

# **MEANINGS OF BULLYING IN THE GREEK CONTEXT**

**An exploration of the meanings of bullying from the perspectives and experiences of 11-12 yr old pupils attending a primary school in Greece.**

**By**

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**This thesis is submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**at**

**the University of Cardiff ( School of Social Sciences)**

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## Acknowledgements

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**Dedicated  
to  
Greece**

I am grateful to my supervisors, Rayn Jones and Emma Wood. Without their encouragement and advice every difficult step would not have been taken.

I am grateful to the University of Cardiff for all the support I have been offered. I owe a big 'Thank you' to Mrs. Liz Ranton whose behaviour made me feel 'at home'.



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## **SUMMARY**

The phenomenon of bullying has been recognized as a reality within Greek schools; however, the underlying concept seems to be still enveloped by ambiguity and confusion. The present piece of qualitative research aims to offer insights into the meanings that bullying is assigned within the Greek context. Throughout the fieldwork, conducted in a primary school in southwest Greece, thirty one 11-12 year old pupils offered their perspectives on school bullying. Moreover, they wrote and talked about their related experiences.

The children's reports indicate that reaching a consensus of what constitutes a bullying act is unrealistic when real life incidents are concerned. The explanations offered by the children link bullying to a network of personal, socio-cultural, and organizational factors, thus confirming the multi-causal nature of the phenomenon. However, all of them shared the view that bullying is provoked by a deserving victim who transgresses the existing socio-cultural norms. On the other hand, the behaviour of the bullies was understood as conforming to the demands of the existing socio-cultural framework, rather than expressing feelings of malice and hostility. The pupils' responses to bullying seem to constitute their struggle to safeguard desirable social identities, rather than to tackle the phenomenon itself.

Additionally, this study highlights the power of the Greek terminology to mask bullying by reproducing existing socio-cultural meanings and practices, and discusses the related implications of this. The importance of language as a social means through which personal goals are achieved is emphasized. This is because through the rationales, excuses, and justifications offered by the pupils, meanings of bullying can be normalized so as to fit Greek socio-cultural requests. The findings of the present study stress that culture and context should not be overlooked when anti-bullying school programs are designed.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Aggression conducted from and against peers has probably occurred in schools long before it attracted the attention of researchers. Bullying, a relatively new area of scientific research, overlaps with the concept of aggression. However, being characterized by unprovoked and systematic attacks, and an asymmetrical power relationship between the 'opponent parties', bullying is quite distinguishable from other kinds of aggression (Olweus, 1993; Griffin and Gross, 2004).

With the pioneering work of Dan Olweus in 1978, the phenomenon of school bullying has been a topic of international research interest (Smith et al., 1999) with an aim to eliminate its prevalence. This is because it is a complex, persistent phenomenon which is also difficult to explain. This is because it encompasses physical, verbal and mental ways of peer harassment, which might additionally be manifested in socially acceptable ways (Besag, 1989; Smith, 2004; Griffin and Gross, 2004). What seems certain is the difficulty tackling it within schools and its negative effects upon all those pupils involved in it (Bouton and Hawker, 1997; Fonzi et al., 1999; Smith and Shu, 2000; Rigby, 2002).

A basic issue relating to the elimination, or at least the reduction, of the prevalence of bullying in schools is to understand what it means for the pupils who experience it. The children's perspectives constitute an important source of information that can deepen our understanding of

both bullying and the children's subjective realities (Rigby, 1996). However, such information has not been adequately addressed in the studies on school bullying (Gamliel et al., 2003), especially in Greece.

The central aim of the present thesis is to understand the meanings that the phenomenon of bullying is assigned within the Greek context in order to expand our understanding of it. Therefore, it explores whether or not thirty one pupils who attend the final year of their primary schooling in Greece are aware of bullying, as well as their bullying related experiences

The entitlement of the bullied children to speak out their own definitions, explanations, and ways of responding to these experiences is a pervading theme within the present thesis. Additionally, an understanding of pupils' motives which underlie their responses is discussed.

By drawing upon a case of group bullying being conducted against a boy, this thesis offers insights into the meanings that teasing and social ostracism can take within a real life incident. In particular, it explores and critically reflects upon the tactics that these children who acted as bullies in this particular case adopted in order to excuse themselves from blame or justify their reprehensible acts.

This thesis, taking a holistic consideration of bullying-related factors, (O'Moore, 1989; Swearer and Doll, 2001) expands its primary aim into foregrounding a complex network of contexts in order to offer indicative

evidence of how these may support the meanings that bullying is assigned. Notwithstanding the significance of listening to the children's articulations, the thesis stresses that these are not separated from the broader socio-cultural contexts within which children live and socialize. Instead, they are shaped by and shape them. Green and Hill (2005, p. 5) state that 'the child is socialized into a mode of relating to her/himself and the others that is very specific to his or her culture'. The researchers advocate the consideration of a framework within which the perspectives that children offer need to be understood.

Adopting an ethnographic approach of investigation through fieldwork that lasted over a period of four weeks, the findings of this study are contextualized into a network of interrelated socio-cultural contexts. Owing to this, there is evidence that the local community, the school, and the peer group constitute socio-cultural frameworks within which not only bullying-related meanings are understood, but they are also supported by them.

Such an approach to exploring bullying refrains from viewing the phenomenon as a problem relying on a sole interaction between individuals. Instead it places equal interest on lay theories and practices that construct bullying as preserving socio-cultural norms and hierarchies of privilege (Besag, 1989; Siann et al., 1993; Gubrium and Holstein, 1995; Souweidane and Huesmann, 1999). Moreover, this study pays equal attention to the actual roles which pupils take up in specific bullying incidents. This is because these roles affect the meanings assigned to bullying experiences (Monks and Smith, 2006). In addition,



the role that language plays in constructing meanings of bullying is emphasized in the present thesis.

Such a way of exploring bullying is missing from the studies that have been conducted in Greece up to the writing of the present thesis. These studies have in fact followed a quantitative methodological route. Quantitative approaches, valuable as they are in measuring the prevalence of bullying as well as in identifying patterns and related factors, need to be complemented and expanded. The study of Deliyianni and her colleagues (2008) makes the exception to this trend in which context was only partially examined.

Context is a fuzzy concept to define. It includes the actual or symbolic representation of persons, situations, relationships, temporal and spatial boundaries, norms, and even the circumstances under which accounts are offered. Graue and Walsh (1998, p. 9) define context as ‘a culturally and historically situated place and time, a specific here and now’. In this study, following the line of the definition cited above, context is conceptualized as a ‘here and now’ framework within which a specific action is considered in order to be understood.

The exploration of the ‘case of Ermis’ (as it is discussed in chapters ten and eleven) specifically highlights the ‘here and now’ meanings that teasing and social exclusion take. This is because shifting realities of bullying are constructed when discourses of the phenomenon are

personalized and interwoven with the socio-cultural identities of all those involved.

## **Intentions**

This study aims to expand understanding of how bullying is interpreted and dealt with within the Greek context. This is because findings from previous studies indicate that differences exist in the meanings bullying is ascribed across cultures (Souweidanne and Huesman, 1999; Morita et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2002; Kanetsuna and Smith, 2002; Nabuzoka, 2003).

Such an understanding seems important at a time when no official anti-bullying school policies exist within Greek schools, even though the phenomenon does exist. Besides, the concept of bullying seems to be surrounded by ambiguity, thus creating confusion within the context of Greek society.

This thesis also intends to stress the need for reconsidering the role of cultural discourses and practices that either reinforce or legitimize acts that can be considered as constituting bullying in different socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role that schools play in the occurrence of the phenomenon. In addition, it aims to offer evidence which supports the view that the current societal discourses on an immature, thoughtless and non responsible childhood should be re-examined. The role of religion in promoting unlimited tolerance to harassment, as well as the promotion of interdependent selves within the

formal and the informal school curriculum, is also emphasized. Lastly, the role of peer group dynamics and how these contribute to the occurrence of group bullying is also addressed.

### **Definitions and clarifications**

Although a sole definition of bullying does not actually exist, my own definition of bullying in the present study is in line with the current dominant ones (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Therefore, I conceptualize bullying as those acts that were systematically or occasionally conducted against children causing them distress or pain. Besides, the children who were considered as being bullied needed to have the desire, but not the effectiveness, to tackle the situation at hand or avoid re-offending.

What is important in this study is how the participants defined specific acts that could either be defined as bullying or as non-bullying acts across contexts. This is because it is difficult to define an act as bullying when it is detached from its context.

I also define experience as ‘the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition or of being consciously affected by an event’ (Green and Hill, 2005, p. 4). For example both the pupils who were targets of bullying and those who took up the roles of bullies were considered as experiencing bullying. In addition, pupils who were observers of bullying incidents within their daily lives were also considered as experiencing

bullying. However, when the participants watched bullying scenes represented in a videotape they were not considered as experiencing bullying.

## **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis has twelve chapters. The second chapter presents a review of the literature on bullying, and examines and discusses aspects of research on bullying that relate to the aims of the present study. The chapter consists of three main sections. The first section opens the debate about the complex issue of the definition of bullying. It critically discusses the criteria applied for an act to be characterized as bullying and how the terminology associated with the phenomenon creates and promotes ambiguity through the construction of shifting interpretations. The second section is concerned with those factors that have been proposed to explain why bullying occurs. This section places additional significance upon the contribution of language and views explanations as social actions<sup>[P2]</sup> through which specific goals are attained. The third section refers exclusively to Greece and offers an overview of academic and societal concerns about bullying. It aims to emphasize the confusion that characterizes bullying-related images and constructions that exist within Greek society. This conceptual confusion surrounding bullying is stressed throughout the discussion about the related terminology, which offers evidence that bullying is a social construct. As such, the meanings assigned to it are unstable, contextual, and culture bound. Therefore, the need for further clarification in order for these specific meanings to be “uncovered” and understood is emphasized. The section ends by associating the researcher’s concerns with the aims of the present

research study. It describes the areas to be explored and the gains that are expected from this exploration.

Chapter three discusses the methodology that was followed. It describes the research methods that were used in order for the data to be generated and analyzed. The process of the fieldwork is analytically described, and rationales regarding why specific decisions were taken are fully explained. The chapter offers a detailed account in order to represent the atmosphere within which the fieldwork was conducted. By doing this it reflects on the efficacy of the methodology that was being followed, and also highlights its limitations. The issue of the validity of the findings and the ethical considerations of the researcher are also discussed.

Chapters four and five set the contexts within which meanings ascribed to bullying need to be understood. Throughout chapter four, aspects of the local community's socio-cultural context are described in order to indicate how these are reproduced within the school context, as well as within the peer group context. Chapter four additionally links the local culture with the dominant culture of the broader Greek society within which the former is embedded. Chapter five explores the school context in order to offer understanding of how schools reproducing the local cultures communicate messages that encourage the existence and maintenance of school bullying. It places emphasis on the teachers' views of acts that might be considered as constituting bullying, as well as on the related discipline which was administered. Chapter five also introduces the sixth graders to the reader: the groups that the pupils formed are described, whilst graphical representations of the peers' ecology are

additionally placed in Appendix A. This is because indicative evidence is offered to suggest that the pupils' social status within the peer group is not unrelated to the roles they usually take up in bullying episodes. Additionally, it points to the affiliations developed among the participants, since these affect both how they act, and how they talk about themselves and about their peers. Thus, the children's views of friendship make the focal topic of this section.

Chapter six describes how bullying was introduced within the Greek context as a 'sensitive' topic through the use of a video tape produced in a different cultural context. The chapter explores the participants' views of bullying when these are referred to a non-personalized context. It also discusses the effectiveness of the video as a material to explore perspectives of bullying on the part of children.

The three following chapters (seven, eight, and nine) explore and analytically discuss the meanings assigned to the acts of nasty teasing, swearing, rumor spreading, and social exclusion on the part of the recipients. Chapter seven highlights the role that the Greek terminology plays in masking or modifying the meanings assigned to specific bullying acts. Therefore, it points to the role that the assignment of nick-names plays in communicating the existing norms through the use of a figurative language. In chapter eight, the children's explanations of their experiences bring about a blend of angles that the participants consider in order to confirm that bullying is understood as a multi-causal phenomenon. Chapter eight explores the responses of the bullied to their experiences, and offers an understanding of why specific responses were

adopted by the participants. It points to the factors that encourage or inhibit the employment of specific ways of responding to bullying. The chapter aims to offer an understanding of how the culture of the broader community reproduced within the school, as well as the peer group culture, veil the actual need of the bullied children for support.

The chapters ten and eleven refer exclusively to a single case of group teasing conducted against one boy, named Ermis. These two chapters illustrate how the pupils who acted as bullies in this particular case wrote and talked about their acts, as well as about themselves and others. The chapter's aim is to offer an understanding of the crucial roles that culture, language, and peer group norms play in either normalizing or justifying bullying. Therefore, it stresses the sophisticated strategies that children adopt aimed at negotiating their acts as well as their socio-cultural identities. Furthermore, it discusses the related implications. Chapters ten and eleven additionally represent the complexity that surrounds the definition of teasing even when this is concerned with a single specific case.

The last chapter brings together the main findings of the study. It discusses them in relation to the research questions and the issues that the participants themselves raised. It aims to offer concluding comments by linking definitions, explanations, and responses to bullying to socio-cultural and educational factors. Moreover, it offers insights of the importance of considering the meanings assigned to bullying within a personalized context in which children take up specific roles. Additionally, it offers the implications for considering the importance that



interrelated contexts play in supporting particular constructions of bullying whilst leaving others unspoken. The final chapter also highlights how the current societal discourses on an innocent and impulsive childhood pervading Greek society are challenged. Finally, the researcher offers a reflective account regarding the limitations of this study, and suggestions for further research are made.

Chapter two makes a review of the research literature on bullying. Specifically it refers to issues which relate to the present study. It aims to offer an understanding of the complexities and the gaps that exist in the research on bullying in order to explain how these will be addressed in the present thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a detailed review of the literature concerning the phenomenon of bullying. It focuses particularly on definitions and explanations of bullying because these issues constitute themes explored within the present thesis. Additionally, it critically reflects upon them. The chapter includes three broad sections. In the first section the problem of reaching a consensus on what constitutes bullying is raised. Specifically, in this section the negative consequences of bullying upon the victims, the intention of the bully, as well as the relativistic nature of the imbalance of power are discussed. This is because these elements have been accepted as the typical criteria for a particular behaviour to be labelled as ‘bullying’ by most of the researchers. This section also addresses the problem of the terminology which is adopted in order to give meaning to various bullying experiences. This is because the terms used to describe bullying seem to carry context and culture bound implications, thus rendering the definition of bullying a complicated issue. In the second section, various theoretical perspectives are drawn upon with the aim to explain why bullying occurs. This section additionally emphasizes the role of language, viewing it as a social means that enables various constructions of bullying. The third section is exclusively devoted to the problem of bullying as it appears in Greece. It describes how the concept of bullying emerged and progressively unfolded within the Greek context. This section aims to represent the complexity that surrounds the concept of bullying among the Greeks, and

the need for clarification of the terminology related to bullying is stressed. Therefore, the research questions that are raised and need to be answered throughout the present fieldwork are reported. The final section sums up the key points raised and discussed throughout the chapter and links the present chapter to the following one.

### **Bullying: an ‘elastic’ concept**

The phenomenon of bullying in schools was brought as a research topic into the community of academics with the pioneering work of Dan Olweus (1978) in Norway. Since that time the term ‘bullying’ has gained particular attention through a variety of voices. Bullying has been a concern for researchers, school children, teachers, and parents. It is noteworthy that although the media and the public seem to use the term as self-explanatory, especially within the Anglo-Saxon context (Pikas, 1989; Smith et al., 2002), researchers still struggle to reach a consensual definition of the phenomenon. This is not without reason [P1]when bullying is considered as a construct that encompasses a range of direct and indirect acts that are carried out with different motivations and result in different consequences for the individuals who are affected by them (Tattum, 1989; Arora, 1996 ).

A review of the literature on bullying offers clear evidence that an agreement exists among researchers that bullying overlaps with the construct of aggression. However, its specific characteristics make it a quite distinguishable kind of aggression. Despite such a consensual view, Rigby (2002, p.32) presents the difficulty of conceptualizing such a

distinction by arguing that ‘it is like splitting hairs’ when bullying is separated from aggression, whilst Griffin and Gross (2004) on the other hand caution against the risk of overgeneralization of bullying to include any act that can be perceived as aggressive. These concerns indicate that confusion and ambiguity surround the particular concept.

Olweus (1994, p.1173) defines bullying in school in the following way: ‘A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.’ Olweus further clarifies that negative actions can be of physical (e.g. hitting, kicking etc), verbal (e.g. name calling, use of abusive language), or of social nature (e.g. ignoring someone, or spreading nasty rumors about him/her). He also adds that the acts carried out against the victimized student should be unprovoked by the victim and intentional on the part of the bully. In this way accidental acts or acts conducted for reasons of retaliation are not defined as bullying, which is a goal-orientated behaviour. The notion that an imbalance of power exists between the bully and the bullied, as well as the need for the acts to be systematic rather than occasional, typifies bullying as a construct which is generally accepted among the researchers of the phenomenon.

The need to investigate the ‘same’ phenomenon in order for research findings to be compared both across countries as well as across contexts within the same country, was met when most of the researchers adopted in their studies either the definition offered by Olweus (1993) or definitions designed in line with that offered by Olweus (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Baldry, 2004; Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Sapouna,

2008). However, even in such a case the definition of bullying still remains a problematic area as the following section indicates.

Firstly, ambiguity is related to the nature of the phenomenon itself. This means that it is difficult to judge what kinds of acts can be labeled as bullying both in different contexts and from the different positions that those who offer the definitions take. Secondly, it is related to the criteria that are applied in order for an act to be labeled as 'bullying'. This connotes the subjectivity within which those criteria are understood or applied by those who offer definitions. Thirdly, there is the difficulty of terminology: this difficulty is obvious in the absence of a non-universal terminology to define the phenomenon in different languages. As a result the existence of various words related to acts that can be considered as bullying acts connote multi-cultural conceptualizations. These difficulties and the concerns raised will be discussed in the following sections.

### *Bullying: a plethora of experiences*

A general agreement exists among researchers that bullying can be direct and/or indirect, and displayed in physical, verbal, or social ways (Olweus, 1993; Farrington, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Whilst physical means of attack ( e.g. hitting, kicking) hold a high degree of certainty that can be defined as bullying, verbal, as well as social means of attack, offer degrees of ambiguity in terms of their definition.

In the case of verbal bullying, teasing makes the most ambiguous kind of behaviour. This is because whether or not teasing is a humorous, playful act or a bullying act highly depends on contextual cues that are considered along with the act itself (e.g. the relationship of the teaser with the teased, the topic of the teasing, etc.). Therefore, the definition of teasing as bullying is highly subjective (Pawluck, 1989), despite the fact that the act may fit the typical objective criteria set (Olweus, 1993).

Besides, in indirect social exclusionary practices conducted against some children by their peers, the instigator's intention is difficult to identify with certainty (Garanteau and Gillessen, 2006). This is because indirect acts of aggression such as gossiping or rumor spreading 'are delivered circuitously' (Coyne et al., 2006, p.294) and can take the form of a normative kind of communication. Similarly, Besag (1989) supports that bullying can take the form of an attitude displayed in a socially acceptable way. As far as the bully's motivation to hurt the victim is concerned, it can not fit within objective means of judgment.

The preceding paragraphs show that objective criteria of defining an act as bullying is difficult to apply in real life incidents. In cases of physical acts, observations can offer at least considerable hints about the frequency of attacks. Besides, the 'damage' upon the victim may be easily identifiable, as well upon the offender himself/herself. May be this is one of the reasons that physical means of attacks have received the highest degree of consensus among children that they constitute acts of bullying. However, as the following section indicates, gender, age and

context further complicate the issue of an act to be labeled as bullying when definitions offered by children are concerned.

### *Children's definitions of bullying*

Research studies aimed at exploring what kind of acts children view as bullying have been conducted in different countries (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Genta et al., 1996; Kalliotis, 2000). Physical means of attack as constituting bullying acts seem to hold the highest degree of certainty among children (Arora, 1994; Kalliotis, 2000). Further research findings indicate that children's definitions are not unrelated to their age and gender. Younger children tend to adopt a more comprehensive definition of bullying, whilst more boys than girls view bullying in terms of physical and verbal attacks (Arora and Thompson, 1987; Smith and Levan, 1995; Kalliotis, 2000).

However, where real life incidents are concerned, pupils characterize verbal or social means of attacks as bullying more often when they talk about their experiences. Mooney et al., (1991) for example concluded in their research that insults against family and teasing were reported by children as the most hurtful kind of bullying. Such a finding indicates that personal feelings of pain make children define bullying from an 'experience-based' perspective.

The findings of the study conducted by Owens et al., (2000a) are in line with such an approach of defining bullying. The researchers concluded in



their study that girls who were socially excluded reported that being socially excluded was a highly painful experience. Such a finding seems to bring contemplation over the context in which the definitions of bullying are offered. Thompson et al. (2002) recognize that there might be a difference between definitions of bullying concerning acts at a general level, and those offered for a specific personalized incident. The present thesis addresses this issue, which has also been raised by Arora (1996) as well as by Smith (2004).

A social constructionist approach to exploring the definitions of bullying offered by children was taken by Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003). The researchers adopted the concept of the 'interpretative repertoire' (p.136), and analyzed the talk of a sample of seventy four pupils aged 10-12 yrs. In their study, the researchers identified four different ways in which bullying incidents were constructed. They concluded that definitions offered are not unrelated to the actual roles that the pupils hold within the incidents for which the definitions are offered. The study implies that when definitions are asked attention should be placed upon the exploration of *who* offers the definition and under *what* circumstances. The present thesis aims to address these issues, and argues that in such an exploration the role of language should not be overlooked.

A narrative approach to explore perceptions of bullying was taken by Kowalski (2000). The researcher investigated the narratives that a sample of undergraduate students offered. The participants talked about their experiences of either teasing or being teased when at school. In analyzing their narratives, Kowalski concluded that the participants used different

ways of describing their experiences. Specifically, those students who were self-defined as teasers made their own negative emotionality for teasing others a central theme within their accounts. They used less words than victims did, and the terminology they used also differed from that used by the teased. For instance the former represented themselves as 'friends' (p.235) of the teased, and in contrast the teased, who also used more self-reference statements, labelled those who teased them as 'school mates' (p.234).

The preceding paragraphs suggest that the criteria considered in the definitions of bullying offered by children are dependent on various factors. The issue of the relativistic nature of the criteria considered for an act to be defined as bullying is discussed in the following sections .

Objective criteria set for defining bullying are valuable for researching bullying across contexts. This is because they enable the 'same' phenomenon to be investigated, thus limiting subjective interpretations. However, they seem to overlook, or at least restrict, the meanings assigned to personalized experiences. Besides, the nature of the pre-set criteria also seems to create considerable puzzlement over the identification of bullying acts.

