

New perspectives on bullying as a social phenomenon



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Bullying may occur everywhere

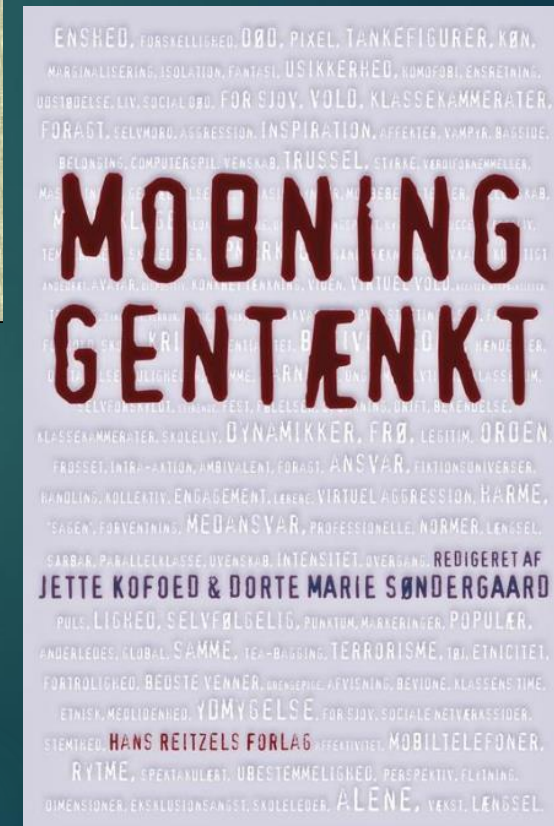
- ▶ Basic mechanisms of bullying remain the same across schools, child institutions, high schools, work places
- ▶ However, the ways in which bullying may be experienced and done vary
- ▶ In kindergartens – bullying is done by e.g. fighting, isolating and leaving particular children out of games



- ▶ Watching bullying among children can be very distressing
- ▶ As an adult and professional it is easy to get caught up in strong feelings of compassion and anger
- ▶ It is easy to fall into quick judgements
- ▶ However, if we jump to quick conclusions and judgements, we risk making things worse by reinforcing the social insecurity and tensions among children

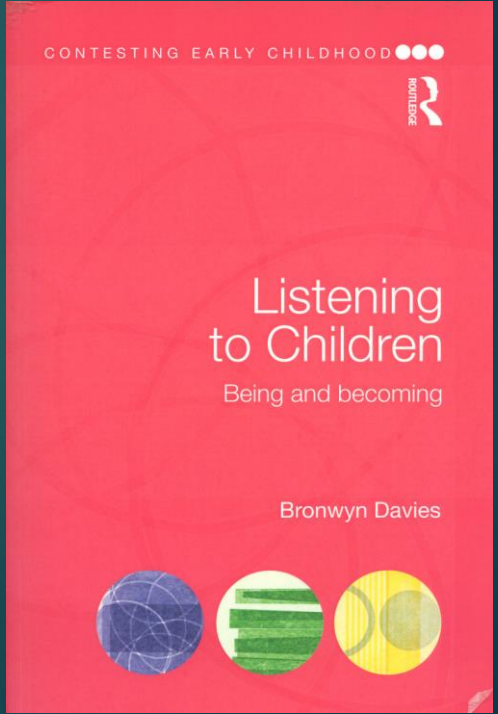


- ▶ eXbus: Exploring Bullying in School
- ▶ Started 2007
- ▶ Cross disciplinary research team: psychology, statistics, law, philosophy, minority studies
- ▶ Research based on interviews, observations, documents, child drawings, and survey





Bronwyn Davies (2014) *Listening to Children. Being and Becoming*. London: Routledge.



PARADIGM ONE

- Defines bullies as particularly aggressive and impulsive, as persons having a positive attitude towards violence, a need to dominate and little empathy with their victims
- Defines victims of bullying as passive, submissive, anxious, insecure and weak
- Points to dysfunctional families and mothers

(Olweus *Bullying in School. What we Know and What We Can Do*. 1993, s32–4.

For discussion: Schott's chapter in *School Bullying. New Theories in Context* 2014).

