girls were assured of anonymity and reminded not to write their names on their booklets. The completed questionnaires were then collected by the liaison person in each school and kept in a locked office. They were then given to the researcher, who visited each school within two days of completion to collect them.

### *Analysis*

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered into the computer programme SPSS, Version 13.0, and frequencies computed. A chi-square analysis was then performed to identify any differences between schools from different decile levels, or between single-sex and co-educational schools.

The responses to the open-ended questions, after cleaning and word processor collation by a research assistant, were analysed by the researcher, who read and re-read and, finally, coded the data to discover themes, according to the principles of inductive analysis, as outlined previously (Stage One: Focus Groups). If a number of participants provided the same answer in the open-ended questions, these were analysed statistically, and merged with the other quantitative data. For example, one question asked how girls felt when they had bullied other girls, listing several feelings for girls to choose from. The feeling of guilt was not included, and yet the open-ended responses revealed that "feeling guilty" was a common experience for girls when they had bullied their friends. In this case, the number of 'guilty' answers were added together to form an additional item on the list of feeling girls experienced when they perpetrated bullying.

In addition, some longer open-ended responses supplied additional rich narrative details (Rogers, 1993) which described a more complex bullying interaction between girls and their friends. In one such response to the final open-ended question, a girl explained her opinion about bullying, her experience of it, and her reflections on why it had been perpetrated. Such responses were merged with the qualitative data from the individual interviews at the end of Stage Three.

### Stage Three: Individual Interviews

Qualitative data were obtained by means of individual interviews to provide more in-depth information about the experiences of Year 10 girls with friendship bullying. According to Fontana and Frey (1998, p. 47) “Interviewing is one of the most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings,” as it allows an individual to tell us about their experience in their own words (Punch, 1998).

The interviews themselves were planned so as to ensure that the best possible data were obtained. Not all girls are equally perceptive or articulate, so that the quality of data was likely to vary from participant to participant. Efforts to address this were made through the selection of participants, through initial brief conversations with volunteers, to establish the kind of bullying experience that girls wanted to talk about, and by the selection of at least two girls from each of the participant schools.

In planning the interviews, it was advisable to take into account the checklist suggested by Fontana and Frey (1998) which reminded the researcher about factors for the interviewer to consider, including understanding the language and the culture of the participants, deciding how to present herself, gaining trust, establishing rapport, and data-collection methods. For example, in terms of language the target group, girls in Year 10, included different first languages, levels of linguistic ability, and meanings ascribed to language, as well as the use of different registers of formal and informal language and terminology, depending on the situation (Evans & Eder, 1993).

Because “the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2002, p. 341), advanced listening skills were thus likely to be the most essential (Punch, 1998). The researcher’s extensive experience as a counsellor, including her facilitation skills, as well as her ability to monitor the emotional

safety of participants, equipped her ideally for this role. Participant safety was ensured through careful attention to any indication that a participant felt distressed or unsafe, because of the potentially threatening material which could render them vulnerable. The interviewer was therefore able to ensure support and containment in the moment, should such a contingency arise (Punch, 1998).

### *Participants*

Thirteen girls, two from each of the participant schools, with three from the coeducational decile 10 school, were invited to take part in individual interviews, and accepted the invitation. Six girls were of New Zealand European ethnicity, three were of Pacific Island descent (including one girl who had come to New Zealand as a young child), two were Maori, one girl had come from China, and another European girl's father had come from a Mediterranean country. Their ages ranged from 14 to 15 years.

### *Instruments*

#### *Questioning Guide*

A questioning guide for the interviews was developed (Appendix T). McLeod (1994) has observed that such semi-structured qualitative interviews seek descriptions and insight into the meaning of central themes in the "life-world" (McLeod, 1994, p. 81) of the informant. Interviews, therefore, rather than being rigid or meandering, are significant interactions between two people, while, in addition, Fontana and Frey (1998) have emphasised that the language used, including body language, should help to create a shared understanding in interviewing. Such interviews have been compared to intimate conversations, with a general sense of the topics to be discussed, or questions asked, rather than specific, tightly-structured guides (Punch, 1998). In order to achieve such an end, Creswell (2003) suggests using a few open-ended questions which are general and unstructured, focusing on the main themes.. Care was taken to ensure that the questioning guide suggested general broad areas and lines of questioning, rather than rigid forms of questions, so that the interviewer, a trained and skilled questioner, could adapt the language used to suit the participants she was interviewing and encourage rapport to develop quickly.



The data from the focus group and the questionnaires informed the composition of themes for the interview question guide. For example, while the questionnaire had provided information about the general range of feelings experienced by victims of bullying, it did not reveal details of other effects, or suggest the long-term effects or reflections. Nor did the questionnaire or focus group provide details of the bullying process. Another area of interest about which the researcher sought to know more was the way in which help was provided. The interviews afforded an opportunity to gather data to fill these gaps.

### *Visual Map*

To assist in clarifying girls' accounts of the relationships and dynamics of their friendship groups during bullying episodes, girls were invited to complete an informal simple sketch map of their group at the time of the episode. This complemented and mirrored their description of what happened in their group at the time of the bullying. This invitation was explained to the girls as an additional way for them to help the researcher understand what had happened during the bullying.

The use of a visual map was based on the interviewer's extensive experience with adolescent girls, as a counsellor helping girls to clarify issues relating to normative friendship groups. An informal map or sketch had often been found to be of great help when girls were trying to explain the often complex interactions between individuals and groups. Literature supports the use of this informal tool in research, especially with adolescent girls (Lange, et al., 2005), and mapping relationships is useful in understanding adolescent development (Flum & Lavi-Yudelevitch, 2002). Such maps have been found to help in understanding group relationships (Peake & Oliver, 1982), while drawing and art have been recommended by Higenbottam (2004) and Kaplan (2007), as a way of helping girls to express themselves. Adolescent girls also enjoy such a means of expression, according to Geldard and Geldard (1999). In the current study, drawing gave the girls a non-verbal means of explaining their experiences, by providing a visual way of describing the network of their changing relationships (Verhofstadt-Deneve, 2003).

The researcher shared a personal rough sketch of a possible conflict between two figures, to help girls feel confident that the task was not a test of their drawing, but an opportunity to create their own informal map of their friendship group. All of the

participants except one accepted the invitation to map their group and talked as they drew, about the group interactions which had taken place.

### *Procedure*

When girls completed the anonymous questionnaire, those who volunteered to be interviewed were asked to give details stating how they would prefer to be contacted, either by mail, phone, email, or text. This was achieved through the use of a separate invitation sheet (Appendix S) inserted inside the survey booklet. The girls were informed that the interviews would take place in a setting of their choice, such as their school's guidance centre or their home. All girls handed in their booklets with the inserts placed inside. This ensured that information revealing which girls had volunteered to be interviewed about bullying remained confidential.

The completed, inserted pages were collated, and all girls who had volunteered to be interviewed were contacted by phone, text, email, or letter, according to their expressed preference. Those who were not selected were informed accordingly, and thanked for their readiness to help.

Two hundred and seventy-five girls volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher, with almost all wishing to talk about their Year 10 experience of being bullied by friends, or of having witnessed such bullying. It was considered that girls who volunteered to be interviewed were likely to be motivated to talk about their experiences.

While not attempting to interview a statistically representative sample, a selection was proposed that was likely to give insights into a range of bullying experiences. The volunteers were sought across the range of schools. An initial group of twelve girls, two from each school, was proposed, with the understanding that more girls would be interviewed if saturation, indicated when no new data were obtained, was not reached with this sample.

Thus, twelve girls were invited to participate in the interviews, two from each school. However, a thirteenth participant who had volunteered, identifying herself as both a bully and a victim, was selected at the request of her school counsellor, who considered that the experience would be of particular benefit to the student concerned, because of the impact that perpetration and experience of bullying had had on her. The experience of

helping others through participation in the study was likely to have a positive impact on her self-esteem (Davis, 1994). According to Punch (1998), “we cannot...let the methods dictate our images of human beings” (Punch, 1998, p. 73), and so it was decided to include the student in the individual interviews, even though her inclusion was not in accordance with the proposed procedures. Thus thirteen girls were invited.

Each girl was interviewed once, with interviews lasting no longer than an hour and a half, as suggested by Patton’s (2002) guidelines for interviewing adolescents.

Thirteen girls accepted the invitation to be interviewed. The interview times and places, such as the school or their home, were arranged, after consultation with each girl. All of the participants preferred to be interviewed at their school, and so all the interviews took place in private interview rooms in the schools’ guidance centres. Consent for the interview and for audiotaping was obtained from each interviewee.

The interviews began with brief informal conversation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), such as a comment by the interviewer about the room in which the interview took place, to help establish rapport (Punch, 1998). The researcher introduced herself, explained her purpose in undertaking the project, and confirmed the participant’s consent to taking part and to the audiotaping of the interview. As part of the introduction, the interviewer described the topic of girls’ bullying as one that all girls and women knew about, and shared a brief mention of her own adolescent experience of bullying among her girl friends (Rogers, 1993). There followed demographic questions of the participant about her age, ethnicity, and the number of people in her household, and how they were related to each other. Questions were phrased tentatively but specifically, so that invitational phrasing such as “Could you tell me about who lives in your house?” would be used instead of “Who is in your household?” These questions helped each participant to settle into the interview and to feel confident as she began to share information in a safe way. Once a sense of rapport was established, assessed by interviewer observation of the participant’s body language and her apparent comfort in responding to feedback and questions, the main data-gathering section of the interview was initiated by an open-ended question about the participant’s experience of bullying. Reflective and active listening were used by the interviewer to facilitate the interview (Patton, 2002). As recommended by Patton (2002), throughout the interview, the interviewer monitored her language, and modified it to suit that used by the participant.

Towards the end of the interviews, general questions which had not been addressed or touched upon were raised, such as “Was there anything else that helped you to get through such a difficult time?” or “Looking back on it now, how did it affect you?” Using questions which invited a slightly more distant perspective, though still in an open-ended format at this point, also allowed the participant to step back from the emotional and personal story she had told, and to prepare for the interview to finish. The interview concluded with thanks and attendance to safety concerns. These were addressed through the suggestion or recommendation of referral to counsellors if appropriate, assurance of the support and resources available to the girls, and identification of people whom girls could contact if they required further support. The girls were each given a CD voucher in recognition of the time they had contributed.

### *Analysis*

In analysing the qualitative data from the interviews, the same generalised inductive approach was followed as had been used in previous qualitative analysis in the study (Thomas, 2006). The data were transcribed by the researcher, cleaned, read and reread, and coded, to elicit meanings and allow broad general themes to emerge (Rogers, 1993). Both major and minor themes emerged from the coded texts. While they fell into the general categories, they also were allocated to subcategories which were thus created.

To illustrate the method used, one of the broad categories relating to the research objectives was the nature of the bullying. Within this category were found subcategories within the data, including the length of time, or the duration, of the bullying. There follow examples of text which were coded into this subcategory:

*I've had a friend for five years who's really bossy, really manipulative. (N)*

*(The bullying began) probably about six weeks ago. (J)*

*She blames us. Last term, it's sort of, like, made me feel it was all my fault. (J)*

*I've been bullied all my life. (T)*

*[It lasted from] halfway through the year... until the end of last term. (M)*

Each of these statements gave some indication of the duration of the bullying behaviour. Samples of other subcategories included helping behaviour (e.g., *“Mum said, ‘You know if you can’t do it in person, ring up’”* (S), the negative effects on victims (e.g., *“That’s basically how I felt, like a little doll that was going around and little kids fighting over it”* (S), or reflecting about morality (e.g., *“Then they started being really mean to her again, and, like, I saw that ... I was standing up for her”* (M).

Some segments of text fell into more than one category as noted by Thomas (2006). For example, the text segment *“Yeah, I think it’s made me a lot more aware of how other people are feeling, and how the whole social group thing works”* (I), was coded into the two subcategories, effects on victims, and experience of empathic feelings.

Following these steps, the data were checked for trustworthiness, accuracy, and validity, by a colleague. Four out of the thirteen transcripts, chosen to give a representative sample of the interviews, were given to a counsellor who was asked to read them, to determine the general themes, and to note these in writing. Those themes were then compared with the original analysis completed by the researcher, and were found to be similar. This process confirmed the original analysis.

The visual maps were examined for any information that clarified, confirmed, or added depth to the verbal responses. This was done through careful examination of the drawings, and comparison with the verbal data that had preceded, accompanied, and followed the drawing process. For example, in the case of one girl, the sketch (Appendix U) was divided into two parts, showing her view of her group before and after the bullying. She emphasised that in the “before” map, there was clear and direct communication between two subgroups, and her place was in the centre of the group. In her “after” map, she had moved to the fringe of the group, and the previous direct communication had been disrupted. She added a drawing of a heart, at the side of the map, and added (orally) that positive emotions had triumphed. Thus, while she had described the changes in words, she summarised her own story with a “happy ending” in the form of a heart, symbolising happiness, which she then corroborated in her verbal account of the outcome of the incident.

## *Summary*

This chapter has described the methods used in the current investigation into girls' friendship group bullying, after having reviewed approaches used by other researchers, as reported in the literature. The three-stage design used in this project has been discussed. Each stage in turn, including the focus groups, the survey questionnaire, and the individual interviews, has been described, together with the rationale for the approaches taken and information presented which explains the selection and the details of the participants, the instruments used, the procedures followed, and the methods employed to analyse the data obtained in the various stages of the study.

The results are presented in the next three chapters, with first the results of the focus groups, followed by the quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire and finally the qualitative results from the interviews.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of Stage One of the study, the focus groups, are presented according to themes and subthemes which emerged from the analysis of the data, incorporating illustrative quotations. Quotations from girls are presented in italics, and participants are represented by a letter of the alphabet, to ensure their anonymity.

### Girls' Friendship Groups: The Context for Bullying

In discussing conflict and bullying in their friendship groups, girls described their interactions, and reported the features they noticed that characterised their friendships.

#### *The Nature of Girls' Friendship Groups*

Girls thought that friends became similar to each other because they spent so much time together. As they grew more similar, their friendship grew stronger, until they even had similar thoughts.

*It's like if you hang around your friends a lot, it's like you become all the same. And then it becomes real strong. (H)*

*And it's like you think together. (A)*

Girls built trust with their close friends by sharing personal information. They also shared information about other girls. They sought exciting items to talk about, and found that keeping secrets was difficult when they wanted to feel close to their friends.

*Like you tell them things about yourself, like you tell them something personal that is different to you, and if they tell you stuff. (D)*

*When you're together and it's peaceful, it's just like, "Oh my God, you know what? This happened", but you can't tell them - I don't think people realise what they're doing, I think they just want something to talk about. (N)*

When conflict occurred between friends, if the friendship was a true friendship then girls could be honest about expressing their grievances. If conflict occurred in good friendships, it was resolved by negotiation and direct communication. Such friends were

loyal through difficult times, and understood that difficulties could happen but friendship could go on.

*If you have a grudge against somebody, then they can confront you, like “You’ve got a grudge.” They’re going to know to stop, because you know how the things you say about real friends and they stick by you, through the hard times, for example the grudges, and you go confront them ... and that may be a hard thing to take but if they’re really a true friend they’ll understand, and they’ll still be there for you. (S)*

Girls noted that friends could act differently depending on who they were relating to at the time.

*Sometimes you can be good friends with somebody, and then they’re like all nice to you, but then they’re really really mean to somebody else. (A)*

Friendship groups were connected with the wider peer group, and girls wanted to fit in with their groups. Appearing similar to the group was important.

*It’s like, who you fit in with. (A)*

In the peer group, girls sometimes belonged to recognised group types such as “Gothic” (N), while status was important in some groups. Certain groups had informal leaders who were both physically attractive and fashionable. Girls felt pressured to conform to the leader’s standards.

*Like, if they look pretty, you have to look pretty. They have the coolest clothes, you’ve got to have the coolest clothes. It’s up there sort of thing. (S)*

The leader was the person in the group with the reputation for being “cool.”

*Yeah, [the leader is] just like, the person that’s really cool in a group. (M)*

The leader also dominated the group’s conversations.

*They talk the most, that’s the main thing. (L)*



### *Recognition of Bullying*

Girls stated that they knew when they were being bullied because of the way it felt: it was painful, they experienced fear as well as hurt, and that was how they recognised it as bullying.

*[It's bullying] when it hurts, when you're scared. (P)*

*If you feel like, upset [it's bullying]. (A)*

### Participants' Experiences of Bullying

The girls in the focus groups described their experience of having been bullied by other girls in Year 10.

### *How Bullying Started*

The girls stated that bullying could happen very suddenly and unexpectedly, so that friendships immediately broke up.

*It could just come out of the blue. One day you could be friends and the next day it could be "Oh I'm not going to be friends, go and find some new friends." (I)*

The bullying could start because of something that had been said, and could rapidly escalate, so that a girl could suddenly find that the other girls were united against her.

*Bullying happens maybe 'cause someone's said something and they all side against you, and you come to school and it's like... sort of things. (I)*

The leader of the group decided on the victim. Others went along with the leader for fear of becoming victims of exclusion themselves.

*It's like one person decides they don't like someone, and so, and if they're at the top then everybody has to agree, otherwise like you risk, you know, getting frozen out as well. (A)*

Bullying could take the form of being artificially nice to the victim, so that she doubted her own opinion about what was happening.

*I think that's almost worse, when they're like overly nice to you, like you think that something's wrong, or like you've got something wrong. (A)*

### *The Processes of Bullying*

The bullying process included other girls besides the two initial protagonists. If one girl had a dispute with another girl, the first girl's friends supported her. Friends would thus band together to bully a single girl, or a group might split into two factions, taking sides, as girls allied themselves with the girl who had initiated the bullying. Girls tended to align themselves with the leader.

*Well, like, say if you've got problems with a person in your class, and then, like, your friends they'll back you up on it, and it's kind of like an attack on this poor person, like you're the only one with problems but since they're your friends they've got to back you up. (A)*

*Yeah sometimes, Like, when they split into two groups or something. (S)*

*Like when if you're one group, you go onto each others' sides and stuff, argue with each other. (I)*

*They go with the leader of the group. (M)*

### *Bullying Behaviours*

Girls recounted the kinds of bullying behaviour that they had experienced or witnessed. The strategies employed by girls in friendship group bullying included 'backstabbing' (saying unpleasant things about a girl behind her back), telling personal secrets, and ignoring her to the point of exclusion. "Backstabbing" avoided confrontation, while girls possessed private information about their former friends. When bullying took the form of ignoring a girl, she felt unhappy and would be alone. Even if others tried to intervene, the bullying continued.

*They never really do it, like, with girls, they don't really do it to your face. They always start a rumour or say something mean, but they never do it to their face, they're always backstabbing. (CH)*

*They'll just more or less do it behind your back and wait until you find out, then you'll just start being in trouble. (D)*

*You've been friends with them and they know your secrets, and they end up telling everyone, it's like something you'd rather keep private. (N)*

*Being quiet when the girl comes – silence! Then you try and say something, and the girl will reply, and then the conversation dies, and then the girl feels all sad, and then they go sit by themselves. (M)*

### *Roles in Bullying*

#### *Bullies*

The participants described the way that bullies picked on individual girls and influenced other girls to follow their lead in hating and excluding the victim. Thus the whole class would bully one girl.

*Like you walk in, and everyone goes "Oh, look who's here" [said in a disappointed voice]. Like, the whole class does it to one person. (T)*

Others had to follow the bully's lead, by disliking the victim. Bullies needed to justify this to the others, and so they would focus on something wrong with the victim herself, thus creating a reason to bully her. The fault then lay with the victim.

*Like if one person doesn't like another, the whole class isn't allowed to like them – like, they get them involved, like, "Oh look what D did, we can't talk to her." (N)*

*They need to justify why they, if they're the only one that hates them they've got other people hating them, they think this is an actually bad person, it's not just me. (D)*

## *Victims*

How victims felt and responded depended on how they perceived the bullying behaviour. Victims withdrew and gradually grew quieter. They felt unhappy and began to think their friends must be angry with them or tired of them.

*And then they'll think you're like, quiet, and so you don't talk as much and it's like, you just keep getting quieter and quieter and it's like more and more depressing and then it, you start thinking that they're against you, or something. (A)*

Others saw a victim of bullying as a “loner” because she was by herself at school.

*They're tired of you and that makes you kind of a loner. (S)*

*You're just like, walking around school: “Oh look there's that chick that has no friends.” (K)*

.The bullying caused victims to doubt their own personality and to experience a sense of loss of self and identity.

*You feel like you're not the person you are. (S)*

Victims became quiet and withdrawn and felt depressed. They perceived their friends as hostile, and felt self-doubt, isolated and ridiculed. Standing up to bullying made one girl feel better.

Challenging her bully made one girl feel better, however. She reported her experience of standing up to physical aggression as a response to bullying. She was proud of her courageous response , which culminated in a physical fight, and felt it had stopped the bullying.

*I used to be a loner, get bullied. I was bullied from this leader, and like two terms later she stepped me. I had a fight with her, I didn't drop it eh! (M)*

## *Observers*

Girls who saw bullying noticed that a victim's reactions could be negative or positive, depending on her mood, so that either she might see the behaviour as bullying, or might not view it as an attack on her.

*It depends on how they take it in. You think, like, if they see it negative then they take it in negative, if they think positive then they'll take it in positive ...it depends on their mood, it's what kind of mood as to how they'll take it in. (S)*

They observed that victims ignored and denied the bullying, and were reluctant to name it as bullying.

*They don't really want to say it's bullying, they just ignore it, and pretend it isn't happening. (C)*

Girls thought that victims put up with bullying because if they sought other girls as friends, they might not be accepted, and in that case, the victim would find herself alone. They thought that it was better to be with friends than to be alone.

*You might go to these people or it could be like worse, or they might not like you, so you'll have no-one (after that), so it's better to have friends than be alone (A)*

## *Reasons That Girls Bully Their Friends*

Girls thought that bullies acted as they did because of their background and family dynamics, or their friends' actions. Some participants believed that the bully acted as she did if her family was aggressive, or her friends were.

*It's generally background as well – it depends on what your family's like, it's like why, if you get hidings from your family, you'll have it like inside of you, so then you'll come to school and you'll give other people hidings. If your parents shout at you you'll shout at your friends. (K)*

*And what your friends are doing as well. (I)*

Others saw such conflict as arising from issues about boys.

*It's always about guys .... Mostly! (M)*

The need for power and domination in a group, or for the appearance and reputation of being “cool” was also seen as a strong motive.

*Yeah it's like they're trying to have all the control over the others and be like the dominant one in the group, 'cause they might think that like, I don't know, it makes them cooler or something. (P)*

### What Helps in Coping with, or Stopping Bullying

Girls thought that some actions helped them to cope, to stop the bullying or reduce its effects. They had help from different sources, including family, other people, the counsellor, and outside activities. Family and resources at home provided comfort.

*Hugs from your family [help]! (P)*

*My TV programme! (N)*

Talking with other people also helped. If victims kept silent about the bullying, the feelings it caused built up, until the feelings surfaced in sudden and distressing ways. Girls might lose control of themselves and their feelings. Talking to others prevented this happening.

*I reckon if they talk about it to other people, like they get it out of them, because as soon as you keep it to yourself, it just bottles up, bottles up and then when it gets too full you just explode, you don't know what to do with yourself, you break down you don't know what to do. (I)*

Peer mediation was somewhat helpful, but might not be successful. It provided an outlet for feelings, and advice about possible action to take.

*It (peer mediation) sort of does (help), it's not actually always going to guarantee it, it's just like you give people advice, and it's like giving the issues for them to let their problems out on. (K)*

School counsellors were seen by some as very helpful. One was described appreciatively as able to lighten the situation; there was no sense in what this participant said that the counselor trivialised the issue in doing so.

*Go to the counsellor, that's really good. [Agreement from several voices]. I like Ms Y, she's good eh? She's cool. So then she makes it into a fun situation (M).*

Teachers' interventions, however, were seen as making things worse.

*if you tell the teacher something they could just go and get the person and sit down and they'll know that you like told on them, and they'll get angry and then. (P)*

Girls also found comfort in spiritual ways. For some participants, prayer and faith were a source of comfort, while others believed in the existence of a presence which gave them a sense of reassurance.

*Every time I get bullied I go off and pray, because that's how I express my feelings, to God, and it's just, it's just something different eh? (M)*

*I'm not sure if I believe in God but I definitely do believe in something bigger than myself, something that kind of, you know it's like they can see you or something, and it's so – when I get a hard time or something, I'll come home from school and it's just like, it's good to just keep that in mind, that there's always something looking, up there (A)*

### Summary of the Focus Group Results

Girls reported that they had experience of friendship group bullying, within the context of the wider peer group. The victim's attitude towards the bullying behaviour was important in determining whether they saw it as bullying. They could react proactively or passively with regard to the bullying. Strategies girls had observed or experienced included, backstabbing, the revelation of personal secrets, exclusion, insincerity (being "too nice"), and ignoring the victim by "freezing" her out. Bullies tended to be the leaders, followed by the others in the group, and as a result of bullying the victims experienced emotional pain, social isolation and self-doubt. Their coping responses tended to be withdrawal and attempting to ignore the behaviour, because it was better to stay in a

bullying situation sometimes than to leave and suffer the isolation of losing their friendship group.

The results of the focus groups were employed in the preparation of the survey questionnaire and the Questioning Guide for the Interviews, as outlined in the previous chapter. This facilitated the subsequent stages of the study, and prepared the way for Stage Two, the survey, to take place.



## CHAPTER FIVE: SURVEY RESULTS

The aims of the current study were to describe three main areas of girls' friendship group bullying, including its nature, how girls experienced it, and what they found to be helpful in stopping it. A description of its nature and girls' experiences also included information about its frequency, duration and girls' recognition of bullying, as well as its processes, together with the roles, behaviours, and effects of friendship group bullying. In addition, the study aimed to discover what girls themselves have found helpful in stopping such bullying, or reducing its adverse effects. Fundamental to the investigation was that it should reflect girls' own views.

In this chapter, the quantitative results from the survey questionnaire are presented in five sections, accompanied by selected tables and explanatory text, with additional tables as indicated, presented in Appendix V. The first section summarises the demographic characteristics of the participants and their friendship groups. The results are then presented in three consecutive sections which reflect the main research question areas: namely, the nature of friendship group bullying, girls' experience of it, and the strategies and resources found by girls to be helpful in recovering from its negative effects. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

In this presentation of the results, the reader needs to take into account that the terms of bully, victim, observer or helper have been used for convenience to denote a particular role indicated by actions and intention at a specific time or times. The terms are not intended to convey a continuous role adopted by an individual all of the time, but to reflect girls' understanding of their experience of those roles. It should be noted also that the questions asked the girls about their experience of bullying in the year in which the study took place. In addition, the term "bullying" refers to self-defined bullying, unless research-defined bullying, as derived from the conglomerate of behaviours in the literature, is specified.

A total of 1,334 Year 10 girls from six Auckland secondary schools completed the questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 13 years to 16 years, with an average age of 14 years, 4 months ( $SD = .51$ ). The majority attended mid-decile or high-decile co-educational schools. Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Age, School Type, and School Decile Level*

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Age</b>		
13	15	1.1
14	836	62.7
15	469	35.2
16	8	0.6
Total	1328	99.6
<b>School Type</b>		
Single Sex	579	43.4
Co-educational	755	56.6
Total	1334	100.0
<b>School Decile</b>		
Low	292	21.9
Medium	456	34.2
High	586	43.9
Total	1334	100.0

Table 2  
*Ethnicity of Girls*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<i>n</i>	%
New Zealand European	495	37.1
Pasifika	293	22.0
Asian	245	18.4
Maori	195	14.6
European	180	13.5
Other	105	7.9
Indian	83	6.2
African	29	2.2
Middle Eastern	15	1.1

Girls were asked which ethnicity they identified with. The girls identified with a wide range of ethnic groups. However, just over one-third identified as European.