The difficulty that the criteria be considered before an act has been judged as bullying has been identified by researchers themselves who seem to be skeptical about the criteria that are broadly accepted (Smith, 2004). More analytically, the issues concerning the repetition of attacks,

the existence of imbalance of power in a bullying interaction, and the intention of the bully make the constituent elements (Farrington, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994), but also problematic areas, in the definition of bullying will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### *Repetition: Does it make bullying?*

Most researchers have included repetition of attacks in their definitions of bullying (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993; Sapouna, 2008). Lane (1989) supports that the behaviour needs to be displayed on more than one occasion, whilst Morita et al.,(1999) view bullying against peers as including systematic oppression. Repetition of acts that can be considered as constituting bullying make the core of the Bully/Victim questionnaires that aim to measure its prevalence in schools. However, although a definition of bullying precedes the administration of questionnaires, repetition itself seems to be problematic. This is because there is always a risk that when reporting being bullied, pupils consider the duration of time differently from what is specified in the questionnaires (Arora, 1996).

The issue of frequency of attacks seems to leave unaddressed one-off incidents that can cause considerable pain on the targeted pupil, a concern that has been expressed by Stephenson and Smith (1989). Roland's (1999) definition of bullying is in line with such a concern. The researcher views the longevity of the harm experienced by the bullied, rather than how frequent the act might be, to characterize the phenomenon. Both researchers, as mentioned above, emphasize that

definitions of bullying should be more concerned with the feelings of the victimized person rather than the systematization of the acts. Smith and Sharp (1994, p.13) in their definition stress that bullying acts ‘...can happen frequently...’ thus taking also consideration over non-frequent acts. In this way, a middle position as far as systematization of attacks as a basic criterion of defining bullying is taken.

Research on pupils’ conceptualizations of bullying as a repetitive activity offer contrasting findings. It seems, however, that for the victimized children, repetition does not make such a necessary component in order to characterize their experiences as bullying. La Fontaine (1991), who analyzed children’s phone calls to the UK Bullying Child Line, supports that frequency of attacks made no necessary condition for an act experienced to be labelled as bullying. However, the researcher could infer that repetition did really matter. This is because it brought feelings of misery and unhappiness to those who reported being systematically bullied. Naylor et al., (2006) explored perspectives of bullying offered by pre-adolescents. They assert that it was only a minority (9%) of those children who viewed repetition of attacks as a basic feature of a bullying act. The researchers’ findings supported similar findings of a previous research study conducted by Guerin and Hennessy (2002). On the other hand, the long- lasting psychological pain that even a one- off incident of social exclusion can cause was supported by girls who experienced social exclusion from the group of friends (Owens et al., 2000a)

Researchers of bullying accept that an imbalance of power existing between the bully and the victim is needed in order to characterize a

bullying interaction (Olweus, 1994; Besag, 1989; Farrington, 1993; Smith et al, 1999; Rigby, 2002). Smith and Sharp (1994, p.13) clarify in their definitions that 'it is not bullying when two children or young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel' in order to stress this particular feature of bullying. However, there is still more to know in order to assess how 'about the same strength' is interpreted or even measured. This is because in situations of observable asymmetrical physicality existing between the two parties, power imbalance seems easy to conceptualize. However, there are cases in which power imbalance seems to be normative in the strict sense that it can be found in any context in which human interactions occur (e.g. being a leader of the peer group).

Rigby (2002, p.15) defines bullying as 'repeated oppression of a less powerful person, physical or psychological, by a more powerful person'. What then seems to make power differentiation displayed as an element of bullying is the illegitimate use of power against the child who is victimized. Again, such a position leads to the question of what is considered as legitimate or illegitimate in a specific context, and how the two constructs vary among groups, societies, and situations. This raises the issue of the norms within a given society dictating how much value is placed on positions of dominance. Besides, it raises the issue concerning who are these persons legitimized to hold such positions. This is to say that what is perceived as deviation from the norms of masculinity can give rise to bullying against those boys who are legitimized as worthy of victimization (Askew, 1989).

Whether or not children conceptualize or report the superiority of the bully as compared with the victim is also important. This is because their own definitions may not accord with the definitions offered by researchers. This will result in erroneous findings concerning the prevalence of the phenomenon and the victimization that those being bullied suffer. The situation, for instance, might not appear to be one in which support for the victim is needed.

Madsen (1996), who explored children's perceptions of bullying, concluded that younger children do not include the imbalance of power in their reports of bullying. The researcher further claims that this element seems not to be important for their definitions. This might be explained by the fact that the children mostly reported bullying experiences of social exclusion, in which power imbalance is not so clear. However, the study of Gumbel and Meadan (2000), who investigated perceptions of bullying among a sample of 979 children ( 3-8yrs ) in Israel, reported that, even at this early age, the children could understand power imbalance in physical terms.

Bosacki et al. (2006), adopting a qualitative methodology, asked a sample of students aged 8-12yrs to draw a bullying incident. The researchers then asked the children to construct their own story commenting on their drawings. Within the students' drawings, power imbalance was portrayed by less than half of the sample (40%). However, it was portrayed in ways that emphasized physicality since they represented 'bullies larger than the victim' (p.236). However, more than half of the participants (57%) seemed not to have paid attention to the element of imbalance of power.

In their drawings the figures representing ‘the two actors’ were of equal size. Hantler (1994), who had also used a ‘draw and write’ methodology to explore childrens’ perspectives of bullying, confirmed that no signs of power imbalance were depicted within the children’s drawings.

Power imbalance seems a complicated issue in the exploration of bullying; however it is an issue of the utmost importance. If imbalance of power is not conceptualized or reported by those being bullied, the school might administer a discipline for resolving what it might be considered as an ‘ordinary conflict’ among ‘equals’. However, such discipline might be ineffective in tackling bullying. Therefore, exploring what reasons may lead some victims not to acknowledge their power inferiority as compared to the bullies seems to be essential for the elimination of bullying. The present thesis addresses this issue.

The frequency of attacks as well as an imbalance of power existing between the bully and the bullied, might be identified in particular situations. However, intention to harm as a criterion of bullying makes the most obscure element of the interaction occurring between two pupils (or groups of pupils) when it has to be characterized as bullying. The following sub-section indicates this point.

*Malign or non-malign bullying? An inferential approach.*

Griffin and Gross (2004) view aggression as intentional harm doing: Bullying as a type of aggression has to be carried out with an intention to

harm on the one hand, and to effect harm on the other hand. Although researchers in their conceptualizations of bullying do stress that the phenomenon does not occur accidentally (Olweus, 1994; Smith et al., 1999; Smorti and Ciucci, 2000), Tattum (1989, p.11) takes an extreme approach and stresses that bullying stems from the bully's 'wilful conscious desire to hurt another person and put him under stress'. He views bullying as a deviant behaviour of the most 'malicious and malevolent' kind (Tattum, 1989, p. 7). Smorti et al. (2003) also characterize bullying as 'a subcategory of aggressive behaviour but of particular vicious kind'. Such a position accords the representation of the bully as an evil mind (Sutton et al., 1999), and typifies the phenomenon of what has been defined as 'malign' bullying (Rigby, 2002, p.49). However on the other hand, acceptance of the existence of another type of bullying, but of a 'non-malign' type (Rigby, 2002, p.49), makes the interpretation of the interaction at hand more complicated and highly subjective. Claims supporting that bullying can occur for a variety of reasons (Elinoff et al., 2004) seem unable to clarify how the bullies' motivations can be inferred, although they reconcile the two extreme positions taken.

The intention based approach as an element of defining bullying seems to be a fuzzy one to take. This is because the motivational basis of an act lies on subjective inferences that either the victims and/or the observers make. On the other hand, allegations of the perpetrators regarding their motivations can affect such inferences (Pawluck, 1989). Therefore bullying becomes an interpretative construct, an issue of discourse that takes place between the bully and the victim, or anyone else concerned.



It seems plausible that it is only the victim who may perceive intention to harm on the part of the bully. In such a case, malicious intention on the part of the perpetrators matters as long as it fits the victims' own definitions of bullying. Archer (2001) however, interrogates how the validity of an inference of others' intentions can be judged, and points to the elusive nature of such definitional approaches. Smith and Sharp (1994) left the issue of intention out of their definitions, and stressed that it is the pain that is inflicted upon the victim that results in an act being defined as bullying, irrespective of the intention of the bully, a claim that Kowalski (2000) also supports.

Research studies aimed at investigating the children's perspectives of bullying gave a non-coherent picture regarding whether or not the intention of the bully was a necessary element of their definitions. However, when intention of the bully was mentioned contrasting findings emerged.

Analysis of the phone calls from the children who reported being bullied to the Bullying Child Line indicated that children at the age of 10-11 yrs rarely mentioned intention of the perpetrator in their reports (La Fontain, 1991). In fact, their own feelings did matter. However, some of them said that they could infer hostility against them on the part of the bullied. Monks and Smith (2006), using a cartoon methodology, investigated the definitions of bullying that children aged 4-6 and 8-14 offered. It was only at the age of 14 that pupils included the bully's motives in their definitions.

In the study conducted by Bosacki et al. (2006), 78% of the sample (8-14yrs) represented the faces of the bullies smiling as if they derived satisfaction from hurting others. The findings of that study contrasted with the findings of another study. Naylor et al. (2006), who investigated definitions that a sample of 1820 pupils aged 11-14 yrs old offered for bullying, found that older pupils could understand bullying as including direct and indirect types. However, only 6.2 % of the sample said that the bully intended to hurt the victim. Similarly, the study conducted by Smorti and Ciucci (2000) with a sample of children aged 11-13 yrs also indicated that the children attributed no hostile intentions to the bullies in their narratives. It was noteworthy that those children who had been identified as bullies used the construct of the bully's intention in their explanations more than those who had not been identified as bullies. This finding offers indicative evidence that reference to intent is not unrelated to roles pupils hold in bullying incidents occurring in a real life context. This point is explored in the present thesis.

The case of teasing seems to represent the most complex interaction as far as intentions of the perpetrators are concerned. This is because teasing as a social phenomenon reflects light-hearted as well as antisocial elements encompassed in almost any single incident (Jones and Newman, 2005). In the definition of bullying offered by Smith and Sharp (1994, p.13), it is specified that in order for teasing to count as bullying, it needs to be conducted 'in a nasty way.' However, what types of teasing are considered as 'nasty' also lies on the subjective interpretation of the bullied child.

Kowalski (2004, p.334) talks about what he calls 'anti-social' teasing, and offers additional criteria on how teasing is contextualized within the norms of a particular society or cultural group in terms of being judged as 'anti-social'. Research studies have indicated that children at the age of 11 yrs can distinguish between a pro-social and an anti-social motivation of the teasers (Mooney et al., 1991; Blatchford, 1998; Scambler, et al., 1998). Therefore, the issue concerning what criteria are considered by the children who are teased in order to characterize their experiences as bullying, rather than as humorous teasing, needs clarification. This point is explored in the present thesis.

Concern needs to be placed upon the ways children conceptualise the intentions of the bullies, as these seem to vary across contexts. They are probably related to the ways the bullied children aim at representing both themselves and their relationships with the bully. They might also be related to peer group norms, as well as to the cultural contexts within which the interpretations are made.

It could be argued that for at least some children, intent is articulated when there is a need to legitimize, rather than characterize, bullying. Such a position is supported by Monks and Smith (2006). The issue of the perpetrators' intentions is highly complex and seems to interrelate with various factors. The present thesis addresses the issue by exploring some of these factors.

The term ‘bullying’, underlying a collectivistic concept, seems to be inadequate to encompass the variety of actions that take place for different reasons and with different effects (Tattum, 1989; Arora, 1996). The translation of the specific term into languages other than the English language seems to pose difficulties within research studies conducted in non-English speaking contexts. In the following subsection these difficulties and their implications are discussed.

#### *The related terminology: confusion and ambiguity*

The word ‘bullying’ is a well known word in the Anglo-Saxon context (Pikas, 1989; Smith et al., 2002). Therefore, it seems that nowadays it is being used as a self-explanatory term, although its meaning has undertaken changes across time (Arora, 1996). In research studies which explore the phenomenon of bullying and are conducted within English speaking contexts the term has been abundantly used (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Siann et al., 1993; Rigby, 1996).

Munthe (1989) argued that the same terminology needs to be adopted when findings from cross-national studies on bullying are compared. Therefore, translated terms were used (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Baldry, 2005) when the construct of bullying was required to be ‘transferred’ and applied in non-English speaking contexts. As early as 1993, Tattum argued for the abandonment of the idea that a single word can be used to define bullying. Instead, he suggested the adoption of different words that related to, rather than defined, such a multi-faceted phenomenon. The researcher also stressed the important role that the

terminology associated with bullying plays in affecting both people's conceptualizations of the phenomenon, as well as their reactions to it (Tattum, 1989).

Elinoff et al. (2004) offered a list of terms currently used in different languages which overlap, rather than coincide, with the concept of bullying. By doing so, the researchers emphasized the conceptual differences that exist between the different terms used, which a lexical translation cannot override. In line with such an assumption, Smith et al (2002), using a cartoon methodology, conducted a study with children aged 8-14 yrs from fourteen countries. The aim of the study was to investigate how children understood those terms that approximated the meaning of bullying and were currently used in those countries. Findings of the study revealed that semantic differences existed among the terms used to denote physical, verbal, and social ways of bullying which children at the age of 14 could recognize. For example it was found that whilst the term 'bullying' was applied in physical and verbal ways of harassment rather than social by the majority of the English pupils, the term 'ijime' was mostly related to social exclusionary practices in the Japanese context.

The study conducted by Smith and his colleagues (2002) raised important implications. These concerned the need to understand the folk terms that are currently being used in different languages in order to describe acts that can be deemed as constituting bullying acts. Furthermore, the study indicated the need to understand what aspects of bullying the specific terms used relate to. The findings of the study stressed the existence of

cultural differences in the ways bullying is understood or represented in different countries.

Baldry (2005) conducted a study with a sample of Italian children aged 12-16 yrs. The researcher aimed to investigate the children's perspectives regarding the role of bystanders within bullying episodes. It was noteworthy that the researcher used in her study the term 'prepotenze' (p.30), although the term 'bullissimo' (p.30) is being officially used in Italy to describe bullying. The researcher explained that her decision was taken on the basis of her belief that the participants might not understand the meaning of the officially used term. She also added that the term 'bullissimo' was relatively new in the children's vocabulary. On the other hand, the researcher reported that the word 'prepotenze' that was used in her study did not define an act that was necessarily repeated, thus contrasting with the dominant definition of bullying (Farrington, 1993). This claim supports the notion that terminology needs to be scrutinized for its conceptual implications before being used in investigations of bullying in different countries. The terminology associated with the phenomenon of bullying which is being currently used in Greece is explored in the present study.

Ortega and Mora-Mercham (1999) also referred to the difficulty of 'importing' a concept within a Spanish school that did not exist before the study of Seville on bullying was conducted. The researchers reported that the words 'maltreatment', 'harassment', and 'abusive behaviour' (p.162) were used as substitutes for the word 'bullying' in the definition offered to those pupils who participated in the Seville study on bullying.

The problems stemming from the terminology used in different language speaking contexts have also been raised by Smorti et al. (2003), who interrogated the different meanings assigned to the phenomenon through the different terms used to define it. The two researchers also raised concerns about how these meanings might lead to erroneous cross-national comparisons. Therefore, they seem to suggest that there are limitations in the ways bullying is understood and represented in different cultures. These cultural representations of bullying merit particular attention. Gubrium and Holstein (1995), for instance, claim that the folk terms currently used in a specific society represent aspects of its culture. The researchers seem to emphasize that words do not take their meanings in a vacuum, but instead their meanings are bound by place, time, and culture. The terminology relating to bullying that is currently being used in Greece, as well as its culture-based connotations, is explored in the present study.

The term 'bullying' seems to underlie a fuzzy concept for children even within the English context. Smith and Levan (1995), who explored the definitions and perspectives of bullying of young children (aged 6-7 years), found that only 15% of the sample related the term to indirect ways of harassment. Moreover, some of the children viewed 'bullying' and 'fighting' as synonymous terms. In another study (Monks and Smith, 2006), it was found that at the age of eight about one third of the pupils could not answer what bullying was when they were asked. Moreover, only half of them gave answers that were related to bullying. These findings confirm that 'a word is a horribly slippery and elusive creature: it defies pigeonholing. Meaning and uncertainty are mutual phenomena' (Terwillinger, 1968, p.165).

The definition of bullying is a complicated issue. Currently used definitions valuable as they might be seen to narrow the pupils' subjective interpretations. Definitions of bullying acts that are offered by the participants of the present study are discussed in the present thesis, and a focus will be placed upon understanding the criteria the children either consider or use within their definitions. The issue of the terminology relating to bullying that is currently being used in Greece and the culture based connotations will also be explored in the present study.

The present thesis also places significance upon the ways that the Greek children explain bullying, both in a personalized as well as in a non-personalized context. It aims to explore what the causes of bullying are from the children's perspectives. A review of the literature regarding explanations of bullying brings about a network of interrelated factors that are considered to relate to the occurrence of the phenomenon. These factors will be discussed in the following section.

## **Theorizing bullying**

### *The pupils' characteristics*

Researchers have been concerned with explaining why bullying occurs, and their perspectives encompass a range of theoretical approaches. However, they reach a consensus that bullying cannot be explained by taking one sole approach (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 2004). Bullying conceptualised as a multi-causal phenomenon direct the



research studies towards factors related to its occurrence, encouragement, and perpetuation, although causation of bullying is difficult to explain (Yoneyamma & Naitto, 2003).

One approach taken concentrates on the characteristics of both the bullies and the victims (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2002). Olweus (1993), for example, offers a typology of the two 'opponent actors'. He stresses the image of a typical bully as having a general 'positive attitude towards violence' (p.34), and being bigger in size than his/her victims. He also refers to 'passive bullies' (p.34), thus separating them from the 'typical bullies' in terms of not instigating a bullying episode themselves, but following the instigators' acts. On the other hand, the labels 'passive victims' (p.56) and 'provocative victims' (p.57) situate those children who are bullied into two categories on the basis of their different characteristics. The former are 'anxious, insecure, sad, withdrawn, physically weaker than their bullies, sensitive and quiet' (p.56). The latter are 'generally offensive and tension-creating' (p.58), provoking bullying against them in some way. Quite similar categories were identified in more recent studies (Smith et al., 2004a) that confirmed previous ones (Stephenson and Smith, 1989).

Although these studies tend to stress the existence of diverge sub-categories of bullies and victims, the 'typical' figure of the victim still dominates. According to this, victims are generally weaker than the bullies and are considered as different in some way from the non-bullied children. However, how such differences are constructed provides the focus for different discourses (Lahelma, 2004). Olweus (1994) for

instance, advocates that it is only the difference in strength that matters, implying that any other differences are constructed in order to justify bullying.

In contrast to the claims made by Olweus (1994), researchers still view the ‘difference’ of the victims as a causal factor or reason for their being bullied. Such a view obviously groups some children into categories of vulnerability or deviance, and therefore places them at risk of victimization. Rigby (2004) presents a number of theoretical perspectives in order to explain bullying. He stresses how gender, ethnicity, or ability can define categories of privilege and disadvantage, the latter being constructed as susceptible to and/or deserving victimization. The ‘different-victim’ approach of explaining bullying presented by Rigby (2004) confirms previous claims. According to these claims, clumsiness, ethnicity, appearance, or ability of some children can make them targets of bullying conducted on the part of their peers (Besag, 1989; Siann et al., 1993). The issue of a different victim in explaining the occurrence of bullying is addressed within the present thesis.

Following a similar approach, Whitney et al. (1994a) reported that bullying conducted against children with special needs warrants considerable attention, especially in the case of those who attend mainstream schools. This is because these children hold some noticeable difference when compared to their peers without special needs. It is therefore possible that being a person with special needs can be taken as a reason for bullying. Indeed, studies indicate that children with special needs attending mainstream school classes are considerably more at risk

of being bullied than their peers without special educational needs (Whitney et al., 1994; Hugh-Jones and Smith, 1999). However, lack of protective friendship relationships within the peer group, rather than their disabilities per se, may be an important factor to explain why children with special needs are at risk of being bullied (Nabuzoka et al., 1993).

Drawing upon the social deficit model of aggression, Crick and Dodge (1994) explain the behaviour of bullies as stemming from a biased perception of social cues. According to this explanation, some children bully because they tend to attribute hostility to the intentions of other people. Sutton et al. (1999) however, caution for the consideration of the context in which bullies act, as well the methods they use to act. They support the 'theory of mind' being applied to the social perception of bullies. Theory of mind is reflected in the 'children's abilities to attribute mental states including beliefs, desires and intentions, to both themselves and others, and to use that knowledge to anticipate and understand behaviour (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2001, p.60). However, Sutton (2001, p.530) refers to Randal (1997) in order to dispute the bullies' 'social blindness.' As he states, this theoretical position can neither explain how skillful some bullies are in manipulating others, nor the sophisticated ways in which they conduct bullying in indirect ways. The different perspectives concerning the characteristics of bullies imply that they should not be viewed as a single category, but as a non-homogeneous group also having diverse characteristics.

Bullying has also been viewed as a group phenomenon whose social nature, advocated by Torrance (2000), is further confirmed. The study by

Salmivalli et al. (1996a) identified six different ways in which bullying is sustained. The researchers claimed that a number of peers are involved in a bullying episode, each holding different 'participant roles' (p.1) within it. According to the typology that the researchers offered, the roles are as follows: 'Victim, Bully, Reinforcer of the bully, Assistant of the bully, Defender of the Victim, and Outsider' (p. 1). It was also supported that these roles are not unrelated to the pupils' social status within the peer group, or to their gender. The researchers supported that the bullies are usually the leaders of groups of co-members by whom they are supported in their acts. On the other hand, the victims tend to be less-liked by the majority of their peers. The social position of the leaders bullies among their co-members can also justify their need for social dominance, a view supported by other researchers (Olweus, 1978; Askew, 1989).

Rigby and Slee (1991), also emphasized that being disliked by a number of peers can be a reason to explain why some children are bullied in schools. This is to imply that a belief exists among some children that their peers who are bullied deserve what is coming to them. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) stress that in the research of bullying the 'peer ecologies' (p.384) should not be underestimated, whilst the social status of aggressive, popular children among their peers, who label them as 'cool' (Rodkin et al., 2006 p.176), offer evidence that bullying constitutes a part of the childrens' culture.

The following subsection discusses findings of research studies in order to comment on the explanations of bullying that children offered. These explanations are expected to deepen our understanding of children's

articulations in their attempt to attribute blame or responsibility on a variety of factors for the occurrence, maintenance, and reinforcement of bullying.

### *Children's explanations*

Research studies investigating the explanations of bullying from children's points of view have been conducted. This is because it seems of great importance to examine what children report the causes of bullying to be. Hideki (2002) refers to a study conducted by the Education Research Center of Kyoto City in order to emphasize that children's explanations should be heard before an act of bullying is condoned.

