## Deconstructing the Policing of the Normal

An Examination of the Work Done by "Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams*"*

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### Abstract

Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues have argued for a Foucauldian analysis of bullying relations in schools as an alternative to the common assumption of pathological moral character in the bully. In a Foucauldian analysis, bullying works to maintain discursive categories of normality through marking those who differ as other. Bullying discourages dissensus and polices social norms more than it deviates from them. This paper takes up this analysis and examines the undercover anti-bullying team process for whether it produces greater openness to difference and challenges the discursive logic of bullying.

### Keywords

bullying, discourse, Foucault, Rancière, policing social norms, undercover anti-bullying teams, dissensus, difference

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Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (Davies, 2011; Bansel, Davies, Laws, & Linnell, 2009; Ellwood & Davies, 2010) have initiated an intriguing re-evaluation of the discursive context through which bullying in schools might be understood. Their argument disrupts the familiar account of bullying that is based on the pathologizing of the person of the bully (and often also of the person of the victim as well). They argue instead for a Foucauldian understanding of bullying as a relational process of power relations in which bullying often involves students imposing behavioral norms on their peers or policing those norms once they are established. This article takes up this Foucauldian reading of bullying in schools and examines the practice of "undercover anti-bullying teams" (M. Williams, 2010; Williams & Winslade, 2007; Winslade & Williams, 2012) in the light of this reading. The question asked is whether this intervention produces the kind of openness to difference that Davies and her colleagues suggest might be an ethical response to school violence.

Conventional discourse about bullying and the most common approaches to addressing bullying are characterized by Davies and her colleagues as founded on a set of assumptions about bullying which focus explanatory attention on the individual as a category of person. The bully is a "pathological individual" or comes from a pathological or dysfunctional family (Davies 2011, p. 278; Bansel, Davies, Laws & Linnell, 2009, p. 62; Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 85). The person who bullies deliberately intends to do harm and lacks the kind of moral conscience that might restrain the violent impulse. This characterization of individual identity is then invoked to explain bad behavior, which "shifts the deviation from normal (what anyone might do) to pathological (what this type of person would do)" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 61).

Michel Foucault (2004) has traced the genealogy of this discourse about the abnormal through nineteenth century psychiatry into current psychological practice. Against the background of Foucault's

genealogy, Davies and her colleagues show that teachers commonly use these categories to distinguish between behavior that becomes called bullying and other forms of deviant behavior that are more likely to be read as the result of "a simple misreading of the rules, high spirits, or a momentary slip-up" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 62).  As Ellwood and Davies (2010) put it, "both bullies and their victims are understood as deficient in social and personal skills and in need of explicit instruction in the collective ethos of the school (p. 90).

### Bullying as the Policing of a Social Consensus

The collective ethos of the school is likely often to reflect the collective ethos of the social world around it. The term that Jacques Rancière (2010) uses to refer to this collective ethos is "consensus," contrasting it with the democratic openness to "dissensus". A consensus is what is generally assumed without much attention given to dissenting voices. In Rancière's account, consensus is the condition of the rule of those who have "entitlement to govern" (p. 31) on the basis of "seniority, birth, wealth, virtue or knowledge" (p. 32). It is the "power of those with a superior nature, of the strong over the weak" (p. 31). It is the "axiom of domination" (p. 32). Thus consensus, as Ranciere uses it, is roughly equivalent to what Foucault refers to as a dominating discourse. One definition Rancière (2010) offers of consensus reads:

> Consensus is a certain regime of the perceptible: the regime in which the parties are presupposed as already given, their community established and the count of their speech is identical to their linguistic performance. What consensus thus presupposes is the disappearance of any gap between a party to a dispute and a part of society.   (p. 102)

Says Rancière (2010), in consensus, there is the agreement that "there is only what there is" (p. 8). In Foucault's terms, this is the equivalent of a taken-for-granted set of assumptions or norms. There are two forms of consensus about "what there is" that we might identify in relation to school bullying. One is the professional consensus on the pathological origins of the behavior of the bully. Bronwyn Davies seeks to introduce a note of difference to this consensus. The other consensus is about the 'collective ethos', the

social norms, the definition of what will be regarded as the normal identity of students within the school community. This collective ethos may not equate so much with official school policy as with the general set of dominating assumptions about people in the wider social world. Against this consensus stand those students who are different in some way. It is this consensus that those who perpetrate bullying are policing. Bullying, from this perspective is more like enforcing the norm than it is like acting abnormally.