#### Features of Year 10 Girls' Friendship Groups

Questions were asked of the girls to find out whether they belonged to a same-sex friendship group, the size of their groups, and what they valued most about their friends. Most of the 1,316 girls (86.5%) who answered this question belonged to a friendship

group of at least three same-sex friends with whom they spent most of their time, in their classes and at interval and lunchtime. The remainder of the girls (13.3%) were either one of a friendship dyad or didn't belong to a group. (See Table V1, Appendix V).

The girls were also asked questions about whether they thought that they were liked by other girls. While most (82.6%) of the 1,294 girls who answered thought that other girls liked them most or all of the time, almost a fifth (17.4%) of the girls felt that other girls liked them only sometimes, hardly ever, or not at all, as in Table V2, Appendix V.

Girls valued fun (53.3%) and support (49.2%) most highly in their friendships with other girls. Less valued but also important were opportunities for doing things together (36.7%), just knowing they had a friend (30.1%), and sharing their private thoughts and secrets (29.3%). Least important (12.3%) was practical help, such as help with schoolwork. These results are summarised in Table V3, Appendix V.

### The Nature of Girls' Bullying

The occurrence of bullying was explored in two ways. In the first instance, girls were asked whether they had been bullied by friends or not, according to their own definition of bullying. Secondly, girls were asked to state whether they had experienced any of a set of behaviours derived from the conglomerate of behaviours associated with bullying in the literature (research-defined bullying), in Year 10. In order to ascertain whether the girls recognised what bullying was, they were also asked to indicate whether each of the research-defined bullying behaviours constituted bullying.

In reference to bullying in the remainder of this chapter, "bullying" refers to self-defined bullying, according to girls' understanding, unless specified as being research-defined.

#### *Experience of Self-Defined Bullying.*

Girls were asked if they had been bullied by friends in the year in which the study took place, and, if so, how often it had happened. They were not given any definition of

bullying, and therefore relied on their own definition as they understood bullying to be (Table 3).

Table 3  
*Number of Times Girls Report Being Bullied by Friends (Self-Defined Bullying) (N=1318)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Not at all	735	55.8
Once or twice	440	33.4
Two or three times a month	66	5.0
About once a week	41	3.1
Several times a week	36	2.7
Total	1318	100.0

Of the 1,318 girls who responded to this question, almost half (44.2%) said that they had being bullied by their friends in the year in which the study took place, with 10.8% of girls reporting being bullied at least two to three times a month.

A further set of questions asked the girls about the specific types of bullying behaviour they had experienced. The list of behaviours was derived from the literature. Girls were asked to identify all behaviours in the list that they had been subjected to when their friends bullied them.

Being ignored by friends was the most common type of bullying experienced, reported by 29.8% of girls, followed by unpleasant teasing (14.2%). A number of girls (9.7%) reported other strategies (from 7 to 14 girls for each strategy). These included “backstabbing” (secretly making derogatory comments about a friend to other girls), actions involving boyfriends, such as sending flirtatious texts to a friend’s boyfriend, sulking, which created anxiety in the friend, general criticism of friends’ actions, “*dirty looks* (unpleasant facial expressions)” (T), or strategies involving public ridicule or embarrassment, such as “*embarrassed me in front of my class on purpose*” (V), or “*went on my msn account [social networking site] pretending they were me and that I was a lesbian*” (G). A breakdown of the behaviours experienced is shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Bullying Behaviours that Girls Report having Inflicted on them by Friends*

	<i>n</i>	%
Ignored me	398	29.8
Teased me in a mean way	190	14.2
Froze me out	160	12.0
Spread unpleasant rumours	154	11.5
Left me out on purpose	145	10.9
Told my confidential personal secret	145	10.9
Left me alone at lunchtime	105	7.9
Texted mean things to or about me	96	7.2
Was over-nice	82	6.1
Left me to sit alone in class	79	5.9
Left me out on purpose	61	5.9
Made abusive comments to or about me by email or on Internet sites	43	3.2
Set me up by listening in on the phone	23	1.7
Something else, e.g., “sent me to another place where we were supposed to be meeting up” (H)	129	9.7

#### *Experience of Research-Defined Bullying*

When research-defined bullying behaviours were considered, the majority of girls (86.1%) said that they had been the target of at least one type of bullying behaviour (research-defined) from friends during Year 10.

Girls were asked in a further question whether they had experienced any of a set of behaviours from friends. Again, the list of bullying behaviours was derived from the literature but was not labelled as bullying. Almost half of the girls (46.6%) had been ignored by their friends at some time in Year 10, followed by unpleasant teasing (39.3%), being “put down” or criticised or made to feel unhappy in some way (39.1%), or called names (36.7%). These results are shown in Table V4, Appendix V.

#### *Recognition of Research-Defined Bullying*

In order to determine whether girls recognised the research-defined bullying behaviours as bullying, they were asked whether or not they considered each behaviour as bullying.

Analysis showed that the girls were most likely to identify unpleasant teasing (66.1%), physical attacks (65.3%), using texting (64.0%), emailing or using social networking sites to say unpleasant things (62.5%), or spreading rumours (62.3%) as bullying. Fewer girls recognised exclusion strategies such as being left out of group work in class (50.6%), or being ignored by friends (38.3%) as bullying. Girls' recognition of research-defined bullying is summarised in Table V5, Appendix V.

*Recognition of Bullying Behaviour: Analysis by School Type and Decile Level*

In order to facilitate an analysis of the bullying behaviours as a function of school type and decile level, the behaviours were categorised, according to whether they were physical, such as hitting, exclusion, such as ignoring, indirect, such as spreading rumours, or direct, such as teasing. The items comprising each of these categories and the associated Cronbach's alphas, a measure of internal consistency, are presented in Table 5. The alphas were all above 0.80, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 5  
*Items Included in Each Category of Bullying and the Associated Alpha Coefficients*

	$\alpha$
<b>Exclusion</b>	0.92
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignoring a friend</li> <li>• Freezing a girl out of a group of friends</li> <li>• Leaving a girl out of an event with friends, e.g. a party, on purpose</li> <li>• Leaving someone alone on purpose</li> <li>• Leaving a girl out of group class work on purpose</li> <li>• Leaving a girl to sit alone in class on purpose</li> </ul>	
<b>Physical</b>	N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hitting or pushing someone</li> </ul>	
<b>Indirect bullying behaviour</b>	0.93
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spreading unpleasant rumours</li> <li>• Telling a girl's confidential personal secret to another girl</li> <li>• Texting mean things to a girl or about her to others</li> <li>• Saying mean things to a girl or about her in emails or chat rooms</li> </ul>	
<b>Direct bullying behaviour</b>	0.81
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being overly nice to a girl in a fake way</li> <li>• Teasing a girl who is a friend so she feels bad, upset or uncomfortable</li> <li>• Setting a girl up with another girl listening on</li> </ul>	

In order to determine if recognition of bullying differed as a function of school type or decile level, mean scores associated with these categories were subjected to MANOVA. A significant interaction effect between school decile level and school type was found across all bullying categories ( $F_{(8, 2652)} = 37.82, p.000$ ). A summary of the post hoc analysis is presented in Table 6.

Table 6  
*Recognition of Bullying Behaviours by School Type and Decile Level*

Category of behaviour X decile	Number recognised				$F_{(2,1333)}$	$P$
	Single Sex		Co-Educational			
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$		
Exclusion						
High	0.74	1.86	4.48	1.80	91.65	0.000
Med	2.49	2.55	4.38	1.97		
Low	3.96	2.04	3.70	2.07		
Physical						
High	0.15	0.35	0.90	0.29	114.94	0.000
Med	0.55	0.50	0.90	0.30		
Low	0.47	0.50	0.90	0.30		
Direct						
High	2.29	0.85	2.07	0.91	109.29	0.000
Med	1.30	1.26	2.31	0.83		
Low	0.39	0.96	2.23	0.81		
Indirect						
High	3.49	0.95	2.98	1.28	155.74	0.000
Med	1.98	1.84	3.40	1.08		
Low	0.57	1.37	3.41	0.93		

Post hoc analysis revealed that in low-decile, single-sex schools girls were more likely to recognise direct bullying behaviours than girls in low-decile coeducational schools ( $F_{(1,290)} = 4.30, p.04$ ) and indirect bullying behaviours ( $F_{(1,290)} = 14.91, p.000$ ). In mid-decile schools there were differences between single and coeducational schools across all behaviour categories. In all cases girls at coeducational schools were more likely to identify bullying behaviours as bullying than girls at single-sex schools. Direct: ( $F_{(1,454)} = 98.76, p.000$ ); Indirect: ( $F_{(1,454)} = 99.12, p.000$ ); Exclusion: ( $F_{(1,454)} = 77.56, p.000$ ); Physical: ( $F_{(1,454)} = 79.52, p.000$ ).

Similarly, there were significant differences across all behaviour categories in high-decile schools, with girls in single-sex schools less likely to recognise bullying behaviour than those in coeducational schools. (Direct: ( $F_{(1.584)} = 607.03$  p.000); Indirect:  $F_{(1.584)} = 797.31$  p.000; Exclusion:  $F_{(1.584)} = 595.45$  p.000; Physical:  $F_{(1.584)} = 741.45$  p.000). Means and associated standard deviations are presented in Table V6, Appendix V.

### *Summary of the Nature of Bullying*

Bullying occurred widely among Year 10 (average age 14.4 years) girls' friendship groups, with 86.1% of girls experiencing at least one form of bullying behavior (research-defined) from friends, while close to half of the girls also reported self-defined bullying from friends. Overall, girls were most likely to recognise unpleasant teasing, spreading rumours, physical assaults, and use of the Internet and texting to make unpleasant comments as bullying. They were less likely to view excluding behaviours, such as being ignored, as bullying. Such behaviours were among the most commonly perpetrated. Differences were found in the recognition of bullying, according to school type and level, showing that girls in mid-decile and high-decile coeducational schools were more likely to recognise all types of bullying than girls at single-sex schools, while in low-decile schools the opposite was true of direct bullying.

### *The Experience of Bullying*

In order to find out how girls experience such bullying, they were asked further questions about their experience of the bullying behaviour among friends, and about its processes and effects. The majority of questions referred simply to "bullying", according to girls' own definitions.

### *Strategies Used to Bully*

Girls were asked questions about whether they had bullied their friends, and, if so, what type of research-defined bullying behaviours they had used. They could choose more than one behaviour. These results are presented in Table V7, Appendix V.

At least a third of all girls reported that they had inflicted a minimum of one type of research-defined bullying behaviour on someone in their friendship group in Year 10.



The bullying behaviour that they had used most frequently was to ignore a friend (30.7%), followed by calling her unpleasant names (22.4%) and “put-downs”, (pejorative comments, 19.1%), “freezing her out” (treating her coldly, 18.7%), or teasing her in an unpleasant way (18.7%). Least used were setting another girl up by listening on the phone (2.5%), threatening not to be friends (3.1%), using email or Internet social networking sites to bully (5.15), and spreading rumours (6.9%).

In order to find out about the nature of verbal bullying, girls who had been subjected to direct verbal abuse were asked questions which provided information about its content. They reported that direct verbal bullying was most likely to be about their abilities (34.5%), such as criticism of their intelligence, or singing ability, or their appearance (26.7%), such as critical comments about having red hair, or being fat. Verbal abuse also focused on girls’ race and culture (13.0%), or beliefs (10.9%), such as their religious beliefs, their sexuality (9.4%) which included comments about their sexual behaviour and sexual identity, or their personality, including their personal taste, style, or attributes, such as their sense of humour. Twenty-one girls gave other answers, with a few in each category having experienced verbal criticism of their families, their names, their other friends, or their actions. These are summarised in Table V8, Appendix V.

#### *Why Girls Bully Their Friends*

The girls were asked to give their views about the reasons that girls bully their friends, and could choose more than one reason. The most common reason chosen was that the bully was angry with her friend (63.4%), while other girls thought that problems about boys (51.0%), other friends (49.0%), or not liking friends any more (46.5%), or the bully just feeling angry (39.1%) were reasons that girls inflicted bullying on their friends. Some girls (7.5%) attributed the bullying to jealousy. Small numbers of girls (from one to two per cent for each option), thought that the reason was having a relationship problem, premenstrual tension, self-esteem problems, having a bad day, family problems, wanting power and status, being “bitchy”, or thinking the behaviour was funny. These responses are summarised in Table V9, Appendix V.

### *Girls' Role in the Group When Bullying Took Place*

To find out how girls saw themselves acting in regard to bullying in the friendship group, they were asked about what their usual role was, when bullying occurred. Of the girls who answered this question, the majority saw themselves as onlookers or as trying to stop the bullying. Only a few girls said that they started the bullying, about one-eighth of the respondents acknowledged that they usually joined in, while others described or reported more specific action that they took, including supporting the girl who was bullied but only if she was a friend, joining in the bullying but stopping it before it went too far, helping the others to sort it out, or confronting the bully. A small group of girls identified themselves as victims (Table 7).

Table 7  
*Showing the Main Roles That Girls Adopt in Group Bullying (N=1017)*

	<i>n</i>	%
I usually try to stop the bullying	424	41.7
I'm usually an onlooker	318	31.3
I don't start the bullying but usually join in	128	12.6
I usually get bullied	73	7.2
I usually start the bullying	39	3.4
Other e.g. try to sort it out	35	2.6

In order to find out more about the role of the onlooker, girls were asked about their actions if they saw bullying in their friendship group.

Table 8  
*Showing What Onlookers Do if They See Bullying in the Group (N=1188)*

	<i>n</i>	%
I try to stop it	660	55.6
It's never happened	310	23.1
Nothing, because I wouldn't be able to stop it	97	8.2
Nothing, because she deserves it	62	5.2
Nothing, in case I get bullied too	59	5.0

Of those who answered this question (1,188 girls), more than half of the girls said that they did something to try to stop the bullying or to help the victim. A fifth of the girls who answered did nothing when they saw someone being bullied, either through fear of

being bullied themselves, or because the victim deserved it, or because they felt powerless to stop it.

*Effects of Bullying on the Friendship Group Itself*

Girls were asked about the effects of bullying on their friendship groups. Of the 994 girls who answered this question, more than half (42.6%) said that it had no effect on their friendship group. The remainder of those who answered the question said that some change had occurred in the friendship group because of bullying, with the most likely changes being the dissolution of the group (11.5%) or loss of friends (8.9%). Other girls reported that someone had left the group (2.9%). About a tenth (11.5%) of those who answered gave multiple or other answers, including leaving the group themselves, having no friends, making new friends, residual tension between girls in the group, or less closeness with friends, with about 2% giving each option, as shown in Table V10, Appendix V.

*Effects on the Victims.*

In order to discover how girls who had been bullied by friends perceived the emotional impact of the bullying on them, girls were asked questions about the emotional effects of any bullying they had experienced, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Showing Victims' Feelings about Being Bullied (N=706)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Felt a little unhappy	287	40.7
Felt terrible	173	24.5
Felt moderately unhappy	132	18.7
Felt nothing	114	16.1
Total	706	100.0

Of the 706 girls who responded to this question, more than 40% felt terrible or moderately unhappy about being bullied, with a similar percentage of respondents feeling a little unhappy about it.

To find out whether different bullying behaviours had different emotional effects, girls were also asked about the emotional impact on them of particular bullying strategies

(research-defined) which they had experienced. Of those who answered this question, most were likely to feel terrible or moderately unhappy about having their confidential personal secret told, being teased in a mean way, put-downs, being ignored, or having rumours spread about them. Table V11, Appendix V, summarises these results.

To find out whether girls' school attendance was affected by friendship group bullying, girls were asked whether they had ever stayed away from school because they were bullied. One-eighth (12.5%) of the 1,171 girls who answered this question had stayed away from school in Year 10 because of bullying from friends. Three per cent of these girls reported being absent from school at least once a week because of bullying from friends. These results are presented in Table V12 in Appendix V.

### *Effects On the Bullies.*

In order to understand the emotional impact of bullying from the perpetrators' perspective, girls who had inflicted bullying (research-defined) on their friends were asked how they felt about the bullying. They were also offered the opportunity to report any other emotions that they felt when they bullied another girl.

Table 10  
*Showing Feelings of Bullies When They Perpetrated Bullying (Research-Defined)*  
(N=742)

	<i>N</i>	%
I felt a bit uncomfortable	240	18.0
I felt nothing	130	12.7
I felt something else, e.g. mean, joking, regret, sad, or a combination of feelings	118	15.9
I felt angry	115	11.2
Guilty	79	10.6
It was a good feeling	34	3.3
I felt powerful	26	2.5

As can be seen in Table 10, reactions to perpetrating bullying varied. However, only a small minority (6%) reported positive feelings as a result of bullying others.

### *Effects on the Observers*

Observers and helpers were asked questions about how they felt when they witnessed bullying in their friendship group

Table 11  
*Showing How Onlookers Feel When They See Friendship Group Bullying (N=1182)*

	<i>N</i>	%
I feel a bit uncomfortable	353	29.9
I feel awful	350	29.6
It's never happened	311	26.3
Nothing	89	7.5
Glad it's not me	79	6.7
Total	1182	100.0

Of those who responded to this question, the majority of girls (59.5%) felt “a bit uncomfortable” or “awful” when they saw someone in their group being bullied, as shown in Table 11.

### *Summary of the Experience of Bullying*

Almost half of the girls (46.6%) had inflicted at least one type of bullying behaviour on someone in their friendship group in Year 10. The most common type of bullying was to ignore the victim, and girls attributed bullying mainly to anger (62.5%). The majority of girls (73.0%) were usually observers or helpers, with more than half of the girls viewing themselves as helpers. The majority of bullies, victims, and observers reported having experienced negative emotions when bullying occurred. One-eighth (12.5%) of girls had stayed away from school in Year 10 because of bullying from friends.

### Sources of Help

To find out about help in relation to bullying, girls were asked questions about whether they had told anyone about being bullied, and what they had found to provide the greatest help in reducing the effects of bullying, or in assisting them to recover from its impact.

### *Who Girls Tell About Bullying*

Girls who had been bullied were asked to indicate whether they had told anyone about it. Almost two-thirds (59.3%) of the 947 girls who responded had disclosed bullying to someone else, while 40.7% of them had not told anyone.

A further question invited girls to identify all the relevant people whom they had told about being bullied. They could choose more than one response (Table 12).

Table 12  
*Showing Who Girls Tell About Being Bullied*

	<i>N</i>	%
Friend who is a girl	425	31.9
Parent/caregiver	183	13.7
Another family member	159	11.9
Friend who is a boy	156	11.7
Boyfriend	148	11.1
Counsellor	113	8.5
Teacher	37	2.8
Other e.g. pet, pastor	27	2.0

Girls reported that they had mainly told their friends, family members, boyfriends, and school counsellors.

### *Help from Teachers*

Girls were also asked questions to determine whether they thought that teachers noticed the bullying and intervened to stop it. Almost half (48.7%) of the 1223 girls who answered thought that teachers almost never noticed the bullying, while 15.7% considered that teachers noticed it “now and then” or “almost always”, as described in Table V13, Appendix V. When asked whether teachers intervened a quarter (24.5%) of the 1,214 girls who responded said that teachers almost never intervened to stop it. However, more than a third thought that teachers always or sometimes attempted to stop bullying if they noticed it.

### *Helpful Strategies and Resources*

Girls were invited to indicate strategies and resources they had found helpful in stopping bullying or in helping them to recover from it. They could choose more than one response. The majority of girls found their peers provided the best support when bullying occurred, with personally expressive activities, such as soccer or listening to music, proving the second most helpful strategy. A small proportion of the girls reported that they had not recovered from the bullying (Table 13).

Table 13  
*Showing What Girls Found Helpful in Getting Over Being Bullied, according to Girls' Opinions*

	<i>n</i>	%
Friends e.g. talking to friends, being with them, and doing activities together	937	70.2
Personal expression e.g. writing, music, sport	328	24.6
Family e.g. talking to a family member	147	11.0
Talking to a counsellor	125	9.4
Other adults	91	6.8
Did not get over it	88	6.6
Other e.g. deliberate self harm, forgetting, talking to the bully, time alone	26	1.9

#### *Summary of Sources of Help*

The majority of victims of bullying told someone about it, usually friends, family, or school counsellors. The most help was provided by friends followed by family support, and support from other adults such as counsellors, while personally expressive actions and activities were also seen as helpful.

#### *Prevention of Bullying*

Finally, participants were invited to indicate what they thought could be done to stop bullying. Girls could choose more than one answer.

Table 14  
*Showing What Girls Think Would Help to Stop Friendship Group Bullying*

	<i>n</i>	%
Encourage girls to sort out problems by talking	638	47.8
You can't stop it	367	27.5
More people to talk to such as counsellors	157	11.8
More people to talk to such as mediators	94	7.0
Something else	59	4.4

While more than a quarter of the girls thought that bullying could not be stopped, half of the girls advocated encouraging effective talking and communication as a way of sorting out problems, with access to counsellors endorsed by a tenth of the girls. Some girls advocated other actions, such as being respectful and honest with friends, or gave brief accounts of their own experience of being bullied.

#### Summary of Quantitative Results

The purpose of the study was to describe Year 10 (average age 14.4 years) girls' bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, according to girls' views, including the nature and experience of such bullying and what girls themselves had found to be helpful in stopping bullying, or reducing its effects. It was found that most girls belonged to a same-sex friendship group of at least three girls, and valued fun and support most highly in their friendships with other girls.

When girls used their own definitions of bullying, almost half of them reported having been bullied by friends in Year 10, but when asked whether they had been bullied according to the research definition of bullying, most girls had been the target of at least one type of bullying (research-defined) from friends. About a third of girls acknowledged having inflicted a minimum of one type of bullying (research-defined) on their friends.

Girls were most likely to define unpleasant teasing, physical bullying, Internet and text bullying, and rumour spreading as bullying, and less likely to recognise exclusion bullying, such as being ignored or left out of class work. Differences were found in girls' recognition of bullying at schools of different types and decile levels.

Within friendship group bullying, three-quarters of the girls identified themselves as either onlookers or those who tried to stop the bullying. About a tenth of all girls started



the bullying or joined in when someone else began it. For a third of the girls, some change had occurred in their friendship group when bullying took place, with the most likely change being the break-up of the group. A tenth of girls described themselves as victims, with a small number of girls reporting being bullied more than once a week.

There were negative effects for most girls in friendship group bullying. Almost half of the victims felt moderately unhappy or terrible about the experience. Bullies also were most likely to feel uncomfortable about their actions, and most girls who witnessed bullying felt either uncomfortable or “awful”. Girls considered that the main reason for bullying was that the bully was angry with her friend. When asked about school absence because of bullying, about an eighth of the girls had missed at least one day of school in Year 10 because of bullying from friends, with some girls staying away from school at least once a week.

When asked about sources of support and help when bullied, the majority of victims had told someone about it, and they were most likely to tell their friends, family members, or counsellors. Teachers rarely noticed or intervened in such bullying, according to the girls. In regard to the nature of the support they had experienced, victims found their peers the best providers of support, and reported a range of other strategies and resources that they had found helpful.

In indicating what would reduce friendship group bullying, most girls advocated teaching and encouraging girls to talk and communicate effectively with friends as the best way to sort out or prevent bullying problems, with counselling seen as the next most helpful strategy. More than a quarter of the girls thought that it could not be stopped.

Thus, the study showed that there was extensive bullying in girls’ same-sex friendship groups, and that girls participated in bullying in a variety of ways. Girls were also found to vary in their recognition of different types of bullying, and in their opinions about the reasons for bullying. The impact of friendship group bullying was widespread, with the majority of those in the group negatively affected by it, no matter what their role. Negative effects included their emotional response and school attendance. There were also differences among schools of different types and decile levels in girls’ recognition of bullying.

## CHAPTER SIX: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW RESULTS

In the third stage of this study, thirteen Year 10 (average age 14.4 years) girls were interviewed about their experiences of friendship bullying. The interview times ranged from 45 minutes to one hour and ten minutes. The results presented here include their views about the amount of friendship bullying that took place, their recognition of the bullying, and their participation in it. They described the rise and progress of bullying in the friendship group, and how it affected individual girls, their understanding of themselves, and their relationships with their friends, as well as what they had found to be helpful in reducing its harmful effects.

In presenting the data, the interviewees are identified by a pseudonym allotted to them, in the interests of confidentiality, and their ages are indicated the first time that their pseudonym is used. The data also include quotations from survey participants who contributed their stories of bullying through the open-ended questions. This additional qualitative data is presented here and these girls are identified by a code letter of the alphabet.

### Participants

Of the thirteen Year 10 girls who were interviewed, eight girls were aged fourteen, and five were fifteen years old. Three girls were of Pacific Island ethnicity, one was Chinese and had been born in China, one identified as being both Maori and Pacific Island in ethnicity, another was Maori, and the other seven were New Zealand European. One girl had a parent who had emigrated from Mediterranean Europe as an adult.

### Girls' Experiences of Bullying among Friends

Girls described their view of the amount of bullying that occurred, and explained how they recognised bullying.

### *The Nature of Bullying*

Girls reported their opinions about whether bullying occurred in their friendship groups. Some noticed little or no bullying in their friendship group, and they thought that the behaviour was mainly viewed as a joke.

*I have only once felt uncomfortable when one of my mates talked to me like I was stupid. But I feel we all get on really well. (H)*

*Most of the bullying in my group is for fun and we take it all as a joke and people should just lighten up. (K)*

Other participants perceived the bullying differently, with several girls conceding that some girls might feel hurt by the behaviour, while others reported that there was increasingly widespread bullying among friends.

*I don't really think it is bullying, but I think that some people might take it seriously and get hurt. (W)*

*It's actually really common within girl's groups. I'm sure everyone's done it at least once. It's becoming really bad and worsening. (I)*

Thus the participants in the study reported widely differing views about how much bullying occurred in their friendship groups. While some girls thought that there was little of the behaviour in their groups, others reported that it did take place but was not bullying because everyone should accept the behaviour as fun. Several girls thought that the bullying was not intended to hurt, but could be perceived as hurtful. Still others considered that such bullying was common.

### *Duration of the Bullying*

From the victims' points of view, bullying from friends varied considerably in its duration. Some bullying had lasted for months or years, while, in contrast, for some it was part of a shorter bullying cycle. The data revealed the duration of bullying episodes:

*I've had a friend for five years who's really bossy, really manipulative, and I'm like a slave or something. (Natalie, aged 14)*

[It began] *probably about six weeks ago.* (Emma, aged 14)

### *Girls' Recognition of Bullying*

Girls provided explanations of how they recognised bullying when it took place in their friendship groups. They readily identified physical aggression or threats as bullying.

[I knew it was bullying] *because it [the interview invitation] said "Have you witnessed bullying?" and Margie gets physical!* (Natalie).

Their recognition of other forms of bullying depended on other factors. The data revealed that, while girls recognised and named physical attacks bullying, they had difficulty in naming friendship group bullying as bullying, because it appeared trivial, and was similar to less unpleasant behaviour. One participant described that she recognised the behaviour as bullying because of her sense of it being inside her head, and making her tearful.