The cause of bullying relying on a 'different' victim predominates within the children's explanations of bullying (La Fontain, 1991; Mooney et al. 1991; Bosacki et al., 2006; Frisen, 2008). As far as the explanations of the bullies are concerned, it seems quite expected for them to place the cause of bullying on factors external to themselves, and particularly on the targeted pupils. However, it is noteworthy, that unexpectedly the majority of the children who are bullied also report the cause of their distressing experiences to lie with themselves.

La Fontain (1989) reports that when children were asked to explain why they thought they were teased, they tended to concentrate on factors concerning their appearance (e.g. being fat or short), or their differences

in school attainment (e.g. excelling in lessons). Their disclosures to the UK Bullying Child Line indicate that children might hold a consensual belief that they are bullied because they are different from what their peers expect them to be. Similarly, in the study conducted by Mooney et al. (1991) with children aged 9-11 yrs, it was found that differences in appearance that do not fit the normative ideals as an explanation of their happenings was highly supported by the children who were teased.

Findings of the same study indicated that it was only for teasing that the majority of the children reported their appearance as a cause for their experiences. Instead, the bullies' desire to start fighting was an answer that reached the highest consensus as to explaining why bullying happens generally. The latter finding may suggest that as children grow older, they can understand that responsibility for bullying is distributed, probably not equally, between the bully and the victim.

The study of Scambler et al., (1998) offered additional evidence that appearance as provoking bullying against them was supported by a substantial number of the victims (46 percent). It was only a small percentage of them (13 percent) that pointed to their behaviour as a reason for why they were teased, which they nevertheless characterized as 'weird' (Scambler et al., 1988, p.244). The point raised here raises concerns about understanding whether or not some children view changeable or unchangeable characteristics of themselves as provoking their bullying experiences. This understanding is important as it might affect the children's responses to any bouts of bullying they are receptors of. If, for example, children view their characteristics as not susceptible to

change, then they may adopt passive responses to bullying (e.g. ignorance, withdrawal, etc), thus encouraging the perpetuation of the phenomenon.

‘Weirdness’ of either appearance or behaviour of the victim was also reported to be the main cause of bullying by children at the age of 8-12yrs (Bosacki et al., 2006, p.239). Kowalski (2000) assumes that such a report is due to the fact that appearance and behaviour offer an observable reality for children to explain why some of their peers are bullied. The researcher adds that the more complex dynamics that underlie the occurrence of the phenomenon cannot be easily understood.

The different perceptions of children regarding the causes of bullying are probably more obvious when pupils talk about bullying in general, rather than about a specific episode. As far as the latter is concerned, more contextual cues need to be taken into consideration in order to offer an explanation. This point is addressed and discussed in the present thesis.

Frisen et al. (2008) examined the definitions and explanations of bullying offered by adolescents aged 13 yrs. The participants referred to a variety of factors in their explanations, and these factors were coded in eight categories by the researchers. It was a noticeable finding that in six out of the eight categories created by the researchers, the victims’ characteristics were included as provoking bullying. These characteristics were referred to a ‘wrong’ (p.111) or ‘different’ (p.111) appearance, behaviour, personality, and ethnicity, leaving only two remaining categories within

which the motives of the bullies and their characteristics were talked about.

Josecelyne and Holtuum (2006) explored the explanations which 9 year old children offered about a hypothetical scenario of bullying projected on a video tape. The researchers examined the kinds of explanations that were offered, and examined them in relation to the roles the children held in real life bullying incidents. The study indicated that both groups of children, those ones identified as 'bullies' as well as those ones identified as 'victims', tend to explain bullying as being provoked by the latter's unchangeable characteristics (e.g. being short or being from an ethnic minority background). The researchers express considerable concern about the effects that negative self-attributions might bring upon the victims' self-esteem. Following the typology proposed by Jannoff and Bulman, they additionally support that the victims' 'characterological self-blame' (p. 105) highly correlates with feelings of depression and loneliness. It is important, therefore, to examine what types of 'faults' victimized children attribute to themselves when they explain why they are bullied.

According to the research findings which are referred to in the preceding paragraphs, the fact that children with special needs report their handicaps as the dominant cause for their bullying experiences (Hugh, Jones and Smith, 1999) seems not unexpected. This can lead to the further assumption that children with special needs can understand the societal prejudice placed upon the construct of 'special needs'. Besides, they can probably realize that it is this prejudice that makes children with



specific personal characteristics deemed as deviating from what is regarded as the norm.

The contribution of language in normalizing rather than explaining aggression has been highlighted by Hatty (2000), who placed her interest upon the ways in which language can be used to 'masculinise' aggression. With regard to bullying, interest has also been placed upon the language that the perpetrators of bullying use when they account for their conduct aiming at their own advantageous self-presentation (Morita et al., 1999). This attitude of the bullies confirms Olweus' belief (1999), who advocated that the bullies know their victims suffering..

Following a similar line of thought, Lahelma (2004) argues that those children who act as bullies probably use the construct of 'difference' in order to justify their own actions, rather than to explain why bullying occurs. Viewing explanations being offered from such a perspective, Draper (1988. p.28), quoting Antaki, states that 'explaining like speaking, is a social action and reveals personal goals...to gain credit, appear rationale, or to convince...'.

Joking around was among the dominant reasons that a sample of third, fifth, and eighth grade students offered to explain why teasing occurs in the study conducted by Sapiro et al.(1991). Similar findings were reported by a more recent study (Scambler et al., 1998). However, Kowalski (2000) advocates that when humour is involved in teasing, it is for the benefit of the perpetrators and the onlookers. In most cases, the

teased children define their experiences distressing because they bring about feelings of self-degradation, anger, and sadness (Mooney et al., 1991; Kowalski, 2000).

Elliot (1997) advocates that it is a common strategy used by bullies to label bullying interactions in which they are involved as a game, which seems to be enjoyed by the perpetrators at the distress of the victims. Therefore, it looks plausible that the bullies use language as a means to accomplish their goals, probably with an aim to avoid negative consequences rather than to express their real thoughts.

Bandura (1986) states that people develop internal mechanisms of moral disengagement when they recount their involvement in morally unacceptable acts in order to avoid their feelings of self-devaluation. On the other hand, Langehove and Harre (1999), drawing upon the principles of positioning theory, advocate that people who are involved in morally unacceptable acts offer explanatory accounts in order to restore their distorted social identity rather than combating self-blame. However, in practice it seems that in both cases, accounts are quite similar probably serving both aims, as it appears in the following paragraph.

Hideki (2002) aimed to explore how children involved in bullying episodes explain their acts, and described the different ways in which children justify their acts. The researcher viewed those explanations as helping the bullies to 'exonerate themselves from self-blame' (p.198). In contrast, Nelson and Lambert (2001), using the construct of the

‘sympathetic disclaimers’ (p.86), stressed the need to understand the tactics that bullies use in order to ‘furnish exculpatory motives for engaging in disreputable behaviour’ (p.86). The researchers described how the ‘bully’s vocabulary of motives’ (p.83) is constructed and applied in order to normalize or justify reprehensible acts, rather than to assume feelings of guilt and remorse on the part of the perpetrators.

Liefooghe and Davey (2001) also described how bullies achieve the ‘manipulation of meaning’ (p.388) by using language other than that related either to bullying, or any other practice of oppression. The study conducted by Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) showed that bullies may use a repertoire of explanatory tactics in order to redefine, underestimate, legitimise, and justify their acts conducted against another person.

Kowalski (2000) undertook a study with undergraduate students using a narrative methodology with an aim to understanding the meanings the students assigned to their bullying experiences. The participants (aged 22 yrs) offered retrospective accounts of their experiences regarding teasing occurring among peers. Within their accounts the participants referred to incidents in which they had been involved either as perpetrators or as victims of teasing. Differences were identified between the narratives produced by those students who had acted as bullies, and those ones who had been the victims of bullying, differing both in the content as well as the form of the narratives. For example, forty five percent of the teased related their experiences to characteristics of their appearance or behaviour, and they labelled the teasers as ‘schoolmates’ (p.234). In contrast, the teasers tended to name their targets as ‘friends’ (p.235).

Moreover, the latter tended to use more words than the former did in order to express their negative feelings as a consequence of their acts, and feelings of remorse and regret were additionally acknowledged.

Evidence also exists to support those explanations offered to suggest that bullying is gendered: for instance whilst boy-bullies tend to talk about 'games', retaliation to a provocative victim tends to constitute a sound rationale for explaining why girls bully female classmates. In the study of Owens et al (2000a), it was found that it was a common tactic for the bullies-girls to explain their behaviour as being 'tit for tat...' (p.370). In this way girls seem to assign themselves only a defensive role.

Explanations offered by children indicate that bullying is viewed as an individualized problem mostly caused by the victim's 'weird' characteristics, notwithstanding the motives of the bullies. However, attention should be placed upon the ways in which 'weirdness' is constructed. This is because these ways probably highlight the norms dominating a particular society, or particular groups of people. Besides, they make the storehouse which both normalization, as well as justificatory tactics, are taken from, as the present thesis indicates.

Although children view causality of bullying to be situated within individuals, a review of the literature offers evidence that children recognize the peer group as constituting the social context that enables the perpetuation of bullying. The following subsection illustrates this point.

*Peer group: the social context of bullying.*

Causality of bullying cannot be directly linked to the peer group. However, research on bullying has highlighted the role that peers play in the reinforcement of the phenomenon. Viewed from this perspective, bullying is not an individualized phenomenon concerning either the bully or the victim. Instead, it is viewed as embedded within a social system.

Smith et al. (2002), who investigated the meanings of different terms used to define bullying, quoted Heinneman, who was the first to label the phenomenon as 'mobbing' (p.1119) in order to emphasize its group nature. La Fontain (1991, p.12) also viewed bullying as a group phenomenon. She wrote that the 'instigator bully mobilizes a group of supporters', a fact that was later confirmed by observational studies (Atlas and Pepler, 1998; Hawkins et al., 2001).

A group of researchers (Salmivalli et al., 1996a) who observed a sample of sixth grade pupils in Finland further identified six different ways in which peers are involved in bullying episodes. The researchers constructed a typology to illustrate the roles that peers can take up in a bullying episode. These are as they are following: Bully, Assistant of the bully, Reinforcer of the bully, Victim, Defender of the victim, and Outsider (p.1). It is interesting to note that according to the typology offered there is only one method of peers involvement that acts on behalf of the victim. In contrast, a number of methods of peer involvement may operate to the bully's advantage. This is a miserable reality to identify,

and various explanations are given for such a reality. These are described in the paragraphs that follow.

The victim being disliked by his/her peers seems to be a reason for being a target of group bullying (Rigby and Slee, 1991). This may also explain why victims tend to be loners and/or socially rejected (Olweus, 1993; Whitney and Smith, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 1998). On the other hand, some bullies are liked by peers for their exceptional social skills or as macho-type figures (Sutton et al., 1999; Rodkin et al., 2006). Such a finding may imply that some children tend to believe that the victims deserve what is coming to them, and in fact to justify bullying.

Group norms, especially those related to gender stereotypes, are also considered as explaining the involvement of peers in group bullying. For example, normative gendered expectations can legitimize the roles that the bullies, the assistants, or the reinforcers of bullying take up, especially when boys rather than girls are involved (Salmivalli et al., 1998). Developing a personality or behaviour antithetical to peers' culture (e.g. being weak or complaining too much) may appear as a reason for victimization. In fact, the study of Rigby and Slee (1991) indicated that a substantial number of Australian pre-adolescents expressed their opposition to being friends with children who do not endorse macho-type behaviour. Salmivalli and Voetten (2004) support that the peer group culture highly affects the behaviour of individual members, confirming the 'theory of the reasoned action' (p.247). The group norms' influence can be used to explain why some pupils are involved in the perpetuation

of group bullying even though they hold anti-bullying attitudes as individuals (Rigby, 2005).

Olweus (1994) additionally views mechanisms developed within groups to explain the development of group bullying. The researcher briefly describes these mechanisms as 'social contagion', 'weakening of the control or inhibitions against aggressive tendencies', 'diffusion of responsibility', and 'gradual cognitive changes in the perception of bullying and of the victim.' (p.1182).

Gains expected from bullying others, rather than changes in perceptions, might also explain why some children act as bullies. Social learning theory supports that children copy the behaviour of those who are viewed as figure models (Bandura, 1973). In fact, some pupils view bullies as gaining social status among their peers because of their specific behaviours (Blatchford, 1998). Therefore, it appears that what Rodkin and Hodges (2003, p.384) referred to as 'peer ecologies' can form the context within which bullying behaviour should be examined. For instance, Rodkin et al. (2006) in their study with adolescents, offered evidence of how being viewed 'cool' (p.176) can render some bullies model figures enjoying prestigious status among their peers.

However, children seem not to have fully understood the role that the peer group play in the encouragement of bullying, although they may conceptualize it as a phenomenon in which more than one child may be involved. La Fontaine (1991) for example, affirms that sixty five percent

of the children who called the UK Bullying Childline did report that they were bullied by more than one child. However, they did not mention anything to offer evidence that they could understand the different roles that the peers held in the episodes described. Similar findings were reported in the study conducted by Bosacki et al. (2006), in which the researchers found that only 7 percent of children who participated in the study represented bullying as a group phenomenon in their drawings.

Smith and Sharp (1994) reported that 18 percent of the pupils who were interviewed about their views of bullying in the Sheffield Project admitted that they would join in if they saw their friends bullying another pupil. However, some of them explained that their action would stem from the fear of being the next targets of bullying. Such an argument confirms Rigby (2004), who views peer oppression as an explanation for some pupils to be involved in bullying other peers. Group pressure as a reason for being involved in group bullying was also claimed by children who participated in other studies on bullying (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Kowalski. 2000). However, a hopeful finding comes from the study conducted by Frisen et al. (2008), in which the researchers indicated that as children grow older, they tend to report less that they bully because they are oppressed by others less.

Researchers of bullying have also been concerned with the role that both the family, as well as broader society, play in bullying. In particular, they aim to understand how the family and the broader community, in which children socialize, may encourage the roles that children take up in bullying episodes. For example, parental approval of their boys being



tough can legitimize bullying conducted among boys as being part of the development of childrens' social identities (Askew, 1989; Skeleton, 2001; Psalti and Konstantinou, 2007).

Rigby (2002) states that a patriarchal family structure can enhance the bullying tendencies displayed by children; however, on the other hand strong cohesive bonds among the members of a family may result in overprotective socialization practices. These can in turn lead children to develop submissive tendencies and become prone to victimization. However, the Rigby warns against the avoidance of attributing blame upon families for their children's involvement with bullying and victimization. This is quite plausible considering how some children act either as bullies or as victims at different times (Stephenson and Smith, 1989; Olweus, 1993).

Children who join in bullying incidents initiated by others often articulate excuses to explain why they are involved in a behaviour that they themselves view as reprehensible. The kind of excuses the followers or 'passive bullies' Olweus (1993, p. 34) offer deems important to explore. This is because the kinds of excuses offered indicate what is acceptable in a given society as a legitimate reason to bully. The present thesis addresses this issue, along with how adults' culture affects, and is reproduced, within children's worlds and verbalizations.

The role of the school is emphasized in the following section, since schools produce the arenas within which bullying emerges. Indeed,

schools as socializing agents produce and reproduce societal attitudes that may reinforce or inhibit the elimination of oppressive practices from and against school children. The following subsection illustrates how schools can comprise part of the bullying problem that exists within their premises.

### *The role of the school*

Schools have not been beyond criticism for the occurrence of bullying, since their roles in preventing or eliminating bullying have been argued to be crucial. Research on bullying started in the schools, and as such, the phenomenon looks like a school-bound phenomenon (Olweus, 1978). Later studies revealed that certain aspects of schools can encourage or promote bullying (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Sharp and Smith, 1994; Rivers and Soutter, 1996; Petropoulos and Papastylianou, 2001; Rigby, 2002).

Lifooghe and Davey 2001) stress the need to examine bullying as fitting the norms existing within organizations, thus facilitating the development of a bullying ethos rather than creating it. It has also been claimed that even the way students perceive the school climate may impact upon the level of bullying occurring in schools (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Stephenson and Smith (1989) report that schools vary in the amount of bullying that exists within their buildings. They advocate that although the pupils' intake may not be overlooked, schools are accountable for offering enabling structures for bullying between pupils to emerge. Pellegrini and Long (2002) also state that school factors intersect with personal attributes of pupils, thus contributing to the occurrence of

bullying. Rivers and Soutter (1996), who explored bullying in the Steiner school, placed significant importance on the role of the school culture, and emphasized that bullying is a situational phenomenon rather than the result of the personality factors of pupils.

Olweus (1999) criticizes the school as having a role to play in the advancement of bullying. Therefore he suggests that the development of a warm school climate can eliminate the risk of its occurrence. Such a climate would safeguard the rights of every student to be cared for and respected. Rigby (1996) views such an atmosphere to constitute aspects of what he called the school 'ethos' (p.80). The researcher clarifies that school ethos is reflected in the social interactions that take place among pupils, as well as among pupils and teachers. The researcher warns against the avoidance of sarcasm and ridicule of any means on the part of the teachers as a way of administering school discipline.

The ways in which discipline is administered for schools to combat bullying needs to be paid attention. For example, Greene (2006) suggests that counselling can bring changes in the values and norms which promote bullying. As Smith and Sharp (1994) have noted the silence and secrecy that often surround bullying can be the greatest allies of the bullies. Cowie (1999) additionally places hope on the development of peer support systems within the schools.

Besag (1989) cautions against the risks of adopting of harsh, punitive discipline, as it may communicate pro-bullying messages to the students.

When such discipline is administered by male teachers the reproduction or advancement of gendered stereotypes can be interpreted by pupils as promoting and establishing an ethos of masculinity within the school. Such an ethos is closely related to bullying (Askew, 1989).

The level of supervision is an important factor in preventing bullying episodes (Olweus, 1993). Findings from the Sheffield project showed that 75 percent of the bullying incidents took place in the school playground (Whitney and Smith, 1993), and the quality of the supervision was also emphasized (Boulton, 1994).

Teachers' attitudes and their own definitions of bullying are also of importance, as they relate to their responses to it (Siann et al., 1993). Research indicates that teachers seem hesitant to recognize social exclusion and rumor spreading as bullying, even though these acts cause considerable pain on students (Boulton, 1997; Boulton and Hawker, 1997). Therefore, the need for all teachers working in a school to develop a shared definition of what acts are to be labeled as bullying seems clear, as already advocated by Lee (2006).

The preceding section highlights factors such as school ethos, discipline, and teachers' attitudes towards bullying which affect the prevalence of the phenomenon within schools. These factors are discussed in chapter four of the present thesis, since the school is the site in which the present fieldwork was conducted. Furthermore, it makes the socio-cultural context in which meanings as well as where practices related to bullying

were open for exploration. The following section describes the situation in Greece with regards to bullying, since Greece is the country in which the present research study was conducted.

## **The situation in Greece**

### *Bullying: a difficult concept*

Research on bullying in Greece is still in its early stages. Bullying as a phenomenon with specific characteristics, as dictated by the current definitions (Olweus, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994), appeared as a topic of research interest in Greece with the study of Kalliotis (2000). There are two basic reasons that may explain such a delay. The first concerns the issue of the terminology and the related conceptualizations of bullying. The second concerns the lack of notorious incidents to attract the attention of the media until 2006. These issues are analytically discussed in this section.

Houndoumadi and her colleagues (2003) argued that the phenomenon did exist in Greek schools, but no specific term was used to define it until 1988. This claim probably implies that bullying was either studied under the broader area of aggression before it was assigned a particular Greek term, or that aggression in schools was a topic of research probably overlooked. According to the same researchers, it was in 1988 that the Greek word “*sholikos ekfovismos*”<sup>1</sup> first appeared within the circle of

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<sup>1</sup> Sholikos ekfovismos: threat in schools, fear in schools Stavropoulos, 1998, p.276).

academics in order to describe the phenomenon of bullying in schools (Houndoumadi et al., 2003, p.172).

The employment of the new term “*ekfovismos*” seemed to imply that bullying was recognized as a phenomenon related to, though different from, what was labelled as aggression, violence, or deviance in Greece until 1988. However, despite the implementation of the new term to describe the phenomenon of bullying, the concept of bullying seemed to be difficult to “grasp” for the Greeks. This difficulty was even reflected within the researchers’ agendas. However, the latter acts, which could be described with the term “*ekfovismos*” and were regarded as fitting the typical definitions of bullying, were still labelled as deviant, violent, or aggressive acts.

For instance, in the study of Manoudaki (2000), physical assaults being conducted both on a systematic basis and without provocation between peers were still nominated as deviant acts rather than as acts of “*ekfovismos*”. The findings of the study conducted by Gotovos (1996) followed a similar line of definition. The researcher here wrote about youth violence rather than “*ekfovismos*” in order to describe acts of physical or verbal assaults that typically fitted the current definitions of bullying.

Artinopoulou (2001) points to the difficulty of defining school violence or aggression, and points to the relativistic nature of the meanings that the terms and definitions carry. Specifically, she referred to the phenomenon

of bullying, and stressed the difficulty of translating the term ‘bullying’ in the Greek language. Furthermore, she confirmed that although the English term ‘bullying’ has been translated in Greek as “*ekfovismos*”, the difficulty of applying the new term in everyday communication was a reality.

Sapouna (2008), who investigated the nature and extent of bullying in Greece with a sample of primary and secondary school children, like Deliyianni and her colleagues (2008) who conducted interviews with pupils, reported the difficulty they faced in using the term bullying with the participants. The two researchers reported their assumption that the participants did not fully understand the meaning of the Greek term “*ekfovismos*”, although they could recognize the phenomenon as related to their experiences.

The preceding paragraphs seem to imply that researchers in Greece understand that a lexical translation of a term from one language to another cannot guarantee the ‘transportation’ of the underlying concept. This concern has already been expressed in the Anglo-Saxon context (Arora, 1996; Holmes, 1998; Smith et al., 2002). Such a concern may further imply that the meanings assigned to bullying are situational rather than stable across contexts.

When the new term “*ekfovismos*” appeared within books and articles written by researchers (Artinopoulou, 2001; Kalliotis, 2000), it was used

interchangeably with other Greek terms such as “*via*”<sup>2</sup> and “*epithetikotita*”<sup>3</sup>. Katstiyianni and Xanthakou (2002, p.274) however, used the Greek term “*palikarismos*”. This term is currently used within the Greek context to denote a male who acts in a way so as to look strong, tough, and courageous. The masculinisation of bullying within academics’ statements is the dominant way bullying seems to be understood within the Greek society (Houndoumadi, et al., 2003; Katsiyianni and Xanthakou, 2002).

An ‘imported’ definition in order to fit an ‘imported’ concept was also adopted by researchers of bullying in Greece. They aimed to investigate what seemed to be a well-known phenomenon within Greece (Houndoumadi et al., 2003). Therefore, researchers in Greece used in their studies definitions, as well as self-report questionnaires that have been designed and are used in the research of bullying in different countries (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Thompson, et al., 2002). These definitions were translated and slightly modified in order to be used with pupils in the Greek context. (Kalliotis, 2000; Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Pateraki and Houndoumadi, 2001; Deliyianni- et al., 2008; Sapouna, 2008). Such a methodological process was in line with similar studies in other countries (Smith et al., 1999), and was valuable as it enabled cross-national comparisons of findings.

Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001), using a self-report questionnaire with a sample of primary school children aged 8-12 yrs in the area of Athens,

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<sup>2</sup> Via: violence (Stavropoulos, 1987, p.164).

<sup>3</sup> Epithetikotita: aggression (Stavropoulos, 1987, p.322)



identified the existence of bullying in Greek schools. In particular, the researchers reported that 14.5 percent of the children who participated in the study were self-nominated as victims of bullying, with verbal types of bullying dominating over physical ones. Bullying, as reported, was also found to relate to gender, since more boys than girls reported being either bullies or victims. In addition, types of bullying were found to relate to gender, as more boys reported being involved in physical bullying than girls. With regard to verbal bullying however, no significant differences were found between boys and girls. Findings of the same study supported that indirect types of bullying tend to increase with age, and girls seem to favour indirect ways of bullying more than boys. Although the majority of the pupils reported negative attitudes both towards bullying and the bullies, the researchers emphasized that bullying 'had not yet attracted appropriate attention by pupils' (p.23). Quite similar findings with regard to the prevalence and the types of bullying were reported by Kalliotis (2000) and the findings of both studies were in line with findings reported in similar studies that were conducted in other countries (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994).

The findings of the first studies on bullying raised concerns among academics and educationists regarding the existence of bullying in schools. Therefore, a large scale survey funded by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in Greece was undertaken. The study aimed at investigating the extent, as well as the nature, of violence and aggression in Greek schools. Moreover, it aimed to identify factors that could be associated with reprehensible behaviours (Petropoulos and Papastylinou, 2001). The findings of this survey offered indicative evidence that bullying exists in the Greek schools, although on a non-

organized group basis. Concern about the problem was raised by the National Educational Authorities and the first steps to deal with it were taken. The Pedagogical Institute of Greece prepared two booklets on bullying that were distributed in schools with an aim to raise awareness among teachers, students, and parents about the phenomenon. In addition to this, advice was offered within the books concerning how to deal effectively with it (Motti-Stefanidi and Tsergas, 2000; Hinas and Hrisafidis, 2000).

An interesting finding from the presentation of the research is that boys are over-represented in the pictures which illustrate incidents of bullying within the books that were prepared. On the other hand, girls with smiling faces appear in only two of the nineteen incidents of bullying represented within the books (Motti-Stefanidi and Tsergas, 2000; Hinas and Hrisaphidis, 2000). This fact may imply that a social representation of gender within the Greek society, rather than 'scientific' theories, affect the way bullying is conceptualized by the Greeks.

Sapouna (2008), using a translated version of the Olweus B/V Questionnaire with a sample of 1758 students aged 10-14 yrs, also reported the existence of bullying within Greek schools. 'General name calling' (p.209) was the most commonly reported type of bullying, whilst more boys than girls reported being involved as either bullies or bullied. However, the researcher explained that the low rates of victimization reported (8.2 percent) might be due to the difficulty of the participants to understand the meaning of the Greek term "*ekfovismos*" that was offered

to them. Therefore, the researcher suggested that more studies need to be conducted in order to explore how pupils perceive bullying.

What kind of names ‘general name calling’ includes also needs further exploration. This is why the connotations that each name conveys might indicate what specific acts of bullying (e.g. racist bullying, homophobic bullying etc.) exist within the Greek schools. This issue is explored in the present thesis.

Taking another approach into consideration, more recent studies examined the relation of bullying to psychological variables, such as self-efficacy of students to aggression and victimization (Andreou, et al., 2005). In addition, the relationship between parental attitudes towards physical punishment and their childrens’ involvement in bullying was also investigated (Smith et al., 2004b).

### *The pupils’ meanings of bullying*

Although the researchers in their studies on bullying used the term “*ekfovismos*”, when children were asked to use words to define the phenomenon within their own colloquialisms, Pateraki (2000, p.149) reported that it was called ‘*magkia*’<sup>4</sup>, whilst Kalliotis (2009, p.3) asked pupils to report incidents of “*ataktosyni*”<sup>5</sup> in his study of bullying. It is equally interesting that when asked, the teachers characterized the bullies

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<sup>4</sup> Magkia: the behaviour of a magkas (see the following page).

<sup>5</sup> ataktosyni: the condition of being naughty( see the following page).

as ‘*ataktous*’<sup>6</sup> (Kalliotis, 2000, p.53), or “*zoiros*”<sup>7</sup> (Manoudaki, 2000, p.146). It seems obvious that different words were used to characterize both bullying and the bullies. These words convey different conceptual connotations as it will also be described below. Besides, they make the conceptual contexts within which acts and attitudes that could constitute acts of bullying are “judged”.

The significance of the words used to define bullying in different languages as offering indicative evidence for differences in the ways the phenomenon is perceived in different language speaking countries was raised by Smith and his colleagues (2002). The researchers, using a pictorial methodology with a sample of students aged 10-14yrs, explored the meanings of the different terms used in fourteen countries to define bullying. Greece was one of the fourteen countries that participated in the study, and the findings indicated that the Greek phrase “*kano ton magka*”<sup>8</sup> was mostly used by the participants to define incidents of physical bullying. Verbal bullying, including indirect or social bullying, was related to the words “*meiono*”<sup>9</sup> and “*taleporo*”<sup>10</sup>, and basically describe the feelings of the children who are verbally bullied, socially excluded, or gossiped about.

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<sup>6</sup> ataktous: naughty

<sup>7</sup> zoiros: overactive (Mpampiniotis, 2002,p.717)

<sup>8</sup> kano ton magka: behave in such a way as to pretend that I am a magkas.

Magkas is a label rarely used to characterize a woman’s behaviour. Mpampiniotis (2002, p.1032) defines the meaning of the phrase “kano ton magka” as 1. ‘Using proactive aggression to achieve personal goals. 2. Showing off daring behaviour and excessive audacity as if he is not afraid of what others normally do. 3. a male positively valued

<sup>9</sup> meiono: make someone feel devalued (Mpampiniotis, 2002 p.1067)

<sup>10</sup> taleporo: place someone under physical or psychological pain (Mpampiniotis, 2002,p.1736)

The phrase “*kano ton magka*”, and those related to it (“*magkas*”, “*magkia*”), used by children in Greece raises two important issues. Firstly, physical bullying is perceived by most children to be a male behaviour. Therefore its definition merely lies on describing how a ‘*magkas*’ is perceived by the children, or what a “*magkas*” is expected to do. Secondly, it appears that verbal or social ways of bullying are defined on the basis of the feelings of the victims. The twofold way that the children define bullying should have led the researchers to be skeptical: they need to decide whose definitions they ask for and for what type of acts, rather than asking what kind of acts fit a given definition. This approach of defining bullying is adopted in the present thesis.

### *Bullying as a societal problem in Greece*

Bullying as a serious problem and as a threat in schools received societal recognition in June 2006 when the disappearance of Alex, a thirteen years old boy, received wide-spread media attention. The boy was reported to have been persistently bullied by a group of four boys in his school. When Alex disappeared, the four boys confessed to the police that they had beaten him to death and buried his body which was never found.

The case of Alex shocked Greek society and challenged the current discourses of an innocent and pure childhood. The English term ‘bullying’ and ‘bullies’ appeared in the Greek daily newspaper ‘Athens News’. They were used by the newspaper to describe both the vicious acts, as well as those who committed those acts against Alex (Athens News, 2006, p.1). Since that time, the Greek term “*ekfovismos*” became

commonality in the Greek newspapers as well as in web sites to describe practices of oppression on the part of peers.

The Greek society was probably unprepared to accept such an extreme case of peer cruelty as was the case of Alex, and talked about a “*protophanes*”<sup>11</sup> and “*xenoferto*”<sup>12</sup> phenomenon (Koutsampari et.al., 2006, p.6) and a moral panic was created.

The term ‘bullying’ appearing in Greek characters “*μπούλιγκ*” in the media (Koutsampari et al., 2006, p.6) probably affected the conceptualizations of bullying that might have been perceived as a phenomenon not being developed or grounded in Greece. Vasileiadou (2006) quotes Magkanas, who constructed the phenomenon as reflecting the American culture, by talking about “*Amerikanopoiisi*”<sup>13</sup> (p.1) of Greek society.

In some web sites however, the Greek terms “*ntais*”<sup>14</sup>, “*tsampoukas*”<sup>15</sup>, and “*pseytomagkas*”<sup>16</sup> (haniotika nea [www.psyhe-gr/bulying.htm](http://www.psyhe-gr/bulying.htm)-accessed on 4-10-05) were used to describe the persons who could be labelled as bullies in a non-Greek context. These terms not only confirm the ‘masculinisation’ of bullying, but also highlight how bullies are

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<sup>11</sup> Protophanes: appearing for the first time

<sup>12</sup> Xenoferto: arriving from abroad

<sup>13</sup> Amerikanopoiisi: rendering into (US of) America.

<sup>14</sup> Ntais: someone who shows power which in fact does not holds, someone who “*kanei ton magka*” (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1197)

<sup>15</sup> Tsamboukas: the person who adopts the behaviour of *magkas*, displaying toughness and courage (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1806)

<sup>16</sup> Pseytomagkas: the person who pretends that he is a *magkas* does but in fact he is not (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1032).

socially represented in Greece. Houndoumadi et al. (2003, p.172) confirmed the construction of bullying as a masculine phenomenon in Greece on the part of academics. They used the words '*pseytopallikarades*' and "*ntaides*" in order to define the *boys* who act as the bullies do.

The moral panic that was created around the phenomenon of bullying in Greece was highlighted by a number of voices from parents who disputed the safety of their children within the schools. Those voices confirmed the existence of what was viewed as a 'new kind of peers harassment' that was reported to cause fear to their children. Christina Mauraki, who works as a psychologist in a Charity Union established in Athens called 'The Child's Smile', reported that two thousand phone calls were received in the telephone line SOS of the Union. Those were from parents who were terrified, and disclosed incidents of bullying that their children had experienced in their schools (Benekou et al., 2006).

When a societal problem arises people attempt to explain it by drawing upon their own experiences, as well as upon scientific discourses. Voices from Greek society were brought to attention by the media, which constructed the discourse of a child-bully who is susceptible to his/her family's pathology, and also lives within the society's pathology. The discourse of a 'disorganized family' and that of a 'corrupted society' (Traitou, 2006, p.27) were projected through the media as the dominant explanations of why some children bully their peers.

Talking about youth violence in general, there also seems to be a tendency among the Greeks to place blame on anyone else other than the children or young people. Unemployment, confusion of gender roles within families, as well as single parent families appear blameful for the offences that their children commit (Foura, 2006; Piperopoulos, 2006; Papadimitriou, 2006; Magkanas, 2008).

According to the current societal representations of childhood and adolescence that exist in Greece, young bullies seem not to be responsible for what they do or they think to do. The discourse of an impulsive, irrational, and others' directed childhood, or even pre-adolescence, seems to exempt young offenders from taking personal responsibility for the reprehensible acts that they themselves commit.

However, Panousis (2008), who works as a Professor of Criminology in the University of Athens, warns against the risk of such overgeneralizations. He suggests that the assignment of responsibility to anyone other than the children themselves should be avoided. Instead he advocates it is a necessity that personal responsibility should be taken for one's own misconduct.

The school was also criticized for having lost its socializing mission, and being instead exclusively engrossed with producing academic knowledge (Vasileiadou, 2006). In fact, as the findings from the research conducted by Deliyianni and her colleagues (2008) indicated, the Greek students themselves criticized the unresponsiveness of the school to incidents of



peer aggression occurring within their classrooms. This can probably explain why the pupils in Greece tend to disclose their victimization from peers to their parents rather than to their teachers (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001). On the other hand, teachers in Greece tend to place the causality of bullying, and the responsibility of dealing with it, on the victims' shoulders (Manoudaki, 2000; Deliyianni et al., 2008).

### *Bullying: deviance, "plaka" or "magkia" ?*

Although the deviant character of bullying was overstressed by the media after the case of Alex received widespread recognition, not every child seemed to share the adults' concerns. The study conducted by Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001), as well as the one conducted by Boulton et al. (2001), offered evidence that pupils in Greece hold negative attitudes towards bullying and aggression occurring in schools. However, a number of participants were identified who did not feel the same way. In fact, some children viewed bullying as a justified behaviour (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001), or perceived aggressive behaviour to have beneficial aspects (Boulton et al., 2001).

As it was probably expected, some pupils reported that bullying is fun. The study of Deliyianni et al. (2008), funded by the Ministry of Education in Greece, was undertaken between the years of 2004-2006. Adopting a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers aimed to investigate issues relating to bullying within primary schools and secondary schools in Greece from the perspectives of both pupils and teachers. These issues covered definitions, explanations, and

ways of responding to bullying, as well as the school climate within which bullying incidents take place.

Findings from the analysis of the data in terms of the reports offered by pupils and teachers indicated that, although both pupils and their teachers admit that bullying exists in the schools, the latter are still viewed as places that pupils are willing to go. This finding may suggest that pupils in Greece do not view bullying as a distressing phenomenon, confirming previous claims (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001). It may also suggest that bullying is accepted or tolerated as comprising part of the pupils' cultures. This point will be addressed in the present thesis.

In the study of Deliyianni et al., (2008, p. 86), it was found that a number of boys, when asked how they would characterize incidents of shoving or pushing of another pupil by his peers, stated that they are "*plaka*" <sup>17</sup>. The specific word seems to be currently used by more children to characterize teasing occurring amongst peers (Onisenko, 2008, p.7). Surprisingly, shoving, pushing, and throwing of peers' schoolbags on the floor were characterized as "*plaka* ", even within the reading books prepared for and distributed to the pupils who attend the fourth year of primary schooling in Greece (Diakogiorgi, et al., 2006. p. 74). This fact further confirms the assumption that acts which could be characterized as constituting 'bullying' in different socio-cultural contexts, are probably viewed as constituting childrens' cultures in Greece.

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<sup>17</sup> Plaka: fun (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1414).

Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001) distinguished the verb “*koroido*”<sup>18</sup> from that of “*peirazo*”<sup>19</sup> in order to separate nasty teasing from humorous teasing respectively. The researchers viewed the former as bullying. Therefore the two different terms can be skillfully used either by the teasers or the teased to produce accounts that manipulate the meanings of the acts for their own benefit, as the findings of this thesis indicate.

In spite of the existence of the phenomenon in Greece, it seems rather difficult for the pupils to grasp its meaning. Moreover, the evil or tyrannical figure of the ‘bully’ that was constructed by the media after the case of Alex and achieved public recognition (Mpoultouza, 2007), seems to be outside the children’s conceptualizations. Instead the children seem to conceptualize bullying in relation to the social figure of the “*magkas*”, who is even admired by a number of pupils (Pateraki, 2000, p.149). This finding confirmed the study conducted by Kourakis (2004) on juvenile deviance. It was also very interesting that Maria Konstandinidou (2007) separated violence from “*magkia*” in her commentary in the daily newspaper “*Kathimerini*”. In doing so, she communicated that the latter is conceptually different from the former.

“*Magkas*”, as a male figure, has been assigned as much negative as positive value within Greek society. The discourse of “*magkas*”, and the positive value that is ascribed to the person who is nominated as such, is

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<sup>18</sup> Koroidevo: Make a distressing comment, gesture or with an aim to make fun at the distress of someone to who those are directed (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 934).

<sup>19</sup> Peirazo: make a comment, or gesture to someone with an aim to make some fun, excluding any malicious motives. (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1366)

obvious when one considers a number of Greek songs that praise this particular male social figure (see Appendices, D and E).

The social figure of the “*magkas*” has also been linked to the literature prepared for children in Greece. For example the specific words “*The magkas*” are the title of a book written by a well known Greek author (Delta, 2002). A section of this book is also included within the reading books prepared for the pupils who attend the fifth year of their primary schooling in Greece. Within the section, the story of a dog whose name is “*magkas*” is recounted. Interestingly, the dog is assigned the specific name for its exceptionally positive characteristics, such as independence, courage, humour, and loyalty (Delta, 2006, p.50). Such stories popularize the construct of the “*magkas*” within the children’s cultures. Moreover, they can create positive images for those who are assigned the specific label. Therefore, the phrase “*kano ton magka*” that was found to relate to physical bullying (Pateraki, 2000; Smith et al., 2002), might be an indication that the specific behaviour is an attempt on the part of some boys to display these characteristics which are positively valued within Greek society. This behaviour is antithetical to the bullies’ desire to cause harm to the victims (Tattum, 1989); however, it relates to tendencies of dominance and independence that can be considered as bullying in other contexts (Askew, 1989; Besag, 1991).

The conceptual complexity that surrounds the construct of bullying in Greece is clear and therefore requires that meanings and perspectives related to it to be further explored. This exploration will hopefully offer a deeper understanding of the different facets of the phenomenon that are

valued or devalued. Furthermore, it will offer understanding of how these positive or negative evaluations relate to the Greek culture. Such understanding is missing from the research studies that have been conducted in Greece. The present thesis aims to shed new light on this area by focusing on understanding bullying through the children's perspectives, as well as through the ways in which they make sense of their bullying experiences. Furthermore, this thesis aims to bring new insights with regard to situational and broader cultural norms and practices that may reinforce the production and reproduction of a pro-bullying culture. The need for such an understanding has already been advocated (Liefoghe and Olafsson,1999), since it can help the school policy makers in Greece to make more informed decisions concerning how to dealing with the phenomenon.

More specifically, the present study aims to explore four basic areas of interest, which are cited below, Each of these areas will be expanded and analytically developed in the following chapter::

- Definitions of the phenomenon of bullying constructed by children who live in Greece.
- Explanations that children offer about the phenomenon.
- Responses of children to real-life bullying incidents in which they are involved.
- How meanings assigned to bullying are shaped and affected by the socio-cultural contexts within which they are generated.

## **Summary**

A comprehensive understanding of what 'bullying' means and encompasses is a complex issue. This is because the criteria set to define bullying, as well as the related terminology, are relativistic in nature. Therefore, reaching a consensus of what bullying is seems rather an unrealistic goal. A number of perspectives are taken regarding the ways in which bullying has been explained. These perspectives not only emphasize the multi-causal nature of the phenomenon, but they also foreground a number of factors associated to its occurrence. The few research studies on bullying that have been conducted in Greece leave unaddressed the complexities and ambiguities which surround the phenomenon. The present thesis aims to offer a richer understanding of the meanings of bullying as they are reproduced within pupils' everyday verbalizations and interactions. After the broad areas of research interest have been stated in this chapter, how these areas were explored through the present fieldwork is discussed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodological issues of concern to the present study. It aims to offer an understanding of how and why specific methodological decisions were taken. These decisions concern the nature of the study and the methodological tools adopted in order for data to be generated and analysed. The chapter starts by discussing why a qualitative paradigm was followed, and how the research questions emerged. It then goes on to the second section, in which the sampling decisions that were taken are discussed in order for an understanding of the reasons underlying these decisions to be gained. The third section deals with the issue of my relationships with the participants. It starts by describing the formal processes through which I was granted access into the particular school. Then it explains how reciprocity between me and the participants was gained and maintained during the fieldwork. In the following section, the stages through which this fieldwork went are analytically described within the subsections. Additionally, concerns regarding how the process, as well as the methods of research adopted, were informed by ethical considerations are analytically discussed. Section five is devoted to the method of participant observation in order to explain how and why it was applied in the present research study. Considerations with regards to the analysis of the data are reported in section six, which explains how the analysis of the data was an ongoing reflective process rather than a mechanical one. Section seven deals with the complicated issue of the truthfulness of the findings of this research

study, and how this is related to the issues of credibility rather than the truthfulness of the findings. Section eight aims to answer the question of whether or not the findings of this research study can be reproduced, thus offering an account of the meaning of internal validity in qualitative studies. Section nine deals with the ethical principles pervading the present fieldwork: the issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity are discussed, along with how the participants were protected from harm during this research study. The final section summarizes the key points and links this chapter to the following one.

### **A qualitative paradigm**

The present piece of research, which was conducted within a primary school in Greece, draws upon the tradition of qualitative inquiry. This is because it aims to understand rather than to explain, and fits with the exploration of the perspectives on, and meanings assigned to, the phenomenon of bullying (Bodgan and Biklen, 1992; Sarantakos, 1998; Ezzy, 2000). Furthermore, it displays a commitment to naturally generated data (Silverman, 1993). A qualitative approach enabled me to ‘capture the full richness of experiences’ (Greene and Hill 2005, p.13) of the participants in order to gain an understanding of the meanings they assigned to those experiences. Moreover, a qualitative paradigm was followed because the present study draws heavily upon language-based methods of generating data, and also adopts an inductive approach of analyzing the data (Silverman, 2000).

This study followed an ethnographic approach of exploration since, not



only did this approach enable the introduction of such a sensitive topic as bullying in a non-threatening way, but it also allowed for the exploration of meanings constructed through the everyday social interactions of the participants. Emond (2005) supports the use of ethnographic approaches in order to understand the world of children and uncover the symbolic ways through which this world is constructed. Moreover, an ethnographic approach foregrounds context, which should not be overlooked when bullying is investigated (Torrance, 2000). In this study, the meanings assigned to bullying are understood as related to a network of contexts within which these were generated. These contexts refer to the socio-cultural context of the local community, the school socio-cultural context, and the peer group socio-cultural context. In addition, these also include the focal context, as this is defined on the basis of the roles which the participants of this study took up within specific bullying incidents. Furthermore, contexts include the circumstances under which data were generated (e.g. meanings generated within personalized or non-personalized contexts). Graue and Walsh (1999) support the adoption of a qualitative methodology to explore children's meanings when they need to be contextualized. Owens et al. (2000a, 2000b) also emphasize the rigour of qualitative studies when an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of pupils involved in bullying incidents is sought.

### *Generation of research questions*

There are few research studies concerning bullying conducted in Greece, and the available ones mostly follow the quantitative methodological tradition. Therefore in this study I followed a highly exploratory mode of

inquiry, given that I neither offered a 'scientific' definition of, nor did I use a specific word to label the phenomenon. Through this mode of exploration, the participants were free to construct their own definitions and bring about their own words to label the phenomenon. This approach fitted my aim to learn from the participants, rather than to investigate a pre-defined phenomenon. Thompson et al., (2002) suggest the avoidance of pre-set scientific constructs in the exploration of the meanings attributed to bullying.

As a result of this, instead of pre-setting specific research questions, I entered the field of this research study having in mind some general areas of inquiry. However, these areas were refined and rendered into more specific questions during the process of the present fieldwork. This is what a 'funnel' structure of an ethnographic approach to investigating social phenomena dictates (Hammersley and Attkinson, 1995, p. 206). Therefore, a pre-fixed plan, in the strict sense, was not followed.