Dissensus, on the other hand, in Rancière's terms, is the condition of democratic politics in which there is a chance for the voices of the "demos" to be heard, that is the voices of those "who do not count" (p. 32), who have no entitlement to govern or are not in the position to govern. Dissensus is thus necessary for the democratic exchange of views. It is the condition of "rupture with the [dominant] logic" (p. 33) of natural command, of "the police" (p. 36), of those who are destined to rule. In this account, the bullying relation is the expression of domination of the weak by the strong which brooks no dissensus, and dissensus would involve the victims of bullying and the bystanders who witness it being invited to have a voice that is listened to. This would amount to the political conflict typical of democracy. For Rancière, "political conflict does not involve an opposition between groups with different interests. It forms an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways" (p. 35).

 An approach to bullying that rests upon the logic of the collective ethos, the determinate rule, the consensus, of those who have the natural right to rule (the "strong" among the student body) will seldom open a space of dissensus in which the voice of victims and bystanders can contest politically their domination and claim a space to be different. It will not undermine the policing function unless the voices of those who do not count can be heard. Ranciere's work thus offers some concepts which potentially sharpen our understanding of the local politics of bullying.

I do not mean to imply that schools are administered in a way that sanctions or encourages bullying. I do mean, however, that the usual responses to bullying are founded on assumptions that leave

the social meaning of difference unchallenged. The result of forms of explanation that emphasize the

pathology of the bully is that, among those who have the professional right to rule (teachers and

administrators and popular leaders among the students), no dissensus is also allowed and the consensus

rules. In this consensus, efforts to combat bullying are often focused on individual moral reform for the

bully (and sometimes also for the victim). The bully is "cast out" or "abjected" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 61;

after Kristeva, 1982; see also Butler, 1999; Søndergaard, 2012) and then required to demonstrate remorse

or perform a show of having a conscience (for example, shedding tears about one's own actions). Indeed,

under the common zero tolerance regime (Skiba et al., 2006), automatic exclusion from the school

community (suspension or expulsion) is routinely applied to bullies. Under restorative practice regimes,

as Bansel et al. (2009) show, bullies are often readmitted to this community once they have shown the

requisite remorse.

The problem with this perspective is that it omits "the relational, situational and cultural

dimensions of bullying" (Davies, 2011, p. 278). The focus on individual pathology ignores both

Ranciere's concern with the politics of consensus and dissensus and also what Foucault (1980) asserted

with regard to the individual.

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple
> and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike … The
> individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power, it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The
> individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that
> effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the
> same time its vehicle.    (p. 98)

If individual, subjective experience is an effect of power, exercised through discourse and taken up by the

person as the performance of agency, then we cannot understand the phenomenon of bullying without

taking account of the discursive world surrounding the individual bully. Through exploring this "line of

fault in the bullying discourse" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 89) Davies and her colleagues arrive at a

fresh account of how the bullying relation might be read.

In this account, the "figure of the bully may be more active in the construction and maintenance of the norms of schooling" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 90) than pathologically amoral. In other words, the function of bullying is the function of police, in Rancière's terms. These norms are actively maintained by students, rather than just imposed by school authorities, and produce the social order of the school community. If this order is aggressively pursued, then it helps those who observe the bullying relation (often called bystanders) to know what they must do to produce themselves as normal and as good students. As Ellwood and Davies suggest, "it is vital to students' survival to know how the social order works" (p. 90).