*I don't know whether you'd call it bullying, I certainly felt, it's quite a sort of mild, like not really, mild, but it gets into your head. I've gone home crying about it quite a lot.* (Joanna, aged 14).

Another girl recounted her insight when she linked the definition of bullying that she had learnt in school with the reality of her lived experience of being bullied.

*We've always been told about different kinds of bullying, and then you realise that it happens after a while. That's what it is, and not just, Yeah, it was different from what it used to be like, like normally it wouldn't go on for so long, and people weren't so mean about it.* (Claire, aged 15)

Having been told about the characteristics of bullying had helped girls to recognise bullying from friends. Victims also decided when behaviour was bullying because of the way they felt about it. Responses that suggested to them that it was bullying were the way that it dominated their thinking, or because it was unkind, or made them sad.

Analysis thus revealed discrepancies and uncertainties in girls' opinions about the nature of bullying in friendship groups. Girls varied considerably in their recognition of such bullying. While they easily recognised physical assaults as bullying, they found it

more difficult to identify other bullying. When girls failed to see friendship group bullying as bullying, it was because they understood it as fun, and because it was similar to normal behaviour in their friendship group. Those who recognised it as bullying did so because of the way it felt, or because others so named it, or because they recognised that it fitted the definition of bullying given to them in school. Bullying could be short-lived or it could last many months.

### Girls' Experience of Bullying

Participants' description of the nature of girls' bullying included descriptions of what the participants noticed in themselves and others in the interpersonal dynamics of their friendship groups in the current year, as well as accounts of bullying processes, and how girls participated in bullying in the group.

#### *The Interpersonal Dynamics of Girls' Friendship Groups*

In their friendships, the participants sought particular features. Girls had noticed changes in themselves, in their friends, and in their friendship relationships in the current year.

#### *Features of Girls' Friendships*

Closeness, similarity, caring, and loyalty were important in the girls' friendships, and so they found it hard to accept that there could be differences between them and their best friends.

*For me, I guess your best friends are the people who are most, in personality are most like you... because if your best friend, if your personality is totally different, how are you meant to get along? (Stephanie, aged 14)*

*We were like, twins, we knew each other so well...like we used to stay at each other's house like two... (Gina)*

*I was close with her. (Claire)*

*Rhiannon's always going to be my best friend...I do feel it's my responsibility to help her (Joanna)*

*It's about having your best friend and your best friend's being with other people, having best friends in between them... kind of like a big spider web... it's heaps of people. (Melinda, aged 15)*

Girls mixed with different groups:

*We kind of all sit together on the field, and just, like, groups that come and weave into each other, so it's all kind of spread out and all good (Melinda)*

*Sometimes, in the X group, I don't really want to hang out with them. Sometimes I don't want to be in that image, but then also some of them are really nice. (Emily, aged 14)*

They sought similarity and congruity of image and personality in their group friendships. A sense of ongoing connection was important for friendship groups, with individual friends and the friendship group. Dyads and groups were interconnected through a network of close friendships.

#### *Changes in Girls Themselves*

The participants realised that they had changed:

*Everyone changes. I think it's mainly enforced by the people who you hang out with. Even though it's not, like, sudden, over time you sort of change, it is true, for good or bad. (Stephanie)*

*I ask people if I've changed because I know that heaps of people are changed. We talked about it, and I'll say, if they don't like it, "Oh, have I changed?" (Ana, aged 15)*

They considered that the changes they noticed in themselves and others were reinforced through their friendships. The gradual changes could be viewed as either positive or negative.

### *Changes in Friends*

They had noticed changes in their friends as well. Some change they attributed to a new interest in boys, which led to concern with fashion and appearance. Others viewed the difference they observed as a more general change:

*The group that I used to be with ... they got into boys, and then they got into, like, "You should be wearing this!"* (Claire)

*Thinking back to last year, they've, like, changed so much. Some girls, like, even from a term ago heaps of girls have changed right now. They're just different.*  
(Ana)

Many friends had changed significantly in the current year. As girls grew older their interests changed, and they began to put pressure on others in the group to conform.

### *Changes in Relationships with Friends*

Girls noticed that the nature of their relationships with friends had changed:

*When we were younger ... it was just our friends and we'd play and stuff. Now, (we) talk about different things, go different places yeah, just got different.* (Claire)

*Like, we always used to hang out and then, like all of the summer we just slowly started splitting away...When people change, that's when you'd probably start backstabbing* (Ana)

*This year a lot of it (bullying) just started by, I think when people were getting sick of each other, and half-way through the year, a lot of backstabbing... like they're searching for a fight, just looking for an argument.* (Melinda)

At the start of the current year girls had spent most of their time with friends. Then the groups began to change through girls moving away from their groups. Friendships were different; girls spent more time talking and going to places together. Participants attributed bullying to girls' wish to explore new friendships, followed by the reaction of their previous friends, who started backstabbing former friends. The conflict began over trivial pretexts for hostility, because girls had grown tired of their friends.

Girls explained the difference between conflict in childhood and their current conflicts.

*In primary school you always have a fight with friends, and the next day, you have a fight and then go home, "Oh, I hate her", and you go to school the next day and you're best friends again ... They were more like disputes. But now it's just more, "How can she do such horrible things?" And so I can just tell the difference.*

(Stephanie)

*They'd been really mean to this one girl ... Then I felt horrible about myself, because I didn't have a reason and I was only doing that, I was choosing them over her, so I was doing something mean.* (Melinda)

Arguments between friends had changed, so that internal conflict focused more on personal factors and moral issues.

Thus, in summary, the data regarding the interpersonal dynamics of the friendship group revealed that girls perceived widespread changes in themselves and in their friends in the current year. They had grown tired of friends, or came to dislike them, and had begun to explore other friendships. Groups were seen as splitting up; this was experienced by friends in the groups as rejection. During the year, their friendships had also become qualitatively different, while attitudes and behaviours had developed which created tension and conflict between friends. Girls also attacked friends on trivial pretexts, as if they sought an excuse for conflict.

Participants attributed the rise of bullying to such changes. If they felt rejected by formerly close friends, they would talk negatively about them to other friends, who would concur, and join in the bullying. The whole group was then involved.

Disputes in Year 10 between friends were viewed by girls as different from the minor disagreements, quickly forgotten, of childhood. Instead, friendship conflict was about the friendship itself, and the relationship and the personal qualities that were manifested in friends' actions. Participants pondered on their own and others' moral qualities.



### *The Process of Bullying in the Friendship Group*

The processes of bullying included data concerning the strategies used to inflict harm among friends, and the rise and progress of bullying in the friendship groups. Direct and indirect bullying attacks such as mocking, gossiping and rumours, which were spread throughout the peer network, were among the tools that girls employed to bully friends.

#### *Strategies Used to Bully*

Participants described a range of bullying strategies used to inflict pain among friends in the group.

*(They) just sit there and mock, and mock, till you cry. They said it's a joke and once you cry they stop. (Tui, aged 15)*

*The biggest is gossiping. Girls have the biggest mouths out and once something is told, the whole world knows about it! Gossip! (C)*

*She was really arrogant and snapped my head off whenever I said a thing. (A)*

Girls described further strategies of exclusion or duress used to bully others:

*We told her to leave and pretended not to know her. (P)*

*(She) was jealous that I was friends with another girl in my class and started sulking and putting pressure on both my friend and I. (O).*

*Silently put me down. Didn't verbalise it. (Y)*

*I stopped talking to her for a while. (Ally)*

*I didn't even know what was being said...no-one said anything to me about it. (Susannah, aged 14)*

Girls acknowledged that exclusion, ignoring, emotional pressure, body language, spreading made-up rumours, and body language were also used as bullying strategies which damaged or rejected relationships. Victims of rumours might never be told the substance of the stories. Electronic methods, such as the Internet or texting, expedited the bullying.

*How Bullying Began and Proceeded: “You’re Out!”, or “You’re Mine!”*

Friendship group bullying proceeded in two distinctly different patterns, and this was related to the size of the group. In the larger friendship groups, of four or more girls, bullying proceeded differently from the way it occurred in triadic friendship groups.

*Larger Group Bullying:*

Girls in larger friendship groups explained how the bullying arose. In larger groups, of four or more girls, subgroups formed. The girls in the subgroups spent time together, and the girls in them were close to some girls in the other subgroups but not to others. There was underlying tension across the subgroups, between some people in the larger group, and individuals held varying levels of status within the group.

*Well, I guess there was kind of two sides to the group, like, different people, and, like, four or five on each side. And then they’d come and have connections with each other, and then, like, people that looked down on (them), (they) tried to stay away from each other. Like, even though they said they were friends, that side would kind of be backstabbing that side. (Melinda)*

*A group of us, were, like, I was the one that (they were) trying to get pushed out of the group, and now I’m back in and then another girl has kind of been... I was the friend again and now she’s not the friend (Claire, aged 15)*

Bullying began by focusing on one victim at a time. In larger groups, the ostensible reason was likely to be a perceived snub, or minor offence. Girls ignored the victim. Other girls joined in, regardless of the validity of the pretext for bullying, and made up stories about the victim. In turn, girls were excluded from the group. Larger groups could have leaders, who were dominant girls with high status, whom others followed.

*They say something about one of your close friends, maybe, or if they say something that’s not true, and you know that it’s not true, you’d say something but they’d rather stick to that, the thing that sounds better. (Ana, aged 15)*

*Someone else would be alone, they’d be pushed out and then, just lots of things...it happened lots, it happened to everyone, but there was one girl that was never*

*pushed out, really strong, the other girls just followed like usual”.* (Emma, aged 14)

*Then they’ll start, like, just if you don’t hear them one day, they’ll go “Yeah, she snobbed me too”... and then you try to talk to them and then they won’t talk back, so they snob you because you snobbed them, for like, ages afterwards.* (Claire, aged 15)

Certain strategies and processes were observed in the large group network. One participant described the way in which the process developed:

*It’s, like, rumours, and then it, like, alters. It just keeps on growing, like people find out, and then they’ll get really angry. You’re trying to trace back who said it but they don’t know so they just blame it on somebody... where it started, like maybe someone heard it wrong but then they’ll, like, still pass it on.* (Ana, aged 15)

Girls in larger groups readily passed on rumours, even if the stories became inaccurate as they were passed on. This gave rise to anger when the subject of the rumour found out. Rumours could not be traced, because, if challenged, girls blamed the rumour on someone else.

Groups employed extremely subtle forms of exclusion. Analysis revealed that such favoured strategies as silent exclusion of a girl because she was perceived to have offended in some way, or subtle body language, or the spreading of rumours about a member of the group, made use of the extensive network provided by a larger group;

*I know it’s probably not the case, I’ve spoken to one of the girls I’m closer to, she said, “No, no, no, it’s not like that, you’re being stupid, you know you’re taking it the wrong way”, but I was sitting next to her and she actually physically turned her back to me, and started talking, so that (she was talking to) the people who were over here, and I don’t think it’s something she’d do, just say, “Look, I’m going to ignore you”, but it was just the body language, and the fact that she’d rather be talking to them than be talking to me. It’s kind of like I’m standing, and the rest of the group will kind of move! Or angling! [demonstrating by turning away].* (Laura, aged 15)

Girls in larger groups also attempted to exclude their friends covertly through the use of subtle body language which directly contradicted their apparently friendly and reassuring verbal messages. The victim's belief that she was excluded was then attributed to her having misinterpreted the group's intention. This treatment denied the victim's reality, by invalidating her experience and her understanding of what happened.

In summary, bullying in larger groups tended to focus on issues of exclusion from the group. Girls in the larger groups favoured strategies which were particularly effective in a network, and hierarchies were more apparent within the groups. In larger groups, the bullying cycle was repeated over and over with a succession of girls as victim.

### *Triadic Group Bullying*

The second type of bullying occurred in triadic groups. The data revealed several features which distinguished triadic group bullying:

*I've been friends with Rhiannon for nine years. I started to be friends with Maxine at the beginning of the year. (Joanna, aged 14)*

*She has this friend that she had, and she's a year older and now we're really, really close, like, her friend has been being a bit stink to me. (Emily, aged 14)*

A triadic friendship group started as a long-term best-friend dyad which had acquired a third girl as a new friend for either one or both of the original pair. Any one of the three could initiate the bullying or become a victim.

Triadic group bullying proceeded in a different way from bullying in large groups. Tension grew between girls in a triadic friendship when the friendship between one of the original dyad and the new friend became too close for the peace of mind of the other member of the dyad. She then exerted emotional pressure which developed into bullying, as she attempted to retain one, sometimes both, close friendships for herself exclusively.

*She put all this pressure on me and made me feel sad. She said it was to do with me why she kept getting upset and sulking. (L)*

*I started to be friends with this girl at the beginning of the year, but it wasn't really quite apparent, I guess to my best friend ... I think what she wants to do, but she's quite a possessive person... She wants us each to herself. (Joanna, aged 14)*

Triadic group bullies preferred certain strategies suited to the group's size and the bullying dynamics, including emotional pressure and blackmail in order to control the friend who was the victim, subtle "put-downs", and manipulation of the victim to gain a monopoly of the friendship, through rostering of her time and attention.

*I think she wants us, me and Y, not to be friends, and, like, whenever we have a little conversation, like she gets really upset, she throws huge tantrums, and like, storms out, and says "Oh I'm going to kill myself, and it's all your fault." and stuff like that, and it sort of makes me feel really – guilty. (Joanna, aged 14)*

*We had seating plans, (who) to sit next to in certain lessons. There was the seating plan, there was the days where they'd get me to themselves, like Tuesday, Minnie! It was one day to themselves a week. (Natalie, aged 14)*

The data showed that triadic bullying was fuelled by powerful emotions such as jealousy and despair, and an intense desire for closeness. The girls in such bullying situations continued to remain locked into a struggle for long periods. In triadic bullying, girls fought to retain their place in a dyad, and particularly to retain a close friendship. One girl's visual map showed her arms being pulled in opposite directions by the two friends who both claimed her. Victims were less likely to be successfully excluded than were the victims in larger group bullying.

In summarising the processes of bullying, the data revealed that bullying occurred through two distinct processes, which used a range of direct and indirect bullying strategies. One type occurred in larger groups and focused on exclusion and inclusion concerns, with victims excluded from the group. The group then re-formed or the victim was readmitted. Group affiliation and status were important in large group bullying, with preferred strategies which best served bullying in a larger group context.

In the second type of bullying, in triadic groups, the intention was to retain a close friendship exclusively. Feelings of jealousy and anger were intense, and bullying situations lasted for long periods. Strategies preferred were more direct, using the

friendship relationship to exert compliance, accompanied by intense emotional pressure and the threat of losing or damaging a close friendship.

### *Girls' Participation in Friendship Group Bullying*

Group members took part in friendship group bullying through the assumption of the different and clearly identifiable traditional roles of bullies, victims, and observers or helpers. Girls in the different roles were distinguished by their behaviour, attitudes, and recognition and responses to the bullying. Roles were not fixed, and some girls had experience of all three roles.

#### *The Bullies*

Girls explained why they bullied friends in the group. Reasons included trying to “look cool” and gain acceptance from peers, imitation, and their view of it as normal behaviour, because others in the group did it.

*I would say some of the (bullying) things, I know I did. I was just trying to look cool, wanting to please people. (Emma, aged 14)*

*When I was round the others doing bullying, I'd just start doing it, and you just get used to it, it just seems OK to do it. Then, when you do it in front of other people, they're like, "What are you doing?" (Melinda, aged 15).*

*Having been in the position as well of someone who is doing it [bullying], you just think, "Oh well, I'm just telling them what I think, what's wrong with that? It's my opinion". (Laura, aged 14)*

Girls who had initiated past bullying or joined in when others started it only referred to it as bullying if they appeared to experience some regret or shame about their participation. They joined in bullying, either to create affiliation with others, or because they wanted to gain status in the eyes of the group, or because they perceived the behaviour at the time as a normal activity within the group. At the time, they justified having made unpleasant comments as simply stating their opinion as they saw it. Later, they could see the bullying from a different perspective.

Some girls blamed the victim.

*Some people really bring it upon themselves, one of my mates does/says something silly or mean every day. It's hard not to get frustrated at her. (R)*

Girls who were currently bullying friends justified their behaviour, because they considered that their friend deserved it.

*She did things that got herself put out... since she'd lost a lot of her friends she hasn't been coming to school, it just annoyed us and I said it to her and then she didn't, she hasn't talked to me for a few weeks. (Claire, aged 15)*

When girls reported their current behaviour which included bullying actions, they did not describe it as bullying; instead, they viewed their actions as fair and justifiable punishment for girls who had offended the group. Even if the bully had previously been a victim herself of a similar type of exclusion, she did not name her own behaviour as bullying.

### *The Victims*

Victims reported their feelings, reactions, and responses to the bullying, which caused its victims intense pain. Even if the actions appeared trivial, participants felt deeply hurt.

*I went home and was crying all night... I didn't want to go to school, I didn't want to do any work or want to have any fun. I didn't want to do anything with anyone else...the lowest point I've ever had in my life. (Melinda, aged 15)*

*Not really direct, you know...It's really harsh... like, little comments and things, (Emily, aged 14)*

*It really hurt... I didn't want to live. I didn't want to live; I didn't want to be there at all. (Emma, aged 15)*

*I missed school, no more than five times, just when it got really bad.\ ... It takes you years to figure out that you're unhappy. (Natalie, aged 14)*

Some participants in bullying situations grew so accustomed to feeling unhappy that they accepted it as normal.

Bullying affected girls in other ways, restricting their personal power and freedom.

*I didn't have any power over her. She had it all over me, and took it all away. At the time it was just natural, you know, 'Go buy my lunch!' A lot of the time I'd had to do it, like, go and buy lunch for her. (Natalie, aged 14)*

It affected their relationship with their families, and resulted in their staying away from school. At the time, they perceived the situation as normal.

*The worst part of it (being bullied) was losing things with home. I'd rather have no friends and be happy at home. I don't mind being by myself but it makes it harder when people, when like, they come into the library and just laugh at me. But I haven't come to school very much lately, anyway, because I don't want to.... (Emma, aged 14)*

Bullying restricted girls' personal power and freedom. It affected their relationship with their families, and resulted in their staying away from school. At the time, it seemed normal.

Victims of bullying responded to the bullies in various ways. While victims felt distressed and sad, they concealed the pain they experienced. It was a source of pride to them not to let the bullies know that their actions had succeeded:

*I don't talk back to them, I just sit there and pretend that I can't hear them, you know they'll just tease me and tease me until I cry, but they think I'm going to cry...That's so hard, cause you sort of think "I'm not going to cry", cause it's going to show that, but they keep on. (Tui, aged 15).*

Victims' responses included changes in their trust of others and in their self-confidence. They lost self-confidence and trust in people, becoming isolated and withdrawn:



*I didn't trust anyone for a long period of time. Because all my self-confidence disappeared, and I pretty much just stayed in my room, really, for the whole evening, and morning till I had to go to school. (Susannah)*

Bullying also caused current victims to reflect negatively on their own attributes or actions:

*I think sometimes it's a bit of a flaw because I'm so switched onto what's going on, and I'm almost too onto what's happening, and it kind of makes me think. I think a lot, and I think that's a bit of a problem. (Laura, aged 14)*

*I've thought a lot about what I did and how stupid I was, following people like that. (Emma, aged 14)*

When girls were excluded, or threatened with exclusion from their friendship group, they ruminated about what had happened, and were highly critical of themselves.

Bullying led to girls to make complex changes in their behaviour and attitudes:

*I think the worst thing about it is because I'm so conscious of whether I am being included, I act differently, because I'm thinking, "Oh, maybe I should say something now that they might think's funny, or maybe I should bring up something that they might want to talk about so I'll be included," so you're always kind of thinking about things that you can do and that makes you act differently. (Laura, aged 14)*

Victims strove to please the others in the group, in order to prevent exclusion. However, this then led them to act in ways which felt unnatural to them, and so they became even more self-conscious than before about their actions and words, aware that they were behaving unnaturally.

Girls who had been excluded could be invited back into the group. If they were invited back, victims of exclusion rejoined the group, even though they had justifiable reservations about trusting the proffered friendship.

*We should really just say, "Nah, you don't want to be my friend I don't want to be your friend any more", but we'll go back to them. (Claire)*

*The girl who kicked her out invited her back in, for, like, a day. (Melinda)*

Victims tried to resolve bullying situations, working hard to please or placate the bully and taking responsibility for making the bully happy. It was an unrewarding process:

*I have tried so many different things. The counsellors have suggested lots of different things, and my parents have, but nothing works, and I've just sort of given up. It sort of drains you when you try and make her happy and she's only happy for two minutes. (Joanna, aged 14)*

Victims of bullying explained the main reason for their anxiety:

*I felt like I didn't have any friends even though I did...I couldn't trust them. I was just scared they would move off as well, and I didn't want to lose them. (Melinda)*

*Looking back and thinking maybe that's a situation that's going to happen again... the paranoid (feeling) is about wanting to avoid being hurt again. It's kind of a fear, and I sometimes think, yeah, that's pretty much it, I'll be left with no friends, and then what have I got? I think that probably is the thing that makes it scary, having had that past experience. (Laura)*

*Quite a few of them are still at school here. I don't talk to them at all. (Susannah)*

Girls who had been bullied, especially those who had also been bullied in previous years, feared a repetition of the loss of more friends, and consciously avoided those girls who had victimised them in the past. Girls who were currently being bullied expressed significant grief and loss concerns. These included grief for the loss of friends, future or present, or past; the loss of a precarious sense of self because of the potential distortion from others' viewpoints; and the loss of family members, through family breakup, illness, or repartnering, or death:

*I just want my old friend back, I don't want this one... she used to be really bubbly and happy, and she never used to be so emotional and moody. (Joanna, aged 14)*

*What if I think about myself differently to the way that other people think about me, then it kind of makes me think, is my life twisted then, if I see myself differently to the way that other people (see me)? (Laura, aged 15)*

*I don't have a dad... to be there for me. (Tui, aged 15)*

*My mum's good, I told her about it, but I never really tell her about it, she helped me, but her partner came home a little while ago, when we were finally having a proper conversation. (Emily, aged 14)*

Thus, the study showed that victims participated in the bullying process, through their response to the bullying. Because they were frightened of losing friends, they would tolerate being bullied in their group for very long periods, provided they were still accepted as a member. Even if they were excluded, the bullying continued in other ways, but victims generally returned to the group, given the chance.

Victims had difficulty recognising or openly acknowledging their pain. They rarely confronted the bully, and were often uncertain about the nature and intent of the bullying. Instead they tried to placate the bully or ignored the bullying, though they reflected on it, ruminated about it, and internalised it. Some girls withdrew, emotionally and physically, from the bullying environment. Other girls also found that when they were bullied at school, conflict at home increased.

Those victims who were in current bullying situations experienced significant self-doubt, anxiety, inner conflict, uncertainty about their own understanding of themselves and their lives, and distress. They feared a future possible loss of friends, and ruminated about their relationships with their group, but felt powerless to stop the bullying.

### *The Observers*

Observers were present when bullying occurred in friendship groups. Observers also saw themselves as helpers. They noticed when friends were being bullied, and were concerned for the victim, but faced a difficult dilemma. Fear of becoming victims themselves if they intervened kept them silent when the bullying occurred, and yet they felt guilty about their failure to speak up. There was a fatalistic acceptance of the bullying pattern among members of the group, since to intervene was to be seen to be aligned.

*You think, "That wasn't funny," and you can see the people they're saying it to, how much it hurts them or whether they're bothered, just by looking at them. Like, you know it's happening, but you're, like, you want to stop it, but you don't want to because then the same thing'll happen, it'll get reversed back and you'll get pushed out again and then that person'll be back in. (Claire)*

*I try to stick up for mates, which makes me involved. (K).*

*They'll kind of subtly pick on her...with something that everybody else knows is about her, but she might not click, and they think it's really funny, and she doesn't know it's going on, and...that type of thing that happens quite a lot ... (Laura)*

Observers and helpers reported that they gave covert support in other ways to victims by continuing to be friends with them sometimes. They offered suggestions to the victims on how to respond to the bullying. There was a fatalistic acceptance of the cycle of bullying, and a sense of powerlessness.

*I have two of the three friends from that group still there, so I can hang out with them sometimes. (Emily)*

*They [observers] just tell me, 'Oh ignore them, you know, pretend they're not, you know, pretend you're deaf or something. (Tui)*

*You just kind of listen to them [the bullies] and talk about it, and say nothing, feel kind of sad when you go to the person they were talking about, being friends with them, even though you weren't saying anything, you feel stink, or you tell them what someone else was saying about them and they'll be like, they'll understand why you didn't say anything, cause, yeah, they've done it before as well. (Claire)*

Some observers/helpers directly intervened with the bullies on behalf of the victims. They wanted to help the victim because of their sense that the bullying was unfair, and because they could take the victim's perspective. Girls had also felt hesitant about intervention, in case it drew the victim's attention to the bullying. Intervention could also result in the helper being bullied.

*Then they started being really mean to her again, and like I saw that, and even though I didn't like her, I didn't have a reason, and I just kind of like, "Oh, what's going on here?" and I kind of like stood up for her so that they started picking on me as well, because I was standing up for her and they just wanted to get rid of her. (Melinda)*

*Sometimes it's just like , [I want to say] "Guys, it's rude!" But it's very hard to do that without making her (the victim) feel bad, because it's like, well what if she*

*hasn't picked up on the fact that they're picking on her, and when I go and say something [she will realise]. (Laura)*

Thus, in summary, the data showed that girls who were present in the roles of observers/helpers when bullying occurred saw themselves as trying to help if they had witnessed the bullying of a friend. They recognised and named the behaviour as bullying, if they saw that a friend was distressed by it. However, even though they felt uncomfortable about witnessing the bullying, they rarely offered help openly in the group. This was because they worried that they would be bullied too, or because they did not want to make the bullying overt, and therefore worse. Observers sometimes empathised with the victims.

Sometimes girls openly intervened to distract the bully, or confront them, or encourage positive behaviour, especially if the victim was a close friend, or if observers felt strongly enough that the bullying was unjust, even if the victim was not a close friend. A few friends would continue to maintain limited social contact with their ostracised friend. Otherwise, intervention was covert, as girls secretly comforted their bullied friends, by contacting them, or offering information or advice.

In summary, girls participated in bullying as bullies, victims, or observers/helpers, or in a successive mix of roles. The bullies engaged in bullying because it was normal in their group or because they thought the victim deserved to be punished. They did not recognise bullying for what it was at the time that they were perpetrators, even if they had also been victims, but acknowledged past bullying.

Girls who were victims suffered a range of significant negative effects, and responded to bullying by pretending it did not hurt, or by placating the bully, or by eventually confronting the situation. Those who did the latter experienced positive outcomes in themselves and their friendships. Those who were currently bullied suffered loss of trust, revisiting of other grief and loss concerns, and loss of self-confidence.

Girls who were observers/ helpers were aware of the bullying, but those who intervened risked victimisation themselves, and few intervened openly. Others helped or supported the victims secretly, in a variety of ways. They felt guilty about their failure to intervene openly.

### *Summary of the Nature of Bullying*

Girls attributed bullying to changes in themselves, their friends, and their relationships in the current year. There appeared to be two main bullying processes which depended on whether the groups were triadic friendships, or larger groups.

The group members all played some part in the bullying process, accepting bullying as normal. It was often covert and ambiguous and victims found it hard to be sure they were bullied. Bullies did not recognise their behaviour as bullying at the time. Girls in the group followed the bully's lead or responded passively in ways that condoned or supported the bullying.