This understanding of bullying produces a particular traffic of the problems

INTO THE
CHILD

OUT OF THE
SCHOOL

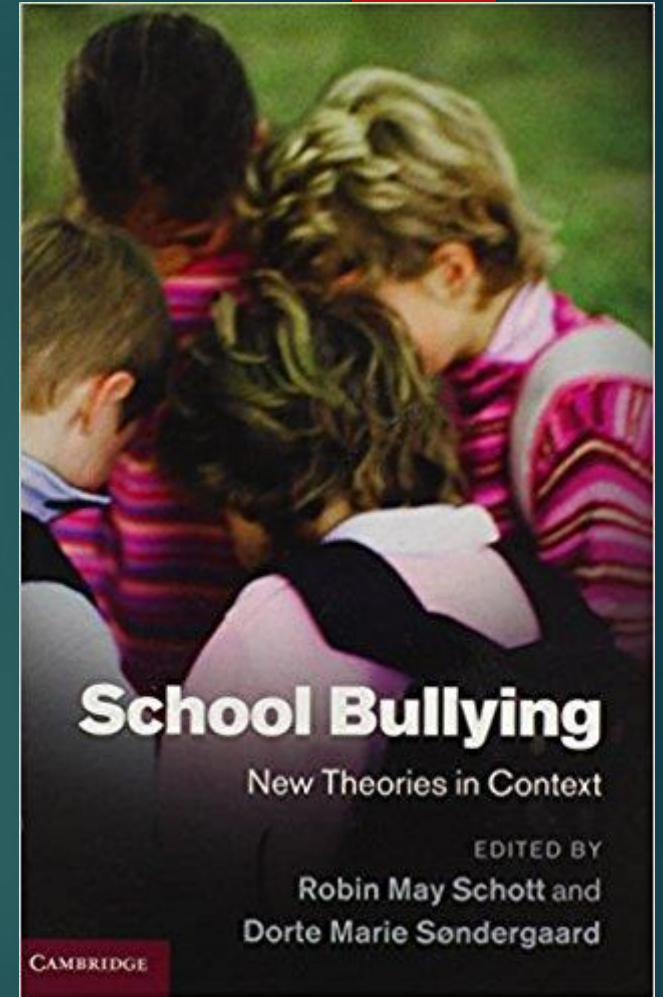
HOME TO
THE
PARENTS

PARADIGM TWO


Sees bullying as a complex social dynamic

Focus a range of interacting forces such as e.g.

- ▶ the practices of professionals (pedagogues and teachers and principals) and parents
- ▶ collective and individual experiences and histories in the social group
- ▶ the virtual experiences and practices of children
- ▶ the norms connected with gender, race, ethnicity, social class – and local norms of particular groups etc.



Schott, Robin May & Dorte Marie Søndergaard (eds.) (2014) *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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- ▶ All such factors and forces interact as part of a complex social machinery that produces the institutional child culture, from which bullying practices may emerge
 - ▶ Culture produces positions for children as bullies, victims, bystanders - sometimes as both bullies and victims interchanging
 - ▶ Personality traits play a role but are malleable depending on the context in which they interacts

Conceptualizations form understanding and practice



- ▶ Ways of asking questions are crucial
- ▶ Understandings form our thinking; they form our ways of asking questions and they also form the horizon within which we are capable of creating responses
- ▶ Our ideas about potential interventions are formed and limited by our understandings

Using an individualistic approach

With an individualistic approach, we'd ask:
“What is wrong with the child”

– and next step would likely be to ask:

“How can he/she be punished”?

“How can we regulate and discipline his/her behavior”?



Using a social approach

With a focus on complex social forces we would ask:

- ▶ How did those actions become necessary or obvious to engage in for the child?
- ▶ What in the culture of this child institution makes it an obvious choice to produce aggression and contempt?

And next step would be to ask:

- ▶ How can that culture be transformed – so as to make the production of mutual acknowledgement and dignity a taken for granted way of relating to each other?



Whole school approach

Intervention is formed along many different dimensions simultaneously, involving, for instance:

- ▶ teachers, school principals, pedagogues
- ▶ parents
- ▶ students
- ▶ structure of space
- ▶ planning of activities
- ▶ didactic practices linked to class room management etc. etc.