The general areas of inquiry in this study were centred on four broad areas:

1. How do children define bullying?
2. How do children explain bullying?
3. How do children respond to their bullying experiences?
4. How do the meanings which children assign to bullying relate to the different contexts within which they are generated?

As it has already been stated, my initial inquiries were specified and six  
As it has already been stated, my initial inquiries were specified and six  
research questions to be answered emerged through the process of this  
fieldwork. These questions are listed below:

1. Are children aware of the phenomenon of bullying? (Do they recognize this phenomenon, and what comments do they make about it when it takes place in a context outside their own personal experiences?)
2. Do children experience acts that might be considered as constituting bullying acts? (What kinds of acts do the participants experience and what roles do the participants take up in these acts?)
3. How do the children who are bullied write and talk about their experiences? (What kinds of bullying do they report, how do they define them, how do they explain their occurrence, and how do they say they respond to them?)
4. How do the children who take up the roles of the bullies in a specific case of group bullying write and talk about their conduct? (What are the linguistic tactics that the children adopt in defending their roles as bullies?)
5. What are the roles that the broader cultural contexts, the school context, as well as the peer group context play in affecting, mediating, and shaping the meanings that the children assign to bullying?

6. Regarding the findings of this research study, what 'lessons' can be learned?

## **Sampling decisions**

### *Selecting the city and the school*

As a school counsellor, I was quite familiar with school settings; however, taking sampling decisions was not a straightforward task for me. This is because I had to face both formal and informal constraints with regards to this research study. The formal ones refer to the official channels I had to go through in order to be granted access within the research site. However, the informal ones were of equal significance, if not of higher significance. This is because being granted access within a school does not guarantee access within the groups of teachers and pupils who are in there. My own concerns about the sampling of this research were expanded to many areas: for instance I was preoccupied with thinking about whether I would be accepted by the school staff and the parents, from which written informed consent allowing their children to participate in this study would be asked. I was also preoccupied with thinking about how I would be accepted by the inhabitants of the city in which the research site is situated. Finally, I was preoccupied with thinking about how I would introduce the phenomenon of bullying in school life to a number of pupils in order to elicit their perspectives and experiences in a non-threatening way. A stranger who comes as a researcher to learn about acts, relationships and meanings runs the risk to being viewed as an intruder into the life and the inner world of a group of people. Therefore, I had to protect myself from being viewed with

suspicion by all those who participated in the present research study in one way or another.

Given that official access being granted does not guarantee being really accepted within the research site, I decided to conduct the present fieldwork in a specific city and within a specific school. The city was chosen because I had been living in it for more than five years, and felt welcome to ask my questions. Besides, I had a good understanding of the culture of the local community. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) emphasize that in order for meanings and practices to be understood, cultures need to be understood by researchers. I also decided to conduct this fieldwork within the specific school I selected because I had a long-standing acquaintance with the teachers who worked in it. Therefore, they welcomed my decision to conduct my research study there. Holmes (1998) wrote about the importance of conducting research studies in a context in which the researcher is welcomed. Besides, the school was a 'typical' public primary school in Greece, and findings would meet the principle of applicability (which will be described in the final section of the chapter).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) support that familiarity with a specific setting or culture does not prevent the researcher from understanding and exploring what is taken for granted. According to these authors, my own obligation was to treat the setting as 'anthropologically strange' (p.9), thus challenging what was taken for granted. In fact, my contact with other cultural contexts, as I used to live and work in the UK, offered me

an opportunity to at least reflect upon what I saw as familiar (Delamont, 2002 ) within the research setting.

As far as the geographical area in which of the research study was conducted is concerned, I decided to do this fieldwork in a rural area of Greece. This is because previous research studies of bullying were conducted in urban areas of Greece (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Sapouna, 2008), leaving meanings and practices linked to bullying unexplored in rural areas and in small cities.

### *Selecting the pupils*

Thirty one pupils aged 11-12 years who attended the sixth (and final) year of their primary schooling constituted the sample of this research whose meanings assigned to bullying were explored. These pupils were allocated in classes (ST1 and ST2), as will be analytically described in chapter five. The size of the sample varied across the different stages of the process of the fieldwork: for instance, only those pupils who attended the ST1 class watched the video tape on bullying. On the other hand, only those pupils who attended the ST2 class wrote and talked about the case of Ermis, as discussed in chapters ten and eleven.

The sixth graders were selected on the basis of the following specific criteria: firstly, the pupils of the year six were expected to perform better in the writing tasks that would be assigned to them during the fieldwork than the younger ones. This is because the school did not allow much

time for the children to be preoccupied with tasks outside their daily school schedule. Therefore, I fitted this fieldwork within the classroom tasks. Secondly, indirect bullying was difficult to observe, but important to be identified and understood. This type of bullying was expected to occur more often between pre-adolescents rather than between younger children (Boulton and Hawker, 1997). Finally, the school timetable and the formal curriculum the sixth graders followed offered me the opportunity to take up four teaching hours per week with the sixth graders, for as long as this fieldwork lasted. This enabled me to conduct a significant part of the research within the time limits that the school daily program imposed, which in turn made the methods of data collection look like ordinary classroom activities.

### *Broadening the sample: The key informants*

During my presence in the school, younger children from different classes approached me to disclose their experiences of either teasing or being denied participation in games. I viewed those children as ‘key informants’ because they offered me data which allowed me to identify patterns of action and thought related to bullying that pervaded the whole school community across age and gender (e.g. what kind of name-calling was not regarded as bullying). Moreover, data from their accounts was compared with and supported findings generated from other sources.

I also defined as ‘key informants’ all those inhabitants of the city in which the research site is located. This is because by meeting and talking to them I collected data on bullying which was related to my research interest, as described in chapter four. Additionally, I viewed the teachers of the school in which this fieldwork was conducted as ‘key informants’

since, although their perspectives of bullying were not directly sought in the present study, they constituted part of the school culture that was of interest to this research.

Bogdewic (1992) advocates that 'key informants' can be selected for a variety of reasons: without denying any person's contribution in the present research, these people were eager to 'confess' and some of them also knew how to tell good stories. However, the fact that their perspectives on bullying were 'culturally sensitive' (Gilchrist 1992, p.75) was the most important criterion on which I selected them as 'key informants' in this study.

### **Gaining access within the school**

#### *Formal procedures*

Being granted official permission to have access within schools in order to conduct fieldwork with children is not easy in Greece. Official permission is always decided by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs after formal procedures have been completed. These include the submission of a written report to the Pedagogical Institute in Greece. The aims of the research, the procedure to be adopted, as well as the ethical guidelines by which the research study was informed, were clearly stated within this report. Additionally, a letter from my supervisor was also submitted with my own report, in which her acknowledgment of the study to be conducted was confirmed. The time and place of the research study were clearly stated, and the sample of the study was also



fully outlined. By getting through these official channels, access within the school and permission to conduct the present fieldwork in the specific school requested was granted. This formal permission was also communicated in writing to the headmaster of the school by the Ministry of Education in Greece.

### *Access as an ongoing process*

Although the teachers welcomed me in the school, I could understand that access was an ongoing process to be negotiated and obtained throughout the fieldwork. I had the feeling that most female teachers saw me as someone who will know and will help, which was often made clear when they asked me to go into their classrooms to observe their ‘naughty’ children, as they characterized them. Such a fact also made me feel that some teachers also saw me as someone who knew better (and was there to help them), rather than someone who was there to learn from them. Therefore, I tried to keep a balance between these two images by establishing a reciprocal relationship with the teaching staff through which my ‘credentials’ were re-examined every day. On occasions, I helped them with their teaching, as I worked as a school counsellor<sup>1</sup> before being granted a scholarship to do my PhD. The teachers in return offered information to me concerning my research interests. Furthermore, I was always welcome within the staff room, where I could listen to their discussions or talk with them. They never objected to my taking notes of what they said in the staff room or in private conversations I had with some of them. I interpreted their stance as both reflecting their trust, as

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<sup>1</sup> School counsellor: school inspector appointed by the Ministry of Education in Greece to provide teachers working in a number of schools with information and advice regarding teaching and pedagogy.

well as their respect to my research endeavours. I never hid from them that I was taking notes about what they said or did. This is because I felt that note-taking was an additional way to reassure the teachers that I viewed what they said or did as worthy of being recorded. That was a promise that not only was I keeping to myself, but that I also reminded them of occasionally.

### *Getting closer to the pupils*

I think that getting close to the pupils who attended class six was not difficult for me for two basic reasons: firstly, I liked to be with children and talking with them, as I have always believed that their world is extremely valuable. Therefore, any attempt to find a path leading to this world would be a unique opportunity for me, albeit quite an unrealistic expectation. Secondly, not only did I communicate my research interest to them on the first day we met but, more importantly, I emphasized how much I valued their contribution to reach the goals of the present research.

Although I believe that I was clear and honest to them, I did not use labels such as ‘aggression’, ‘violence’, or ‘peer harassment’ in order to communicate the topic of my research study to the children. This is because I felt that bullying is a ‘sensitive’ topic to discuss. Although Lee and Renzetti (1993, p.5) view the exploration of sensitive topics ‘as evoking feelings of guilt, shame or embarrassment for those who participate in such journeys’, they do not actually define the criteria on which a topic can be deemed sensitive. Instead, such ‘sensitivity’ is

dependent on the cultural context in which the topic is examined, according to the authors' claim. From my experiences with school children, I assumed that using emotive words, as referred above, on the first day of my presence in the school might have raised suspicions amongst the pupils about the actual reasons for my being there. This is because the school is a context in which children are often judged, rather than understood, for their acts. On the basis of this assumption, I decided to introduce the aims of my research as 'being interested in understanding all they had to say about their relationships with peers or classmates'. Such a way of introducing the exploration of sensitive issues was also used by Renold and Barter (2003), who investigated children's perspectives on violence.

Fielding (2008, p.271) views 'impression management' as a basic skill an ethnographer needs to have. Through word of mouth, my concerns were quickly circulated among the school children: during the first days of my presence in the school, children attending different classes came to see me and ask if I was going to their classrooms to 'ask them about things'. Davies (1982) suggests that children do not fully understand the role of a researcher, which is why they continuously investigate it through their daily interactions with him/her. Therefore, getting closer and closer to children was an ongoing process and a constant concern for me.

The sixth graders seemed happy to spend time with me: 'a polite woman who wants to learn from children rather than to teach them', 'a different teacher', 'someone who is willing to hear', 'someone who does lessons in a different way', and 'someone I want to open my heart to' were labels

that were being circulated about me or were directly ascribed to me. When asked, dancing with them in the Physical Education sessions, singing with them in the Music sessions, and sitting next to them on the playground benches were among the techniques that I employed in order to minimize the power differentiation that exists between children and an adult researcher. I also used to take long walks and have chats with groups of girls who were eagerly gathered around me during break times. Remembering Holmes (1998, p.17), I tried to keep the 'least adult role', rather than pretending that I was one of them. For example, showing respect to the school culture, I never asked the children to call me by my first name, as the existing cultural conventions did not approve of it. Therefore, I was called Mrs. or Mrs. Varvara by them. However, I did ask the pupils not to stand up when I was entering their classroom, as they did when an adult entered.

I do not know how my gender influenced the ways in which the participants interacted with me or what they disclosed to me. Holmes (1998, p.61) states that 'women researchers are perceived as less threatening and as having better communication skills'. The boys of class six were gathered around me more often than girls asking to offer information regarding bullying incidents. Instead of taking personal responsibility for correcting what they reported as 'wrong-doings' conducted by peers, they preferred to take up the roles of the informers, probably aimed at gaining my appreciation for their behaviour. On the other hand, the girls preferred to conduct discussions centred on my appearance or personal issues, such as where my family live or what my husband looks like. They seemed to position themselves outside the

reprehensible behaviour that existed in the school, being exclusively preoccupied with 'feminine' issues.

I had the feeling that at least most of the sixth graders were pleased with my presence within their classrooms: they clapped their hands at my entrance in the school and asked me not to leave soon. Escaping the classroom routine is one explanation I could give among others. Contributing in a research study was also a fascinating challenge for them; however, as will be described in chapter nine, my presence in the school offered relief and hope for some of the pupils.

Gilchrist (1992) quotes Agar (1980) in order to argue that in ethnographic approaches of inquiry, both the context and the process of the study should be clear for the reader. In the following section, the steps taken in the present fieldwork are analytically represented. Furthermore, rationales for every decision taken are offered in order that reader have a feeling of 'being there' throughout the fieldwork process.

### **When, where, and how: Mapping the process of the fieldwork**

Fetterman (1998) suggests that ethnographers use a research design, or 'a road map that helps the ethnographer to conceptualize how each step will follow the previous one and build knowledge and understanding' (p.8). I could say that my 'road map' was designed in the process of the fieldwork and was completed after I had finished it. Following a 'funnel approach' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.206), I proceeded to

explore from the 'general' to the 'specific'. In this way, each step taken was based on the information gained from the previous one, whilst focus was gradually gained.

Emond (2005) advocates that qualitative researchers ought to use a variety of techniques to generate data in order for the best rewards to be gained. Christensen and James (2000) specified that in research with children, any methodological tools may be used providing these suit the children's' interests and are informed by ethical guidelines. The methods that I used, as will be described and discussed below, were not outside the pupils' interests. Some of them, such as the letter writing, did fit their everyday classroom tasks. The participants found the conversations they had with me fascinating, whilst the interviews constituted a new challenge and interruption to their school routines. Ethics was a concern that pervaded the whole study, being expanded to include considerations even before and after the study.

The three stages of the fieldwork are analytically described below, in order to outline both the content and sequence of each method applied in the study to the reader.

### **The introductory stage:**

#### *Introducing bullying to the sixth graders*

Playing video tapes on bullying for the pupils to watch has been supported and used as an effective technique for eliciting their

perspectives on and experiences of the phenomenon (Rigby, 1996; Tullock, 1998; Baldry, 2005; Joscelyne and Holttum, 2006). In the present study, I decided to use this projective technique for two reasons. Initially, it offered me the opportunity to introduce the phenomenon in the research site without using any definitions or words to describe it. Thereafter, it offered me the opportunity to elicit accounts of the pupils' awareness of the phenomenon which was defined and described in their own terms. More importantly, by introducing the phenomenon of bullying in this way, I avoided intruding upon the personal experiences of the participants in a direct way. Therefore, I anticipated that the possibility of inflicting feelings of embarrassment, shame, or guilt would be minimized. These feelings, which may have been experienced by the children in the final stage of the fieldwork, might have threatened the initiation of a trustful relationship between the participants and I in the initial stage of the fieldwork.

I decided to show the video tape 'Don't Suffer in Silence' (DfEE, 2000), which was produced in England and is included within an anti-bullying pack prepared for schools (Whitney et al., 1994b). My rationale for showing this video tape to the sixth graders was twofold: Firstly, it included direct and indirect acts of bullying conducted among peers in a school context. Secondly, the participants' level of knowledge of the English language was not adequate enough to understand the narrator's verbalizations, notwithstanding that the voice of the narrator was purposefully kept low. It seemed unavoidable that some of the words shown on the video might have affected the pupils' perspectives of bullying; however, without a full understanding of what the narrator or

the actors said, the pupils were expected to make sense of the scenes mostly on light of their own cultural representations of the phenomenon.

The video tape was an effective technique to elicit the perspectives of the seventeen pupils who watched it. Moreover, it was effective in eliciting the perspectives of those children who attended different classes in the school, even though they had not watched the video tape themselves. This is because information concerning the content of the video tape was circulated amongst the schoolmates, who then approached me to report their own similar experiences. The pupils' reports generated data indicating aspects of the school ethos related to bullying, as described in chapter five. Furthermore, they informed me about the 'case of Ermis': this case (of group bullying) concerned a boy named Ermis who was persistently teased in a way he did not like by all his classmates in ST2 class. Therefore, I decided not to show the tape to ST2 class for ethical reasons, so as to avoid the discomfort and embarrassment the bullied boy might have felt.

#### *Writing about the video tape: The pupils' responses*

The letters the participants wrote and the conversations they had with me following the screening of the video were used as methods to generate data. That data was concerned with the participants' responses to the video's representations of bullying. Sixteen out of the seventeen pupils who watched the video tape wrote about it without being offered any guidelines regarding what or how to write about it, which suited the highly exploratory initial stage of the fieldwork. These letters were asked



to be anonymous so that the children felt free to comment on bullying in their own terms. Some children also found this method to be an opportunity to disclose their own experiences and feelings.

Letter writing took place soon after the playing of the video: the pupils who watched the video tape returned to their classroom and wrote about it. They were allocated only twenty minutes to do this, in order for me “to catch” their first immediate and spontaneous responses. To write about the video rather than discuss it was decided upon two reasons. Firstly, disclosures of personal information were expected to be made more easily within the privacy that anonymous letters offered, rather than in a public context. Secondly, classroom discussion was avoided as the voices of the pupils would overlap, and the level of noise produced would probably have disturbed the class next door. Besides, writing was an activity that fitted the class routine. Jones and Tannock (2000, p.89) characterized writing as a ‘normal classroom activity’ that allows children’s perspectives to be elicited, whilst Rigby (1996) recommends the use of writing as a method to generate pupils’ perspectives of bullying.

The following day, the pupils who attended class ST2 talked to me about the content of the video tape that had been communicated to them from their conversations with the pupils of the ST1 class. They expressed their thoughts to me either in pairs or individually. There was no whole class discussion or writing for ethical reasons, since the ‘case of Ermis’, as described above, existed within ST2 class. The pupils’ first letters and the points they made in the conversations they had with me offered me data

regarding their perspectives regarding bullying conducted in a context that was outside their real-life experiences.

### **The ‘personalized’ stage**

#### *Experiences of bullying: The pupils’ reports*

The analysis of data generated from the participants’ responses to the representations of in the video offered clear evidence that bullying was a reality within their school life. This evidence led me to decide that there was time to explore the meanings that the participants assigned to their *own* experiences of bullying.

One week after the writing of the first letter, twenty five pupils who attended both ST1 and ST2 classes wrote their second letter to me. Within those letters, the children were asked to write about their personal experiences of acts that could be defined as constituting bullying. The use of essays was an effective method to explore the bullying experiences of school children, as has been suggested in anti-bullying school programs (Rigby, 1996), and this method has also been effectively used by Hantler (1994).

The second letters that the participants wrote were different from the first ones in two basic aspects (see Appendix C). Firstly, they were not anonymous: this is why, as I informed the children, their content would be talked about within interview sessions that would follow the letter

writing. Bickman and Rog (1998) view the importance of communicating to the pupils the aims of each activity they are asked to engage with. The lack of anonymity was necessary since it would inform me about the roles the pupils assign to themselves in the incidents they write about. Considering the ethical conventions, as will be described below, the pupils' second letters were necessary. Secondly, guidelines were offered for the writing of the second letters for pupils to follow, thus contrasting the open-ended character of the first letters. In doing so, I aimed to narrow down the process of the fieldwork and focus on bullying, thus ensuring that an 'ordinary' type of conflict would not be recounted. This means that, in some way, I took into account the criteria of bullying as currently set by most researchers, expecting these to characterize the incidents that the pupils would write about. Besides, the guidelines aimed at generating data related to the aims of the research as outlined by the research questions (e.g. the kinds of acts experienced, terminology, definitional criteria, explanations, as well as ways of responding, feelings and afterthoughts).

However, this 'restriction' did not hinder the children from referring to anything else they thought was important for them to write about. Besides, I decided to offer guidelines for an additional reason: in offering them to the pupils, it was hoped that the children would feel more confident regarding what they thought I expected them to write about.

The freedom they were allowed to report additional issues of their interest was not only verbally stressed to them, but was also included in the guidelines. Adhering to the ethical principles, it was equally important

that I asked the participants to self-nominate a role within the incident they were going to write about, instead of asking about these roles in a face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, this was an opportunity for me to assess the amount of trust the participants place upon their relationship with me.

In the guidelines offered, I used the Greek word “*enohlo*”<sup>2</sup> since the word ‘bully’ cannot be accurately translated in Greek. Besides, I was interested in identifying what words the pupils would use to define their ‘bullying’ experiences.

My teaching experience informed me that writing is not an enjoyable activity for pupils, particularly when the pupils are prepared to have a friendly chat with ‘a different teacher’, as some of them called me. However, I decided upon this method of data collection out of sensitivity to the temporal limitations the school schedule imposed, as well as to the participants’ personal disclosures.

The task was given to both classes within two successive teaching sessions. I pointed out that no more than ten lines of writing would be preferable so that the pupils would not feel ‘overloaded’. However, not all the pupils wrote: two children were absent, and two boys did not write. One boy wanted to ‘talk about it’, which he did in private

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<sup>2</sup> *Enohlo*; to make someone feel uncomfortable, to harass someone, to bother someone (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.295. -

conversation he had with me, and another boy, who had writing difficulties, also had an individual interview instead of writing.

The second letters that the pupils wrote were very informative in terms of their content and form, as will be analytically discussed in chapters six, nine, and eleven. They revealed a number of bullying episodes in which the pupils were involved, as well as the roles the pupils took up in them. Data regarding the content, as well as their form, highlighted a number of issues on which additional research interest was placed (e.g. the pupils' self-representations and the linguistic tactics used). Data from those letters also revealed a case of group bullying conducted against a boy who attended ST2 class. The 'case of Ermis' will be analytically described in chapters ten and eleven.

#### *Administering a sociometric questionnaire*

Sociometric techniques have been used in research with children (Greig and Taylor, 1999) to enable the generation of data concerning the pupils' networks, as well as their social status within the peer group and the factors related to bullying (Salmivalli et al., 1998; Schneider, 2000; Warden and Mackinnon, 2003; Estell et al., 2005).

The conversations I had with the pupils of year six offered me additional data with regards to the function of the groups, indicating inter-group relationships as well as relationships between groups. Combined with data generated from participant observation, I could say that I gained

what I would name as an informal sociometry. However, I also decided to administer a formal sociometric questionnaire to the pupils in order to gain a better understanding of their social networks. Furthermore, apart from indicating the relation of a pupil's social status to the roles he/she takes up in bullying episodes (as reported in the paragraph cited above), it also set the 'focal socio-cultural context' within which accounts and activities of peers are understood, as will be discussed in chapter eleven. The activity lasted only fifteen minutes, during which each participant was asked to write on a piece of paper the names of three classmates (one in each category respectively) who they wanted to 'play with', 'work with', and 'sit next to'. A fourth category also existed in which the pupils were asked to write the name of one classmate who 'they did not want to sit next to'.

This technique was used as a complementary method to what I called 'the informal sociometry', as preferences are easily changed among children. However, despite its limitations, the method was valuable in confirming the comments that pupils made about their classmates. For ethical reasons, I was concerned with the way the guidelines offered were worded: for example, the verbs 'like' and 'dislike' were related to the activities rather than the persons to whom the pupils' choices were offered. Furthermore, in terms of the aim of the activity, I explained to the pupils that their choices would enable me to get information in order to construct group activities with them.