Outcomes for victims differed. Those girls still currently bullied experienced grief and loss, revisited other losses, and suffered from self-doubt. Those who had emerged from bullying situations with a sense of resolution viewed their loss of trust as having positive as well as negative effects, and had gained more faith in their own judgment and in themselves.

#### *What Helps Girls to Stop the Bullying or to Cope With Its Negative Effects*

The results showed that girls were helped by telling various people about the bullying, by their use of a range of personal resources, and by successful confrontation of the bully.

#### *Telling Someone*

The data revealed the effects on girls of telling someone about the bullying. Girls reported whom they had told about bullying and indicated what had happened that had helped, by stopping the bullying or by helping them cope with its effects. They also gave accounts of other resources which they had found to be helpful.

#### *Telling Friends*

Support from friends, including same-sex friends, friends who were boys, and boyfriends, had helped, resulting in increased closeness, and gratitude for their loyalty:

*Your friends, after what happened you are closer to your friends. Like, I don't know what to call it but when something bad like that happens you really see who your true friends are, like you know like who're there for you ...Kind of grateful, yeah! (Stephanie)*

*Different people's opinions, like people from out of school...like if you told them the story, they'd only know my side of the story but they could understand and think of different things to get through it as well. Also the friends I had helped, just talking, and actually said positive things about me, so I felt secure about myself. (Melinda)*

*My boyfriend helped! (Laura)*

Friends, who on former occasions had themselves been helped by the victims were able to help in their turn, providing positive affirmation and enhancing victims' self-confidence. Friends understood the victim's perspective and were able to make suggestions about possible helpful actions.

Friends remained detached from the situation but were still concerned for the victim. They did not become involved in the dispute, but listened well, and gave feedback. Even those who merely seemed to listen well, helped:

*I would tell them [friends] about it, and they wouldn't get involved in it, but they would listen to me when I had something to say about it, so they wouldn't just purposely get involved and say "Oh she's being a bitch, don't be her friend," they would just be, like, if I said that to them that "She said something about me," they would listen and talk to me about it. (Claire)*

*I sit with my friend Vicky, we get our work done fast... I sometimes talk to her! [said with an expression of delight]. (Tui)*

It was important to have friends in different groups, and to belong to more than one friendship group. Then, if victims were excluded from one group, they could go to another group. Other friends, too, gave greetings and recognition to girls who had been excluded from their usual group. This gave girls a sense of reassurance against the fear of being a "loner".

*Just like having different friends was good for me because I didn't want to just stay with one group. If I did get pushed out of one group I didn't like, that I couldn't just stick with one group of people. (I knew) that I still had other friends, that even the group that didn't want to be my friend and I'd think I've got no friends, and then the people would come along and talk to me and I would feel, like happy that they had. I did have friends, I wasn't just a loner by myself, I did have other people there if I needed them. (Claire)*

### *Telling Families*

Girls also confided in their families. Family members provided insights which had eluded the victims of bullying. By naming or recognising the abuse they enabled victims to see more clearly how they themselves felt about it.

*My little sister said "I want you to ring her and tell her you don't want her to be your friend any more, and I mean it or I won't love you," so I rung up and told her. Yeah. She was only six but she understands it, so I'd tell her, and she thought, you know, "I'm going to fix it," so she told me to go and do it, so I did. How it can be just a little kid, so obvious to a little kid? (Natalie)*

Girls consulted their mothers about the bullying. Mothers supported their daughters' independent decision-making, but shared their own feelings of concern and protectiveness as well. One participant explained that she valued her mother's perspective on the bullying, because her mother could provide insight into the situation, by listening to her daughter's account of what had happened. She could talk to her mother as to a friend, and yet it was important that her mother was not the same as a friend. Mothers were not always available for such conversation, but if they were, girls valued the discussion.

*Well I was talking about this to Mum the other day. I asked her if she'd like me to be friends with Lena again. She says it's my choice and I need to learn. I just think she doesn't want me to get hurt again, by Lena. (Melinda)*

*When she's got time to talk she's really good. (Emily)*

*'Cause like if I didn't see something was happening, and I'd just tell her, even though I was right there telling her about it, she could see kind of stuff that I hadn't seen, even though I was telling her about it. And like I could talk to her like*



*she was one of my friends sometimes ... sometimes she was really, like she wouldn't let me do things just to be my friend but she could talk to me, like.*

(Claire)

The family gave support together:

*(My family) will talk about everyone and have a joke about people, and I guess, I think that they'd always say "Oh, who's been nasty to you? Oh, we don't like **them**, I always thought they're not very nice anyway."* (Laura)

Families also made a joke of the bullying, establishing a sense of distance from the bullying and offering the reassuring support of the family for the victim while placing the blame squarely on the bullies.

The act of telling was helpful.

*It's all better when you have someone to talk to, it's like the problem isn't necessarily solved, but it's just you don't feel so alone, cause when you get like that you can get, like, really depressed and you feel all sad all of the time.* (T)

The very act of telling someone made the bullying less painful because victims felt they had support. Victims knew that the problem was not solved but they no longer felt alone.

#### *Telling Adults in School*

Girls told certain adults in the school about the bullying.

*Ms B, she's a good teacher to talk to about this stuff, she's a PE teacher. I talked to her about it. She said, "Don't worry, it'll be all right." Yeah it (helped), just getting it out, telling someone about it. Someone knows what you're going through.* (Gina)

Some teachers gave sensitive listening and support.

Girls had sought help from counsellors:

*Talking to people (counsellors, mediators) usually makes the problem worse, 'cause the bullier feels obligated to hurt the accuser, and the accuser is more scared. (U)*

Some girls were doubtful about seeking counselling or student mediation, because of retribution from the bully which made the bullying worse.

Other girls readily sought suggestions and support from counsellors and mediators:

*I've been going to see the counsellor, so my friend R's been going to see Ms D about the problem, and then me and my other friend's going to see Ms K."*

(Joanna)

*I used to come and sit here at lunchtime, and then she (the counsellor) just noticed it, she just came."* (Emma).

Girls had been helped unobtrusively by counsellors, through suggestions or practical information.

Peer mediation had been sought.

*We were like in the same room, and there was like half of us on one side and half of us on that side and we were like leaning back, like the way we were feeling... By the end of the mediation we were all crying... after that day, everyone we said we'd stay away from each other in school, well, we could talk to the individual people we wanted to talk to but we wouldn't do anything as a group. (Melinda)*

Mediation was viewed as a frightening and unhappy experience, though some relatively positive change had also been negotiated.

Senior staff members were approached for help in case of threats of physical aggression:

*Ms G also said if it happened again [a physical threat] that Rowan would probably get suspended, because she's one of the troublemakers of the school, and so that was ok. She'd finally be gone, sort of thing! (Melinda)*

Staff members such as principals helped through direct intervention when victims received threats of physical bullying.

In summary, girls talked at school to certain trusted adults, including teachers and counsellors, and sought the assistance of peer mediators about the bullying. Sympathetic teachers helped by one-to-one listening and by giving suggestions.

Girls had some reluctance to seek counselling, because of their fear that it could induce bullies to retaliate, but the data also showed that girls found counsellors' help useful. Counsellors also provided a safe refuge, support, suggestions, and practical help. Peer mediation was more problematic. Girls felt justified in seeking help from senior management if the bullying threatened to become physical.

### *Helpful Personal Resources and Activities*

Girls employed a range of personal resources to help them deal with the bullying, either by stopping it or by coping with its unpleasant effects.

Some victims had approached the bully directly:

*I spoke to the bully and sorted it out. (J)*

*Some girls had talked to the bully one to one, and had resolved the conflict. (M)*

*Participation in sport helped. (F)*

*Horseriding! (X)*

*Going to training (helped) because I can let my frustration/anger out without hurting anyone. (D)*

Physical exercise and sport helped victims to express their feelings. Some sports provided an outlet for stress and anger.

Girls turned to artistic activities for support.

*I listened to music, danced using a DVD – “You Got Served”, step by step instruction. (L)*

*Clarinet, soccer, guitar, singing, showering, dancing. (Y)*

Emotionally expressive artistic activities helped girls to feel better. Girls used their own creative approaches to expressing their feelings.

*I used to write a lot of songs. I think just writing about it, from my point of view, it's kind of like asking rhetorical questions that don't need to be answered, but they were still there... I think a few of them I burnt, because I went through a stage where I didn't want to, like, know the other girls at all, and I burnt up a lot of their photos and letter they'd written me, and things that reminded me of them, so I just like destroyed them, anything that had to do with them. (Melinda)*

Their creative approaches included song-writing which expressed emotions, or the symbolic destruction of mementoes of the friendship.

Girls found activities with other friends helpful.

*Watching a movie with other friends. (W)*

*Finding new friends, people who respect me. (F)*

Other friends or new friends helped them to deal with the negative effects of bullying.

Some girls reported having an increased awareness of and empathy for others who were victims of bullying.

*It's made me a lot more aware of how other people are feeling and how the whole social group thing works. (Laura)*

*When I see someone, like, sitting by themselves, I know what that girl's (feeling) like. (Ana)*

*You can see the people they're saying it to, how much it hurts them, or whether they're bothered. (Claire)*

*I don't want other people to be bullied like I was, just because of something that they feel. (I belong to) a diversity group, ours is called Be Proud. (Susannah)*

Girls showed that they were able to take a third-party perspective. Their experience of being bullied had contributed to their empathy for other girls, and they supported others.

Some girls consciously tried to change their emotional response to the bullying.

*Don't think about it and let it go. (E)*

*What I do when I come to school too, when I'm walking to school too, I pray to Him to take the anger away. (Tui)*

Girls used willpower and spiritual support to help them choose their emotional response to being bullied.

### *Helpful Responses to Bullying*

The data revealed that victims who had succeeded in assertively confronting the bully or bullies had experienced positive effects.

*I was best friends with Lisa nearly straight away, and I don't really do that now, I'm like, I make a really strong friendship with someone before I can really say they're best friends. (Melinda)*

Girls who had been bullied by friends had become less trusting. Those who had emerged from the bullying experienced some sadness about this, but felt mainly positive, in that they were better able to protect themselves against trusting too easily. They had learnt to choose their close friends more carefully, and to give developing friendship more time, rather than rushing into intimacy.

They reflected on those effects, which they described in positive terms.

*Yeah, it took me ages to say it. I didn't know how to say it. I think it makes you better as a person cause then you can say it, and not have to put up with it for five years, or however long it takes. And when I said "No," I was like, "Oh yeah, good, man!" I felt so proud of myself. Like God, man! The power's awesome! You shouldn't be walked around on, like a carpet for people to stand on, you're your own person. Don't let anyone boss you around. And choose your friends very carefully. And who you talk to. They change, you know. (Natalie)*

*(Because of the bullying) well, I think I like art more, and I'm more into sports... I always liked school, but the subjects, I want to be an artist. I'm sort of making my own decisions, being more independent. Like, if we were still friends we would still*

*be doing it, but a little bit, and then come back to it, I would still be doing it, but not so much. (Gina)*

*If I'd never met her I wouldn't be so upset, but I don't know who I'd be right now. (Emily)*

*I am now able to choose my friends and know what it was like to know this sort of person and what they would do... so now, it sounds really bad saying it this way, but now I can judge people more easily, like, say, ok, if I become friends with this person, they're probably more likely to hurt me. (Susannah)*

The experience of having been bullied and finally confronting it or resolving the situation in some way had resulted in the realisation for victims that they had considerable personal power, autonomy, and effectiveness, as well as discovering the need for caution in choosing friends. Girls had been thrown onto their own resources by the conflict with friends, and had explored other areas of their lives. They had a stronger sense of themselves as individuals.

The experience had resulted in increased awareness of, and emphasis on, victims' ability to make decisions for themselves, and to follow their own preference in school subjects and interests.

Girls who had resolved or confronted bullying situations found that there were positive outcomes for them in their own individuality and personal autonomy, in learning to care for themselves, and in valuing friends. They were more likely to attend to their own needs ahead of those of the group. At the same time, the group as a whole felt that they had managed the situation successfully, and appreciated each other more. Certain friendships, whether old or new, were better than before.

*Although I'm there for my friends I'm thinking about what the results are going to be for me. As opposed to me with my group as well. I think I just think of myself or the results, for me, as an individual before the group, maybe. I think our friendships are stronger now (be)cause we became, we sort of like made it through, and we're on top of it now. It's different, it's really different... On the inside. I think like, we used to do everything together like before this happened, and like now we make time for each other. It's not like, "What are you wearing to*

*this?" It's more like "I want to spend time with you, I want to make time to be with you". (Melinda, aged 15)*

The experience of group bullying which had been successfully resolved created closer friendships. It also resulted in girls' increased consideration of their own needs as individuals within a friendship, as well as their group's needs. In addition, it had created greater awareness of and valuing of the qualities of individual friends, who became valued for themselves rather than as companions for activities.

#### *Analysis and Summary of What Helps Victims to Stop the Bullying or Recover from It*

In summary, girls who were bullied told others about it. They chose people they felt close to in their families, and confided in friends, usually outside their friendship groups. Girls also told certain adults at school. The act of telling someone was helpful in itself, simply because girls benefited from the knowledge that they had support and were not isolated with the problem.

Friends outside the problem helped simply by remaining constant in their friendship. Friends were helpful because they belonged to different groups and knew nothing about the bullying. They also helped by listening. They did not get involved but affirmed the victims for their strengths as friends and individuals, offered suggestions and advice, and provided distraction and companionship.

Families helped by providing advice and opinions, humour, assurance of their support, and listening. They provided important feedback about bullying situations, and showed their concern. Girls talked to mothers particularly, and valued their perspective.

Girls who had been bullied had also found help from a range of personal resources, which helped them to express their feelings about the bullying, or manage the stress it caused. Confronting the bully in an assertive way, one-to-one, was helpful, as was making a conscious decision not to be affected by the behaviour but to put it in the past. Girls found creative, spiritual, and recreational ways of expressing their feelings, as well as the release afforded by physical activity. In addition, it was helpful to spend time relaxing with other friends in ordinary normal social activities. Girls who had managed to confront the bullying successfully were more aware of themselves as individuals with different

needs from those of the group, and had a stronger sense of their own personal power. They thus had found their response to the bullying itself to convey benefits.

Thus the data showed that victims of bullying found help and support in a variety of sources. The act of telling someone they trusted about the bullying was in itself helpful. Families and friends were helpful in similar ways, because they were able to give a different yet sympathetic perspective, and their responses gave victims strategies and a sense of having support. Girls found some support from telling certain adults at school, including a few teachers, and the school counsellors.

Victims turned to a range of activities and personal creative strategies which helped, mainly those which encouraged the expression of feelings. They also found it helpful to consciously put the bullying behind them, or to make an effective assertive response to the bullying. They thus had found their response to the bullying itself to help in negating its harmful effects.

## Summary of the Qualitative Results

### *The Nature of Bullying*

Girls' views about the nature of bullying among friends varied considerably. While some girls thought that there was little bullying in their groups, other girls reported that the behaviour was common but was not bullying. Other girls stated that the bullying was not intended to hurt, but could be perceived as hurtful. Yet others considered the bullying to be widespread, either as single incidents or continuing over a long period of time.

While some girls accepted the behaviour in their group because it was perceived as fun, and was viewed as normal behaviour, others recognised the behaviours as bullying because of the way they felt about it, or because others outside the group so named it, or because it fitted the definition of bullying given to them in school.

### *The Experience of Bullying*

Bullying appeared trivial in nature, and was covert and ambiguous. It occurred in the context of friendship group relationships, so that victims found it hard to be sure they



were bullied. Girls in the group responded in ways that concealed, condoned or supported the bullying.

Girls attributed bullying to the changes they perceived in themselves and in their friends in the current year. Their friendships had also become qualitatively different, with attitudes and behaviours developing which created boredom or tension and conflict between friends. Sometimes this led to the realisation that they no longer liked their friends. Because of this, girls began to explore other friendships, and groups appeared in danger of splitting up. This was experienced by existing friends as rejection.

The “good or “bad” attributes or behaviour that girls had become aware of in their friends thus became a reason for bullying them. However, girls also attacked friends on trivial pretexts, as if they merely sought an excuse for conflict. Girls who felt rejected by formerly close friends would also confide in other friends, and so others would align themselves, and join in the bullying.

Disputes between friends were therefore perceived by girls to be different from the disagreements, quickly forgotten, of childhood. Instead, friendship conflict had grown to focus on the friendship itself and the kind of people friends were, based on their actions, personal attributes, and behaviour, according to girls’ values and the groups’ norms.

The nature of bullying included the strategies used to inflict harm among friends, the way that the bullying process developed in the friendship groups, the participation and responses of group members when bullying occurred, and its effects on the group and individuals.

Girls used a wide range of bullying strategies. These included non-verbal signals and body language, and other indirect methods such as the spreading of rumours or backstabbing, or ignoring victims. Emotional pressure was exerted to coerce or manipulate victims. Verbal bullying strategies which were employed also made use of electronic methods of communication, such as Internet chat rooms, texting, and email.

Bullying tended to develop in two distinctly different patterns, and these were related to the size of the group. Larger group bullying, in groups of four or more girls, focused on exclusion and inclusion concerns. Group affiliation and status were important in large group bullying, with strategies preferred which best served bullying in the larger

group context. In triadic group bullying, which arose from a threatened close dyadic friendship, the intention was to retain a close friendship exclusively. Motivated by jealousy and anger, girls remained locked into triadic bullying situations over long periods. Examples of strategies used by bullies included the use of the friendship relationship as a lever to exert compliance.

All the group members participated in bullying in some way, either as bullies, or victims, or observers/helpers, or in a combination of roles, or in changing roles. The friendship group itself was affected by bullying in a variety of ways, as were individuals. Bullies did not recognise bullying for what it was at the time that they were perpetrators, even if they had also been victims. Girls did however acknowledge past bullying.

Girls who were victims suffered a range of negative effects, and some stayed away from school because of bullying. Victims responded to friendship bullying by ignoring it and pretending it did not hurt, or by placating the bully, or by eventually confronting the situation. Victims who had been bullied in previous years were anxious and fearful about potential future bullying, and either avoided the bullies or sought their company. Girls took steps to insure against further victimisation. Interestingly, they also considered that having been bullied had made them more empathic, and so they were more likely to offer support to other victims.

Girls who were observers/ helpers were aware of the bullying, and understood how victims felt, but those who intervened openly ran the risk of victimisation themselves or making the victim's situation worse. Observers/helpers felt uncomfortable and guilty about their lack of intervention, and though they rarely intervened openly, they helped or supported secretly, in a variety of ways.

#### *What Helped Victims to Stop the Friendship Group Bullying*

Girls who were bullied usually told others about the bullying. They were most likely to tell families, friends, or counsellors. The act of telling someone removed victims' sense of isolation, and gave them support. Friends from outside the group and family were helpful in specific ways. They did not directly involve themselves in the conflict, but, instead, listened carefully, and gave feedback which gave a different perspective, self-confidence, and suggestions for action. Friends and family members also supported

through humour, social interaction, and companionship. Among school adults, girls turned most to counsellors for suggestions and support. Occasionally girls had assistance from trusted teachers.

Girls who had been bullied had also found help from a range of personal active, social, spiritual, and creative resources, which helped them to express their feelings about the bullying, manage the stress it caused, or reassure through social interaction and fun.

The experience of group bullying which had been successfully resolved supported the development of closer friendships to develop among some girls in the group. Girls who had managed to confront the bullying successfully found that their response helped in negating the harmful effects of being victimised, and provided positive rewards. They realised more fully their own personal power, and were more confident. They had become more aware of their identity as individuals, with different needs from those of the group. They were also less trusting and more cautious when undertaking friendships, while also more appreciative of the positive qualities of individual friends, who were valued for themselves rather than as merely companions for activities. For this reason, when intimacy developed in friendships, it was both closer and more satisfying.

On the other hand, girls who were still in a victim situation experienced anguish, pain, confusion and self-doubt. They wrestled with inner and external conflict, as they sought ways of maintaining their friendships and their own self-confidence and integrity.

### Summary of the Results of the Study

There were commonalities which emerged through the three sets of results, so that the focus group qualitative data was affirmed by the quantitative data from the questionnaire and by the qualitative data from the interviews. However, there were other separate themes which emerged, so that the two different types of data complemented each other in often complex and subtle ways. For example, with regard to the confirmation of themes, the sharing of private thoughts among friends was found through the quantitative data from the questionnaire to be an important aspect of friendship, and this was affirmed through statements from the focus groups and interviews, but with the added information that such disclosure was important for the building of trust between friends. However, all three data collection methods also found that the disclosure of such personal secrets to

other girls was a strategy used in bullying, and the interview data revealed that this strategy damaged the trust which had been created. An instance of a different theme which emerged from the interview data concerned the process of bullying in friendship groups of three. This aspect of the bullying process was not apparent until the third stage of the study, the interviews, was completed.

### *The Nature and Experience of Bullying*

Girls' relational bullying was common in their friendship groups, with some girls experiencing prolonged or repeated episodes of victimisation.

Disturbingly, girls failed to recognise it as bullying. Reasons for this were that girls thought of bullying as visible aggression, while friendship group bullying was similar to the normal actions of friends. Furthermore, the bullying was condoned or supported by the responses of all the girls in the group, by the covert nature of the bullying, and by girls' widespread acceptance that such behaviour was inevitable for girls.

The results indicated that there were differences in girls' recognition of bullying depending on the type and level of school that girls attended. Girls at medium and high decile single schools tended to recognise all types of bullying more than girls at medium and high decile single-sex schools did, while in low decile schools the opposite was true.

A range of bullying strategies were wielded through the use of superior power, and were intended to hurt. Two different and distinct types of friendship group bullying were found, larger group bullying and triadic group bullying, which arose differently, proceeded in different ways, and differed in their outcomes. The roles of bully, victim, and observer or helper were identified and described, with girls sometimes changing roles. Bullying had negative effects on all girls in the group.

The girls themselves attributed bullying to four main causes, including the personal character and situation of the bully, the characteristics and behaviour of the victims, the presence of boys, and developmental changes which girls noticed in themselves, their friends, and their friendships.

### *What Helps Girls to Stop the Bullying or to Recover from It*

When relational bullying in friendship groups occurred, girls found three sources of help most useful, including that which came from trusted others, mainly friends and families, their own personal actions and resources, and successful resolution of the bullying situation. Families, friends, and some school adults provided support in very specific ways. Girls also described a range of helpful personally expressive actions and resources.

Assertive confrontation and resolution of the bullying situation provided positive rewards for the victim, including better friendships and a stronger sense of self. Conversely, victims still in bullying situations experienced significant pain, self-doubt, and loss and grief.

Girls recommended solutions which lay in giving girls better communication and conflict resolution skills, and making counselling more available. While more than a quarter of the girls were pessimistic about whether such bullying could be stopped, others urged that it was important to try. These results are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

In this chapter a discussion of the significant research findings is presented. Firstly, the study's aims are briefly reiterated. Next, the significance of this study is addressed, through the discussion of the key findings, in relation to existing research and theory, and in the light of their application to the aims of the study. This discussion includes a consideration of the study as it contributes to and extends current understandings of bullying in the context of conflict between mid-adolescent girls and their friends. The study's strengths and limitations will also be discussed, to assist in its establishment within the literature. In conclusion, the implications for further research as well as for counsellors, their supervisors, and other adults who work closely with girls of this age will be considered, with recommendations for future directions. These are discussed as they relate to the research questions.

### The Aims of the Study

The three-fold aim of this investigation was firstly to describe, from the perspective of Year 10 girls (average age 14.4 years), the bullying which occurs in their friendship groups, with an account of its nature, and its duration. Secondly, the project aimed to portray the experience of such bullying, according to the views of the girls themselves, including the associated roles, behaviours, processes, and effects. Thirdly, the study sought to discover what girls considered helpful in stopping such bullying, or reducing its adverse effects.

### The Significance of the Study

While findings of previous research were confirmed through the investigation, a number of discoveries were made which offer significant contributions to current understanding of the complex picture of Year 10 girls' friendship group bullying. The study also contributes to the body of research concerned with adolescent development, and to the literature with regard to bullying, with additional application to the professional literature concerned with the counselling of adolescent girls. Overseas studies have explored relational bullying among adolescent girls (e.g., Besag, 2006; Bjoerkqvist,

Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Owens, et al., 2000), and this study adds to research which has sought information from the perspectives of Year 10 girls themselves.

In New Zealand schools, although bullying and relational aggression have been the subject of a limited number of investigations (Adair, et al., 2000; Browne & Carroll-Lind, 2006), or have formed part of larger studies (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003, 2008; Carroll-Lind, 2009), the current study breaks new ground. It not only provides a broad overview through the results of a survey but also presents girls' views through individual interviews. In this way, it not only contributes a broad map of girls' friendship bullying, with fresh insights afforded by girls' accounts of their lived experience, but also, through its innovative design as applied to this area, it suggests confirmation among middle adolescent girls of much that has been successfully investigated through observational studies with younger child and early adolescent populations (e.g., Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004).

### Key Findings of the Study

Five key findings arose from this investigation.

The first and most significant finding is the widespread nature of friendship group bullying. The majority of Year 10 girls have had some experience of being bullied by friends, with the accompanying discovery that girls have difficulty recognising or acknowledging this bullying when it is perpetrated among their friendship groups. The study suggests a number of complementary and overlapping explanations for this response, which is common across all girls involved in bullying, whatever role they assume. Related to this is the discovery that girls in coeducational schools of middle and high decile level are more likely to recognise all types of bullying than girls at middle decile single-sex schools, while in low decile schools the opposite is true.

The second and surprising major finding is the discovery that this bullying appears to be of two distinctly different kinds, which are related to the size of the group. The two subtypes of relational bullying arise from different causes, proceed in different ways, and are fueled by different motivations, emotions, and outcomes.

A third significant finding which emerged concerns aspects of the effects on the girls involved in bullying, with fresh insights into the experience of the observers and the

victims when friendship bullying occurs. Roles in bullying have been widely documented, but the current study suggests that the effect on observers of this type of bullying may have been underestimated. New concerns about victims were also raised.

A fourth finding of significance, in contrast to popular belief, is the revelation that help is available when this type of victimisation occurs. The nature of the help, as perceived by girls, is specific, depending for its effectiveness on a cluster of factors.

Finally, the fifth, and perhaps the most important finding relates to the relationship between friendship group bullying, and the developmental processes in which girls are engaged as individuals. It emerged from the study that the participants considered that friendship bullying arises from changes which they notice in themselves, in their friends, and in their relationships. Aspects of girls' development appear to be linked with the processes involved with the dynamics of conflict and the relationship changes that often result from bullying, and so the experiences and outcomes of bullying may exert important influences on their wellbeing and positive development.

Each of these five major findings is discussed in depth in the following separate sections, together with possible explanations, and each is considered in the light of the research questions.

### The Nature of Girls' Friendship Group Bullying

A highly significant finding from the study revealed that relational bullying is widespread in girls' friendships groups, but with the accompanying discovery that girls find it difficult to recognise or acknowledge this bullying when it comes from their friends, and this failure to recognise bullying is closely linked to their views about whether bullying has indeed occurred (Adair, et al., 2000). Interestingly, differences were found in the recognition of bullying among girls at schools of different types and decile levels.

The widespread nature of girls' friendship group bullying has important implications for an understanding of the complexity of bullying. A distinction has been made in the past between mutual conflict and bullying (Rigby, 2008). While research has identified extensive conflict with friends (Besag, 2006; Laursen, 1996), provided vivid accounts of girls' aggression towards their peers (Owens, et al., 2000), and has established that relational bullying increases among girls of this age (Pepler, et al., 2004), the current



study has revealed that bullying forms part of many Year 10 girls' experience of friendship.