- ▶ Work is done on the school or child institution as a complex machinery/organism – it is done through many simultaneous entries and transforming endeavors

A shared goal: encreasing dignity for all

- ▶ The whole school approach can make successful intervention programs – when conducted with the common goal: to increase the production of dignity for everybody – not just for some
- ▶ The production of dignity for everybody is very central. If you only increase dignity for some (e.g. the victims) but increase contempt in relation to others – the child culture won't change: You have simply moved the problem

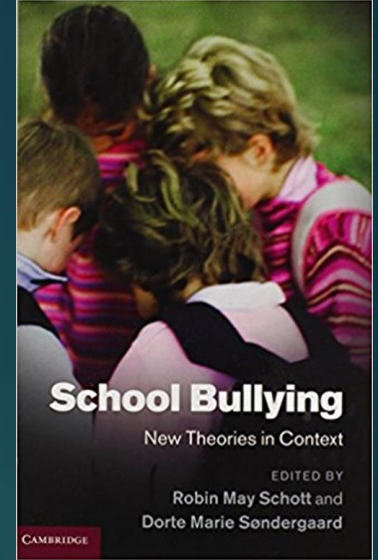
Pedagogical institutions are social organisms

- ▶ In- and exclusions
- ▶ Norms are nursed, policed and negotiated
- ▶ Hierarchies are established, broken up and rebuilt
- ▶ Friendships and alliances are formed and dissolved
- ▶ Formal and informal activities are integrated and separated



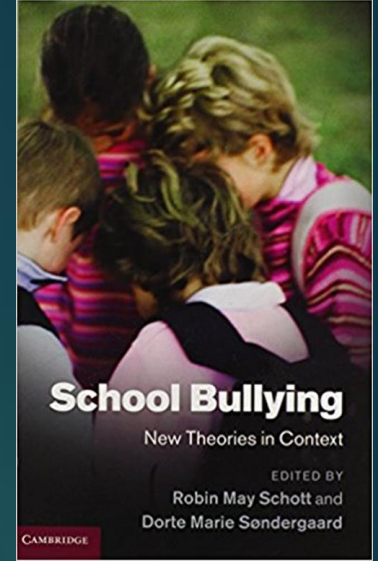
Definition of bullying

- ▶ “Bullying is an intensification of the processes of marginalisation that occur in the context of dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, which shape groups.
- ▶ Bullying happens when physical, social or symbolic exclusion becomes extreme, regardless of whether such exclusion is experienced and/or intended.



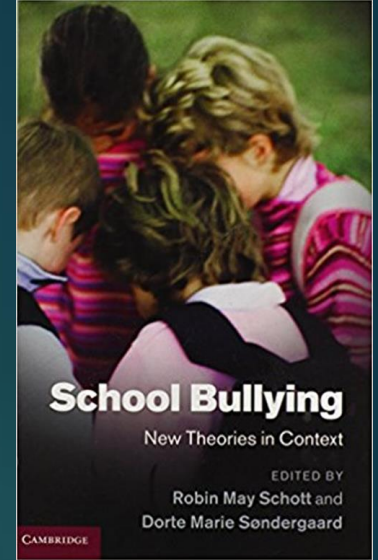
Definition of bullying

- ▶ One of the central mechanisms of bullying is social exclusion anxiety, which may be alleviated by the production of contempt. This contempt for someone or something may be expressed by behaviour that, for example, humiliates, trivialises or makes a person feel invisible, involves harm to person or property, abuses social-media profiles or disseminates humiliating messages via technological communication.



Definition of bullying

- ▶ Although some members of the social group may experience these marginalising processes as positive, robbing an individual(s) of the social recognition that is necessary for dignity can be a form of psychic torture for those who are targeted.”



Schott, Robin May & Dorte Marie Søndergaard (eds.) (2014) School Bullying: New Theories in Context. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Page 16-17

Social exclusion anxiety & longing for belonging

- ▶ All people need community belonging
- ▶ When social embeddedness and belonging are threatened – social exclusion anxiety intensifies
- ▶ Social exclusion anxiety emerges in relation to communities of belonging

Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) *Social Exclusion Anxiety: bullying and the enactment of exclusion amongst children at school*. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rabøl Hansen, Helle. Longing for belonging: <http://dev.rummelighed.org/l-longing-belonging/>



Seeking alleviation

- Social exclusion anxiety is unpleasant – if it intensifies, people will seek alleviation
- Apparently the production of contempt works as a common and widespread strategy of alleviation
- The strategy holds a promise of gaining control with the terms of social exclusion

Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) Social Exclusion Anxiety: bullying and the enactment of exclusion amongst children at school. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*.