Bullies are thus recognizable as powerful champions of the consensual "collective ethos" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 93) of the school or of the society in which the school exists. In other words they champion what Ranciere refers to as consensus. They work to fix the categories of personhood that will be regarded as normal and to police any deviation across the boundaries around these categories. Fixed categories do not allow for mobility in power relations and hence the bullying produces a relation that is described by Foucault as domination.

> When an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political or military [and in this case discursive] means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination. In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained or limited. (Foucault, 1997, p. 283)

Bullying is thus about domination of the general social consensus. For example, a general homophobic consensus might be expressed in the targeting of gay or lesbian students in school for bullying and also in the directing of insults toward any student that refer to his or her identity as gay or lesbian. Even young children can be shown to engage in "category maintenance work" (Ellwood & Davies, p. 90) often involving them in punishing those who disrupt through their difference the established categories of subjectivity in the school. At stake is the production and policing of a "recognizable" identity (Davies, 2011, p. 281), that is, an identity that fits within the unquestioned order

and is not too different to stand out. For this reason, bystanders seldom challenge the bullying and victims are frequently isolated in their suffering, because they stand out as different in some way. According to the logic of the bullying relation, it is the victim who has offended against the consensus or collective ethos of the school community by being different and the bully is acting to police the norms against the threat of difference.

Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2012) has also been concerned about the social aspects of bullying, rather than starting from the assumptions of psychological deficit. She suggests that bullying is about the management of anxiety about "social exclusion" (p. 355) on the basis of the "necessity of belonging" (p. 355). She theorizes from this basis the production of identities in school through processes of despisal and abjection on the one hand and empathy and dignity on the other. I am sympathetic with Søndergaard's argument but, following Davies, seek to tease out why it might be that certain recognizable categories of identity are commonly targeted by the bullying process. In particular, those categories of identity that are associated with the production of abjection in the wider society are also reflected in the targets selected by bullying: that is, those who are different in some way.

Davies (2011) points out that the logic behind the establishment of a "recognizable identity" is founded on a philosophical tradition that goes back to Aristotle's conceptualization of difference as "categorical difference, in which the other is discrete and distinct from the self, with the difference lying in the Other" (p. 282). She contrasts this with Gilles Deleuze's account, which rejects an emphasis on "discrete difference" in favour of "a continuous process of becoming different, of differentiation" (p. 282). An ethos based on Deleuze's conceptualization would recognize difference as continuously evolving and remaining open to what is "not yet known" (p. 282) in other students and to how one might be affected and changed by others; that is, it would remain open to what Ranciere calls dissensus.

Let us now turn to some examples of what Davies and her colleagues are talking about. The example they cite reads as follows.

There was a session two weeks ago on a Friday where they actually physically I guess you'd call it abused a child, a Sudanese child. [. . .] they thought this Sudanese boy was playing Kiss and Catch with the girls in Year 4 and they didn't like that so one of them went and held his head against the wall and the other child just went and slammed it three times so the child then had a missing tooth and the parents had to be called in and they've never gone physical but, this was their first time. (Primary school teacher). (as cited in Ellwood & Davies, pp. 87-8.)

In this story, the bullying works to construct the Sudanese child as breaking the rules of social order (the consensus) in the sense that he presumes the right to personal connection with white children. The violent response from two girls (who have "never gone physical" before) reminds him that he belongs to a different category of person, a refugee immigrant of a different race. As a result, racial and citizenship categories are enforced and relations of power between races maintained. At first, the girls are convinced of the rightness of their attack and later show remorse for their use of violence but the school's restorative efforts are geared towards the growth of a personal moral conscience and no recognition is expected of the discursive policing implicit in their actions. The categories of personhood on which the acts of domination are based are thus left intact. So is the ruling consensus.