Thus, most girls in Year 10 are at some risk in regard to friendship bullying: either of bullying their friends, or of being bullied by those whom they consider their friends among their peers, or of witnessing bullying. Thus, bullying, which carries with it an increased risk of negative short-term and long-term effects (Coggan, et al., 2003), is encountered most often in that mutual and reciprocal friendship group context in which girls should be able to feel safe and confident of acceptance (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).

This has serious implications for girls' social development from two perspectives, their negative experience of bullying, and the failure of friendship to provide reliable support and other positive effects for girls. If girls in middle adolescence depend on their friendship groups to provide aspects of the social support which is important for their well-being (Furman, 1989), this study shows that friendship may also contribute to a sense of betrayal (Brown, 2003) and uncertainty (Simmons, 2002). The girls in this study experienced betrayal, and, from their point of view, their sense of betrayal centred on the conflicting values and concepts of friendship. If their friendships contain bullying elements, girls are likely to be at an increased risk of negative outcomes (Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005). Thus bullying in friendships may be a hitherto unrecognised contributor to an increased risk of health concerns for girls, in adulthood as well as adolescence (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Trzesniewski, et al., 2006).

#### *Girls' Difficulty in Recognising Bullying in the Friendship Group*

A second finding which emerged in close association with the widespread nature of girls' friendship group bullying is that girls may fail to recognise or name this type of bullying, because it occurs among friends. They may tolerate a high level of bullying from their friends, but fail to name it or acknowledge it as bullying. Thus, aggression which may not be tolerated from the general peer group is likely to be accepted as part of normal friendship dynamics. There are several factors which the study found to contribute to this, including the visibility of bullying, the influence of the group, the flexibility of roles, and girls' attitudes and responses to bullying. Each of these is discussed in turn, with reference to relevant literature.

The current study tends to confirm various aspects of previous research in relation to girls' recognition of friendship group bullying, and these are discussed first, followed by an exploration of the new findings of the study. In some cases, both are presented together, when their association is relevant, and this is indicated as it occurs.

This study suggests that, firstly, in confirmation of previous research, since girls in Year 10 think of bullying primarily in terms of visible acts of aggression, they may fail to recognise more subtle types of victimisation (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Monks & Smith, 2006). Previous research has found that adolescents are less likely to recognise relational bullying than teachers are, and this study suggests confirmation of this (Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Hearteningly, the current study also suggests that having a working definition of bullying may be useful to girls in helping them to identify and name more subtle types of bullying.

Secondly, the study's findings also tend to confirm previous studies indicating that girls do not readily acknowledge this type of bullying because it comes from their friends and because the consequences of isolation and shame associated with rejection by the group (Giannetti & Sagarese, 2001) are worse than acceptance of the bullying. This implies that some girls cope with the experience of victimisation through a form of denial.

Furthermore, this study suggests, as found in earlier research, that such bullying (Crick, 1997; Sutton & Smith, 1999; Woods & Wolke, 2004) is embedded in girls' friendship group dynamics, and maintained by the culture of the friendship groups. As Salmivalli et al. (1996) found, group processes, such as gossiping (McDonald, et al., 2007) or teasing (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2004), reinforce the particular strategies and behaviour used by girls, the roles undertaken, and the effects of the behaviour. Participation in bullying is widespread and dynamic, with girls having experience of all three main roles in bullying (S. Coyne, et al., 2006). The friendship group thus provides both the cause for relational bullying and the means whereby such bullying is perpetrated.

Again, the findings of the study suggest, in confirmation of earlier studies, that the actions and attitudes of all the girls in the group support or condone the bullying. The middle adolescent girls in the study justified exclusion as a moral decision, since the victim had transgressed the moral laws of the group. This suggests that, when in the bully role, girls normalise bullying as a legitimate pastime in their group's culture, because the

reason for it is presented as a moral issue. This permits all in the group, including the victim, to pretend that the behaviour is harmless, and to deny the pain caused. The behaviour of the bullies is thus ambiguous or hidden so that it raises anxiety in its victims without the cost of social disapproval for the bully. Rather, bullies are likely to be viewed as champions of the group's moral concerns and expectations, or as fun-loving tricksters (Owens, et al., 2000; Singer & Doornenbal, 2006). According to Sippola, Paget, and Buchanan (2007), such behaviour is a form of adaptation to societal expectations, and may be viewed positively. However, the negative experiences of girls in bullying situations appeared to contradict this.

Victims' responses, such as placation of the bully, appear to condone the bullying by friends, as shown in the current study. Because victims doubt their own judgement about their friends' intentions, and about the validity of their own emotions, their confidence and self-esteem decreases. Powerless to stop the behaviour, they try to suppress their negative responses in a form of denial (J. Martin & Gillies, 2004). It is possible that victims may eventually learn to dissociate from their feelings as a response to the abuse, and may even become accustomed to viewing themselves as victims in the future (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006). Bullying becomes a normal part of their friendship relationships, because unpleasant attention is better than no attention, and to be in the group, even in a role as a permanent victim, is preferable to exclusion (van Beest & Williams, 2006). To challenge or confront the norms of the group is to risk even greater isolation (Champion, Vernberg, & Shipman, 2004; Cranham & Carroll, 2003). The girls in the current study coped with bullying by avoiding confrontation (Ebata & Moos, 1991, 1994; Lodge & Feldman, 2007), but if they were successfully excluded from their group, they withdrew from school itself, leaving the field to the bullies. Thus, this study revealed the way in which friendship group bullying continues unchallenged and becomes a normal experience for the majority of Year 10 girls. Membership of the group is paramount (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006) since ostracism is acutely painful (van Beest & Williams, 2006). Action which confronts the bully will result in escalation of the bullying (Salmivalli, Karhunen, et al., 1996). For those on the perimeter, escalation may result in total exclusion (Giannetti & Sagarese, 2001).

One aspect of bullying which has exercised interest in the existing literature is the shame experienced in bullying during the period of middle adolescence, and this

contributes to the invisibility of relational victimisation (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Meier, 2004). The greater part of the literature regarding shame in bullying has focused on the feelings of the bully, but a finding of the current study suggests that, while those who had bullied historically experienced shame, the victims of rejection from peers also experience significant shame. Cheung, Gilbert, and Irons (2004) found that older adolescents who had low social ranking were more likely to experience shame, evoking possible rumination, and a higher risk to their well-being. The current study suggests that bullying by exclusion may induce a similar emotional response in girls in middle adolescence. The girls in this study who were successfully excluded by their peers responded by withdrawal, so that bullying by friends resulted in significant absence from school. Girls' apparent refusal to acknowledge their own victimisation may be an adaptive response which protects them against the extremely negative consequences of shame.

Consistent with previous research, observers and helpers also support the bullying process (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996). They rarely intervene openly, remaining caught between conflicting needs, for intimacy and for affiliation, and suffering internal conflict. If girls know that a friend may be excluded, they may even avoid associating too closely with her, in order to preserve their own place in the group. Group affiliation is likely to be obtained at the cost of intimacy, which is important for girls' self-esteem (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Meier, 2004; Townsend et al., 1988). The dilemma of observers reflects the moral ambiguity of their situation, as they struggle with conflicting loyalties to their friend and to the group.

An additional minor finding which emerged from the study, a further factor influencing girls' failure to recognise friendship group bullying, is their fatalistic attitude towards it as inevitable. Their passive response, unsurprisingly, appears to owe something at least to society's stereotypical espoused view of girls and women as "bitchy", while also suggesting an alarming readiness on the part of mid-adolescent girls to relinquish their sense of personal choice or control. It is possible that this develops from previous unsuccessful attempts and interventions on the part of victims to stop the bullying, as well as continued exposure to gender stereotypes (Brown, 2003). Not only do girls accept the bullying as inevitable, but this response also appears likely to be endorsed by some of the adults around them (Swearer et al., 2006). The socioecological context of the behaviour

thus promotes powerlessness in the face of this bullying, so that the powerlessness of the adults is reflected in that of the victims.

Surprisingly, a finding of the current study suggests that the flexibility with which girls change roles in bullying may contribute to the invisibility of the behaviour. This adds to current understanding regarding the stability of roles in bullying. The flexibility of role which was apparent in this study, with girls changing roles as the bullying repeated its cycle, underscores and reinforces the normalisation of friendship group bullying, enabling girls to view the cycle of bullying as a normal group interaction. Salmivalli et al. (1998) have suggested that the roles which girls adopt are influenced more by their current peers than by their previous behaviour in regard to bullying, so that they are more likely to copy their peers' behaviour. The girls in the current study may have been thus affected by their current peers.

Intriguingly, the current study found that girls who currently bully may not view their own actions as bullying, though they recognise these behaviours as bullying when perpetrated on them by others. This is useful to consider in the light of Horn's (2000) discovery that, while adolescents consider exclusion from a group to be morally wrong, if they see a decision to exclude a peer as a moral decision, they will be influenced by their personal moral judgment, rather than seeing it as exclusion. In other circumstances, they will use their knowledge of peers' group membership in their reasoning. Thus, if girls do not see relational aggression as bullying, but as integral to friendship problems, when conflict arises in their group, any decision they make is likely to be based on their knowledge about the protagonists' participation in the group. This may explain bullies' apparent inability to see their own behaviour in a negative light.

Nevertheless, a new finding of the current study indicates that some Year 10 girls are capable of reflecting on their behaviour as perpetrators in the recent or distant past, and can acknowledge it as bullying. In such instances, their insight may result from their ability to see their behaviour as object, rather than as subject, as suggested by Kegan (1982). What enables this shift to occur remains unclear. It may be that emergence from embeddedness in the group determines girls' ability to reflect on their behaviour in the bully role. This finding draws attention to the possibility that Year 10 girls' individual differences in such self-awareness with regard to bullying may help to explain the complexity of their friendship group bullying.

This denial of friendship bullying in the current study may aim to mask an uncomfortable truth: that friendship, in contrast to the valued qualities of support and loyalty (Sharabany, et al., 1981), is often negotiable, and that one's friends, given the right circumstances, may let one down. The concept of the best friend who is loyal, "always there", and trustworthy, is not readily abandoned or modified. Importantly, girls who consult school counsellors for relational bullying issues are likely to deny the true extent of their pain, and may successfully conceal it even from their counsellors. Martin and Gillies (2004) found that long-term bullying is most likely to be met with denial on the part of the victim. While privately prepared to name the behaviour they had experienced as bullying, girls maintain the outward pretence that the behaviour is acceptable to them. Girls seem therefore prepared to put up with hostility, particularly covert hostility, provided they can remain part of the group (Lodge & Feldman, 2007).

Girls' intense need to retain connection to friends and with their peer group supports their failure, and, in some cases their reluctance, to recognise friendship group bullying. If girls deny their painful experience of bullying to themselves, and hide their real response, they are therefore also likely to deny it to school counsellors. This may explain why counsellors may tend to view relational bullying as "peer conflict", and to consider it as a less serious concern than bullying (Manthei, 1999), if that is how it is presented by girls themselves.

#### *Recognition of Bullying by Girls at Coeducational and Single-Sex Schools*

A further finding which emerged in the results of the study was that girls at mid-decile and high decile coeducational schools are more likely to recognise all types of bullying than are girls in single-sex schools of similar decile levels, while in low decile schools the opposite is true. This has not been identified previously in the literature.

Rigby (2008) has stated that research generally shows little difference in bullying levels between high and low-decile schools. However, girls from higher socioeconomic families are likely to have a higher self-concept, a greater sense of an internal locus of control, are less likely to avoid social situations, and may therefore be more adept socially and more sophisticated in their social awareness (Ralph, et al., 1995). Their increased social sophistication may thus account for their greater ability to recognise bullying.

However this does not account for the superior recognition of bullying by girls at mid-decile coeducational schools. It is possible that in coeducational schools the presence of boys, who engage in higher levels of bullying (Olweus, 1993), particularly physical bullying, may increase girls' awareness of all types of bullying, or may enhance girls' awareness of less obvious forms of bullying, such as relational aggression.

These differences in the recognition of bullying may be attributable to the different social contexts constructed by the schools themselves or by their communities (Swearer et al., 2006). The hidden curriculums of different schools, expressed through such areas as staff attitudes to bullying, may encourage or discourage recognition of bullying. These aspects of school experience help to form girls' attitudes to various types of bullying or to the different school and community cultures which both inform and reflect girls' views about aggression, presenting a complex and intriguing picture which may involve a number of possible explanatory factors.

It must be kept in mind that the sample of schools was small in the current study, and since there may be concentrations of particular cultures at different decile levels and types of school, depending on the school catchment area, the cultural mixes of the student and staff population in different schools may well be a factor influencing the recognition of relational bullying. Different cultures may well have different understandings of exclusion and its social significance, or of the significance of individualism compared with collectivism (Culbertson, Agee, & Makasiale, 2007).

### Girls' Experiences of Friendship Group Bullying

A second key finding from the interviews, which provides new insights into the experiences of girls' friendship bullying, is that girls' accounts of friendship group bullying reveal two distinctly different patterns of relational bullying, arising from different causes and proceeding in different ways, depending on the size of the group. While some features which emerged support existing literature, the current study has revealed a new distinction between large group and triadic group bullying. Again, these findings are presented as they complement and enhance each other.

### *Bullying in Large Friendship Groups*

Alarmingly, it appears from the current study that the girls in large friendship groups accept as normal a cyclical, almost ritualistic pattern of bullying. This pattern has been noted elsewhere (Owens, et al., 2000; Simmons, 2002), and presents a similar pattern of disapproval, anger and persecution, followed by forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption which is reminiscent of the cycle of abuse (Hodges, et al., 1999).

In large groups, the current study confirms existing research with regard to group bullying patterns, suggesting that most girls are normally in the ambiguous and paradoxical position of observers, with occasional experiences as bullies or victims, while some girls are popular leaders with the power and the will to bully, and a few are always, perilously, regular victims on the perimeter. It may be conjectured that if girls daily face the possibility that they may be excluded, they are less likely to pursue communal goals, which would enhance the welfare of all those in the group, and are more likely to ensure their own safety first, even if it means bullying a friend in order to re-establish or protect one's own status in the group (Ojanen, et al., 2007). For the others in the group, the large group's cohesion is thus constantly reinforced by the bullying, through the strengthening of the affiliative bonds which hold the group together (Kroger, 2000; Roland & Idsoe, 2001). In this way bullying continues to provide entertainment for the group members, and continues to reward the leader or leaders.

As found in the current study, girls accept relational bullying as a normal aspect of integration with the peer group, but this type of large group bullying also suggests that girls may prioritise membership of the group above the pursuit of close friendship. Yet closeness to friends is more important for girls' well-being than popularity (Townsend, et al., 1988). Whatever the values that may influence girls to prioritise the group's bond above individual relationships, such a choice is likely to strengthen the group, but may postpone or inhibit opportunities for personal development, in areas such as intimacy (Kroger, 2007; Laursen et al., 2006). It is also likely to weaken the motivation for stopping the bullying, and so individuals' well-being may be sacrificed in the perceived interests of the group.



### *Bullying in Triadic Friendship Groups*

In triadic groups, in contrast, the current study revealed that the bullying processes are distinguished by intense emotions, such as jealousy, guilt, distress, and pain. Jealousy and the wish for exclusive possession of a friendship have been identified in previous research as emotions which characterise some adolescent girls' relationships (Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Kulish & Holtzman, 2008; Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005).

Previous research into friendship has shown that adolescent triadic relationships have certain unique features, and triadic group bullying supports and adds to this understanding. Lansford and Parker (1999) and Besag (2006) have noted that for younger adolescents, girls' triadic friendships are more intimate, exchange more information and are less aggressive than those of boys, but this depends on the quality of their interactions, while Xie, Cairns, and Cairns (2002) have discovered that triadic friendships are more likely to suffer from relational aggression than other types.

In considering what gives rise to triadic bullying as described in the current study, a number of possible explanations may be considered. The perpetrator's intense jealousy in triadic bullying, with the possessive wish for the exclusive dyadic friendship, may have its origin in the tension between the bonds of close friendship, a tendency to use relational aggression, and low self-esteem. Grotperter and Crick (1996) have discovered that jealous children are likely to be relationally aggressive with their friends, and their friendships are marked by high levels of intimacy and exclusivity. They therefore suggested that jealousy is a hallmark of the friendships of children who are relationally, rather than overtly, aggressive, and this accords in part with what was seen in this study, but does not provide an explanation. Alternatively, those who perpetrate this type of bullying may suffer from low self-esteem (Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005), or may be attempting to resolve attachment or separation issues (Blos, 1979; Bowlby, 1988).

It is useful to consider girls' triadic bullying in the light of psychoanalytic theory, because of the intense emotions experienced and the drive to possess an exclusive intimate relationship. As girls enter adolescence, a developmental task is to individuate gradually from the parental introjects and to form new, adult, relationships with their parents (Erikson, 1968). Girls who bully in triadic groups may be experiencing difficulty with this task. The intensity of the emotions involved, both the jealousy and the desire for

intimacy, resonate with psychoanalytic theory (Seelig, 2002), regarding girls' revisiting in adolescence of an earlier developmental stage (Kulish & Holtzman, 2008), and with Blos's (1979) belief that early adolescent same-sex friendships are important in providing a sense of defense against the impending disintegration of the self. Interestingly, Seelig refers to triangulation in girls' relationships with parents in early childhood, and the triadic groups in this study seemed to mirror this stage in some respects, supporting Kulish and Holtzman's delineation of similar relationship configurations for girls in adolescence.

A further possible explanation for triadic bullying may lie in attachment theory, again because of the intensity of the emotions involved. Not only are the close friendships of girls with an insecure attachment style likely to be of lesser quality (Weimer, et al., 2004), but girls who bring an insecure attachment style to their same-sex adolescent friendships are also likely to compare themselves unfavourably with others, to be submissive, and to experience anxiety and depressive symptoms (Irons & Gilbert, 2005). Such characteristics may well lend themselves to victimisation, if the balance of power in the friendship is uneven. A further possible explanation for the intensity experienced in this type of bullying may be the powerful new feelings of the intimate friendship, which appear to foreshadow or prepare for the intensity of romantic love, as suggested by Besag (2006) and Zimmer-Gembeck (2002). Such same-sex friendships certainly resemble romantic relationships in the intensity of their emotional attachment, and may in some cases owe more to some girls' early experience of a romantic relationship involving same-sex romantic attraction (Jones & Clarke, 2007), though this was not evident in the current study.

In summary, these two different group bullying processes described by the current study appear to be fired by and embedded in two very different developmental motivations or needs: the need for affiliation with and acceptance by the peer group, on the one hand, and the need for intimacy with another individual, on the other. Membership of a larger group offers the dual rewards of affiliation and peer group acceptance, confirming the findings of a number of studies (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Ojanen et al., 2007; Roland & Idsoe, 2001; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005). If intimacy develops, it occurs within the subgroups, between individuals, or with other girls outside the larger group. Triadic groups, in contrast, therefore offer the chance for intense closeness in a dyad

(Besag, 2006; Laursen, 1993; Townsend, 1992), fulfilling the need for intimacy, but not necessarily that of affiliation.

### *Loss and Grief*

A further new finding which emerged from the current study, and one of concern, was the discovery that, in both types of bullying, girls who were currently victims suffered from additional major loss and grief concerns. This finding suggests that reflection about bullying by friends may trigger mid-adolescent girls' revisiting of grief regarding other personal losses, in association with their current feelings of pain, rejection, low self-esteem, shame, and unworthiness. The loss that is associated with bullying, that of self-esteem (Owens, et al., 2000), may prompt rumination about, or revisiting of, other losses. Adolescents also experience loss as part of maturation, with the losses of adolescence including grief for the lost childhood and the childhood self. Mourning is a fundamental part of development, since each new challenge and transition in human development involves loss (Noam, 1996). This implies that the adolescent's grief for childhood may be disenfranchised in Western society, which emphasises adolescence as a period of opportunity and individual freedom. Noam has also suggested that developmental theories need to incorporate conflict and vulnerability in relationships, and that the symptoms, such as a depressed mood, which are observed in adolescents, may be signs of a new complexity which the individual is attempting to integrate, rather than a sign of disorder.

Loss and grief issues for a victim of bullying may also contribute to a depressed mood which may adversely affect the individual's social position. Profound grief or depression may have the effect of causing a girl to withdraw from contact with others or to be irritable in her response to friends. Friends then react negatively, and this makes the victim of loss and grief even more likely to be bullied (Rigby, 2008). This has serious implications for girls who have experienced other losses and as a consequence encounter bullying in their friendship groups. If girls who are bullied by friends find that they tend to recall other losses, such girls are likely to be vulnerable, and may well be at increased risk of developing depression or anxiety, unless sufficient support is available.

### *Effects of Friendship Bullying on Observers*

An additional unexpected yet significant finding in the current study was the widespread effect of witnessing friendship bullying experienced by the observers. While the emotions and responses of young adolescent observers have been documented (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Rigby & Johnson, 2006), the effects on middle adolescent observers in friendship group bullying are not so well-known. The consequences for the onlookers are widespread and extremely negative, with the majority feeling uncomfortable or awful when they observe victimisation. The observers of friendship group bullying feel torn between their empathy for their friend's suffering and their need for affiliation with the group (Carney, 2000). They must consider their own safety as regards the group, and either ignore the bullying or intervene in covert ways which protect their own interests. If observers regard exclusion as unfair, and morally wrong (Horn, 2000), they are faced with either internal or external conflict, perhaps both, depending on whether they intervene or not (Harter & Monsour, 1992). This creates a moral dilemma for them.

There is a danger that girls who suppress the pain and guilt they experience from witnessing abuse, or from being victims themselves, may take these group relationship patterns into their adult lives, of work, and romantic and family relationships. Such adolescent experiences are likely to exert different influences, depending on the type of bullying which girls have experienced. The literature on workplace bullying, for example, shows that some workplace bullying is founded on social interactions, such as gossiping (Baillien, Neyens, & De Witte, 2007), and on social processes and social environments, with resulting changes in social relationships (Lewis & Orford, 2005). The type of bullying described in these studies resembles large group bullying, with its utilisation of rumours, and its focus on inclusion and exclusion.

### What Helps in Cases of Bullying

A further important finding in the study is that, while most girls tell someone about having been bullied, many girls utilise a range of helpful strategies and resources for themselves. The study provided encouraging new insights into what and who are sources of effective support in the face of relational bullying. Rigby (2008) has noted there is no single "magic wand" solution to relational bullying, and punishment for the bully is not

effective; in extension of this, the current study showed that, according to girls' views, help from others in bullying among girls of this age is likely to be derived from a combination of small helpful actions and resources evolving from the support of others whom the victim herself chooses and trusts. The empathic, supportive listener is the most likely source of help. Several findings related to this were identified, and these are discussed in turn. They include the important helping roles played by friends and by mothers, other sources of support, and girls' own resources and activities.

A surprising and encouraging discovery made by this study is that girls' friends are extremely effective helpers. While some friends may perpetrate bullying, other friends are skilled listeners whose support is sensitive and helpful. Associated with this discovery is the finding that girls advocate the teaching of communication skills to help them resolve conflicts as a way of preventing bullying. Girls' sophisticated social intelligence, their empathy and sensitivity, and their humour were all identified as important in the helping process.

In confirmation of previous research, this study also suggests that, if girls do become the targets of bullying, they turn to families for support, provided they have sound relationships with their families. As has been found elsewhere, families tend to meet these expectations (Wang, et al., 2009). The actions of families, especially mothers, in providing support, comfort, and advice for their daughters when they are bullied by their friends, recall Blos's (1979) description of the second rapprochement process which is marked by alternate closeness with and moving away from the primary attachment figures (Bowlby, 1958b; Meissner, 2009; Winnicott, 1965), in this case as girls seek the reassurance of a stable base. They position themselves once again as a child in relation to their families.

Moreover, new insights from the current study suggest that mothers' help is a surprisingly significant factor, in both the matter and the manner of the support. Meissner (2009) states that "in the face of adolescent detachment and separation, the parents continue to serve as a secure and supportive base, enabling adolescent experimentation" (p. 284). It appears that girls tend to consult their mothers, when female friendship is at stake. The current study suggests that, since girls' primary relationship with an adult woman is with their mothers, their mothers' thoughtful feedback, grounded in their own experience, may be of particular value to them. Girls view their mothers as experts, in whom they confide and whom they consult as a wise person. As mothers discuss their own

remembered adolescent friendships, or express concerns about the bullying, their daughters, with developing cognitive awareness may be acquiring a sense of time past, in stories of their mothers' experiences, as well as their own concerns for their friendships in the present and the future (Rogers, 1993), and this may encourage the reflection which accompanies insight. Girls appear to have conversations with their mothers about friendship and bullying which are different from other discussions they have experienced. Interestingly, a study by Beaumont (2000) found that mothers of middle adolescent girls tend to be thoughtful and considered when they speak to their daughters. The current study suggests that mothers may adjust their speech and its content to suit the changing relationship which they have with daughters, which is not yet that of equals but is different from the relationship they had when their daughters were children. This was reflected in the current study in the way that girls stored up and valued their mothers' wisdom.

Because girls' bullying aims to damage relationships, interventions that are successful respect the victim's wishes about her future relationship with the bully or bullies. The current study found that, while girls are pessimistic about stopping bullying, they are also surprisingly optimistic about the power of support and the potential for girls to learn to manage this type of conflict. Unsurprisingly, the interventions which girls find helpful from adults at school reflect those strategies which they find helpful elsewhere. The current study tends to confirm Rigby's (2008) recommendation that help in relational bullying is most effective when each individual situation is managed with discretion and consideration for the outcome of the relationships.

In the current study, an interesting finding added weight to a previous study (Owens, et al., 2000) with the discovery that effective help from school adults with relational bullying is in the nature of support, rather than through direct intervention. The prohibition against help-seeking by girls is strong (Rigby, 2008), and so confidentiality and respect are important elements in considering which adults can be trusted. Girls in the study approached the adults whom they trusted, including those adults who would not take over, or tell, or otherwise make the situation worse (Kopala & Keitel, 2003). It appears that help from counsellors is effective because it is unobtrusive and empowering, appearing almost accidental, from a supportive rather than an intervention role. Such help empowers, rather than adding to the helplessness often felt by victims. Counsellors also affirm individual girls' perspectives, and, through the supportive relationship, encourage

them to consider and test different strategies and approaches to managing or resolving bullying situations. Similarly, when someone outside the situation names the behaviour as bullying it helps the victim to identify the behaviour for what it is. This may both validate and legitimise their feelings, and enable them to respond assertively.

Interestingly, while friends' help is viewed by victims as effective, help from peer mediators is seen as somewhat problematic. Researchers (Geiger, et al., 2004; Rigby, 2008) have noted that intervention in relational bullying is particularly problematic, because it often provokes further victimisation. The current study confirmed this in the case of peer mediation.

A finding which is also suggested in previous studies indicates that the support provided, whether from families, friends, or school adults, depends for its success on privacy, and the respect shown for the victim's autonomy, through its confirmation of her ability to manage the situation on her own. This may allow girls to develop a sense of power and agency in confronting the bullying. This differs from the types of interventions which have been found effective in stopping or preventing traditional forms of bullying (Juvonen, 2001), such as mediation, or restorative practices (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2002). The current study indicates that effective help from others in friendship group bullying respects the victim's privacy, and reassures her that she is supported, accepted by others whom she values, and valued in relationships, by other peers, by family, or by trusted others.