## **The ‘sensitive’ stage**

### *Interviews with the key informants*

Interviews were given a prominent role as a method of generating data: perspectives and meanings can be effectively elicited through interviews, especially when retrospective accounts concerning personal experiences are sought (Merriam, 1982). Furthermore, interviews have been used as an effective means of generating data regarding perspectives and experiences of bullying (Hantler, 1994; Hideki, 2002). Throughout the process of the fieldwork, I carried out a series of interviews with a number of ‘key informants’ (e.g. teacher, pupils of different classes in the school, inhabitants of the local community) within the context of participant observation, and took the form of an ordinary conversation. They were also conducted with the pupils who attended both ST1 and ST2 classes. Those interviews were conducted on an opportunistic basis, as far as place, time, and informants were concerned. They were not tape recorded but some notes were taken, to which the informants expressed no objection to me doing so. The form of the interviews was semi-structured, thus allowing for the interviewees’ concerns to be raised. A semi-structured interview also allowed me to explore ‘culturally sensitive’ issues relating to bullying, such as the ethos of “*paratsoukli*”, which is described in chapters four and five.

### *Formal interviews with the pupils of year six*

Formal interviews were conducted with the pupils who attended both the ST1 and ST2 classes of year six, and covered the period of the last two

weeks of the fieldwork. These were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All the interviews were conducted in a separate room that was used to store books in: this room, being small and quiet, offered a warm atmosphere, and as such was expected to minimize the distance between the pupils and myself. The room had a large window which let the sunshine in, and looked like a place where friends meet to have a chat rather than as a 'court room' where pupils were judged for their behaviour. Byrne (2004) suggests that sensitive issues, as experiences of bullying are, should be discussed in a context that looks friendly and caring. The interview sessions occurred during the time that the pupils were in school, specifically between 11.00 and 12.30. During that period of time each pupil or group of pupils were asked to leave their classrooms in order to be interviewed. Therefore, it was also important that the place where the sessions took place was near to the classrooms of the participants.

Thirty out of thirty one pupils who attended class six were interviewed either individually or in the company of their friends (details about the content and structure of the sessions is given in chapters seven, eight, nine, and eleven). The interviews aimed to elicit the meanings that participants ascribed to their experiences of bullying. The rigour of the method to elicit an in depth understanding and offer rich insights into the complexities of bullying-related experiences is supported by the literature on bullying (Mooney et al., 1991; Owens et al., 2000a; 2000b; Bosacki et al., 2006). Interviews have also been used as a method suitable for exploring and tackling experiences concerning sensitive issues of children's lives, such as violence or death (Renold and Barter, 2003; Jones and Tannock, 2000).



I named this final stage of the fieldwork the ‘sensitive’ stage since, in the context of the interviews, children offered their accounts in a face-to-face interaction with me, and in most cases in the company of their friends. That context, as will be analytically described in chapter eleven, affected the accounts that the interviewees offered, and the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. It was through those interviews that the focus of the present research study was narrowed down in order for ‘the case of Ermis’ to be explored.

The formal, semi-structured interviews aimed to specify and expand the issues that the pupils raised within their letters, thus unmasking the existing related norms and cultural conventions. Therefore, although the participants were offered opportunities to take control over the process, a basic agenda of the issues to be explored was pre-decided by me and followed during the interview sessions.

For those children who self-nominated as the ‘bullied’, that agenda broadly covered definitions of their experiences and explanations offered for them, as well as the children’s responses to bullying. Therefore, the meanings ascribed to their experiences (e.g. terminology, explanations, feelings, self-presentations), as well as how these meanings were applied in everyday interactions (e.g. rationales and responses), were the basic themes that were discussed in the interviews I had with the children.

Green and Hill (2005) recognize the symbolic ways that experiences are communicated, and point to the role of the language as a culturally shared

social tool to communicate both personal and culture-based meanings. Language was the element of interest in the interview sessions that were focused upon ‘the case of Ermis’; in exploring this case, an understanding was sought of the linguistic tactics that those children who acted as bullies, in this particular case, used. Furthermore, an understanding of the processes through which these tactics were constructed was also sought. In fact, the exploration of ‘the case of Ermis’ indicated that culture on the one hand, and the participants’ self-positioning on the other, mediate the ways in which bullying is constructed.

## **Participant observation**

### *A method and a continuous link*

Participant observation was conducted throughout all the stages of the fieldwork, but also extended beyond them. It was conducted in an informal way prior to the start of the fieldwork, and was expanded after the fieldwork in the school was finished. This is why as a former inhabitant of the city in which the research site is situated, I had countless opportunities to immerse myself into the various aspects of daily life. This fact helped me to have an understanding of those aspects that relate to bullying, as will be discussed in chapter four.

That understanding was particularly enriched during the two months that this fieldwork lasted. During that period of time, I had additional opportunities to meet people in the streets, coffee shops, or supermarkets and talk with them about issues relating to my research interests. As

already mentioned, I call all those people ‘key informants’. This is why they were willing to talk, and they uncovered native points of view about bullying, as well as culture-rooted interpretations of the phenomenon (Silverman, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Participant observation within the school took the form of affiliating myself with the pupils rather than simply observing them. However, the Physical Education or Arts and Music sessions were very productive for observation, as they allowed me to ‘see’ the peers’ existing relationships, and also to get an understanding of the school climate. Furthermore, these sessions offered me evidence regarding the peer group ecology (e.g. the different groups’ formation, the existence of reciprocal friendships, etc.), and confirmed the data generated from the sociometric technique, as already described. In fact, the secretive nature of bullying (Torrance, 2000) did not really allow me to observe what could be defined as bullying, although teasing and gossiping were commonplace within the school.

During my presence in the school I fitted myself within the school life quite well. I always carried my note book, which was never hidden from either the pupils or the teachers to ‘scribble things’ in. Some pupils, who attended lower classes, used to come closer to me at break times in order to ask me if I could write in my note-book ‘about them’, as they said. Others, approaching me when I was sitting on the bench in the school playground jotting in my notebook, used to say to each other: ‘She is writing about us’, although they did not seem to have any concern about or fear of it. Graphics, initials, italics, and compressed verbalizations

stood strange in my notebook for the pupils who wanted to have a quick glimpse upon it and then run away. Participant observation was an ongoing process that reinforced the maintenance of a constant link between the inhabitants of the city, the pupils, and the teachers, with me.

### **Analyzing the data: A reflective process**

Tesch (1990) advocates that the analysis of qualitative data can follow a variety of approaches, whilst other researchers suggest that the researchers should pay attention to the identifiable procedural steps that need to be taken (Bodgan and Biklen, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, whatever way analysis is conceptualized, it should meet the aims of the research and also answer the research questions. I conceptualize qualitative analysis as a process of transformation of the data (Wolcott, 1994). This transformation required me to organize a bulk of written material in such a way that would allow me to identify patterns and inconsistencies in order to gain an understanding of the meaning of the data, as described in the following sections.

Following the qualitative paradigm, the present study relied on an inductive analysis, generally informed by the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Although I did not strictly follow all the steps suggested by the two authors, grounded theory dictated to me that themes of importance would emerge from the participants' own meanings and colloquialisms. For instance, the words that participants related to bullying constituted the specific category of 'terminology', with this being part of the broader category of 'definitions'. Indexing and

coding were the basic devices that I used in order to identify patterns and discrepancies through the cross-checking of the data.

I viewed coding to be what Miles and Huberman (1994, p.56) have characterized as 'the stuff of analysis'. Therefore, coding was used by me as an heuristic device rather than a mechanical analytic tool. Viewing coding in this way enabled me to interrogate the data, rather than merely organizing it into identifiable segments. Furthermore, instead of de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing segments of data from their original context, I kept them linked to the 'whole'. This is because it was the 'whole' which made the framework within which the meanings of bullying were situated and to be understood. The 'whole', in this research study, represented the broader socio-cultural context (e.g. aspects of the community culture) and the focal context (e.g. the participants' roles in specific bullying incidents, or the peer group norms), as well as the circumstances under which the meanings of bullying were constructed (letters, conversations, interview sessions). I admit that this is a difficult task for a researcher to do, since the interrelation of contexts resulted in the difficulty in identifying how these affect and shape each other.

Reading and re-reading the whole data was essential in the analytical process that I followed. During that process, I created memos as well as graphs which I kept in a separate file. Those proved to be of great help to me as, not only did they help me to identify patterns, but they also enabled me to conceptualize the complexities surrounding the meanings ascribed to bullying. Generic codes were determined by the research interests (e.g. definitions, explanations, responses to bullying), and these

constituted the basic themes of the analysis, which were explored across the different methods of data generation adopted throughout the fieldwork.

However, sub-codes emerged from the combination of my research interests on the one hand, and the informants' own interests on the other, although priority was given to the latter. For example, in searching for explanations of bullying acts that the participants experienced, the school, the peer group, and the victims' personal characteristics were among the sub-categories constructed by the participants, which were linked to the generic code 'explanations'.

The general areas of inquiry, as already stated, informed my decisions with regards to the analytical techniques that I adopted. The analysis of data generated at the initial stages of this study led me to pose a number of specific research questions on the one hand, and to perform a denser level of analysis on the other. This is not unusual in qualitative analytical procedures (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996); Ezzy (2000) suggests that analytical speculation over the data leads to analytical processes that are more 'sensitive' to the emerging themes, such as the analysis of the linguistic tactics used by the children described in the following paragraph.

Generally speaking, I define the method of analysis of the data which I adopted as a thematic one (Sarantakos, 1998; Ezzy, 2000); however, a combination of the principles broadly conceptualized as constituting the

theoretical frameworks of discourse and narrative analysis were also applied to segments of data. Such an analytical approach expanded the question of ‘how do the pupils write and talk about their experiences’ (research question 4) into a more specific one: ‘What kind of linguistic devices do the bullies use in their accounts in order to defend their reprehensible identities?’ A narrative analytical perspective also directed my attention to the ways in which the participants ordered facts into their accounts. This perspective helped me to understand how the children who acted as bullies in ‘the case of Ermis’ communicate their meanings.

### **Where is the truth in qualitative research?**

Truth is a problematic construct in qualitative research. As meanings and perspectives are not transparent to any researcher, it is unrealistic for me to claim that this thesis foregrounds the ‘absolute truth’, if such a truth even exists. This is because no one can ever know what is within the heads of those who hold the meanings and as such, findings cannot be true or not true in themselves. In the present study, it was *my* interpretations of the data that shaped the findings that are represented in this thesis. These interpretations were also affected by various factors, as will be explained in chapter twelve. Therefore, it is preferable to claim that I tried to make the most plausible interpretations, rather than I ‘found the truth’. This plausibility relates to both the micro and the macro cultures within which the present fieldwork was conducted. Truth in my study lies upon my efforts to minimize my own impact upon the data in order to achieve the best fit between what I represent in this thesis, and what the informants’ meanings actually are.

Lincoln and Cuba (1985) stress that the researcher's account needs to be credible rather than true in order to emphasize his/her obligation to demonstrate how he/she has worked systematically and rigorously in order to generate the data, as well as how he/she has come up with the specific conclusions. From this perspective, in this chapter I have offered a detailed account of the process followed in the fieldwork, of my relationships with the participants, and of the theoretical approaches I drew upon in order to analyze the participants' accounts. As such, I have informed the readers of what I did, as well as pointing to the restrictions I faced in the field. A more detailed and reflective account concerning the present research study is included in chapter twelve.

Hammersley (1992) suggests that the data should be approached with confidence rather than certainty insofar as the researcher's account represents the social world of the participants from their own perspective. Thus, I cannot claim to have reproduced the realities of my participants in this thesis; however, I tried to keep to my obligation as a researcher to represent these realities as I could understand them, as well as the processes through which that understanding emerged (Bodgan and Biklen, 1992).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) advocate for plausibility rather than truthfulness in the accounts offered in ethnographic studies. Given my Greek ethnicity and the Greek cultural background I assume, I could approximate the interpretation of the meanings that bullying takes up within the Greek context with more confidence rather than if I were a non-Greek researcher. However, evidence derived from subsequent



studies might further confirm the credibility of the findings represented within the present thesis and lead to the possible generalization of the findings. This last issue will be also discussed in chapter twelve in more detail.

### **Are the findings reproducible?**

Padgett (1998, p.91) supports that ‘for a qualitative researcher, replication is not a goal, nor is it considered as feasible, as one cannot recreate the original conditions of an uncontrolled field study’. I also view the absolute re-production of the findings of the present study to be unrealistic: this is because the findings, apart from being based on my own interpretations, subjected to bias, cultural background, interests and theoretical perspectives, are also bound by place, time, and represent the perspectives of a specific group of informants. However, in offering a detailed description of the context, the process of the study, the characteristics of the participants and of the circumstances under which the study was conducted, there is no reason to believe that some findings could not be applied to similar contexts, as long as they fit the criteria of applicability (Lincoln and Cuba, 1985). For example, the school in which this study was conducted is not an ‘atypical’ primary school in Greece. Therefore, factors related to discipline, organization, and curriculum can be easily identified in other primary schools, situated either within the city in which this study was completed or within different cities in Greece. Similarly, the local cultural trends identified in this study can be easily traced in other local communities that exist in Greece. Viewing the findings from this perspective, it can be claimed that some kind of

generalization of the findings can also be assumed, as will be explained in chapter twelve.

## **Ethics**

‘Ethics’ is a term surrounded by emotion and ambiguity: Bodgan and Biklen (1992, p.49) state that ‘Like the words sex and snakes, ethics is emotionally charged and surrounded by hidden meaning’. France (2004, p.181), appearing to be more specific, refers to Homan to define ethics as the ‘science of morality’. Although legal conventions dictate what is right or wrong in terms of both the participants’ rights and the researcher’s obligations, Masson (2000, p.35) argues that ‘not everything that is legal is ethical’, implying the social constructionist nature of the term. I viewed ethics as an attitude (Graue and Walsh, 1998) that was involved in every decision or step I took before, after, and during my presence in the school and the local community, thus penetrating the whole process of the study. Ethics was involved in the way I viewed the participants, the language I used to talk to them, and the respect that I placed upon their opinions and their contribution in this study. It was also embedded in the way I treated them in terms of not attempting to exploit them or take advantage of the power asymmetry between the children and myself. Therefore, I feel that I never attempted in any way to persuade or lead them into situations for my own advantage (e.g. cajoling them in any way to participate in the study). Alderson (1995) made a list of ethical guidelines that any researcher who does research with children should follow: obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, and the protection of children from harm or discomfort were of poignant importance for me, as analytically described below.

### *Gaining an informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from every parent (mother or father) permitting his/her child, attending the class six in the specific school, to participate in the present research study. This was done before the fieldwork started, and after a letter was sent to them clearly explaining the aims of the research study. Although informed consent was granted by every one of the participants' parents, this did not exclude the right of the children to deny participation in the study at any time should they wish to do so. This was explained to the children, and it seemed that informed consent was applied in practice rather than merely being a theoretical principle. This is because not every child participated in every activity, as already stated. The value of informed consent was also concerned with my obligation to continuously remind the participants of their right not to answer a particular question, or to refuse to their articulations to being tape-recorded.

### *Can anonymity and confidentiality be guaranteed?*

The right of the participants to anonymity and my obligation to keep their identities unknown was explained to the pupils, teachers, and the 'key informants' from the first days of the research study. However, the principle of anonymity seemed not to be welcomed by the pupils, as they asked instead that their names be placed at the front page of 'my book', as has occurred in other studies (Emond, 2005). They were pleased that they would at least be included in the book with their pseudonyms. However, the practice of thick description in ethnographic approaches makes anonymity an unrealistic goal; case studies that are highly

contextualized make the participants highly identifiable to those who know the case very well.

Confidentiality was also a problematic principle within the present study. Although I promised the participants that what they disclosed to me would not be told to anyone else, I was aware that the pupils told each other most of what they had said or written to me as a result of the pressure and demands that a close friendship imposed upon them. However, I did keep to that principle, especially when very personal issues (e.g. the participants' feelings) were expressed in their private conversations with me. Teachers were interested to know 'what was happening in there', and I had the feeling that the bullied pupils did expect me to inform the school about their experiences and concerns so that action would be taken on their behalf (see chapter nine). Under such emotional pressure, I communicated to the school the pupils' concerns and the general situation that existed in the school with regard to bullying, but details of the personal disclosures of the participants were kept in full anonymity.

#### *Protection of participants from harm*

Exploring sensitive issues is an emotion-laden activity: I could not assume that asking children to recollect past and unwelcome experiences would be free from feelings of embarrassment, shame, or distress for some pupils. However, interviews conducted with participants indicated that they found the sessions to have a therapeutic effect upon them, and often most of them came around me to ask whose turn it was to talk with

me, as was not unusual in similar research situations (Jones and Tannock, 2000). Furthermore, Alderson (2004) supports that protection of harm does not necessarily mean silencing children about their distressing experiences, as they are also left unprotected within their miserable realities. When signs displayed by pupils were interpreted as signs of distress (e.g. silences or hesitation to answer a particular question), no force to disclose was ever imposed, and instead children were left to take control over the conversation they had with me in their own ways. Whether children are protected from harm it is really difficult to know. Merriam (1988, p. 180) stresses that when asked a particular question, 'children might feel under pressure to respond' even though this is not the intention of the interviewer. However, I regarded the protection of the participants from intentional harm-doing to being my essential obligation, and as such, I made every effort to create a warm atmosphere in which the participants would feel that they were listened to and cared for rather than judged for their behaviour. Such an atmosphere seemed to pervade the whole research, rather than merely being reflected in the decisions taken regarding the methods used for the collection of data.

## **Summary**

The present case study draws upon a qualitative paradigm since it aims to understand the meanings assigned to the phenomenon of bullying by exploring perspectives and experiences. It adopts an ethnographic approach of inquiry, foregrounding a network of contexts, flexibility in the process of the study, purposive sampling decisions, and prolonged engagement of the researcher with the participants. Letter writing and interviews are the basic methods through which data were generated,

whilst participant observation was used to constitute an ongoing link between the participants and the researcher, rather than as a methodological tool. Analytical techniques were broadly informed by the principles of grounded theory, as these fit an inductive approach of investigation. The issue of the truthfulness of the research findings was addressed through the researcher's concerns to represent her account with confidence rather than certainty. For this to be achieved, documentation of the methods through which data were generated and analysed, as well as documentation of the researcher's reflections over the whole procedure, is represented in the present chapter. Furthermore, instead of being obsessed by searching for confirming evidence, I treated some kind of data as situational and contextual rather than true or not true. Ethics, although an ambiguous and context-related construct, informed every decision taken. Specifically, the informed consent of the participants (and their parents) was obtained, and every effort was made to ensure that harm or any kind of oppression was not intentionally imposed upon them. However, I found the ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity difficult to handle in the present study. The following section introduces the readers into the city where the research study was conducted, and aims to highlight culture-grounded issues that relate to bullying. In doing so, it offers a descriptive account of the inhabitants' practices and articulations. These constitute the broader socio-cultural context within which the meanings that the pupils assign to bullying need to be related in order for them to be understood.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **The Community of the ‘Sacred City’**

*‘It Does Take a Village to Reduce Bullying’*  
(Espelage and Swearer, 2003, p.378)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter refers to the local community in which the school which forms the context for the present fieldwork is situated. It is there that the pupils who participated in the study, as well as their teachers, lived. By offering a detailed descriptive account, the chapter aims to set the socio-cultural framework within which the meanings that the participants assigned to bullying can be understood. The local socio-cultural context offers a feedback system concerning shared beliefs of the inhabitants and everyday routines related to the phenomenon of bullying. In particular this feedback system mediates the meanings that the participants assign to bullying as it filters their interpretations and constructions (Warner and Richards, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In this chapter, I define community as ‘a group of people within a bounded geographical area who interact within shared institutions and who possess a common sense of interdependence and belonging’ (Outhwaite and Bottomore, 1993, p.98). This chapter includes five sections. In the first section, the city in which the people who participated in the study lived is described in terms of its historical and geographical layout. By doing so, this section aims to illustrate how those layouts affect both the cohesive bonds developed among the inhabitants, as well as the constructions of their socio-cultural identities. This is done because the latter additionally

affects the participants' interpretations of, and their responses to, bullying. The second section refers to aspects of social life developed within the community and situates teasing, taunting, name calling, and rumour spreading within this social life. Furthermore, it illustrates how these acts were normalized as men's ordinary practices. The localized meanings of the acts are explained and are furthermore situated within both the local and the broader Greek context. The third section refers to the local discourses on childhood and on the 'proper' family. This is because it was by drawing upon those discourses that the pupils who participated in the present study explained, normalized, or legitimized their acts. The fourth section indicates aspects of the religious life as run by the inhabitants of the city. These seem to affect the pupils' responses to bullying as it is discussed in the following chapters. The final section summarizes the main points discussed and links the present chapter to the following one.

### **The 'Sacred City'**

The city in which the research site is located is the capital city of one of the prefectures of South West Greece. Due to its famous historical background, it is also known among the Greeks as the "*Iera Polis*"<sup>1</sup> (Makateas and Tegopoulos, 2006, p.102). This label was assigned to the city as a sign of respect to remind the descendants of the resistance and life-sacrifice of their ancestors. These were displayed during the

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<sup>1</sup> Iera Polis; The Sacred City (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.385).



Revolution of the Greeks against the occupying Turks between the years 1821-1827. The Greek history praised the ancestors for their love towards their country, and for the courage they displayed in their struggle for freedom and independence. Owing to this fact most of the inhabitants of the city developed a sense of ethnocentrism with almost no doubt. As a temporary inhabitant of the 'Sacred City', I can now recount numerous conversations I had with men who stressed their ancestors' braveness and toughness to me. In their articulations, they made it clear that they viewed themselves as responsible to maintain the tradition as well as the old glory. Moreover, they admitted that they were proud of themselves for possessing their ancestors' attributes as genuine descendants as most of them said. In their verbalizations, it was obvious that those inhabitants whose families had been settled in the city before the Greek Revolution against the Turks in 1821, separated themselves from those ones who came to the city after the end of the Revolution. This separation was made apparent in their daily lives, since they seemed to resist incorporating aspects of different cultures within their own cultural heritage. The development and maintenance of shared local identity were sealed with the maintenance and the use of a shared, localized vocabulary (Kordosi, 1998; Alexandropoulou, 2000). Even the 'survival' of a number of traditionally architectural style old mansions situated in the center of the city seemed to maintain the link between the past and the present.