**An Alternative Approach**

What might constitute an alternative approach? Davies (2011) makes some comments in this direction. She suggests that:

Teachers could encourage the girls to see the limitations on themselves and others of the normative moral order they are intent on maintaining. They could invite them to question the excessive use of their power that brings harm to others, and that assumes that others should be sacrificed to the absolute moral order to which they are committed. (p. 284)

From this perspective, acts of violence would not just appear as "autonomous acts, free-floating from their histories and contexts that can be accounted for through the character of one faulty individual" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 66). Instead, they would be understood as relational exchanges based on cultural and discursive knowledges. Perpetrators of bullying would be understood as participating in "lines of

force" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 45; Winslade, 2009, p. 336) and would be encouraged to shift to a

more inclusive "hospitality toward the other" (Derrida, in Borradori, 2003). Ellwood and Davies imagine

programs that might address bullying along different lines.

> School programs currently focusing on the pathologized bully would change to one in which
> schools take up responsibility for developing relational practices that recognize and honor the
> other, with all their differences … Difference would not be seen as an error to be at best tolerated
> and at worst obliterated, but an expansion and extension of each-in-relation-to-the-other.  (p. 95)

Such a program would be based on an "ethical relationality", involving reflection on the performance of

relational practices and the persons that students are becoming through those practices.  Moreover

openness to the difference of others would be emphasized in such a program. The consensus on which

bullying rests might be made open to political contest, such that the voices of those who do not count

might be heard to challenge the natural determinate rule of the strong. Students who perform acts of

bullying might be posed a question like: "What normative moral discourse were you taking up in this act,

and how might that moral discourse be re-read as oppressive, depriving others of freedom?" (Davies,

2011, p. 284).

## Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams

The next task is to outline the "undercover anti-bullying teams" approach to combating bullying

and to ask how it squares with the suggestions Davies and colleagues make for an approach to bullying

that disrupts the discursive regime that their analysis exposes. Undercover anti-bullying teams are formed

by a school counselor in response to an expression of concern from a victim of bullying. After hearing the

story of what has been happening, the counselor inquires into the effects of the bullying and then asks the

victim to nominate a team of six to be invited to change the situation for the victim. Included in the team

of six are two of those who have been doing the bullying and four others who, to the knowledge of the

victim, have not been doing any bullying or been bullied themselves. The victim is not present when the

assembled team is invited to participate in bringing about a change in relationships for the victim.

The team members are not told at first about the identity of the victim, until they have agreed to participate in the team. Instead the story of what has happened is read out in the victim's own words as well as an account of the effects of the bullying. The counselor also assures the team that there is no intention to name the perpetrator of the bullying, nor any plan for anyone to be punished. The team's aim is explained to the team members as just to change the circumstances for the victim and to end the bullying and its effects. To this end, the team is asked to come up with a five-point plan to achieve these goals. They are also asked to keep their work undercover so that it is not too obvious.

Nor is there any requirement for the victim and the bullies to confront each other. The counselor meets with both the team and the victim to check on progress of the team's project every few days but these meetings are separate. However, the victim is put in the position of deciding when the team has done its job and when the team members will be given their promised certificate from the school principal and a canteen voucher.

More details about how this process is implemented can be found elsewhere (M. Williams, 2010; Williams & Winslade, 2007; Winslade & Williams, 2012). Several things are noteworthy, however, about this process. The bully or bullies are placed in a position where they are not named or exposed unless they choose to do so themselves (some do). Neither are they punished. Instead they are given the chance to hear the story of what has taken place and its effects on the victim alongside four others whose responses are often strongly sympathetic with the victim. The logic of the bullying begins implicitly to be called into question at this point. The bullies are also given a chance on the basis of this account to address the situation and help the others on the team change the experience of suffering to which the victim has been exposed. For many bullies this is an awkward commitment to make, given their previous pattern of behavior, and they are sometimes lukewarm in their commitment to it, but often actually do change their behavior to the extent of working with other team members to shift the bullying.