Authorities have focused on the importance of empowering individuals through self-expression activities, as a means of protection against relational bullying (Choate, 2008). This study confirmed that girls' own personal resources, through their personally expressive actions and involvement in outside activities, are of importance in recovering from bullying. Helpful strategies increase the victims' sense of themselves, through self-expression and involvement and success in other, more positive, spheres of activity in their lives. These provide the victim with a new perspective on herself and her life, which is likely to make it possible for her to gain a sense of distance and a new perspective, to respond more assertively and less helplessly to the bully, and to be genuinely less affected by the victimisation. This increases her self-confidence and self-assurance which is likely to be subtly manifested as nonchalance in her response to the bullying and this, in its turn, discourages the bully, as shown by Salmivalli, Karhunen, and Lagerspetz (1996).

## Girls' Bullying in the Context of Development

The fifth and final key finding of the current study is that, from the point of view of girls themselves, Year 10 friendship group bullying may arise from and proceed from girls' development. Connected with this possibility are the concerns raised by the study about the relational areas of intimacy, empathy, conflicting moral values, and personal growth and change. Girls in Year 10 appear to be on a developmental cusp, in transition between identification with the group and attention to their own emergent and individual relationship needs.

One factor in support of the view that relational bullying in Year 10 may be grounded in development is the timing of the increase in relational bullying, namely, in Year 10. Other researchers (Pepler et al., 2006; Rigby, 2008) have tended to attribute relational bullying at this age to the unsettling effect on friendships of the transition to secondary school at the start of Year 9. In contrast to this viewpoint, the girls in this study had experienced previously stable friendships in their first year of secondary school, and yet the bullying arose in Year 10. It is possible that the friendship affiliations formed in Year 9 may have arisen from expedience and opportunity because of girls' urgent need in Year 9 to establish some kind of friendship group. In Year 10, different motivations may compel girls to challenge their existing friendships.

Adolescent development includes exploration of choices and opportunities, and girls' Year 10 friendship reflects this (Erikson, 1968). Yet the findings of the current study suggest that the intimacy of Year 10 friendships, which depend on similarity between friends, may initially preclude, from girls' points of view, the possibility of differences between them and their friends, or of the changes associated with development. Girls want stability in their friendships (Bowker, 2004), and yet they also seek the excitement of variety and novelty. The exploration which they undertake during this year resembles both the exploration which is associated with a secure attachment style (Bowlby, 1958), and the exploration which is associated with the development of a sense of self (Erikson, 1968).

### *Intimacy*

The high degree of importance placed on closeness by the girls in the study suggests that, for some girls at least, the development of intimacy may have particular



significance in Year 10, an intimacy initially based on similarity. The different approaches to closeness of the girls in the study and their responses when their trust was misplaced also suggest that girls may be at different points in their development of intimacy (Sharabany, et al., 1981). It has been suggested that for adolescent girls, intimacy tends to precede, or accompany, rather than follow the establishment of a strong sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Arseth, Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia (2009) proposed instead that identity and intimacy may co-develop for adolescent girls, powered by both of the twin personality development forces of relating to others and the drive/delay of gratification, and the current study appears to confirm this.

Laursen, Furman, and Mooney (2006) have commented on the challenge that the management of intimate friendship affords, and the girls in the current study struggled with their developing ability to comprehend and manage the differing rewards and limitations of these intense same-sex friendships. If girls' individual development proceeds at a different pace from that of the majority of other girls during this period, conflict and imbalances of power are likely to develop in some areas of their friendships (Engels, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2002; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Experiences of conflict associated with the consequences of misplaced trust, such as when a trusted friend begins to backstab, or the reward of renewed closeness when trust is tested and is proved well-founded, appear to support developmental steps forward for girls. These experiences lead them to reflect on their relationships with others, themselves and their own perspectives in relation to that of others (Buhrmester, 1990; Townsend et al., 1988).

The current study suggests that an assertive response to bullying may furnish girls with the opportunity and motivation to refine and reshape their views of their friendships through reflection and insight about their understanding of the nature of trust, rather than depending on an untested definition (Singer & Doornenbal, 2006). Girls who have managed to emerge from the conflict continue to seek intimacy but more cautiously; they are cautious before engaging in new close relationships, and no longer take stable friendships for granted. The converse applies if girls remain as victims. Salmivalli, et al. (1996) have noted that victims' responses to bullying influence the outcome. The current study found that if girls do not confront bullying assertively, they remain trapped in a state of inner conflict, rumination, and uncertainty about themselves and their self-worth. In

considering what may influence victims' responses to bullying, there are likely to be a range of factors, including individual situations, personality and other attributes. Attachment style may also play a part in influencing girls' responses to bullying, since it may well be that the difficulty of some girls in extricating themselves from such abusive relationships may owe something to their relationship with important others in their lives, or with events in their lives beyond the peer group, or their control.

### *Empathy*

The current study tended to confirm that Year 10 girls vary considerably in their capacity for empathy. Thus some girls in Year 10 are able both to engage in a third-party perspective, or cognitive empathy (Davis, 1994) and also to use affective (emotional) empathy to help them to understand the part that others play in their close relationships. Others may only be able to consider one, their own, point of view, or may be actively engaged in the process of struggling to accommodate a new perspective (Harter, et al., 1997). Some girls may undertake a tentative identification with others, but then retreat back to their own perspective again. The differing and changing capacities for empathy revealed in the current study by girls' statements and actions suggest that as girls develop empathic awareness in mid-adolescence individual differences in the development of empathy may account for some of the instability of their friendships. Different abilities with regard to empathy will also affect girls' likelihood of perpetrating bullying, and their ability to resolve conflict effectively, depending on the response of the victim (de Wied, et al., 2007). With girls who have bullied, the differences in empathy may be because of developmental differences, such as cognitive development, inhibiting their ability to imagine themselves as different in different roles (Harter & Monsour, 1992). These differences in empathy are likely to affect girls' understanding about bullying as well, since, as the current study suggests, girls who empathise with other girls are more likely to share their perspectives, and feelings of pain.

### *Moral Development*

Aspects of Year 10 girls' reflection about conflict in their friendships, as suggested by the current study, centre on questions of moral and ethical judgment and result in inner and external conflict. Bullying among friends causes girls to examine values which they

have hitherto taken for granted, but which now, with development, they begin to ponder about in a different way (Kegan, 1994; Winnicott, 1969). Girls may experience significant difficulty and distress if they struggle to resolve inner conflict formed when they find themselves torn between different moral stands (Harter & Monsour, 1992), and the girls in the current study at times found themselves torn between the desire to remain loyal to their original friendships, while simultaneously seeking to experience the stimulation and excitement of exploring similarities in a new friendship. Such new friendships may promise closer, higher quality relationships. For girls to ignore such exploration is in a real sense to deny themselves and all that they may become (Erikson, 1968).

The moral conflict experienced by Year 10 girls may therefore focus on the dilemma of meeting both their own and others' expectations, as they become aware of competing moral principles in their friendships. This may intensify their internal conflict, as Harter and Monsour (1992) described, since girls at this age are able to recognise the different aspects of themselves in different roles, but are likely to find such discrepancies disturbing and frustrating in their view of themselves.

In extension of this, the experience of being let down by a friend appears to influence moral development in that girls start to measure themselves and others against their own personal sense of right and wrong, provided that they have enough trust in their own values. While girls choose friends who are similar, in Year 10 they are likely to find that their friends change, and may reveal different and less admired qualities. In such an event, a girl may choose to protect her personal integrity rather than compromise in order to retain the friendship. Such decisions suggest moral processes are at work (Crick et al., 2001; Kroger, 2007).

The current study indicates that, in Year 10, friendship itself is changing and developing, becoming more complex and demanding more of its adolescent participants, so that girls grow less trusting in their friendships and more guarded in their sharing, while at the same time becoming more appreciative of their friends and of their friends' personalities and qualities (Selman & Schultz, 1990). As friendships grow stronger when bullying is confronted assertively, mutuality increases, and girls' appreciation of pleasure in another person's company is refined. Interestingly, a lesser finding which was revealed in girls' perceptions of their friendships is that the girls in this study regarded fun and support as the most important attributes of their friendships. Girls' prioritising of fun and

support in friendship in Year 10 may in fact contribute to the rise of friendship problems in adolescence, since, with increasing maturation, the study found that girls gradually realise that other more personal values, such as trustworthiness, or loyalty, have become important, and they are compelled to re-examine their earlier priorities in friendships.

Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) refer to the narrative integrity of individuals whose autobiographical stories are grounded in their understandings of what a life should be when it is lived well. Intriguingly, the girls in the study who narrated their experiences of bullying viewed their experience as instrumental in their development as individuals. They emphasised the importance of being themselves and of knowing who they were.

### *The Growth of Self-Awareness or Self-Doubt*

A finding from the current study suggests that, after experiencing Year 10 friendship group bullying situations, girls show development in their self-awareness and sense of self, provided that the bullying has been successfully confronted or resolved. In contrast, when still in bullying situations, they experience significant inner conflict, distress, and self-doubt.

In Year 10, girls' sense of self is likely to be vulnerable and unstable (Harter, Marold, & Whitesell, 1992). Harter and Monsour (1992) found that discrepancies in girls' self-attributes in different domains do not bother them in early adolescence, but later, in middle adolescence, as they become more self-aware, they find themselves experiencing conflict about the discrepancies, until, finally, with the cognitive development of later adolescence, they accept these different aspects of themselves. This conflict intensifies if it is between girls' true and false selves (Harter, et al., 1997). It is possible that bullying situations with friends may be markedly influential in creating such inner dissonance. The ambivalence and uncertainty which mark girls' mid-adolescent friendships (Lange, et al., 2005) may be exacerbated by friendship bullying, increasing girls' sense of unease and making it even more difficult for them to challenge bullying relationships:

To act in any way on one's emergence from an embeddedness in the interpersonal in the absence of any confirmation is to risk feeling profoundly disloyal and selfish, at best, or to feel one is going out of one's mind, at worst. (Kegan, 1982, p. 210)

While some Year 10 girls may be in the process of emerging from the stage of development described by Harter and Monsour (1992), it is likely that others are as yet unable to stand back from their behaviour in the present and observe themselves, particularly in unpopular roles, either as bullies or as victims. At this stage, they *are* their roles, rather than having and enacting them. They have not yet developed the ability to step back, reflect and consider their own actions as something which is object to them, as described by Kegan (1982). The current study therefore suggests a revisiting of Kegan's view, based on object relations theory, that development involves movement through a series of balanced stages of equilibrium, separated by transitions which are uneasy at best and may be marked by discord. These transitions mark a shift in the way in which individuals make meaning of the world and their experiences, noted also by Selman and Schultz (1990), who observed the movement in adolescence through friendship developmental stages to the achievement of a collaborative self-in-relationship. On reaching this stage, the self has the ability to integrate simultaneously its own personal needs with the needs of the other person and the relationship. The current study indicates that girls' bullying may reflect the discord apparent in the transition between stages.

Somewhere across the span of early adolescence, children become reflectively aware of the importance of meaning and recognise alternative interpretations of actions, their own and those of others. At this point, they begin to both negotiate meaning and alter previously internalized meaning-making systems, which may be ordered along developmental dimensions. (Selman & Schultz, 1990, p. 307)

Possibly in confirmation of this, the girls in the current study who acknowledged having bullied their friends tended to recognise their own behaviour as bullying only if it had happened in the historical, rather than the very recent past, suggesting that a shift of some type had taken place. While this tends to confirm Monks and Smith's (2006) finding that bullies are far less likely to view aggressive behaviour as bullying, another interpretation suggests that recognition of one's own act as bullying may depend on developmental factors, and on situational aspects. Snow, Duval, and Silvia (2004), in a study which explored the use of the Gestalt figure/ground effect on self-awareness in older adolescents, have drawn attention to the process, rather than the effects, of self-awareness, and concluded that the experience of difference from others increases self-awareness. According to this view, the girls' conflict with friends may therefore provide

an important element in the development of the self. The girls in the current study who recognised their bullying role in previous incidents experienced shame, but were also likely to acknowledge their earlier actions. They were able to look back on their earlier selves, and understand their motivation and rationalisation at the time of the bullying. This suggests that there may be development in regard to girls' ability to see themselves as object as well as subject, a crucial step in cognitive and moral development (Davis, 1994).

The current study, in finding that girls who remain in friendship bullying situations suffer intense distress, also suggests that this distress may be connected with the development of their sense of self. Failure to manage or resolve the situation, through avoidant-coping, means that girls continue in their fear of the loss of friends. Loss of friends is paralysing, shameful and devastating. This is set against the loss of oneself, through self-doubt and the loss of one's authentic voice, or loss of one's self-worth. This response by victims requires them to dissociate from their own emotions and voice, as found by Gilligan (1997) and to dissemble (Rogers, 1993), especially for those who are bullied regularly and often by their friends, so that victims may develop a concept of friendship as a relationship which is based on abuse, with themselves in the victim role. Victims struggle with subjection to the opinions of others, even if they sense that others' judgments are unjust.

In contrast, Year 10 girls who feel they have stopped the bullying successfully, or have resolved the issues it raises, develop increased self-confidence and self-awareness, and are better able to balance their own needs against the demands of the group. They have a stronger sense of who they are and what they want. Acceptance by peers is important for psychosocial development, but this study suggests that acceptance must not be purchased at any cost. The ability to prioritise one's own needs above those of others in close relationships requires both maturity and agency. Thus emergence from bullying situations leads to self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-management, suggesting that this process is girls' work, in a very real sense.

This study, while confirming many aspects of the complex phenomenon which is girls' friendship group bullying, has added significantly to knowledge about the nature and experience of such bullying, from girls' points of view, together with indications of what is helpful in reducing its negative effects. Most Year 10 girls have some experience of friendship group bullying, and yet it is not widely recognised or named. There are two

distinct types of such bullying, with different implications and with far-reaching effects. Perhaps most significantly, the bullying arises from the changes which girls observe, suggesting that its occurrence and resolutions may be linked with the many developmental changes and tasks which girls experience in middle adolescence. The implications of these findings are discussed in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS

### Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

In consideration of the significance of this study, a number of strengths and limitations are noted. Its first strength is its unique place in the context of New Zealand research into this area. While other research has focused on such aspects as adolescent friendships or status, adolescent development, young people's well-being, bullying, or relational aggression amongst younger girls, this study breaks new ground in its endeavour to bring together crucial aspects of middle adolescent girls' bullying by their friends, at a time when girls are also experiencing rapid and complex development.

Secondly, its strength lies in the mixed method design used, innovative in this area of research, which enabled this complex phenomenon to be presented in depth as well as in breadth. This was achieved through the combination of a broad map of the problem, endorsed and enhanced by the rich multilayered tapestry of detailed personal description provided by personal stories. The careful, detailed, yet comprehensive picture thus created has thus made available a fresh insight into the intense experience of mid-adolescent girls.

A third strength of the current study is its emphasis on gaining girls' views of the phenomenon under examination, so that girls' lived experience has been portrayed through their own voices and in their own words. This has provided an integrity which is congruent with the counselling perspective which originally gave rise to the study. Counselling is founded in respect for and validation of the client's voice and the client's own point of view.

In considering the limitations of the study, its very complexity has also necessarily placed restrictions on its scope. It explored the nature and experiences of friendship group bullying at a comparatively small number of schools, which, although carefully chosen, did not provide a large enough basis for more conclusions to be drawn regarding different types of school or decile level. The study is also limited in that the wealth of detail and the need to select from girls' stories has meant that some aspects, such as the implications for the worst-affected victims, remain referred to in passing, rather than explored in depth. Such exploration must wait for other researchers and projects with a more specific focus.



A further limitation in the study is the varying numbers of participants who answered the questions in the survey questionnaire. Possible explanations for this include the design of the questionnaire, or its length, or the linguistic ability it required from participants. It is probable that, while provision was made for extra help for those for whom English was their second language, some students might have experienced difficulty in understanding the questions. An additional concern, related to the role of the interviewer, was the hierarchical setting within secondary schools. There was a risk that it might lead to biased responses from girls or to a sense of reserve when girls responded to questions, if they perceived the interviewer as a teacher.

Furthermore, the scope of the study did not extend to a consideration of the possible influences exerted on friendship group bullying by culture, gender, or sexuality, because, while the study reflected girls' voices, the questions refrained from probing into sensitive, personal areas, unless girls themselves volunteered information. In regard to culture, for instance, the interview participants offered tempting opportunities to speculate on the cultural understandings of friendship for girls of this age. Issues of gender were also outside the scope of the study, unless girls themselves had raised such issues. For example, although the interviewer might speculate inwardly about why a girl had decided to join a diversity group which offered support to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender young people, the interviewer did not probe or ask questions about the participant's own sexuality. Such an approach would have been unsafe and intrusive, in the context of this study.

### Recommendations

In considering the results of this study, a number of recommendations are suggested, for school counsellors and those who responsible for their training, school managers and personnel, ministerial authorities whose business it is to form and direct policy which affects the education of girls, families, and finally, for girls themselves. As this study grew out of a school counselling practice, so its findings resonate most with the work of school counsellors, giving rise to a number of recommendations for them.

### *School Counsellors*

School counsellors are encouraged to consider the findings of the study to inform their practice, by enhancing their existing awareness of Year 10 girls' bullying. The study's findings make it important for school counsellors to acknowledge the significant contribution of counselling in preventing and reducing the harmful impact of girls' bullying, and to continue to work through the establishment and maintenance of a safe place in the secondary school. The counsellor's office is a refuge, offered not as a permanent solution but as a place which affords welcome and respite for victims to recharge, gather strength, and find the assistance and resources to help them to manage the situation, and the confidence to change it for themselves. The interactions found in the study among girls in bullying situations are likely to resonate for school counsellors and to support the work they do by contributing new perspectives about this phenomenon. In particular, the responses and experiences of the observers, the two types of bullying, and the loss and grief of victims are noteworthy for counsellors. Counsellors may also use the findings of the current study in contributing input to programmes designed to help girls to manage their anger in relation to this type of bullying.

The current study raises questions about how we handle difference and conflict in our school communities. Counsellors are well-placed to contribute to school-wide and early intervention programmes which focus on conflict resolution and the restoring of relationships.

For those tertiary institutes who are responsible for the training of school counsellors, a consideration must be the incorporation in such programmes of an understanding of this type of bullying, particularly when it is presented as a friendship problem. Programme content regarding adolescent development should also include those aspects of development which are concerned with the interplay of personality and relationship.

### *School Managers*

This study's findings support Underwood's (2003) proposal, that programmes which aim to raise awareness about this type of bullying in the school community should follow Olweus's (1993) suggestions for a whole-school approach for combating other

types of bullying. This approach is a practical, effective, and cost-efficient first step in managing it. The implementation of programmes which inform and empower girls is important, as is the provision of activities which encourage girls to express themselves. School-based educational programmes should endeavour to give victims, and others in the school community, information by which to recognise relational bullying. A caution is suggested in regard to peer mediation programmes, which this study found to be somewhat problematic in the case of friendship group bullying. Great care should therefore be taken to ensure the safety of all the students concerned in such programmes.

School authorities have a responsibility to provide professional development for teachers in regard to this type of bullying among their students. Interventions need to take into account the nature of friendship group bullying. Helpful actions may be unobtrusive, and might even appear accidental or unrelated. Teachers can assist students by helping to access appropriate support and by respectful attentive listening, on a one-to-one basis. They can also learn to support victims unobtrusively in classroom situations. While teachers need to be extremely sensitive and discreet when intervening, they need to be aware of girls' beliefs that teachers do not see bullying, and do not help the victim. Teachers therefore need to consider carefully the ways in which they can, in fact, work to change this perception.

There is a need for schools to examine the roles of victim, bully, and observer more closely in the context of girls' bullying within friendship groups, which have been shown to be more fluid and more interchangeable than in other types of bullying. Programmes which develop the role of the observer as helper are recommended. Schools may also wish to consider their responses in regard to the attendance of girls of this age, particularly the ways in which they respond to girls who skip classes, or withdraw from school entirely. The possibility that such patterns may reflect relationship bullying difficulties needs to be considered.

It is imperative that both school culture and espoused school philosophy support restorative practices, negotiation, and conflict resolution, and that school adults also model relationships based on respect and mutuality. It is incumbent on the school managers to examine the sources of power and the misuse of power in schools and classrooms. If the culture of an institution normalises relational bullying behaviour, the intention to hurt may be ignored, hidden, or minimised.

Finally, multiple strategies are likely to be required if the occurrence of this type of bullying is to be reduced. If the roots of bullying lie in relationships, schools need to attend to all relationships throughout the school community, to ensure a school culture of acceptance, respect, and trust. To achieve this, attitudinal change may be needed, in order to change the culture of a school and adopt a multi-layered relational approach in addressing the problem.

There are implications for school managers in the finding that school type is a factor in girls' recognition of bullying. It cannot be assumed that girls recognise bullying, or, if they do recognise it, that they know where and how to access support. Managers of schools may wish to investigate whether girls at their schools have sufficient understanding of different types of bullying to support their safety.

Finally, questions which schools may find useful to address include concerns about the approach of boys as well as girls to such interpersonal conflicts. Schools may therefore also consider whether, depending on their type and decile level, their students recognise bullying of different types.

#### *National Education Authorities*

Given the implications of this study, it is suggested that those at a national level whose business is writing and directing policy affecting the education of young people should consider these recommendations in the light of the safety needs of all students, and in the light of the recent changes in the New Zealand Curriculum. Firstly, the widespread occurrence of relational bullying among Year 10 girls and their friends has serious implications for girls' emotional well-being, and for their learning. Secondly, the study's findings should be considered with reference to the New Zealand Curriculum, with recommendations for schools and how they embrace and utilise conflict, dissonance, and difference. Specific education is needed: in schools, as in other communities, in regard to the handling of conflict in close relationships, in the understanding that it is normal to experience conflict with those we are close to, that it is a positive development, that power must be managed according to the needs of the relationship, and that managing both power and conflict are learned skills. Such skills will be needed by all students, as they learn to manage themselves, relate to others, and become valued members of their communities, according to the New Zealand Curriculum. It is suggested that it is

important to educate girls and boys on a national scale, through the health curriculum, about relational aggression, to ensure that students know that bullying can be emotional, and help them to recognise the forms that it can take. While schools are required to have steps in place to prevent bullying and ensure safety, it is important that programmes aimed at preventing this type of bullying are incorporated in school anti-bullying programmes. Pilot programmes, trialled at a national level, would aim to train girls as support people or coaches rather than mediators, based on what the current study found to be helpful.

### *Families and Girls*

Families have a vital role to play in supporting their daughters through this period of transition, and can be confident in their ability to help if daughters are bullied. Families, especially mothers, can be affirmed in the ways in which they support their daughters, and encouraged to create and maintain good communication with them. Girls who have experienced friendship bullying may need support from families to take part in activities which are both creative and expressive, and help girls to recover from bullying. Schools are well-placed to take a lead in supporting families in their helpful responses, by engaging in conversations with them about relational bullying concerns.

### Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that future directions for research include further investigation into girls' friendship dynamics, including the ways in which role-taking and subject/object relations influence girls' development, since this study suggested that there may be more flexibility in the roles which girls adopt, with more girls taking part in bullying than they perceive at the time. A further area concerns the differences in recognition of bullying among schools of different types and decile levels. Research is also encouraged to design, trial, and evaluate the success or otherwise of programmes which aim to help reduce this type of bullying, particularly those which use girls' undoubted strengths in the areas of communication and conflict management. The situation regarding friendship bullying among boys may also be a fruitful area for investigation.

An important area for future research is the experience of those girls who are the victims, especially those who are most deeply affected. For instance, the relationship between being bullied and difference, and its place in girls' friendship bullying, may be

fruitful for researchers. Certain characteristics or attributes, including emerging sexuality or disability or other kinds of difference, may make girls more vulnerable to bullying, as it occurs in a friendship group context, and research may suggest new directions for the prevention of victimisation. Similar directions may emerge through a closer examination of the experiences of the worst-affected victims of friendship bullying, who suffer significant shame, loss, and grief.

Finally, it is urged that those with an interest in research to inform the practice of counsellors consider investigating how best to help girls of this age in managing and emerging from bullying.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of the current study lies in the landscape it affords us of this vital period of girls' development, showing us, through their own eyes, something of girls' lived experience of challenge and growth during Year 10. As they endeavour to understand and manage a new and different type of friendship, girls tend to encounter conflict in their friendship groups, and this often develops into bullying.

In drawing attention to the part played by the bullying in Year 10 girls' friendship groups in the development of a sense of themselves as individuals, with needs, wishes, and relationships which deserve respect, the current study has allowed the extraordinary complexity which underlies the presenting "friendship problems" to appear. It has revealed girls' struggles for power and control through bullying. It has identified the two types of bullying, which can be understood in different ways. Moreover, the study has endorsed the valuable dual contributions of friends and family in supporting girls' emergence from bullying.

Most of all, the current study has highlighted how development is influenced by bullying as girls respond to this conflict. Their emergence from it is accompanied by their developing compassion, their striving for integrity and honesty, and their search for both intimacy and autonomy, as their friendships change to accommodate both similarity and difference, in preparation for adulthood.

Conflict may be considered a sign that something is in question which is precious and concerns our most deeply-held values, so that we are prepared to defend it and

ourselves. The dilemma for everyone in the school and counselling communities, as it is for Year 10 girls, remains how we may retain what is precious to individuals, while also respecting what is precious for others, and sustaining both connection and autonomy. How we support girls to encounter, embrace, resolve and yet hold this dilemma, reflects the measure of ourselves as a society and, ultimately, the future of our global community.

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## Appendix A: Questioning guide (focus groups)

Friendship groups in Year 10:

Could you tell me about how girls' friendship groups work?

Friendship in Year 10:

Could you tell me about girls' friendships?

Some people think girls are catty. Could you tell me what you think about this?

What happens if there is any bullying?

What happens if bullying stops?

What might be the disadvantages of or negative aspects of friendships?

Conflict or bullying with friends in Year 10:

How does this affect girls?

What is the effect of these kinds of friendships on girls and the way that girls feel about themselves?

What would be safe ways for individual girls to talk about this kind of bullying, or to tell about it?

## Appendix B: Participant information sheet for principals and boards of trustees



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Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**Research Project:** Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

**Researcher:** Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange and I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying within girls' friendship groups. In particular, I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it. To do this I would like to conduct a three-part study.

I would like to invite students at your school to participate in the first stage of my research, and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. The study I would like to conduct at your school is a focus group study. I would like your help in informing parents by notifying them of the research study in the school newsletter and in sending to parents a Participant Information Sheet. They will be invited to contact the researcher, the supervisors, or Head of School if they have any questions. In addition, I would like your assurance that participation or non-participation will not affect any student adversely.

I would like to ask the school Guidance Counsellor to help in the recruiting of participants, who would be girls from Year 10. The teachers of the girls will be fully informed about the project. The Guidance Counsellor will invite up to six girls, from different friendship groups, who feel comfortable and confident talking about the topic to participate in the focus group. Girls will be given written information and will have an opportunity to ask questions of the Guidance Counsellor, before deciding whether they wish to take part. Their teachers will be informed that the girls are taking part in the group. You will have the right to withdraw your permission for the researcher to access students until 1 June 2005. Girls will be asked to give written consent for themselves.

I would like to conduct the focus group discussion in a quiet interview room in the school, such as in the Guidance Centre, at a time which suits the school and the participants. The focus group discussion will take up to an hour and a half. The discussion will be about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it affects girls, how it happens within their friendship groups, and what they think can reduce its impact or stop the behaviour.