What Pantazopoulos (2004, p.5) recognized as the "*neo-ellinikos ethnikismos*" was used in order to criticize the attitude of ethnocentrism

that had developed in Greece, and seemed to find its application in the context of the “*Iera Polis*”. My own feeling was that a number of non-Greek financial immigrants, most of them “*Alvanoī*”<sup>2</sup> who had settled in the city were generally regarded and treated as inferior by the Greek inhabitants. Social contact between the former and the latter was kept to a minimum and only when it was necessary. The immigrants from Albania were easily found for any kind of manual work because they were often paid less than the Greek inhabitants, and I often heard degrading comments against most of them on the part of the Greeks. The “*Alvanoī*” were regarded as conveyors of a culture that was not only regarded as different from, but also as inferior to, the Greek culture. There seemed to be a shared belief among the Greeks that the “*xenoi*”<sup>3</sup> threatened both the safety and the cultural identity of the Greek community. This is why they were often represented as foreigners, thieves, evil, or criminals. Worse than this was the fact that the term “*Alvanos*”<sup>4</sup> was gradually being assigned a degrading metaphorical meaning: it began to be used as a label assigned to any one Greek inhabitant who was criticized for being “inferior” or “deviant” from that which the existing norms dictated someone should be. Galanis and Triantafillidou-Galani, 2002 criticize the Greek society for developing racist attitudes towards the immigrants from “*Alvania*”<sup>5</sup> who live in Greece, and furthermore they characterize these attitudes as showing lack of moral values. They also criticize the media in

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<sup>2</sup> *Alvanoī*: (plural form) immigrants from Albania (see, *Alvanos*, below).

<sup>3</sup> *Xenoi*: Foreigners, having a non-Greek nationality (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1217).

<sup>4</sup> *Alvanos*: (singular form) A person that is of Albanian ethnicity (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.30)

<sup>5</sup> *Alvania*: Albania (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.30).

Greece for promoting racist attitudes, as it often constructs the “*Alvanoi*” immigrants as thieves or deviants, and therefore unwelcome in Greece.

The Greek inhabitants of the city also kept themselves strictly apart from a number of Roma families who lived in the city. The latter, who lived in the outskirts of the city, were self-nominated as “*tsigganoi*”<sup>6</sup>. However, the Greek inhabitants of the city called them “*gyftous*”, and this label was also used within the local community to assign disrespect and inferiority to those persons who did not meet the existing cultural expectations. Mpampiniotis, (2002, p. 237) refers to the metaphorical meanings that the term “*gyftos*” is currently assigned within the Greek society. He gives a list of degrading terms that are currently used as synonymous to the term “*gyftos*”: these aim to characterize any person ‘who is worthy of no respect or dignity’, or ‘who is untidy, dirty or even stinks’. He stresses that the word “*gyftos*” is being used as a degrading nick name assigned to the group of “*tsigganoi*” who live in Greece. Such an attitude of Greek society towards the members of the Roma minority has been also supported by Karayiannis (1998).

My own observations as a temporary inhabitant of the city, as well as the comments the members of the Roma minority made in a number of conversations I had with them, confirmed that they were often subjects of

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<sup>6</sup> Tsigganoi: plural of the word ‘tsigganos’. Tsigganoi are formally called the members of the Roma race that are settled down in Greece (Vagi-Spyrou, 2001,p.20)

offensive comments and exclusionary practices. My feeling was that the Greeks inhabitants who lived in the city created an atmosphere that supported hierarchies of dominance. It was within that context that maltreatment and injustice was ascribed to those people who were culturally different. Such a climate offered fertile soil for the development of what could be worded as racial bullying (Besag, 1989; Lloyd and Stead, 2001).

### *A close-knit community*

The city which totals around 18,000 inhabitants (downloaded from <http://messolongi.atspace.com/gr/grindex.html> :18-6-2008) was built at the inlet of a big lagoon, and its real name is related to this lagoon. In the moonlight, the mountains and hills surrounding the area are reflected in the clear waters. Apart from offering a panoramic view, this place was the central meeting point for almost every family living in the city during the summer. It was a common scene for me to watch inhabitants of the city either swimming or having some relaxation time in the sea breeze.

The narrow streets on the one hand and the houses that share a fence on the other promote an easy, everyday contact among people. The sunny and warm weather additionally allows for many outdoor activities that enhance the level of social contact among the inhabitants. These features of the city are factors that seem to promote social relations among people who live there, and may result in the establishment of a close-knit community. Such physical and social proximity in turn encouraged both the development and the maintenance of shared beliefs and practices.

The spacious “*plateia*”<sup>7</sup> was another central meeting point for the people of the city. In the sunny mornings of the weekends during the winter or late in the afternoons during the summer, people met in the local “*cafeterias*”<sup>8</sup> to have a cup of coffee, or sat in the “*zaharoplasteia*”<sup>9</sup> to eat sweets. In these places, one could hear different stories concerning persons or families who lived in the city. Being myself an occasional visitor in the local cafeterias, I had the feeling that some kind of gossiping was taking place in there. I could therefore understand the meaning of gossiping in these places as ‘chatting about the news’, mostly regarding the happenings in the small city. As it will be discussed in the following section, gossiping in this case served the purpose of keeping people informed of, and concerned with, localized issues. This kind of gossiping appeared to strengthen the relationships of the inhabitants with each other. Moreover, it offered some excitement, which was necessary to fight the boredom of the small city during the dull and quiet nights of winter.

The cohesion and interdependence of the inhabitants of the city made themselves visible in all aspects of social life. The need for affiliation and membership within the community was apparent in the inhabitants’ everyday life; rarely could I observe a man hanging about without the

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<sup>7</sup> Plateia: city center (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1419).

<sup>8</sup> Cafeterias: places where people meet to talk and drink coffees (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.876)

<sup>9</sup> Zaharoplasteia: places where sweets are made and are sold or served (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.707). (These places are usually visited by old people who meet there to talk).

company of a friend. During my five years living in the city, I had never heard that an old lasting friendship, especially between men, had been broken.

People kept strong bonds with the members of their families who lived in the city as well as with their neighbours. Big families, the “*soia*”, included members such as the father, the mother, and their kids, but also the grandparents and all the rest of the relatives who shared the same surname. It was quite common, if not a rule, for them to meet every Sunday and have dinner together. Strong bonds were also observed among the neighbours. It was routine for the housewives to offer home-made sweets to the neighbours/friends who lived next door, whilst the men had a drink of Greek wine together in the evenings. Children called the adult neighbours ‘uncles’ or ‘aunties’ in their everyday interactions with them, thus offering a striking indication of a local community that was tightly-knit. In fact, interdependence and collectivism seems to be a characteristic of the Greek culture (Loukatos, 1992).

The following chapters of this thesis will indicate how the cohesion and interdependence that exists among the Greek members of the local community was reproduced within the school and within the pupils’ relationships. There is evidence to suggest that these also affected the participants’ definitions and explanations of their bullying experiences, as well as their responses to these experiences.

### *Meanings of friendship*

The issue of friendship seemed to be significantly more important for men than for women. A good friend was considered to be a precious gift: 'A good friend is more important than a good wife' was a motto that dominated men's quotes. Friendship was conceptualized as a trustful, long lasting relationship developed among two or more men based on mutual support and sacrifice of individualism. A 'best' friend was the one who could never cheat or grass his friend for his own benefit. Cheating and grassing were tolerated as women's social practices according to the local beliefs. Offering to 'cover up' for his fellows at any cost was among the obligations of a boy who was self-nominated as a true or 'real' friend. It is worth-noting that in a local fairy tale included in a book, a characteristic example of a good friend is offered through the recounting of a short story. In this story, the behaviour of a man is stressed with the aim to indicate what the meaning of real friendship is. The protagonist of the story preferred himself being accused of murder, rather than revealing an act of murder that his friend had committed (Papatrehas, 1986).

### **Social Life in the Community**

#### *Scenes of masculinity*

The role of tradition in maintaining the localised identity of the Greek inhabitants was highlighted through the running of a number of local

festivals, the “*panigiria*”<sup>10</sup>. The “*panigiri* of *Ai-Simios*”, which lasts three whole days and encompasses features relating to religion and ethnicity, is among the most famous in the area. For as long as the festival lasts, groups of inhabitants can be observed drinking wine and dancing traditional localized dances to the tunes of traditional music. By doing so, the Greek inhabitants of the city assign respect to the old warriors, thus reviving the old glory. Men of any age dress up in local costumes, the “*ntoulamades*” (Gorpa and Gorpa, 1972, p.46), and either march or ride horses along the streets of the city. By doing so, they represent the image of the old warriors, and declare that they are dedicated to display braveness, strength, and courage just as their ancestors did (Gorpa and Gorpa, 1972). Such practices underlie the existing norms which dictate, amongst other things, what the meaning of being a male is.

#### *Teasing and taunting: Men’s humorous culture*

During the years I lived in the city I realized that outdoors enjoyment was different for men and women. It was a rare phenomenon for a man to stay at home in the evenings: the “*tavernas*”<sup>11</sup>, were almost full of “*parees*”<sup>12</sup> consisting of men. The latter shared concerns and laughs and had a good drink of “*retsina*”<sup>13</sup> there at the end of a tiring day. Loud voices,

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<sup>10</sup> Panigiria: collectivistic way of people’s entertainment in Greece in order to assign honour and respect to of a religious or national event (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1312).

<sup>11</sup> Taverna: a traditional kind of Greek restaurant where food and wine are served mostly visited by men (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1733).

<sup>12</sup> Parees. (Plural form of the noun ‘parea’): group of people, usually of men or boys, who were self-nominated ‘friends’ and spent time together (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1341).

<sup>13</sup> Retsina: a kind of traditional Greek wine, relatively cheap (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1537).



gesturing, and arguments were usual among the men; however the arguments were terminated by abundant laugh almost in any case.

Teasing and taunting each other were routines for the members of the “*parees*” to amuse themselves. The people I asked about these practices called them “*kalampouri*”<sup>14</sup>, stressing that the acts were conducted among friends. Motives of hurting someone seemed not to be suspected within such a context. According to the inhabitants’ articulations, it appeared that anyone in the “*parea*” could be the target of such humorous teasing or taunting at times. Such a context precluded domination-subordination relationships that could lead the acts to be defined as bullying (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

Clearly, the adults who lived in the city constructed teasing and taunting as acts that strengthened the bonds amongst men rather than as acts of aggression. Such constructions of teasing and taunting were also reproduced within the childrens’ quotes in order to situate similar acts that they conducted within the cultural context of the local community. The boys who acted as bullies in specific instances tended to use particular words (e g. “*peirazo*”<sup>15</sup>, “*kalampouri*”) currently used in the local community rather than others in order to define their acts to their own advantage. This point will be discussed in detail in chapter eleven.

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<sup>14</sup> Kalampouri: a folk term to denote fun, joke (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.815).

<sup>15</sup> Peirazo: tease in a humorous way, joke (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.678)..

### *The culture of “paratsouklia”<sup>16</sup>*

Name-calling was a significant aspect of the local community’s cultural characteristics. Assigning nick-names to each other, these being labelled “*paratsouklia*” (Kordosi, 1998, p.100), was a routine among the inhabitants. This practice reflected the humorous spirit of the people living in the area; however, it also indicates how they criticize that which seems to deviate from the existing standards of ‘normality’. Kordosi (1998, p.101) claims that the local nick-names constructed and assigned to some of the inhabitants reproduce the local ‘folk wisdom’. Such a claim conveys connotations about the critical spirit within which the “*paratsouklia*” were generated.

Kordosi (1998) included in her book a list of three hundred and seventy different “*paratsouklia*” currently being assigned to the inhabitants of the city. The author commented that the “*paratsouklia*” were viewed as expressing the culture of the community and keeping up with tradition. As such, not only were they accepted by the persons to whom they were assigned, but they were also enjoyed by them, as Kordosi confirmed in her book. However, the list she offered indicates that name-calling tends to be gendered. This is because there were only twenty two of them that pointed to women’s characteristics.

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<sup>16</sup> Paratsouklia: (plural form of the noun ‘paratsoukli’), teasing names, nick-names. (Stavropoulos, 1998, p.665).

The spirit and the meanings of “*paratsouklia*” were reproduced within the school in which the present fieldwork was conducted by pupils and their teachers. They were viewed as culture-grounded routines, and were therefore expected and normalized, as I will discuss further in the following chapters. Such normalization can probably explain why name-calling is regarded as the prevailing type of bullying within the schools in Greece (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Sapouna, 2008).

### *Nick-names as cultural codes within the broader Greek context*

Assigning nicknames for fun and critique is a routine that takes place in most parts of Greece. Nicknames are assigned and maintained to serve for a variety of purposes: for instance, people who belong to the same family, the “*soi*”<sup>17</sup>, and share the same first and second names can be easily identified from their nick-names. Nick-names are so socially powerful that persons are often known within their communities by their nick-names rather than the names they were assigned when baptised.

However, the “*paratsouklia*” are far from being value neutral; instead, specific nick names function as codes within a particular society that aim to bring attention to personal characteristics that seem make a person stand out. These are often called “*kousouria*” and carry negative evaluations (<http://users.otenet.gr/~lougaw/paratsouklia.htm>, accessed on

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<sup>17</sup> The soi: all the relatives who share a common family background (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1607).

23-11-2008). The “*paratsouklia*” are often regarded as seemingly neutral labels that apparently construct personhoods; however, they can also be viewed as constructing societal discourses. This is because they say more about the norms and the values of the society within which they are circulated than about the persons to whom they are assigned.

Mpampiniotis, (2002, p.947) defines “*kousouria*” as ‘stable characteristics that deviate from the existing norms’. Roumelitis for example, gave a list of examples of “*kousouria*” in the daily newspaper *Eleftherotypia* issued on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2004. Among others, gambling, alcoholism, and ugliness defined as “*kousouria*” signify aspects of what might be considered as deviance within Greek society (<http://www.enet-gr/online-text/c>, accessed on 23-11-2008). Within such a socio-cultural context, the practice of name-calling is expected to be tolerated by the persons to whom it is assigned since they probably view themselves as deviants. Such views legitimise the act of name-calling as one which can be regarded as imposing social order rather than humiliating, degrading, and hurting, in other words as bullying. This issue will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Moreover, there are people within the Greek society who are longing for the revival of the ‘old times’. It was in these old times that nick-names were being exchanged between people. This is because they conceptualize name-calling as breeding contact and familiarity among people rather than separating them in the way bullying does (<http://alex.eled.duth.gr/depak/kosmio/texts/10.htm>, accessed on 4-4-2009). However, for some Greeks the act of name-calling is nothing more

than a culture-rooted routine which dates back to the ancient times in Greece, and as such, “*paratsouklia*” are therefore viewed as ‘linguistic monuments’ of Greece’ (<http://www.stephanion.gr/paratsouklia.htm>, accessed on 4-4-2009).

### *Gossiping and backbiting: women’s oral culture*

In a place where physical proximity and intimate relationships among the inhabitants is a reality, the privacy of personal lives is difficult, if not impossible, to safeguard. The difficulty that the inhabitants of the city faced in combating rumour-spreading concerning their personal lives was obvious. Therefore, they often resorted to a proverb which is well known within the Greek context in order to face this situation: they often said. “*Piso apo tin plati tou kai ton vasilia vrizoun*”<sup>18</sup> (Even the king is being gossiped about behind his back) (Meraklis, 1998, p.150). This probably indicates the sense of futility they felt in combating gossiping. Such a view led to the normalization of gossiping as an inevitable aspect of their social life.

“*Koutsompolio*”<sup>19</sup> was regarded, and seemed to be accepted, as a way of socializing that exclusively applied to women. In fact, it seemed to

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<sup>18</sup> *Piso apo tin plati tou kai ton vasilia vrizoun*: Even the king is gossiped about behind his back (Downloaded from: [http://24dim-ioann.ioa.sch.gr/yliko/diafora/paroimies\\_ria.-doc](http://24dim-ioann.ioa.sch.gr/yliko/diafora/paroimies_ria.-doc)). Accessed: 5-1-2009.

<sup>19</sup> *Koutsompolio*: talking about persons or others’ personal issues often with a malicious intent or with exaggeration (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.950).

separate males from females. This is because it was regarded as an insult for the former to be suspected of gossiping: a man who gossiped was ridiculed within the community for acting as a “*gynekoula*”<sup>20</sup> would act. In other cases, gossiping was assigned the derogatory label of “*katiniasma*”<sup>21</sup> that not only indicated how it was related to women’s oral culture, but also signified the degrading status women were ascribed as compared to men.

Whilst gossiping was seen in many cases as imposing some kind of social control because it prevented people from acting unacceptably, “*sykofantia*”<sup>22</sup> was regarded as the most vicious aspect of gossiping. People believed that it involved the dissemination of distorted information with the aim to impose an undesirable social identity to the person that was “targeted”. People’s fear of being “backbitten” was expressed in their attempts to keep issues that could deteriorate their social image hidden from the community. They often pronounced a well-known Greek metaphor in order to signify the importance they placed upon safeguarding a good reputation for themselves: “*Kalytera na sou vgei to mati para to onoma*”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gynekoula: a thoughtless woman.

<sup>21</sup> Katiniasma: an act of Katina. “Katina” is a Greek name assigned to women. “Katina” is also used as a derogatory term to symbolically characterize a woman who lives in a village is uneducated and is engaged in trivial affairs (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.870)..

<sup>22</sup> Sykofantia: backbiting, intentional false rumour spreading (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1678).

<sup>23</sup> Kalytera na sou vgei to mati para to onoma: It is better to lose your eye than your good reputation (Downloaded from: [http://adianoito.blogspot.com/.../blog-post\\_8309.html](http://adianoito.blogspot.com/.../blog-post_8309.html) - Accessed , 8-1-2010)

The fear that was obvious in the inhabitants' verbalizations indicates that they were trapped within the cultural norms which their behaviours should accord with. If someone deviated from these cultural norms, social alienation was expected to be imposed as a social punishment. Being alienated or criticized by the members of the community was the most threatening experience people in the city reported they could face. This feeling highlights their need for membership and interdependence. The negative consequences this aspect of gossiping may bring upon the persons against whom it was assigned means that "*sykofantia*" could be defined as bullying.

Although it was feared, gossiping was viewed as promoting excitement in the quiet life of the community by some old people. Papakosta (2008) views gossiping as promoting social cohesion among people since it communicates the news in the neighbourhood.

Many people in the city believed that being talked about brought misfortune, and this is why they used to keep "lucky objects" in their houses. These were usually crosses or icons with the face of Christ carved upon them. They called these objects "*phylahta*", and believed that they had a magic power to prevent them from the 'bad-eye' and the 'bad mouth', as they said. In order to explain the occurrence of social phenomena, such practices indicate the adherence of the people of the city to tradition rather than to logical processes. Gossiping in this case could be defined as bullying since it was a threatening experience for those being gossiped about. Besides, apart from the difficulty people

faced in stopping gossiping from happening, they also faced difficulty in combating it.

### *More gendered norms and practices*

Although no formal constraints dictated ways of being and living for women and men who lived in the 'Sacred City', informal socio-cultural conventions did. Men tended to keep distinctive roles and identities from women both within the family and outside it. Men were represented as 'sensible, overactive, decisive, tough' (Alexandropoulou, 2000, p. 117). People in the city consensually believed that 'real men' should endure psychological, and even physical, pain. Owing to this social image, men were expected to offer support and protection to women and be polite to them. The explanation they offered for such a claim was that women were more sensitive and 'soft', whilst men had to be tough and emotionally strong, and able to endure challenges and 'hard jokes'. Whilst women were regarded to use crying as a means of revealing feelings of distress or emotional hurt, they were also expected to have a good drink in similar situations. On the other hand, men were regarded as using shouting, swearing, and threatening gestures as a means of expressing anger, distress, or frustration. These discourses of masculinity were reproduced within the pupils' discourses, and affected their explanations of, and their reactions to, bullying, as discussed in the following chapters.

Within their families, men were considered to be the basic 'bread winners', and were also expected to offer safety and financial support to



the rest of the family members. Women, on the other hand, were viewed as tolerant, dependent upon their husbands, and generally conforming to their husbands' wishes. Mothers were the sources of emotional support for their husbands and children, even in old age.

Whereas men search for any opportunity to display their masculinity, for a woman to over-project her femininity did not accord with the existing social conventions. Women and girls should be "*semnes*"<sup>24</sup> and "*metrimenes*"<sup>25</sup>. Whilst talking about sex or sexual partners reinforced masculinity identities, it seemed to be a taboo issue for women and young girls. Crying was an indication of sensitivity and fragility of femininity, but a sign of weakness for boys and totally unacceptable for a "real man". Additional signs of masculinity included a strong voice, occasional use of abusive language, physical vigour, and risk taking. Even the sight of a 'moustache' covering the upper lip of a man's face strengthened the image of masculinity. Drinking was almost essential and smoking was, unfortunately, often complementary.

Language seemed to construct socio-cultural categories through the assignment of nick-names that had specific and highly contextual meanings. Offensive labels were usually assigned to any man who was not viewed as the dominating figure within his family. The local label

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<sup>24</sup> *Semnes*: timid, people who conform to moral rules (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1580)

<sup>25</sup> *Metrimenes*: not taking things too far, not saying too much (Mpapiniotis, 2002, p.1092)

*“gynaikoto”*<sup>26</sup> was ascribed to men who lacked those aptitudes which confirmed stereotypical masculine behaviour. It was an intimidating label. In contrast, respect and admiration was assigned to any woman who could get through difficulties in her life without the support of a man. She was often referred to as ‘having guts’ or as *“antrogynaika”*<sup>27</sup> because she acted as if she were a man. An *“antrogynaika”* was viewed as independent, strong, and capable of going through difficulties, although her ‘femininity’ was threatened by this label.

### **Views on childhood and practices of socialization**

The inhabitants of the city viewed childhood as not confined in strictly temporal constraints. Lixourgiotis (1986) wrote that the concept of a child in Greece remains with the person for as long as his/her parents live. He stated that both adolescents and adults are usually regarded by their parents as ‘kids’ (p.145). Within the community of the ‘Sacred City’, it was usual that grandparents were made part of their children’s families and supported them in various ways: for example grandchildren were raised up by the *“yiayiades”*<sup>28</sup> and the *“pappoudes”*<sup>29</sup> in most cases. It was obvious that even adults at any age were viewed as needing advice and help by their parents. The latter stopped being concerned with their children when they died.

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<sup>26</sup> Gynaikoto: a man whose behaviour looks like that expected from a woman, a devastating label to be assigned to a man (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.446)

<sup>27</sup> Antrogynaika: a woman whose appearance or behaviour fit in the male stereotype (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.215).

<sup>28</sup> yiayiades: grandmothers

<sup>29</sup> papoudes: grandparents

Children's socialization followed gendered routes, and boys and girls took up the roles of their fathers and mothers when needed. Scenes in which either a sister was preoccupied with feeding her baby-brother or a brother was engaged in fighting with peers in order to protect his sister's good reputation were common. These seemed to reproduce gendered roles in which the children were socialized. It was a motto within the local community that boys were the 'columns of their homes', whilst girls the 'ornaments' within their homes. Such mottos enhanced the development of the 'tough' masculine identities of the young boys: they were often advised to refrain from any 'feminine' activity, whereas narcissism was developed as the basic characteristic of girls (Lixourgiotis, 1986).

In Greece, responsibility for the children's misconduct was rarely assigned to the children themselves. Misconduct on the part of children was usually explained as a consequence of their living within a 'dysfunctional family' (Traitou, 2006, p.27). Great importance was placed upon the maintenance of the two-parent family, since people in the city reported that it affected childrens' social development. In fact, when I asked them a number of women confessed to me that they remained in an unhappy marital relationship for the sake of their children. They added that 'broken marriages', as they characterized single-parent families, were the source of children's' problematic behaviours, or even of their involvement in criminal acts.