The victim is not required to directly confront the power of the bully but has the power of veto

over the extent of the process. The other team members, however, often actively tackle the bullying and

interrupt it or challenge the ethos in which it occurs.

### Examining the Data from Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams

Now let us examine some of the examples of bullying stories reported by victims. These

examples were recorded by Mike Williams at a high school in New Zealand in the victim's own words as

part of the process of implementing thirty-five undercover anti-bullying teams. They are given in

response to an inquiry into what has happened and recorded verbatim on a standard form used for the

purpose by the school counselor.

Here are examples of the policing of difference with regard to disability. The first speaker has an

artificial limb. The second is in a wheelchair.

> In most of my classes I am in, I get hit in the head. On the way to most of my classes, kids kick
> my leg and mock me a lot, saying things like "legless" and other really mean things. When I am
> in science, people take my stuff, like my pencil case. Sometimes they open it up and tip all the
> stuff out on the floor; sometimes they throw it out the window.

> On Wednesday, the girl who was the worst bully and some other girls were mocking me. They
> were laughing at me and making jokes about me. I would just sit in my wheelchair and do
> nothing, cause there's nothing I can do. The teachers do nothing. They know but they don't do
> anything. People say stuff like, "handicapper" and kids kick the wheelchair. They kick the bottom
> of my shoe because it's big.

Racial difference is another target for the policing of difference. The dominant norm of white

superiority is maintained by marking out anyone who is not white as others. The school where the

undercover teams were implemented contains a mix of students from many cultural or racial

backgrounds, including Pakeha (white), Maori, Polynesian, and Asian (especially Indian and Chinese).

Relevant to one of the examples below, there are also a number of students from families who are

immigrants from South Africa. Here are some examples of the use of racial difference that can be said to

reproduce and enforce the dominant racial norms.

> She mocks me for being white and weak and calls me a midget.

> One girl said, 'Fuck (student's name), fuck your India,' and some other words. I don't know what to say. I say, 'Why are you so mean?' She says, 'Nothing, nothing.

> Everyone started calling me 'snoop-dog' and it was getting annoying ... When it is lunchtime, he calls me names and calls me a 'kaffir.'

Often the discourse that is targeted for the marking of difference (and the policing of departures from the norm) relates to what is constructed as normal with regard to body image. A person who is too fat or too short, for example, can be selected out for bullying. But so can someone who has a distinguishing feature that is a little different in some way. In the third example below, the speaker has bright red hair, which makes her stand out from others.

> I was waiting outside my social studies class and he comes over and tells the girls who were also waiting, 'He's too fat to fit in his car.' All the girls laughed.

> We were going to my next class when this boy started saying I was vertically challenged, I needed anger management, I was a masturbating midget. I sat down and he came and picked up my books and threw them on the ground. Every one laughed when I went to pick them up.

> I am still getting comments about my hair and the way I act around people. People still mock me for speaking loudly and getting angry because of the problem. I take it out on others, which makes them hate me.

It is noticeable in these examples that these victims of bullying are acutely conscious of the role played by bystanders – especially when they implicitly support the policing of the norm in the bullying relation by laughing.

In the early years of high school, students are primed to respond to the onset of puberty and to explore relationships with others of the other or of the same sex. Sensitivities about these developments are common targets for category maintenance work and the policing of difference. Here are some examples.

In science I was sitting with a kid and this girl wanted to be in my group and he let her. Then she started saying that I couldn't get a girlfriend and if I could it must be a rat. Then she said that she was going to get her humungous boyfriend to beat me up and told me to watch my back.

In English, this kid calls me a faggot and accuses me of looking at him. He just keeps on saying the same thing over and over again. All his mates just laugh and support him.

There was this other kid who was calling me a faggot and he pushed me and punched me after I pulled the fingers.

It started last year when I started to hang out with my best friend. We ended up getting mocked because we are always together. Kids said we were gay and that we should get married. It happens about five times every week.