Because the discussion is about difficult issues, girls may experience some emotional distress. The researcher is a trained counsellor who is experienced in ensuring students' safety in individual and group situations. At the conclusion of the focus group, girls will be offered support.

Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' experiences, having their opinions heard and valued, and contributing to helping in reducing or

stopping invisible bullying. At the conclusion of the focus group, girls will be offered a movie pass in recognition of the time given to the project.

Taking part will be completely voluntary. The focus group discussion will be audiotaped, and consent will be sought for this. The tape will be transcribed by the researcher and the tape will then be erased. The transcript will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and will be destroyed after six years. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group. No individual school or student will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I have already conducted similar discussions with student groups, and girls have found taking part to be both enjoyable and useful for them.

The findings from the study will be made available to the school.

Thank you for your time and help in considering this request. I would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns with you, or you may wish to contact one of the people whose names are at the bottom of this letter. If you agree to your school being part of the study, please let me know by signing and returning the accompanying Consent Form and sending it to me or by phoning me at the number given below.

Ro Lange,  
Counsellor  
Lynfield College.

**Researcher:**

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

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The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on...../...../...../ for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....  
Reference...../.....

## Appendix C: Participant information sheet for teachers for focus groups



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
Te Kura Akeoranga o Tamaki Makaurau  
INCORPORATING THE AUCKLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
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The University of Auckland  
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Auckland, New Zealand

**Research Project:** Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

**Researcher:** Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange and I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying within girls' same-sex friendship groups. In particular, I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it.

I would like to invite students at your school to participate in my research, and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. The information from the study, a focus group discussion, will be used to develop questions and procedures for the next part of the project. The Principal and the Board of Trustees have given their permission for me to conduct this study.

I will ask the School Counsellor to invite up to six Year 10 girls to participate in the focus group. They will be girls who feel comfortable and confident talking in a group about the topic. Girls will be given written information and will have an opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether they wish to take part. Parents/guardians will be sent a Participant Information Sheet, and will be invited to contact the researcher, the supervisors, or Head of School if they have any questions. You may withdraw your permission for the researcher to access students until 1 June 2005. Girls will be asked to give written consent for themselves.

I would like to conduct the focus group discussion in a quiet interview room in the school, such as in the Guidance Centre, at a time which suits the school and the participants. You will be informed about which girls participate in the group. The focus group discussion will take up to one and a half hours. The discussion will be about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it affects girls, how it happens within their friendship groups, and what they think can reduce its impact or stop the behaviour.

Because the discussion is about difficult issues, girls may experience some emotional distress. The researcher is a trained counsellor who is experienced in ensuring students' safety in individual and group situations. At the conclusion of the focus group, girls will be offered support.

Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' experiences, having their opinions heard and valued, and contributing to helping to reducing or stopping invisible bullying. At the conclusion of the focus group, girls will be given a movie pass in recognition of the time given to the project.

Taking part will be completely voluntary. While the focus group discussion will be audiotaped, consent will be sought for this. The tape will be transcribed by the researcher and the tape will then be erased. The transcript will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and it

will be destroyed after six years. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group. No individual school or student will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I have already conducted similar discussions with student groups, and girls have found taking part to be both enjoyable and useful for them.

The findings from the study will be made available to the school.

Thank you for your time and help in considering this request. I would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns with you, or you may wish to contact one of the people whose names are at the bottom of this letter. If you would like the school to take part in the study, please let me know by signing and returning the accompanying Consent Form and sending it to me or by phoning me at the number given below.

Ro Lange,  
Counsellor  
Lynfield College.

**Researcher:**

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For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on .....for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....  
Reference...../.....

## Appendix D: Participant information sheet for parents/guardians of students under sixteen for focus group



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Bullying is a problem for all schools in New Zealand, and it is an issue which ..... College takes very seriously. As part of our support for anti-bullying, the school has decided to take part in a study about girls' bullying of other girls.

The research project is entitled "Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying."

The researcher is Ro Lange, a counsellor at another Auckland secondary school who is studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. She is interested in the invisible bullying within girls' friendship groups, particularly in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls themselves have found helpful in reducing or stopping it.

One of the ways in which she would like to gain information is by conducting a focus group discussion with six girls in Year 10 together. Girls will be invited to take part by the Guidance Counsellor. Girls will need to be able to understand the questions, which are in English, but can be from any culture. Students will need to be from different friendship groups, and to be comfortable and confident talking about the topic of girls' bullying. Girls will be asked for their written consent. The discussion will be about girls' bullying of other girls in friendship groups. Examples of discussion themes are:

- The kinds of bullying girls do
- Girls' cattiness with friends.
- When bullying has been going on and then stops.
- The effects of bullying on girls.
- Safe conditions for a girl to talk about her own experience of bullying.

She would like to conduct the focus group discussion in a quiet interview room in the school. The discussion may be completed in school hours, at a time that suits the school schedule, or outside school hours, and each discussion will take up to an hour and a half. Teachers will know that the girls are taking part in the group. Because the discussion is about personal issues and girls may experience some emotional distress, students will be asked if there is anything else to do with the discussion that they would like to discuss, and will be given information about additional support.

Taking part is completely voluntary. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the discussion of the focus group. No individual student or school will be identifiable in the final report of the study. The focus group discussion will be taped. The tape will be transcribed by the researcher and the tape will then be erased. The transcript will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and it will be destroyed after six years.



Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' experiences, having their opinions heard and valued, and contributing to helping to reducing or stopping invisible bullying. At the conclusion of the focus group, girls will be offered a movie pass in recognition of the time given to the project.

Ro Lange has already conducted similar discussions with student groups, and girls have found taking part to be both enjoyable and useful for them.

The results of the large study will be of value to counsellors, social workers, families, teachers, and others who work in secondary schools, and will benefit the teenagers who use their services. The findings from the study will be made available to ..... College.

The Principal and the Board of Trustees have given their permission for Ro Lange to conduct this study, and would like to assure you that neither participation nor non-participation will affect your daughter's relationship with the school.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this information. Please contact Ro Lange or one of the following people if you have any questions or concerns, or would like to know more.

.....Principal

.....College

**Researcher:**

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
College  
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Mt Roskill  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 6270600, ext. 827  
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For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee  
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Tel: 09 373 7999 Ext. 87830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on...../...../...../ for a period of.....years,  
from...../...../.....Reference...../.....

## Appendix E: Participant information sheet for students under sixteen for focus groups



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
Te Kura Akeoranga o Tamaki Makaurau  
INCORPORATING THE AUCKLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Epsom Campus

74 Epsom Avenue  
Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**Research Project:** Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

**Researcher:** Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange, and I am a counsellor. I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying in girls' friendships with other girls. I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it. One of the ways in which I would like to find this out is by conducting research with schools. I would like to invite you to take part in this research and I would appreciate any help that you can give me.

I am inviting you to take part in a focus group discussion. The group will consist of six girls. The discussion will take up to an hour and a half, at a time that suits you and your school. Your teacher will be aware that you are taking part in the group. The discussion will be about girls' bullying of other girls in friendship groups. I will use the information from the discussion to help with other parts of the research. Examples of issues in the discussion include:

- The kind of bullying girls do
- How girls know when something a girl does is bullying
- Girls' cattiness with their friends.
- When bullying has been going on and then stops.
- The effects of bullying on girls.
- Safe conditions for a girl to talk about her own experience of bullying.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group discussions but the information given will be reported in a way that will not identify you as its source. No individual student or school will be identifiable in the final report of the study. I would like to audiotape the discussion, and I would like your consent to this. I will transcribe the tape, and it will then be erased. The transcript of the tape will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland and will be destroyed after six years.

Because the discussion is personal, you may experience emotional discomfort, and so at the end of the group discussion you will be given the opportunity to discuss anything else privately, and you will be given information about additional support for yourself.

I have conducted focus group discussions very similar to this, with other teenagers who found the experience both enjoyable and useful. The study is also likely to help counsellors and other people in schools to support teenagers better. The findings of the study will be made available to the schools that take part, but no individuals will be identifiable. At the end of the focus group discussion, you will be given a movie pass in recognition of the time you have given to the project.

The Principal and the Board of Trustees have given their permission for me to conduct this study. However should you decide not to take part in the research, this will not affect your relationship with the school.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this invitation. Please ask any questions you like about the study, from me or any of the other people whose names follow. If you would like to take part in the study, please sign and return the Consent Form, or contact me by phone.

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
Lynfield College

**Researcher:**

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
College  
White Swan Rd  
Mt Roskill  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 6270600, ext. 827  
(09) 6306942  
Email:rlange@lynfield.school.nz

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School of Education  
University of Auckland  
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Auckland  
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**Head of School:**

Professor Viviane Robinson  
Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
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For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee  
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Tel: 09 373 7999 Ext. 87830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on...../...../...../ for a period of.....years,  
from...../...../.....Reference...../.....

Appendix F: Consent form for principal and board of trustees for focus groups



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
Te Kura Akoanga o Tamaki Makaurau  
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Epsom Campus

74 Epsom Avenue  
Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS.**

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that the study includes a focus group discussion.

I understand that I may withdraw my permission to access the students at any time until 1 June 2005.

I understand that data will be held for six years.

I understand that the findings from the study will be made available to the school.

I understand that the discussion will be audiotaped.

I agree that an appropriate notice may be placed in the school newsletter.

I agree that neither participation nor non-participation will affect any student's relation to the school.

I agree to this study being conducted at my school.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on...13/4/05...for a period of...3....years from...13.../...4.../...05...Reference...2005.../...86

Appendix G: Consent form for teachers for focus groups



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
Te Kura Akoaranga o Tamaki Makaurau  
INCORPORATING THE AUCKLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Epsom Campus

74 Epsom Avenue  
Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS.**

Research Project: The influence of the same-sex friendship group on the identity development of girls in mid-adolescence

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that the study includes a group interview and that students may also choose to be selected to take part in an individual interview.

I understand that participation in the project will not affect any student's relation to the school in any way.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or be identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that parents may withdraw their daughters or any information traceable to their daughters at any time up to the end of 2004, without giving any reason.

I agree to.....to take part in this research.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

on...13/4/05...for a period of...3....years from...13.../...4.../...05...Reference...2005.../...86

## Appendix H: Assent form for participants for focus group



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
Te Kura Akoanga o Tamaki Makaurau  
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74 Epsom Avenue  
Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **THIS ASSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS**

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that participation in the project will not affect my relation to the school in any way.

I understand that my teacher will know that I am taking part in the group discussion.

I understand that the discussion will take place in a focus group setting.

I understand that data will be held for six years.

I understand that the findings from the study will be made available to the school.

I understand that I will be audiotaped.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

on .....for a period of.....years, from...../...../.....  
Reference...../.....

## Appendix I: Focus group and interview support

Thank you very much for your help with this study.

Sometimes, talking about personal things can be difficult.

If you would like to discuss anything else, particularly if you would like help with anything that came up during the discussion group/interview, there is help and support available for you.

You can get more support by doing one of these things:

- Write your name on this and give it to Ro Lange or give it to Reception at Student Services.
- Tell Ro Lange.
- Contact the Guidance Counsellor Mrs L... (You can write your name on this and put it under her door)
- Tell another adult you trust, e.g. teacher, parent, sister, Dean,
- Talk to a friend

Your taking part was really appreciated.

## Appendix J: Anonymous questionnaire

### ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE ON GIRLS' BULLYING

To be completed by Year 10 (Form 4) girls.

University of Auckland

2005





## ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE

To the girls answering this:

This Questionnaire is anonymous. Do **not** write your name on it.

- The questions are only about girls, who are friends, in Year 10 (Form 4).
- Girls work hard at their friendships. Friendship is very important to them.
- Teasing is fun when everyone enjoys it but sometimes girls can be mean to their friends. Girls sometimes even bully their friends.
- This Questionnaire aims to find out more about this kind of bullying among friends.
- Your answers will be useful in helping girls to understand their friendships better, and in solving problems between friends.
- Friendship groups can be very big or very small. A friendship group may be quite big, about ten or twelve girls, or most of the girls in one class, or just two or three girls.
- When you are asked about things that have happened this year, "this year" means since the beginning of Term One this year.
- Inside the Questionnaire on a separate page is an invitation to take part in one-to-one interviews.

Answer most of the questions by ticking the box beside the answer which best fits what you think. Some questions need more than one tick.

Example:-

Are you:

- A girl  
 A boy

A few questions ask you to write down your answers.

Do not spend a long time on any one answer, but work steadily through the questionnaire.

Thank you for taking part.

Please answer by placing a tick next to the answers you decide are best.  
You may need to tick more than one

What is your age?

- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16 or older

What is your ethnic group? (You may choose more than one)

- Maori
- European
- NZ European
- Indian
- Pasifika
- African
- Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Other Ethnicities



**SECTION ONE**

1. Which of these is most important to you in your friendships with other girls?

- Help, e.g. when I want to find out how to do some homework
- Support, e.g. when I'm feeling sad
- Knowing I've got a friend
- Having fun
- Sharing private thoughts and information
- Doing things together, eg sports, going out
- Other.....(please write)

2. How many friends who are girls do you have in your class?

- None
- One
- About two or three
- More than four

3. How many girls are there in the group of friends that you spend most time with?

- I don't have a group
- 2
- 3 or 4
- More than 4

4. Do the other girls in your class like you?

- Not at all
- Hardly ever
- Some of the time
- Most of the time
- All the time

5. How often in the last week have other girls wanted to spend interval or lunchtime with you?

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Most days
- Every day

**II SECTION TWO**

6. How often have you been bullied this year by girls who are friends?

- Not at all
- Once or twice
- Two or three times a month
- About once a week
- Several times a week

7. Have you been bullied this year by girls in your class?

- Once or twice
- Two or three times a month
- About once a week
- Several times a week

8. If you were bullied by someone in your friendship group this year, was it:

- A girl in the group who had never been your friend
- A girl in the group who used to be your friend before this year
- Just a friend
- A close friend

9. If you have been bullied by a close friend this year, what did they do?  
(Tick as many as you need)

- Ignored me
- Were over-nice to a girl, in a fake way
- Froze me out of a group of friends
- Pointed or looked at me and whispered or laughed with someone else
- Left me out on purpose from an event with friends, eg a party
- Teased me in a mean way
- Spread unpleasant rumours about me
- Told my confidential personal secret to another girl.
- Left me alone on purpose
- Left me out of group classwork on purpose
- Left me to sit alone in class on purpose
- Texted mean things to me or about me
- Set me up, with another girl secretly listening on the phone
- Emailed or said mean things to me or about me on chatrooms
- Did something else mean (please explain).....



10. What happened to the friendship group because of the bullying?

- nothing
- lost my friends
- the group broke up
- something else ( please explain ).....

11. Have you stayed away from school this year because of this kind of behaviour from friends?

- Never stayed away
- Once or twice
- Once a week or more

12. If you were bullied by someone in your friendship group this year, how did you feel about it?
- I wasn't bullied
  - I felt nothing
  - I felt a little bit unhappy
  - I felt moderately unhappy
  - I felt terrible

**III SECTION THREE**

13. Please use ticks to show whether you think each of these is bullying or is not bullying.

- |   | is Bullying              | is not<br>bullying       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Ignoring a friend   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hitting or pushing someone  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being over-nice to a girl, in a fake way                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Freezing a girl out of a group of friends                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leaving a girl out on purpose from an event with friends, eg a party          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teasing a girl who is a friend so that she feels bad, upset, or uncomfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spreading unpleasant rumours about a girl                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telling a girl's confidential personal secret to another girl.                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leaving someone alone on purpose  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leaving a girl out of group classwork on purpose                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leaving a girl to sit alone in class on purpose                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Texting mean things to a girl or about her                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Setting a girl up, with another girl listening on the phone                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Emailing or saying mean things to a girl or about her on chatrooms            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other behaviour or action.....  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. What do you think causes this type of bullying from a girl towards her friend? (You may tick more than one).

- She is just feeling angry.
- She is angry because of something the friend has done.
- There is a problem between them because of other friends
- There is a problem between them because of a boy
- The girl who is bullying doesn't like the other girl any more
- Other (please write).....

**Section IV**

15. How often have girls in your friendship group put you down? (please tick one)

- Not put down at all.
- Once or twice
- Two or three times a month
- About once a week
- Several times a week

16. What were the put-downs about ? (You may tick more than one)

- My appearance
- My sexuality ( eg slut, lesbian etc)
- My race or culture
- My beliefs
- My abilities, eg called me stupid, thick, dumb
- Other.....(please write)



17. This year (since the beginning of Term One), please show whether any of these things were done to you by other girls who are your friends. Please show how often they happened, and how you felt about it, by ticking the correct box or boxes.

How Often has it Happened ?

	Didn't Happen	Happened once or twice	Happened about once a week	Twice a week or more
I was ignored by a friend without any explanation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend was over-nice, in a fake way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was frozen out of a group of friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was left out on purpose from something with a friend, eg a party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was teased by a friend in a mean way, so that I felt bad, upset, or uncomfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend called me unpleasant names	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had put-downs from my friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend spread rumours about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend told my confidential personal secret to another person.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend went off another girl and left me alone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend sat with someone else so that I had to sit and work by myself in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend threatened not to be friends any more unless I did what she wanted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was left alone by friends at interval or lunchtime.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend texted mean things to me or about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend set me up, with another girl listening-in on the phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend emailed or said mean things to me or about me on chatrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How you felt about it.

	I felt nothing	I felt a little bit unhappy	I felt moderately unhappy.	I felt terrible
I was ignored by a friend without any explanation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend was over-nice, in a fake way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was frozen out of a group of friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was left out on purpose from something with a friend, eg a party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was teased by a friend in a mean way, so that I felt bad, upset, or uncomfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend called me unpleasant names	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had put-downs from my friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend spread rumours about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend told my confidential personal secret to another person.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend went off another girl and left me alone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend sat with someone else so that I had to sit and work by myself in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend threatened not to be friends any more unless I did what she wanted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was left alone by friends at interval or lunchtime.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend texted mean things to me or about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend set me up, with another girl listening-in on the phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friend emailed or said mean things to me or about me on chatrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18 Have you behaved in any of these ways towards other girls who are your friends this year?

(Please tick as many as you need to)

- I ignored my friend, without any explanation
- I was over-nice to my friend, in a fake kind of way
- I "froze out" or helped to "freeze out" a friend in our group of friends
- I left a friend out on purpose from an event, eg a party
- I teased a friend in a mean way
- I called a friend unpleasant names
- I used put-downs towards my friend
- I spread rumours about my friend.
- I told a friend's confidential personal secret to another person.
- I went off with another girl and left my friend alone.
- I went and sat with another girl so that my friend had to sit and work by herself in class
- My friend threatened not to be friends any more unless I did what she wanted
- I left my friend alone at interval or lunchtime, on purpose.
- I texted mean things to my friend or about her
- I set my friend up, with another girl listening-in to her on the phone
- I emailed or said mean things to my friend or about her on chatrooms



19 If you did any of the things listed in question 18 how did you feel ?

- I didn't do any of this
- It was a good feeling
- I felt angry
- I felt powerful
- I felt nothing
- I felt a bit uncomfortable.
- Another feeling (Please write).....



20. If you have been mean to someone in your friendship group this year, was it ( you may tick more than one)

- a close friend
- just a friend
- a girl in the group who had never been your friend
- a girl in the group who used to be your friend before the beginning of the year

21 How often do you think girls join in this kind of behaviour towards other girls in the friendship group?

- I don't know
- Almost never
- Now and then
- Almost always

22. How do you feel when you see another girl in your friendship group being the target of this mean behaviour?

- It's never happened
- Nothing
- Glad it's not me being the target
- A bit uncomfortable
- I feel awful

23. What do you do if you see another girl in your friendship group being bullied?
- it's never happened
  - nothing, in case I get bullied too
  - nothing because she deserves it
  - nothing because I wouldn't be able to stop it
  - try to stop it

- 24 How often do the teachers notice when girls pick on other girls who are their friends?
- I don't know
  - Almost never
  - Now and then
  - Almost always

- 25 If teachers know about the behaviour, how often do they try to stop it?
- I don't know
  - Almost never
  - Now and then
  - Almost always

26. How often do other girls in your friendship group try to stop this kind of behaviour by other girls in the friendship group?
- I don't know
  - Almost never
  - Now and then
  - Always

27. If bullying takes place in your friendship group, which would best describe you?
- I usually start the bullying
  - I don't start the bullying but I usually join in.
  - I usually get bullied
  - I'm usually an onlooker, who sees the bullying but doesn't join in.
  - I usually try to stop the bullying
- Something else (Please write).....

**Section V**

28. If you have been bullied by other girls in your friendship group this year, did you talk to someone else about it?
- Yes
  - No

29. If you answered yes to question 28 , who did you tell?  
(Tick as many as you need).
- Another friend who is a girl
  - Boyfriend
  - Friend who is a boy
  - teacher
  - parent/caregiver
  - counsellor,
  - another family member, e.g. sister
  - someone else.....(please write)



1

30. If you have been bullied in this way by a girl in your friendship group, what helped you to get over it? (You may tick more than one item)

- telling a friend
- telling another girl who did something to stop it
- telling an adult who helped me do something to stop it
- Writing about it in my diary
- A teacher helped
- A counsellor helped
- A senior teacher helped
- Prayer and spiritual faith
- I haven't got over it
- Telling someone in the family
- Being with some other friends
- Something else eg Sport, music (please write).....

31. What do you think helps stop this kind of behaviour among girls' friendship groups?

- You can't stop it
- More people to talk to such as counsellors,
- More people to talk to such as peer mediators
- Encourage girls to sort out the problems by talking
- Something else, e.g. punishment (Please write).....

Is there anything else you would like to say about girls' bullying?

.....  
.....



These questions have been about personal issues.

If you would like support for any issues raised by the questionnaire, please contact one of the following people, or another person who will give you help and support.

**An adult** you trust at school.

**A parent**, or other **family member** Your **school counsellor** or a **friend**



## Appendix K: Form to volunteer for interviews

### Form to Volunteer for Individual Interviews

**Fill in this form if you would like to volunteer to be interviewed by yourself about girls' bullying. Hand the form in.**

**If you don't want to volunteer, hand the form back but don't fill it in.**

If you have been bullied by friends you are invited to volunteer to be interviewed by filling in this form.

You might have been a target of bullying. You might have done some bullying yourself, or you might have seen someone being bullied.

All girls who volunteer will be contacted by the researcher, but not all who volunteer will be invited to be interviewed.

If you would like to volunteer to be interviewed, please write down your name and contact details for the researcher.

First Name.....Family name.....

I would like the researcher to contact me by (please circle one, and give the number or address)

- a. calling my mobile number.....
- b. phoning me at home.....
- c. texting me on.....
- d. emailing me at.....
- e. writing to me ..... (please give address)

I would like to volunteer to be interviewed about my experience of bullying as:

- a. Target
  - b. Bully
  - c. Onlooker
- (You may tick more than one)

Appendix L: Participant information sheet for principals and boards of trustees:  
anonymous questionnaire and individual interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
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INCORPORATING THE AUCKLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
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74 Epsom Avenue  
Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand  
Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

Researcher Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange and I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying within girls' friendship groups. In particular, I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it. To do this I am undertaking research in schools.

I would like to invite students at your school to participate in my research, and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. The study I would like to conduct at your school is an anonymous questionnaire for Year 10 girls, followed by individual interviews with up to three girls. I would like your assurance that neither participation nor non-participation will affect the students' relation to the school. You may withdraw your permission to access the students until 1 August 2005.

I would like your help in informing parents by notifying them of the research study in the school newsletter. Parents/guardians will be given a Participant Information Sheet, and will be invited to contact the researcher, the supervisors, or Head of School if they have any questions. Form teacher and subject teachers will be fully informed about the project.

The anonymous questionnaire will be administered by the researcher to all Year 10 girls whose command of English is sufficient for them to understand the questions and who wish to take part, at a time and place which suit the school. The setting will allow for confidential completion of the questionnaire. The questions are about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it happens within their friendship groups, and what they think can reduce its impact or stop the behaviour. Completion of the questionnaire will take up to twenty minutes, and it will be administered by the researcher. Girls will be given names of support people to contact in case of distress. Girls will also have a confidential opportunity during the questionnaire to volunteer to be interviewed individually about their experience of bullying, and to indicate how they wish to be contacted, by letter, phone, or email. They will be informed that it is possible that not all those who volunteer will be interviewed, but the researcher will contact each girl who volunteers to be interviewed.

The interviews will take place in a quiet interview room in a place acceptable to the participants. For most girls, a room in the school's Guidance Centre will be suitable, provided the school is happy with this. Girls will be asked to give written consent. Interviews will take up to an hour and a half, at a time which suits the school and the participants. There will be a follow-up meeting of up to twenty minutes. The interviews may take place in school time or outside school hours. The researcher will conduct the interviews.

The questions are about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it has affected them, how it has happened within their friendship group, and what they think may have reduced its impact or stopped the behaviour.

The interviews are confidential except that the information girls provide will be shared as part of the results of the study, but no individual girl will be identifiable. While I would like to audiotape the interviews, girls will be asked for written permission to do this, and can have the tape turned off at any time during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, I will transcribe the tapes, and will check the information with each girl in a followup interview of up to thirty minutes. Girls may have their own interview tapes if they have indicated they wish this. The tapes will otherwise have their contents deleted.

The transcripts will not contain any identifiable material, and will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland for six years, when they will be destroyed. Girls may withdraw themselves or any information identifiable to them until the end of 2005. At the conclusion of the interviews, the girls will be given a CD/book voucher, in recognition of the time given to the project.

Because the questions are about difficult issues, girls may experience some emotional distress. The researcher is a trained counsellor who is experienced in ensuring students' safety in individual and group situations. At the conclusion of both the questionnaire, and the interviews, girls will be given the opportunity to access further appropriate support, such as referral to the school counsellor or an outside agency, help in addressing a bullying situation through the school management team, or other appropriate referral.

Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' experiences of invisible bullying, having their experiences valued, and knowing they are contributing to helping reduce or stop bullying.

Taking part will be completely voluntary. Girls will not give their names unless they wish to be contacted, either to be interviewed or for support. No individual school or student will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

In similar studies, girls have found taking part to be both interesting and useful for them.

The results of the study will be of value to counsellors, social workers, families, teachers, and others who work in secondary schools, and will benefit the teenagers who use their services. The findings from the study will be made available to the school.

Thank you for your time and help in considering this request. I would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns with you, or you may wish to contact one of the people whose names are at the bottom of this letter. If you would like the school to take part in the study, please let me know by signing and returning the accompanying Consent Form.

Ro Lange  
Counsellor  
Lynfield College.

**Researcher:**

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
College  
White Swan Rd  
Mt Roskill  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 6270600, ext. 827  
(09) 6306942  
Email:rlange@lynfield.school.nz

**Supervisor:**

Dr Margaret Nelson Agee  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 3737599, ext. 87379  
Email: m.agee@auckland.ac.nz

**Supervisor:**

Associate Professor Robyn Dixon  
School of Nursing  
Director Centre for Child and Family Policy  
Research  
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Park Rd, Grafton, Auckland  
Phone (09) 3737599, ext. 87388  
Email: r.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

**Head of School:**

Professor Viviane Robinson  
Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 3737599, ext. 87379  
Email: vmj.robinson@auckland.ac.nz.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee  
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Tel: 09 373 7999 Ext. 87830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

On 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05, Reference 2005/86

## Appendix M: Participant information sheet for teachers: anonymous questionnaire and individual interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**Research Project:** The perceptions of Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

**Researcher:** Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange and I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying within girls' friendship groups. In particular, I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it. To do this I am undertaking research in schools.