Social exclusion anxiety and social panic

- ▶ The alleviation of anxiety that results from contempt production seems to last only temporarily
- ▶ In fact, the production of contempt, which should relieve social exclusion anxiety, may exacerbate it
- ▶ The more contempt the group produces, the more control of the terms for in-and exclusion seems to be needed, and the more social exclusion anxiety will intensify



Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) Social Exclusion Anxiety: bullying and the enactment of exclusion amongst children at school. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*.

When empathy closes down



- ▶ With social panic, a shift seems to take place from this state of relative empathetic understanding to a situation where the dignity-producing empathy closes down
- ▶ At this intersection, contempt strengthens and dehumanisation increases to acts of bullying

Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) Social Exclusion Anxiety: bullying and the enactment of exclusion amongst children at school. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*.

Address the culture

Intervention here is not about making these children point out the victim's clothes or interests as annoying. It is not about putting pressure on the victim to make him/her adjust

Such interventions address only the surface

Intervention has to address the local child (and adult) culture

Know the social mechanisms

Professionals need to know such mechanisms and be able to analyse the local situations ... but also to keep an empathetic eye on the victims of such systems

Victims come in many shapes and sizes:

- ▶ The bullied and excluded are obvious victims
- ▶ The scared friends, who watch and fear that this may happen to them too, are also victims
- ▶ And the children that may be identified as bullies – with all their complex fears and anxieties making aggression and exclusion an obvious way to react for them – are also victims

Bullying practices produce many kinds of victims in need of support and understanding, if social mechanisms are to change

Read the signs

- ▶ For professionals and other responsible adults it is important to be able to read the signs, to take the temperature of the tensions, and to watch the level of social exclusion anxiety in the groups and among the children they are responsible for
- ▶ An awareness of the practices of 'contempt production' and of 'dignity production' and the transition between them is crucial
- ▶ Both children and adults take part in such processes: Avoid contempt as a strategy of authority

MULTI-PERSPECTIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- ▶ Understanding marginalisation and bullying as part of intricate social patterns and dynamics calls for less of a technically standardised approach to intervention
- ▶ We need an analytically informed, flexibly implemented and socially sensitive way to meet these complicated social processes
- ▶ That is why whole school/whole institution approaches or multi-perspective intervention strategies often work more efficiently – if they are organized in ways that seek the common goal of increasing dignity for all inhabitants in the institution or school

Work in the same direction

- ▶ Reduce the level of contempt
- ▶ Increase dignity for all
- ▶ Increase including and containing approaches to relating
- ▶ Enhance and support accept of diversity



The pedagogues in Tom's and Jonathan's institution:

- ▶ didn't judge or scold or blame the parents and their ways of upbringing
- ▶ They spent time listening, showing interest and respect to all members of the group
- ▶ They created space for the children to listen to each other and to feel and formulate and play what was on their mind – thereby they created space for transformation
- ▶ They engaged in teaching newcomers, adults and children, how to deal with social tensions and social exclusion anxiety

Beyond one size fits all

- The situations of classes and groups invaded by bullying practices vary
- To intervene and to work with the local culture in a group you need to analyse the specific situation and to develop a situated intervention strategy
- Such work calls for points of focus and analytical attention that will guide flexibly implemented praxes

Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) From standardized interventions to analytically informed, multi-perspective intervention strategies. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Key focus 1 & 2

1. Keep a clear focus on the institutional culture and the child culture as the target of intervention. In doing so, don't neglect the suffering and needs of those individuals, who are in trouble because of that culture. However don't lose the culture as a target
2. Remember that intervention strategies which exclusively focus on single individuals merely address the symptoms of a dysfunctional institutional culture

Key focus 3 & 4

3. Avoid intervention strategies that produce new targets of contempt; avoid strategies that move contempt around and which demonize particular groups of children or adults

4. Keep in mind that bullying can take many forms – sometimes bullying practices position particular children as victims and bullies over long periods of time, sometimes the positions are interchanging and the practices shift among the children

Key focus 5 & 6

5. Keep in mind that bullying practices move across virtual and 'real life' interaction, on- and offline; that bullying may take many forms; and that bullying may change expression when addressed

6. Be aware of the dilemmas involved in the group positionings pervaded by bullying practices: e.g. the victims may have to deny what happens in the hope of gaining respect; the contempt producers may not dare change their practices because they fear losing control

Key focus can be found in: Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2014) From standardized interventions to analytically informed, multi-perspective intervention strategies. In *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Analysis of victim dilemmas can be found in: Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2015) The Dilemmas of Victim Positioning. *Confero*, 3(2): 36-79.



Thank you !