If we think in terms of how bullying functions to police the norm, it makes little difference for homophobic slurs whether the victim is gay or straight or questioning their sexuality in some way. The identities constructed for all who hear the taunts or "joking" support the category of heterosexual normality and assign those who do not fit the position of the other.

In other instances of reported bullying it is not so clear how category maintenance work or policing of norms might be at work but it still cannot be ruled out in an example like this one.

I am doing my work and then one of them tells that people hate me. They always talk about me and what I have done wrong. They think they are the popular people. I hear people saying my name, insulting my last name. They call me volcano and that I am about to explode. Some people take my ruler and pens and throw it on the roof.

As part of the undercover anti-bullying teams process that Mike Williams has developed, victims are also asked to speak to the effects of the bullying on them. Responses are again written down verbatim and read out to the undercover team in their first meeting in order to alert them to what the bullying has been doing. What is noticeable in these accounts is the frequency with which mention is made of feeling isolated, not feeling a sense of belonging, or desiring another school. These kinds of statements are consistent with the maintenance of normal identity categories, which someone marked as different falls outside of. Such is the exclusionary effect of the bullying relation. Here are some examples of what victims describe as the effects on themselves.

I feel like I don't belong in the class.

It makes me feel like I don't belong here and I shouldn't be here.

It makes me feel horrible, because it makes me feel like I don't belong here.

I feel like I'm an alien, nobody wants me around. Don't feel like doing anything with anyone really.

It makes me feel sad and angry and depressed, lonely and confused.

I just feel like crawling into a hole and dying or running away.

Sometimes I want to die.

I just want to run away. I hate this feeling of rejection.

I feel like I can't cope. It makes me want to run away. Sometimes I want to leave and not come back.

I feel scared to come to school and go to my classes or even walk around the school by myself.

It makes me feel very alone. I am scared of her. I'm too scared to say anything.

It makes me feel useless. I feel powerless basically all the time.

They make me feel sad and useless. They make me feel hated. I feel stink. They get me to think that I'm worthless.

It made me feel sore inside like I am being tortured by people, that everyone is making fun of me over something that small.

It makes me think it's true (the teasing). It makes me feel ashamed.

I feel like a crazy person, because I am trying hard not to lash out.

I don't want to come to school.

I want to go to another school.

I don't want to come to class. I haven't been back to art for ages.

It makes me hate school. I used to love school and now, when I wake up, I just want to lie there and not move. I hate it.

Each of these responses is consistent with what might be expected from a relational process of identity production that is focused on category maintenance and the policing of difference. Each reports on the effects of being consigned to the outside or of drawing a conclusion of needing to move to some outside position for protection.

**Do the Undercover Teams Contest the Policing of Norms?**

Turning to the work done by the undercover anti-bullying teams raises the question of whether this work can be said to actively contest the discourses in which the policing of the norm takes place. The teams undoubtedly work on the bullying relation in an effort to transform it, rather than pathologizing or punishing the bully. This work is done by students themselves and the adults are cast in a decentered supporting role, rather than as central protagonists. It can thus be argued that the work done by the teams is constructed in the age-related cultural world of young people. This is evident in the use of teenage argot and in the straightforward, uncomplicated, openly optimistic ideas the team members come up with to support the victims and challenge the bullying. These ideas are expressed in the five-point plan each team is invited to come up with in response to the question, "If you were going through the same thing, what would make a difference for you?" Examples of ideas from these plans are listed below.