I would like to invite students at your school to participate in my research, and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. The study I would like to conduct at your school is an anonymous questionnaire for Year 10 girls, followed by individual interviews with up to three girls. I would like your assurance that neither participation nor non-participation will affect the students' relation to the school.

Parents/guardians will be given a Participant Information Sheet, and will be invited to contact the researcher, the supervisors, or Head of School if they have any questions. You may withdraw your permission to access the students until 1 August 2005. While you will know which students have the opportunity to participate, you will not be informed which students choose to take part.

The anonymous questionnaire will be administered by the researcher to all Year 10 girls who wish to participate. The setting will allow for confidential completion of the questionnaire. The questions are about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it happens within their friendship groups, and what they think can reduce its impact or stop the behaviour. Completion of the questionnaire will take up to twenty minutes. Girls will be given names of support people to contact in case of distress. Girls will also have a confidential opportunity during the questionnaire to volunteer to be interviewed individually about their experience of bullying, and to indicate how they wish to be contacted, by letter, phone, or email. Girls will be asked to give written consent for themselves. They will be informed that it is possible that not all those who volunteer will be interviewed, but the researcher will contact each girl who volunteers to be interviewed.

The interviews will take place in a quiet interview room in a place acceptable to the participants. For most girls, a room in the school's Guidance Centre will be suitable, provided the school is happy with this. Interviews will take up to an hour and a half, at a time which suits the school and the participants. There will be a follow-up interview of up to twenty minutes. The interviews may take place in school time or outside school hours. The researcher will conduct the interviews.

The questions are about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it has affected them, how it has happened within their friendship group, and what they think may have reduced its impact or stopped the behaviour.

The interviews are confidential except that information girls provide will be shared as part of the results of the study, but no individual girl will be identifiable. While I would like to audiotape the interviews, girls will be asked for written permission to do this, and can have the tape turned off at any time during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, I will transcribe the tapes, and will check the information with each girl in a follow up meeting of up to thirty minutes. Girls may have their own interview tapes if they have indicated they wish this. The tapes will otherwise have their contents deleted. The transcripts will not contain any identifiable material, and will be stored in secure storage at the University of Auckland for six years, when they will be destroyed. Girls may withdraw themselves or any of their information until the end of 2005. At the end of the interviews, girls will be given a CD/book voucher, in recognition of the time given to the project.

Because the questions are about difficult issues, girls may experience some emotional distress. The researcher is a trained counsellor who is experienced in ensuring students' safety in individual and group situations. At the conclusion of the questionnaire, and of the interviews, girls will be given the chance to access further support, through counselling in or out of the school, help in addressing a bullying situation, or other appropriate referral.

Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' experiences of invisible bullying, having their experiences valued, and knowing they are contributing to helping reduce or stop bullying.

Taking part will be completely voluntary. Girls will not give their names unless they wish to be contacted, either to be interviewed or for support. No individual school or student will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

In similar studies girls have found taking part to be both interesting and useful for them.

The results of the study will be of value to counsellors, social workers, families, teachers, and others who work in secondary schools, and will benefit the teenagers who use their services. The findings from the study will be made available to the school.

Thank you for your time and help in considering this request. I would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns with you, or you may wish to contact one of the people whose names are at the bottom of this letter. If you would like the school to take part in the study, please let me know by signing and returning the accompanying Consent Form and sending it to me or by phoning me at the number given below.

Ro Lange  
Counsellor  
Lynfield College

**Researcher:**

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
College  
White Swan Rd  
Mt Roskill  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 6270600, ext. 827  
(09) 6306942  
Email:rlange@lynfield.school.nz

**Supervisor:**

Dr Margaret Nelson Agee  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 3737599, ext. 87379  
Email: m.agee@auckland.ac.nz

**Supervisor:**

Associate Professor Robyn Dixon  
School of Nursing  
Director Centre for Child and Family Policy  
Research  
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Park Rd, Grafton, Auckland  
Phone (09) 3737599, ext. 87388  
Email: r.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

**Head of School:**

Professor Viviane Robinson  
Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 3737599, ext. 87379  
Email: vmj.robinson@auckland.ac.nz.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee  
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Tel: 09 373 7999 Ext. 87830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

On 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05, Reference 2005/86

## Appendix N: Participant information sheet for year 10 girls: anonymous questionnaire and individual interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**Research Project:** Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

**Researcher:** Ro Lange

My name is Ro Lange, and I am a counsellor. I am studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. I am interested in the invisible bullying that happens within girls' friendship groups. I am interested in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls have found helpful in reducing or stopping it. I am conducting a study in your school, and I would appreciate your help.

One of the ways in which I would like to gain information is by inviting you to complete an anonymous questionnaire, followed by individual interviews with up to three girls. Questions in the questionnaire are about girls' bullying of other girls in friendship groups. Completion of the questionnaire will take up to twenty minutes, and it will be administered by the researcher.

Taking part is completely voluntary and the questionnaire is anonymous. You will be given names of support people to contact in case of distress. You will also have a confidential opportunity during the questionnaire to volunteer to be interviewed individually and to indicate how you wish to be contacted, by letter, phone, or email. It is possible that not all those who volunteer will be interviewed, but I will contact each girl who volunteers.

The interviews will take up to an hour and a half. There will also be a follow-up interview of up to twenty minutes. Taking part is completely voluntary. The interviews will take place in a quiet interview room in a place where you feel comfortable. For most girls, a room in the school's Guidance Centre will be suitable, but this will be discussed with you first. The interviews may take place in school time, at a time that suits you and the school, or outside school hours. I will conduct the interviews. The questions are about what you understand bullying to be, your experience of bullying, its effects, how it has happened within the friendship group, and what you think may have reduced its impact or stopped it. If you take part in the interviews, you will be asked to give written consent for yourself.

The questionnaire is anonymous. The information girls provide will be shared as part of the results of the study, but no individual girl will be identifiable. The interviews are confidential except that the information you give will be shared as part of the results of the study. No-one will be able to identify you, or know it is you who gave the information. While I would like to audiotape the interviews, you will be asked for written permission to do this, and can decide to have the tape turned off at any time during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, I will transcribe the tapes, and will show the transcript to you in the follow up meeting. You may keep your own interview tapes if you have chosen to do this. Otherwise I will erase the tapes. The transcript will



not contain any material identifiable to you, and will be stored in secure storage at the University of Auckland for six years. Only I or my supervisor will be allowed to see it. It will then be destroyed. You may withdraw yourself or any information traceable to you until the end of 2005.

Because the questions are about a sensitive issue, you may experience emotional distress. At the end of the interview, you will be given information about support available to you if you wish, such as counselling in or out of the school, help in addressing a bullying situation, or other appropriate help. You will also be given a CD/book voucher at the end of the interviews, in recognition of the time you have given to the project.

Benefits for the girls who take part include the opportunity to think about your own and others' experiences, having your experience valued, and contributing to helping to reducing or stopping invisible bullying.

Similar studies have been conducted with student groups, and girls have found taking part to be both enjoyable and useful for them.

The results of the study will be of value to Year 10 girls and to the counsellors, social workers, families, teachers, and others in girls' lives. The findings from the study will be made available to the school.

The Principal and the Board of Trustees have given their permission for me to conduct this study, and the Principal has given an assurance that neither participation nor non-participation will affect any student's relationship with the school.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation. Please contact me or one of the following people if you have any questions or concerns, or would like to know more.

Ro Lange

**Researcher:**

Ro Lange  
School Counsellor  
College  
White Swan Rd  
Mt Roskill  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 6270600, ext. 827  
(09) 6306942  
Email:rlange@lynfield.school.nz

**Supervisor:**

Associate Professor Robyn Dixon  
School of Nursing  
Director Centre for Child and Family Policy  
Research  
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Park Rd, Grafton, Auckland  
Phone (09) 3737599, ext. 87388  
Email: r.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

**Supervisor:**

Dr Margaret Nelson Agee  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
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Email: m.agee@auckland.ac.nz

**Head of School:**

Professor Viviane Robinson  
Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Phone: (09) 3737599, ext. 87379  
Email: vmj.robinson@auckland.ac.nz.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee  
The University of Auckland, Research Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland, Tel: 09 373 7999 Ext. 87830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

On 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05, Reference 2005/86

Appendix O: Consent form for principal and board of trustees for anonymous questionnaire and individual interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
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www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS.**

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that the study includes an anonymous questionnaire.

I understand that the study includes the confidential option of volunteering to participate in an interview, and that up to three girls will be interviewed.

I understand that while the information the girls give will be used in the results of the research, their identity will remain anonymous.

I understand that the interviews may be recorded with the consent of the participants, and that they may choose to have the tape turned off at any time.

I understand that girls may choose to keep their interview tapes at the end of the study.

I understand that support will be offered at the conclusion of each interview.

I understand that data will be kept for six years.

I understand that the findings from the study will be made available to the school.

I understand that I may withdraw my permission to access the students at any time until 1 August 2005.

I understand that an Information Sheet will be sent to parents.

I understand that any student may withdraw themselves or any information traceable to them at any time up to the end of 2005 without giving any reason.

I agree that neither participation nor non-participation will affect any student's relation to the school.

I agree that the interviews may be audiotaped.

I agree that an appropriate notice may be placed in the school newsletter, and that a Participant Information Sheet will be given to parents.

I agree to this study being conducted at my school.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

on 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05. Reference 2005/86

## Appendix P: Consent form for teachers for anonymous questionnaire and individual interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS.**

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying.

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that the study includes an anonymous questionnaire.

I understand that the study includes the option of volunteering to participate in an interview, and that up to three girls will be interviewed.

I understand that while the information girls give will be used in the results of the research, their identity will remain anonymous.

I understand that the interviews may be audiotaped.

I understand that girls may choose to keep their interview tapes at the end of the study

I understand that support will be offered at the conclusion of each interview..

I understand that I may withdraw my permission to access the students at any time until 1 August 2005.

I understand that an Information Sheet will be sent to parents.

I understand that any student may withdraw themselves or any information traceable to them at any time up to the end of 2005 without giving any reason.

I understand that data will be kept until the end of the research study.

I understand that the findings from the study will be made available to the school.

I understand that an appropriate notice will be placed in the school newsletter, and that an information sheet will be given to parents.

I agree that neither participation nor non-participation will affect any student's relation to the school.

I agree that the interviews may be audiotaped

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

On 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05, Reference 2005/86

## Appendix Q: : Letter from school to parents informing them of the research

To Parents/Guardians of Year 10 girls .....School.

Dear Parent/Guardian

Bullying is a problem for all schools in New Zealand, and it is an issue which ..... School takes very seriously. As part of our support for anti-bullying, the school has decided to take part in a study about girls' bullying of other girls.

The research project is entitled "Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying."

The researcher is Ro Lange, a counsellor at another Auckland secondary school who is studying for an EdD in the School of Education at the University of Auckland. She is interested in the invisible bullying within girls' friendship groups, particularly in finding out about how this happens in Year 10, and what girls themselves have found helpful in reducing or stopping it.

One of the ways in which she would like to gain information is by inviting the Year 10 girls to complete an anonymous questionnaire, followed by individual interviews with up to three girls. Girls who take part in the study will need to be able to understand the questions, which are in English, but girls can be from any culture. Your daughter will be invited to take part in this research.

Questions are about girls' bullying of other girls in friendship groups. Completion of the questionnaire will take up to twenty minutes, administered by Ro Lange. Girls will be given names of support people to contact in case of distress. Teachers will be fully informed about the study. Girls who are interviewed will be asked to give written consent for themselves.

Taking part is completely voluntary and the questionnaire is anonymous. Girls will also have a confidential opportunity during the questionnaire to volunteer to be interviewed individually about their experience of bullying, and to indicate how they wish to be contacted, by letter, phone, or email. They will be informed that it is possible that not all those who volunteer will be interviewed, but the researcher will contact each girl who volunteers.

The interviews will take place in a quiet interview room in a place acceptable to the participants. For most girls, a room in the school's Guidance Centre will be suitable, provided the school is happy with this. Interviews will take up to an hour and a half, at a time which suits the school and the participants. There will be a follow-up meeting of up to twenty minutes. The interviews may take place in school time or outside school hours. The researcher will conduct the interviews. The questions are about what girls understand bullying to be, their experience of bullying, how it has affected them, how it has happened within their friendship group, and what they think may have reduced its impact or stopped the behaviour.

The interviews are confidential except that information girls provide will be shared as part of the results of the study, but no individual girl will be identifiable. While the researcher would like to audiotape the interviews, girls will be asked for written permission to do this, and can have the tape turned off at any time during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will transcribe the tapes, and will check the information with each girl in a followup interview of up to thirty minutes. Girls may have their own interview tapes if they have indicated they wish this. The tapes will otherwise have their contents deleted. The transcripts will not contain any

identifiable material, and will be stored in secure storage at the University of Auckland. They will be destroyed after six years. Girls may withdraw themselves or any of their information until the end of 2005.

Because the questions are about a sensitive issue, some girls may experience some emotional distress. At the conclusion of the questionnaire girls will be given a confidential opportunity to indicate if there is anything else to do with the questionnaire that they would like to discuss, and will be given information about additional support. At the end of the interviews, girls will be offered further support, through counselling in or out of the school, help in addressing a bullying situation, or other appropriate referral.

Benefits for the participants include the opportunity to reflect on their own or others' experiences, having their experience valued, and contributing to helping to reducing or stopping invisible bullying. The girls who take part in the interviews will be given a CD/book voucher at the end of the interviews, in recognition of the time given to the project.

Similar questionnaires and interviews have been conducted with student groups and with individuals, and girls have found taking part to be both enjoyable and useful for them.

The results of the study will be of value to girls of this age and counsellors, social workers, families, teachers, and others who work in secondary schools. The findings from the study will be made available to ..... School.

We have given our permission for Ro Lange to conduct this study, and would like to assure you that neither participation nor non-participation will affect your daughter's relationship with the school.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this information.

Please contact Ro Lange, her supervisors, or the Head of School, whose contact details are below, if you have any questions.

Principal .....



## Appendix R: Bulletin for school newsletter

### **Research on Bullying**

Bullying is a problem for all schools in New Zealand. .... School takes this issue very seriously, and so we have decided to support a research project into girls' bullying in Year 10, conducted by Ro Lange, a student in the EdD programme at the University of Auckland. Parents of Year 10 girls will receive a letter later this term informing them about the project, with an opportunity to ask any further questions.

## Appendix S: Consent form for participants (Year 10 girls) for interviews



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
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The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### **THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS.**

Research Project: Perceptions held by Year 10 girls of the nature of invisible bullying in their same-sex friendship groups, and what helps in reducing or stopping such bullying, according to girls' perceptions.

Researcher: Ro Lange

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that no individual student or school will be named or identifiable in the final report of the study.

I understand that up to three girls will be interviewed.

I understand that not all who volunteer may be interviewed.

I understand that if I take part in an interview and agree to being taped, I may choose to keep my interview tapes at the end of the study.

I understand that my teacher will not know whether I have volunteered to participate.

I understand that support will be offered to me if I wish at the conclusion of the interview.

I understand that while the information I give will be used in the results of the research, my identity will remain anonymous.

I understand that the data gathered will be kept for a period of six years, and will then be destroyed.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information identifiable to me, without giving any reason, until 31 December 2005

I understand that a letter from the school with an Information Sheet will be sent to parents/guardians.

I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information traceable to me at any time up to the end of 2005 without giving any reason.

I understand that neither participation nor non-participation will affect my relation to the school.

I agree to take part in an individual interview.

I agree/do not agree that the interviews will be audiotaped. I understand that even if I agree to being audiotaped, I can choose to have the tape turned off at any time.

I choose/do not choose to have the tape of my interview returned to me.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

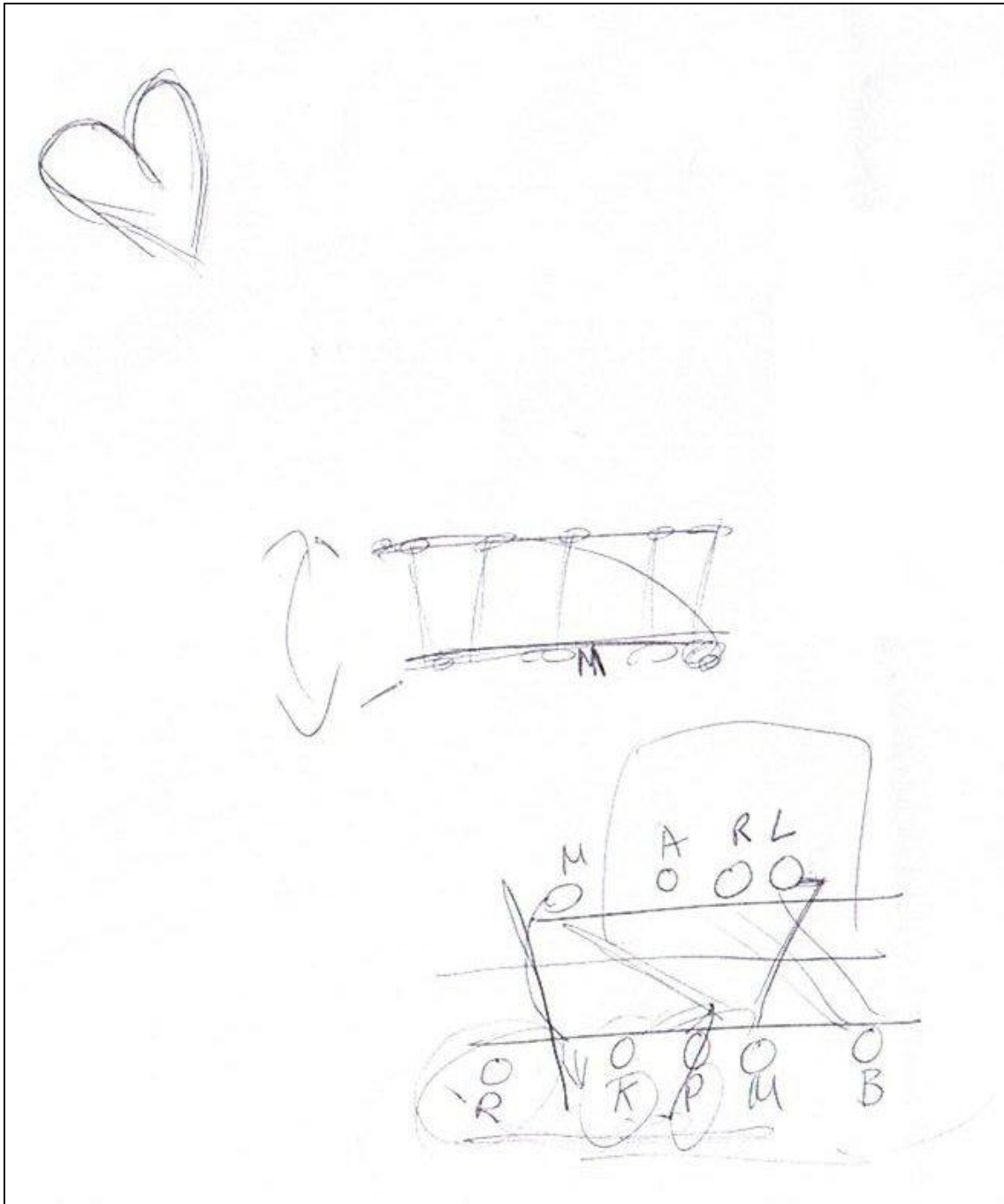
APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS  
COMMITTEE

On 13/4/05 for a period of 3 years, from 13/4/05, Reference 2005/86

## Appendix T: Questioning guide for interviews

1. Informal introductions of interviewer and participants
2. Interviewer then gives a brief outline of the following:
  - a. Safety and confidentiality guidelines
  - b. Check re consent forms and consent for audiotaping
  - c. Purpose and outline of interview
  - d. Brief personal statement about her background.
3. To start with, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, such as your age, something about who you live with, your family, pets, where you were born?
4. Is there anything else that's important for me to know about you?
5. I wonder now if you could tell me about the bullying?
6. How do you think it began?
7. Could you tell me about the other girls involved?
8. What helped you to get through it?
9. Did it affect your family in any way?
10. How do you think it affected you at school?
11. What was the hardest or worst thing about the bullying?
12. Was there anything good or positive that came out of it?
13. Looking back on it now, how did it affect you, or what do you think about it now?
14. If you would like to, you could draw a kind of map, or drawing, just a sketch, of your group, if you think it would help me understand how the group was during the bullying

Appendix U: Example of visual map from interviews



## Appendix V: Tables

Table V1  
*Number of Girls in Friendship Groups (N=1316)*

Number of Friends in Group	<i>n</i>	%
> 4	851	64.7
3 or 4	287	21.8
2	142	10.8
0	36	2.7
Total	1316	100.0

Table V2  
*How Much Girls were Liked by Other Girls (N=1294)*

	<i>N</i>	%
Most of the time	689	53.2
All of the time	381	29.4
Sometimes	178	13.8
Hardly ever	24	1.9
Not at all	22	1.7
Total	1294	100.0

Table V3  
*Features Valued by Girls in their Friendships*

	<i>n</i>	%
Having Fun	711	53.3
Support	656	49.2
Doing things together	490	36.7
Having a friend	401	30.1
Sharing private thoughts and information	391	29.3
Help	164	12.3
Other e.g. trust, loyalty	57	4.3

Table V4  
*Research-Defined Bullying Behaviours Girls Said Their Friends had Inflicted on Them*

	<i>n</i>	%
(Friend) Ignored her	668	46.6
Teased her in a mean way	493	39.3
Put her down (made negative comments)	490	39.1
Called her unpleasant names	460	36.7
Went off with another girl	365	29.2
Told her confidential personal secret	363	29.0
Sat with someone else	333	26.7
Froze her out	328	26.1
Left her out on purpose	318	25.3
Were over-nice to her	301	24.0
Spread rumours about her	299	24.0
Left her alone at lunchtime	236	18.9
Texted mean things	173	13.9
Threatened not to be friends	154	12.3
Made abusive comments to or about her by email or Internet sites	132	10.5
Set her up by listening in on the phone	70	5.6
Something else e.g. made fun of her	52	4.0

Table V5  
*Bullying Behaviours Recognised by Girls as Bullying (Research-Defined)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Mean teasing	882	66.1
Hitting or pushing	870	65.2
Texting mean things	854	64.0
Making abusive comments to or about her by email or Internet sites	834	62.5
Spreading unpleasant rumours	831	62.3
Setting up by listening on phone	756	56.7
Freezing out	752	56.4
Leaving to sit alone	718	53.8
Telling a confidential personal secret	701	52.5
Leaving out	698	52.3
Leaving alone	691	51.8
Leaving out of group or class work	675	50.6
Ignoring	511	38.3
Being over nice	507	38.0
Other	62	4.6

Table V6  
*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Bullying Behaviour Categories as a Function of School Type and Decile*

	Single sex school		Coeducational school	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Exclusion				
High	0.74	1.86	4.48	1.81
Med	2.49	2.55	4.38	1.97
Low	3.96	2.04	3.69	2.07
Total	2.06	2.51	4.29	1.93
Physical				
High	0.15	0.35	0.90	0.30
Med	0.55	0.50	0.90	0.30
Low	0.92	0.27	0.92	0.27
Total	0.46	0.50	0.90	0.30
Direct				
High	0.39	0.96	2.23	0.81
Med	1.30	1.26	2.31	0.83
Low	2.29	0.85	2.07	0.91
Total	1.13	1.29	2.23	0.84
Indirect				
High	0.57	1.37	3.41	0.93
Med	1.98	1.84	3.40	1.08
Low	3.49	0.95	2.98	1.28
Total	1.72	1.87	3.32	1.07



Table V7  
*Bullying Behaviour Girls Said They Inflicted on Their Friends*

	<i>n</i>	%
Ignored	410	30.7
Called unpleasant names	299	22.4
Used put-downs	255	19.1
Froze out	249	18.7
Teased in a mean way	243	18.2
Went off with another girl	196	14.7
Told a confidential personal secret	191	14.3
Left out on purpose	183	13.7
Over nice	145	10.9
Sat with another girl	114	8.5
Texted mean things	98	7.3
Left alone at interval or lunchtime	94	7.0
Spread rumours	92	6.9
Made abusive comments to or about her by email or Internet sites	68	5.1
Threatened not to be friends any more	41	3.1
Set-up by listening on the phone	34	2.5

Table V8  
*Content of Verbal Bullying as Reported by Victims (N=1334)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Abilities	461	34.5
Appearance	356	26.7
Race or culture	173	13.0
Beliefs	145	10.9
Sexuality	126	9.4
Personality e.g. tastes, style, attributes	52	3.9
Other e.g. families, name, actions, other friends	21	1.6
Total	1334	100.0

Table V9

*Reasons that Girls Bully their Friends, According to Girls' Perceptions*

Reason that a girl bullies her friend	<i>n</i>	%
She is angry because of something her friend did	846	63.4
There is a problem between them about a boy	679	51.0
There is a problem between them involving other friends	652	49.0
She doesn't like her friend any more	621	46.5
She is just feeling angry	517	39.1
She is jealous of her friend	100	7.5
They have a relationship problem	27	2.0
She has self-esteem problems	23	1.7
She wants power and status	20	1.5
She has family problems	19	1.4
She is bitchy	15	1.1
She thinks it's funny to bully	11	0.8

Table V10

*Effects of Bullying on the Friendship Group*

	<i>n</i>	%
Nothing	568	42.6
Group broke up	154	11.5
Other	153	11.5
Lost my friends	119	8.9
Someone left the group	38	2.9

Table V11  
*Feelings of Victims about Individual Bullying Actions*

	Felt Nothing		Felt a little bit unhappy		Felt moderately unhappy		Felt terrible	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Called unpleasant names	183	13.7	154	11.5	89	6.7	75	5.6
Emailed or said mean things on the Internet	184	13.8	40	3.0	47	3.5	50	3.7
Frozen out	158	11.8	105	7.9	89	6.7	80	6.0
Ignored	156	11.7	199	14.9	141	10.6	91	6.8
Left alone on purpose	178	13.3	75	5.6	48	3.6	71	5.3
Left out on purpose	191	14.3	92	6.9	75	5.6	73	5.5
My friend was over nice	222	16.6	121	9.1	54	4.0	28	2.1
Put downs from friend	194	14.3	143	10.7	100	7.5	90	6.7
Rumours spread	164	12.3	91	6.8	57	4.3	98	7.3
Sat with someone else	181	13.6	111	8.3	105	7.9	73	5.5
Set up by listening on the phone	192	14.4	35	2.6	35	2.6	35	2.6
Teased in a mean way	150	11.2	163	12.2	120	9.0	95	7.1
Texted mean things	179	13.4	62	4.6	48	3.6	71	5.3
Threatened not to be friends any more	190	14.2	39	2.9	48	3.6	53	4.0
Told a confidential or personal secret	159	11.9	86	6.4	83	6.2	109	8.2
Went off with another girl	164	12.3	111	8.3	105	7.9	73	5.5

Table V12  
*Absence from School because of Bullying (N=1171)*

Frequency of absence	<i>n</i>	%
Never	1024	87.4
Once or twice	113	9.6
Once a week or more	34	2.9

Table V13  
*Whether Teachers See Girls Bullying Other Girls, According to Girls' Opinions (N=1223)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Almost never	596	44.7
I don't know	433	32.5
Now and then	164	12.3
Almost always	30	2.2