Not bring up the word snoop dog

Put a stop to name-calling

Don't call her names or anything

Say hi to him every day

Talk to her socially

Ask her how she is

Talk to her if she's alone, sad or down

Ask her if she's alright

Listen to her

Have a normal conversation with her

Find out what he likes

Ask her if we see she is upset

Ask him questions

Tell him he's ok

Include him in conversations

If he's sitting alone, go and join him

Hang out with her

Making sure that she is never alone

Sit close to her

Don't leave her to stay alone

Sit next to him in class

Walk with her

Sit next to her in as many classes as possible

Include her more-sport teams/group projects

Ask her in to our group activities

Invite her into our games

Invite him to come over to my house and play PlayStation

Try to comfort her when she's sad

Make her feel comfortable

Give her a hug when she needs it

It is not possible to tell from the record of the data whether the ideas were contributed by the bullies or by the other four students but the first three ideas sound like they came from those who had been doing the bullying. What is noticeable about all these ideas is that the participants conceptualize their role as constructing an experience of inclusion rather than exclusion. There is no evidence of political analysis of the production of difference but there is implicit awareness of victims' need to experience inclusive relationships.

Now let us examine the reports of what happens when these plans are implemented. Once again, Mike Williams has kept careful records, in their own words, of what both victims and team members say has happened. Here is a selection of examples of reports from victims of what happened.

They pulled me away when I was going to get into a fight.

They always stuck up for me when I was getting bullied.

When I was in social studies, (participant X) stood up for me and I didn't really expect it.

They stuck up for me and told other bullies to back off.

They stopped bullying me.

The team was always there and they made sure that the bully stopped. The bully's best mate threatened the bully without realizing it was them which also helped stop.

They helped tell other people to stop mocking me and they invited me to hang out with them.

The way they backed me up when others bullied me and treated me like everyone else and not some disease-ridden thing.

They let me know that they were there for me.

Well they would make me do my work and they wouldn't say stuck-up things behind my back.

I like knowing people have my back.

I liked knowing that I don't have to worry about people calling me names and bullying me and swearing at me.

I liked being involved with the undercover team because they made sure no one got bullied, even others that weren't on the team.

I liked the undercover team, because Mr. Bully was a part of it and they made them realize their mistake and fix it.

These reports from victims are selected from others that generally indicate appreciation of moral and emotional support in a more general way. They are consistent with the following reports from the members of the undercover team.

We helped the person and successfully made them feel safe in the classroom again.

Helping the victim to stick up for herself.

Getting people who are so different or not close friends to work together to help someone.

Helping the person and getting people to stop bullying.

Helping my friend and stopping all the bad things that were happening.

Well it's good talking with people to stop bullying.

The team doing things to stop the issue.

The thing I remember most about being on the team is working together with the other members

and trying to make one individual's confidence grow so that he does not have to come to school knowing that he is going to be treated with disrespect.

Being nice to the person you mocked.

It was good to be a part of something that helped someone out and it was good to see that people had actually changed.

We had to look out for X because she had been bullied by so many children.

I remember that it was hard at the beginning because we had to stop Bully X from being smart to people and therefore people wouldn't be smart to him.

We stopped all the bullying and we had fun doing this.

That we ended the bullying in our class and stopped the dislike.

We all responded when X was being bullied.

I remember stopping the person from being bullied.

I remember sticking up for people.

I remember trying to stop people from bullying others.

Everyone tried their best to stick up for X.

Helping Victim X to fit in by sticking up for her and being really nice to her.

I remember on the second day this group of girls had mocked X and it was fun telling them off and it was cool when the whole team stepped in.

We all stuck up for her when someone was mean to her.

Getting people who are so different or not close friends to work together and help someone.

People were asking why are we sticking up for her.

I remember finding it quite hard at some points to speak up to the person bullying X.

I enjoyed helping to stop the bullying and knowing that I am helping someone.

I liked the fact that I was given the opportunity to help out instead of being stereotyped as the bully.

I liked that we all helped him when he was getting bullied.

What I liked about being involved with the undercover team was I was helping someone else. I

don't like seeing people getting treat unfairly.

I liked sticking up for people who are being bullied.

I thought it was good to know what some of our classmates are going through.

When everyone stopped teasing X, that made me happy.

Getting people that are bullies, not to be.

I liked how I was one of the people to stop bullying.

Making sure it will never happen again.

I liked stopping the mocking and bullying in the class.

I liked how just six people can change how people think about someone.

We helped stopped bullying and it did work.

Me and my friends stopped bullying from going around in the school.

I liked that I had the opportunity to set the example for others.

This is a selection of comments made by participants in an evaluation survey at the end of the

team process (J. Williams, 2012). The comments are almost overwhelmingly positive in tone about the

process. What is noticeable for the purpose of this paper, however, is the sense conveyed that the

undercover teams have been doing more than just offering general support to the victim of the bullying.

They have been active in interrupting the interactions that were causing the suffering. They have often

challenged acts of bullying and teasing as they happen and caused them to stop. In at least a limited sense,

they have created what Rancière might call a context of dissensus.

It might be asked whether the undercover team merely establishes a new consensus and polices

the former bullies to the extent that they now are required to bend to a new collective ethos established

within the undercover team. I do not think this explanation applies, because six students do not have the

power to establish a widely understood social norm, such as racism. Rather the victim and the bystanders

are given the chance to raise their voices in a spirit of acceptance of students who are marked as different

and to be hospitable toward them. Moreover the bullies are not themselves excluded but are specifically

included in a shift of ethos. The team provides a context of acknowledgement for the experience of being

made victim that has hitherto remained invisible. It establishes a contestation of the logic of the normal

consensus but should not be confused with giving free rein for a new form of policing against a new target.

The actions undertaken by the undercover teams have actually been identified by victims as making a difference to the effects of the bullying. They no longer feel isolated and excluded. The voices of "those who do not count" have been heard and acted upon. The logic that supported the inclusion of bystanders in the consensus of the bullying relation has been interrupted and a group of potential (if not actual) bystanders has taken a stand against the logic of the bullying relation: that is, against the logic of policing the norm. The bullying relation has been changed in the process and there has been no need to pathologize the moral character of the individual bully. This shift has been achieved through carefully inviting a group of students to work within their age-related cultural world towards a transformative purpose.

What is not clear, however, is whether consciousness of how the discourse of bullying works has been increased. The conventional relational categories have been successfully disrupted, but the shift in thinking remains perhaps implicit. There is not a full invitation to reflect on the concept of difference, or on the oppressive meaning of a process of othering, as Bronwyn Davies envisaged. Perhaps, on the one hand this is not necessary. But perhaps on the other hand, the process might more successfully counter the culture of bullying, rather than just interrupting specific expressions of it, if it were made more explicit. To be clear, if consensus (itself) is a problem that renders bullying more likely, then promoting dissensus might be part of the solution and become an aspect of intervention. But we should not confuse the issue by thinking of consensus and bullying as identical with each other. They are separate concepts that have been argued here to work in relation to each other. Not all expressions of consensus, however, will manifest in bullying. Neither is it yet clear that bullying is only about the policing of norms. It is thus suggested that it may be useful, rather than automatically sufficient, to engage students in the deconstruction of social norms and to create a context of dissensus in which space is created for those who are different to be heard and taken seriously.

To this end, the undercover anti-bullying teams process might profitably be altered slightly to include an opportunity for more conversation about the designation of some persons as "other" on account of perceptions of difference. Participants in the undercover team might profitably be engaged with some questions such as the following:

What is different about X that might have led to him or her becoming the target of bullying?

Do you think it is fair for students to be bullied just because they are different? Why not?

Now that the bullying has stopped, what have you learned about what it is like to be excluded?

What do you now think that bystanders can do to disrupt bullying in future?

Adding questions like these to the process of an undercover anti-bullying team might enhance the extent to which it makes consciousness of the power relations involved in bullying more explicit. Such conversation needs to be located in the language world of the students, rather than laden with theoretical denseness. Potentially, however, challenging more explicitly the discourse of bullying might achieve what Foucault refers to as putting relations of power "back into the hands of those who exercise them" (Foucault, 1989, pp. 143-4).

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