Parents also attributed their children's misbehaviours to the influence of bad friends: children who committed any kind of unacceptable act were

excused for being impulsive, immature, and irrational on the grounds of being susceptible to social manipulation by others. This shifting of responsibility to someone else seemed to be a culture-rooted discourse which was often expressed through a well known Greek metaphor: “*Pes mou poios ein’ o philos sou kai tha sou po poios eisai*”<sup>30</sup>

### **An ethos of Christianity**

The Greek Orthodox Church is the national religion for Greeks. An ethos of Christianity was evident in the city through various practices and discourses that existed there. Ten churches had been built within the city, in addition to the number of monasteries that were located around it (Alexandropoulou, 2000). These were full of people who feasted in order to receive the Holy Communion on Sunday services. Some kinds of church schools, called the “*katihitika sholeia*”<sup>31</sup>, also run specific programs usually by priests in Sunday afternoons. Children between five and twelve years of age attended these programs, which aimed to teach him/her the virtues of Christianity.

The Sunday schools were not the only source of religious knowledge and practice. It was first within their families and later within schools that

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<sup>30</sup> *Pes mou poios ein’ o philos sou kai tha sou po poios eisai*: Tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are (downloaded from: <http://www.inews.gr/60/koita-ton-filo-sou-na-deis-poiios-eisai.htm>, accessed, 12-2-2009).

<sup>31</sup> *Katihitika sholeia*: schools organized by local communities in which children learn about the virtues of Christianity (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.870).

children learned about religion. It is important to note that in Greece the Ministry of National Education, responsible for the National School Curriculum, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are unified, thus making a unique entity. Therefore, education and religion in Greece seem to go hand in hand.

Offering unconditional love, being compassionate and empathetic to others' pain, and being patient and showing resistance to the intolerable were among the virtues into which children were formally socialized. Offering forgiveness and showing mercy, even for one's enemies, were also emphasized as the basic scriptures of Christianity. This seemed to encourage a culture of victimization, in which the suffering experienced obviously attacks the human rights of those people who are victimized. In prayers children learned about the importance of forgiveness and the gains they could expect from God rather than from people. Such discourses appear to perpetuate the ideology of living in harmony and interdependence with other people, perhaps leaving some of them deeply hurt from an unfair world they have to live in.

## **Summary**

The need for affiliation among the members of the dominant cultural community was obvious in every aspect of family and social life: it was obvious in the existence of the "*soia*" and in the well-tied relationships between the inhabitants, especially among neighbours. It was also evident in their opposition or hesitation to integrate ethnic or racial minorities within the community's socio-cultural realms. The conformity to tradition

that enhanced the community's integrity was also evident in language, with localized terms and rhetorical tools such as metaphors used in order to ascertain their culture-based interpretations of social phenomena.

Within this context of cohesion, teasing and name-calling were tolerated as humorous aspects of social interaction which were also regarded as emphasizing aspects of masculinity. Although teasing and name-calling were characterized by systematization, longevity, were unprovoked, and could be well characterized as bullying acts, they were not generally regarded as aggressive or violent behaviours. Cohesion and reciprocity made the intrusion into someone's personal life extremely easy, and gossiping was believed to be unavoidable. Viewed from this angle, gossiping was justified as normal and expected. It was also regarded as imposing some kind of social control in order to safeguard the moral order within the community. However, when gossiping went too far it turned to be 'backbiting', which was regarded as a threatening experience for those targeted as it was related to possible social alienation. This aspect of gossiping definitely related to bullying. People seemed to keep strictly to their gendered roles allowing almost no space for 'deviation' from the norms. However the superiority ascribed to males as compared to females was obvious. Children, whose socialization was also gendered, were regarded as naturally innocent. Any misbehaviour on their part was explained as being the result of a combination of social modelling and the family's pathology. Discourses on children's immaturity, irrationality, and impulsiveness formed the basis on which children were excused for their reprehensible conduct. The ethos of Christianity that existed in the local community valued tolerance and forgiveness as the most important of virtues; however, this resulted in a system of covert victimization in

which superficial harmonic interrelations were built, as I shall discuss in the following chapters. Aspects of the adults' culture within the local community were reproduced within the school and formed part of the school culture. Chapter five discusses these aspects, since evidence is offered that they encourage or support the occurrence of bullying within schools.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The school context**

*Any bullying needs to be seen in the full  
context of the home, school and the  
neighbourhood environments'*

(Besag, 1989, p. 137)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a detailed account of the school in which the fieldwork was conducted. It explores aspects of school culture that relate to bullying. Furthermore, it introduces the group of the sixth graders who participated in the research study. The chapter aims to offer a deep understanding of how aspects of the community culture relating to bullying are reproduced within the school. These aspects are reflected both in the teachers' and the pupils' shared beliefs and practices. This understanding is important because it indicates the school culture (Epstein, 1993), which is not only closely related to the existence of bullying in schools, but also to how bullying is interpreted and dealt with (Smith and Shu, 2000; Rigby, 2004). Additionally, by offering information about the pupils who participated in the study, this chapter aims to emphasize how peer culture, as well as peer group ecology, relates to the roles the pupils take up in bullying incidents. The chapter includes seven sections. The first section refers to the formal and informal aspects of the school that promote cohesion and expand the 'family' atmosphere within the school setting that exists in the local community. The second section is exclusively focused on name-calling and explores the teachers' views of it. It illustrates how name-calling is normalized



embedded within culture-rooted discourses. Furthermore, the teachers' concerns regarding the difficulty in combating it within the school are also discussed. The issue of gendered norms and the value placed upon them are discussed in the third section, which also highlights how pupils are socialized into relating their gender roles to bullying acts, thus normalizing them. The discipline administered within the school is explored in the fourth section; in particular, the teachers' views of, and responses to, the pupils' misconduct are discussed. The role of religion in promoting tolerant attitudes to victimization is also emphasized. The following two sections are concerned with the pupils who attend the sixth class in the school and participated in the present fieldwork. Section five explores the pupils' views on friendship, what categories friendship falls into, and what is expected from each category. The chapter highlights how the pupils' views of friendship reproduce the cultural representations of friendship dominating within the local community, and aims to emphasize how these representations affect the ways in which bullying interactions are interpreted by the pupils. The sixth section offers a description of what Rodkin and Hodges (2003, p.384) characterized as 'peer ecologies'. It offers a detailed description of the groups that the pupils formed, and also seeks to represent the peer group dynamics. Graphical representations of the groups' dynamics, as well as more details about some pupils, are included in Appendices A and B of this thesis. The seventh section summarizes the key points discussed in the present chapter.

## **A context of familiarity**

### *The school formal organization promotes equality and cohesion*

The school in which the research study was conducted is a public primary school which operates under the responsibility of the Local Office of Education, which is part of a centralized scheme of Organization of Education found in every prefecture of Greece. Its members are selected and appointed by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (ΥΠΕΠΘ) in Greece, and they are accountable to it for their activities. The local Office of Education holds the responsibility to provide resources, guidance, and support to every school situated in the prefecture. It also holds the right to ensure that every school operates under the educational principles and the organizational structures which are exclusively dictated by the ΥΠΕΠΘ in Greece.

The school provides for boys and girls and, as with any other public school in Greece, caters for pupils of all abilities. Exceptions are made for those pupils who are officially statemented as having special educational needs whose nature and severity need to be met either in special schools or special units (N.2817/2000). According to the School Official Record, the “*Mitrwo*”, two hundred and twenty pupils were enrolled in the school according to their home address in the school year 2004-2005: 17% of the total number of pupils enrolled were “*tsiggañoi*”, and 8% were those children whose parents were immigrants from “*Alvania*” (see chapter four).

Attending the public school which is situated in the pupils' neighbourhood is an important requirement in Greek educational policy. This requirement aims to safeguard the right of any pupil living in Greece to have equal access to the public schools irrespective of gender, ethnicity, racial or socio-cultural background, and place of residence (ΥΠΕΠΘ, Φ.3/527/89125/Γ1 3-9-2004). In addition, there is a strong belief that each child should be offered the opportunity and the pleasure to meet his neighbourhood friends every day throughout the years of his/her schooling. This in fact strengthened the social bonds among the pupils, as they themselves said. It also affected their conceptualisations of friendship, as it will be discussed in section five. Moreover, it affected the ways in which the pupils who participated in the present research study explained their bullying experiences and reasoned their responses to them. These issues are discussed in chapter eight.

Pupils who attend primary schools in Greece are allocated into six classes, the "*taxies*", each one representing a year of primary schooling. In this particular school, each year class consisted of two sub-classes. In each one of the sub-classes, an equal number of pupils attending the same grade were placed. Therefore, no more than eighteen pupils attended each sub-class in this specific school. This fact enabled more opportunities for individual contact between pupils and teachers, and enabled individual pupils to receive greater levels of attention from their teachers.

Sixteen teachers, who were also inhabitants of the city, had worked in this particular school for more than five years. This fact enabled them to have a better knowledge of one another through long standing contact both

inside and outside the school premises. Most importantly, the majority of the teachers had a long standing acquaintance with the pupils who attended the school, and also with their families. Therefore, the school represented a smaller community within the broader one functioning like ‘a family’, as the headteacher commented, rather than as an aggregate of children and adults. Such a context affected the relationships between the pupils and their teachers, as well as the ways in which discipline was administered.

### *Teachers-pupils interactions: Scenes of intimacy*

Rivers and Soutter (1996) talk about the school ethos and describe it as reflecting the school idiosyncratic identity. Rigby (1996) conceptualises it as reflecting a cumulative attitude that both teachers and pupils have towards ways of treating each other. In this study, I conceptualise the school ethos as both incorporating and reflecting shared beliefs and routines on the part of the teachers and the pupils. These promote a specific atmosphere within the school, not necessarily dictated from the formal curriculum.

The family ethos that penetrated the school was apparent in almost any context: in the mornings before the lessons started, it was routine for some children to enter the main building looking for their class teachers. I also observed other children who rushed into the staff room just to say ‘good morning’ and to offer their teachers flowers freshly cut from the gardens of their houses. In other cases, during break times female teachers were observed to hug younger pupils, boys and girls, or to send

their regards to the pupils' parents. On the other hand, male teachers were occasionally observed to tap boys on their shoulders; according to their quotes, they showed their approval of, or affection for, the pupils in this way. Within such an atmosphere the imposition of clear-cut rules concerning the discipline that school administered in cases of misconduct were difficult to maintain. Furthermore, some 'childish' misbehaviours, such as name-calling or teasing, might be viewed as normal and expected by the teachers.

### **Name-calling and teasing: Fun or concern ?**

Within such a friendly atmosphere, teasing and name-calling formed part of the interaction between teachers and pupils, reproducing in some way the humorous teasing atmosphere pervading the local community. In fact, as some teachers stated, they offered a temporary relaxation to the classroom routine by giving themselves and some pupils funny nicknames. They also added that they communicated messages in symbolic and humorous ways at the same time. For example, as a male teacher commented, by calling a boy "*koufiokefalaki*"<sup>1</sup>, he intended to prompt him to concentrate on the classroom task or to stress that more thinking over the task was needed.

According to the comments that the teachers made, the nicknames assigned to the pupils on their part were occasional and short lived; besides, they did not target a particular child since the nick-names could

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<sup>1</sup> Koufiokefalaki: a child who has an empty head. Metaphorical meaning to describe the child who does not think about something (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.951).

be assigned to any one of the pupils at different times. In their descriptions, they seemed to exclude power asymmetry, or any intention to cause harm to the pupils, from their acts, as these are implied in bullying (Tattum, 1989; Olweus, 1994). It was interesting, however, to observe that assigning nick-nicknames was a gendered act. Although boys were often called 'empty-headed', girls were often assigned complimentary labels by their teachers. Some of them were labelled 'red-hood girl', 'snow white', and 'small bees' as ways of displaying approval of their nice appearance or hard work. In other cases, girls who chatted within the classroom could be called "*gries koutsompoles*"<sup>2</sup> to imply that chatting needed to be stopped, as well as that it was viewed as a feminine practice (see chapter four).

Therefore it is clear that the nick-names assigned within the school by the teachers reproduced the gender norms and expectations that penetrated the local community. More importantly, they were also understood as such by the pupils themselves, as is discussed in chapter seven.

### *Confusion and ambiguity over interpretations of teasing*

All the teachers were aware of the existence of name-calling among pupils. Two female teachers defined name-calling in terms of its negative effects upon the targeted pupils, and such a definition fits the typical definition of bullying (Olweus, 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> Gries koutsompoles: old ladies who gossip ( see chapter four)

As it has already been suggested, their definitions influenced the ways in which both teachers thought they needed to take action against its occurrence (Boulton, 1997), and extract 1, cited below, indicates this point. Moreover, it indicates that the two teachers recognized the importance of their role in combating the phenomenon. This finding confirms the finding of a study conducted by Kalliotis (2000). As Extract 1 highlights, the female teacher also admitted her lack of knowledge in dealing with bullying, a concern that has already been raised in other research (Koutsambari et al., 2006; Konstantinidou, 2005). On the other hand, as the teacher's last sentence implies, she views the victimized child's 'problem' to be the most plausible factor to explain why bullying occurs.

#### Extract 1

'More and more children come after break time and complain that other children call them short, "*yialakia*"<sup>3</sup>, fatty and things like that. I don't know what else to do. I keep on saying that we should not treat other children in this way. I don't know what else to do. I explain to them that everyone has his own problem.'

The explanation that the female teacher offers for the occurrence of nasty teasing highlights the concept of "*kousouria*" (as described in the previous chapter), which places fault upon the teased child. The teacher's quotes emphasize how the discourse of "*paratsouklia*" that pervades the Greek culture not only unavoidably creeps into schools, but also mediates how bullying is explained.

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<sup>3</sup> Yialakia: derogatory label assigned to those who wear eye-glasses (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.443).

The majority of the male teachers that worked in the school undermined the harm that name-calling can impose on the recipients children. Such an attitude to name-calling on the part of the teachers confirms findings from a previous research study which was conducted in a different cultural context (Boulton and Hawker, 1997). Extract 2 indicates this point.

#### Extract 2

- Teacher I don't believe that children are getting distressed from being called names.
- V N<sup>4</sup> But some of them cry as Mrs. X told me
- Teacher Well, if they cry it is because they have other problem and just take them out when they' re being called names. They're oversensitive or overprotected from their families
- V N How these children cab be helped?
- Teacher They have to do something on their own. Otherwise they will not escape (from their experiences)

The teacher's quotes also stress that family overprotection of the victimized child, or the child's over-sensitivity rather than feelings of distress in reaction his/her name-calling, trigger his/her crying. Such an attitude conveys two important implications: firstly, it implies that there is no need to combat name-calling in the school since it is not viewed as a distressing experience for children; And secondly, it implies that responsibility for resolving their problems is shifted upon the shoulders of either the bullied children or their parents. This finding confirms findings from a previous study conducted in Greece (Deliyianni et al., 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> V.N: Varvara Nika (researcher)



A female teacher also assigned no particular significance to the phenomenon: Enwrapping her statements in laughter, not only did she accept that name-calling and teasing happen within her classroom, but she also normalized the acts as being a childish occurrence. Such normalization is also reported in the study of Kalliotis (2000).

### Extract 3

Teasing? Name-calling?(loud laughter) If you want to see what it means just come into my classroom (she is laughing), You'll see a lot in there.

Another teacher quoted a Greek metaphor in order to explain why some children are teased in the school. Drawing upon the folk knowledge, he oversimplified the causes of teasing and constructed it as a cultural routine. In his quotes, cited in Extract 4, nasty teasing was an expected reaction of those children whom he viewed as fun seekers, rather than as bullies. In addition, he constructed the victims of bullying as 'silly'.

### Extract 4

Teacher: "Every village has its own silly boy"

V N      What do you mean by this?

Teacher   There is always a silly person to make fun of (she is laughing)

Such a construction of nasty teasing obviously reproduces the spirit of humour and criticism towards the 'deviant' that comprised part of the local community culture (see chapter four). Furthermore, the way in

which the recipient of teasing was represented by the male teacher confirms the study of Manoudaki (2000, p.142), which found that teachers and pupils characterize the victims of peer bullying as '*ligo hazoulides*'<sup>5</sup>

In light of the teachers' comments, it appears that teasing and name-calling was trivialized and regarded as not imposing harm on the recipient. However, when concern was expressed over the phenomena, it was suggested by the male teachers that it was someone else's responsibility rather than theirs to do something about it. On the other hand, the lack of knowledge on how to deal with acts of bullying seemed to exonerate teachers from taking action on behalf of the bullied children. This finding signifies that teachers might view any anti-bullying policy to be adopted on the part of the school as futile.

The teachers' attitudes towards bullying confirm the pupils' reports, who strongly criticized the school for not taking effective action to combat the phenomenon that existed within the school premises. Furthermore, these attitudes legitimise the ineffective reactions of the pupils to their bullying experiences. These two points are explored in chapters eight and nine.

It is therefore clear that folk knowledge and the related practices regarding teasing and name-calling were reproduced on the part of the teachers within the school. However, it is a miserable reality that such a reproduction offers fertile soil for the normalization of oppressive

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<sup>5</sup> Ligo hazoulides: somehow silly (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1924).

practices conducted against some pupils on the part of their peers. This point is discussed in chapters eleven and twelve.

### **Promotion of gendered roles**

The promotion of gender roles was reflected in the routines and daily practices that took place within the school. Boys were often asked by their teachers to be involved in what the latter defined as ‘male tasks’: for instance, ‘strong’ boys were asked by the head teacher to do ‘tough’ work within the school. ‘Strong’ boys were in cases observed to carry either chairs from the first floor to the ground floor, or heavy boxes from the head teacher’s office to the library. As a result of this, boys who were considered not strong enough and were not asked to help might have experienced feelings of self-inadequacy. The value ascribed to physical rigour and toughness seemed to affect the ways in which bullying conducted on the part of the boys was explained. The point is discussed in chapters eight, nine and twelve.

Seeking out dominance that relates to bullying (Askew, 1989; Besag, 1989, Lahelma, 2002) was viewed by all the teachers as a phenomenon expected to be displayed on the part of the boys. The ideology ‘boys will always be boys’ normalized the boys’ involvement in acts of physical or verbal bullying, as already supported by previous research (Askew, 1989; Skeleton, 2001). In fact, the Greek terms “*epithetikotita*”<sup>6</sup> and “*via*”<sup>7</sup> never appeared in the teachers’ quotes.. Instead, when the teachers were

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<sup>6</sup>Epithetikotita: aggression (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.322)

<sup>7</sup>Via: violence (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.164).

asked to describe what kinds of pupil misbehaviour existed in the school they talked about some “*atahta*”<sup>8</sup> boys. The specific word they used seemed either to exclude any suspicion of bullying from the boys’ conduct, or situated bullying within an over-generalized area of childish and expected “naughtiness”. This finding confirms a previous research study on bullying conducted in Greece (Kalliotis, 2000).

Girls were almost excluded from the discourse on pupil misconduct, and instead were described as a bit ‘chatty’ by their teachers. This description seems to fit well into the discourse of “*katiniasma*”, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. At times girls, who chatted were also assigned the label of “*gries kotsomboles*”<sup>9</sup> by their teachers. Such a label further confirms that gossiping was viewed by the teachers of the school as an act which situated girls into their feminine identities. This is because this specific label did not bother the girls, as is further discussed in chapter seven, since it was accepted as not incompatible with the girls’ gender identities. On the contrary, it did bother the boys, a point further discussed in chapter seven.

In other cases, the girls were encouraged to be, and praised for being, “*kales noilkokoires*”<sup>10</sup>: they dusted off the teacher’s table or watered the flowerpots placed on the window sills of their classrooms. The label indicates that housekeeping was viewed as a feminine activity, and this view both emphasized and confirmed the discourse regarding gender roles that dominated within the local community.

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<sup>8</sup> *Atahta*: out of discipline and order, naughty. (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.137)

<sup>9</sup> *Gries kotsompoles*: old women who gossip (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.475).

<sup>10</sup> *kales noilkokoires*: good at housekeeping (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.589).

### **A moralistic discipline: An ethos of tolerance and forgiveness**

The flexibility with regards to discipline that the Ministry of Education allowed enabled the schools and teachers to adjust discipline according to the context. However, it is law that both physical punishment and pupil detentions are not allowed to be adopted as disciplinary measures in any school in Greece (P.D<sup>11</sup> 201/98, par.8.b). Moreover, it is also legally prohibited that any label bearing negative connotations about the pupils' behaviour be included within the official school records that are kept within primary schools in Greece (P.D 201/98, p.8a).

When the term 'aggression' emerged in the discussion I had with the teachers, the head teacher stressed that it was made clear to the pupils that aggression and nastiness of any kind were not allowed to happen in the school. This finding confirms a previous study conducted in Greece (Petropoulos and Papastylianou, 2001). What was important, however, was the fact that the teachers' conceptualisations of aggression and nastiness excluded kinds of verbal and social bullying as it is described below. At first, the terms 'aggressive' and 'violent' were absent from the teachers' quotes when they characterized some pupils' misconduct, and instead they talked about unacceptable or undesirable behaviour. Whilst the former were worthy of some kind of punishment, the latter were often ignored or tolerated 'up to a point', as most of them quoted.

However, when the teachers were asked to further define 'unacceptable' behaviour, they drew upon the concept of aggression. It was noteworthy

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<sup>11</sup> P.D Presidential Decree

that the majority of the teachers reached the consensus that the visible consequences upon the target was taken as the basic criterion of what they defined as an aggressive act. In the definitions they offered, the intention of the aggressor to hurt his/her victim was overlooked. Such a definition might be explained as relating to their own responsibilities. Indeed, the safety of pupils and their protection from any kind of harm during their presence in the school premise seemed to be the supervisor's most important concern. Any visible harm to pupils would therefore place the teachers in breach of their legal responsibilities (P.D 201/98. par.2.a; F.3/823/88155/G1-5-9-2006).

The absence of clearly stated rules was a notable characteristic in the school. What Rigby (1996, p.195) defined as a 'moralistic' discipline, which emphasizes the moral values the children should conform to, compensated for the lack of a stable disciplinary policy. Verbal reprimands and abundant references to moral values, such as mutual love, compassion, interdependence, and harmony, were the ways in which teachers said they dealt with the pupils' "*ataxies*"<sup>12</sup>, which were included in what the teachers defined as 'undesirable' behaviour. When asked to further clarify the meaning of 'undesirable' behaviour, the teachers tended to refer to acts of name-calling and social exclusion occurring between pupils. Therefore, it is clear that instead of attacking the reprehensible behaviours, the teachers recommended what the pupils were expected to do. Such a 'moralistic' disciplinary approach inevitably led to the establishment of a school ethos within which not only was the toleration of victimization positively valued, but the perpetuation of

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<sup>12</sup> Ataxies: acts of naughtiness, misconduct (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.137).

victimization was also encouraged. This point is explained in the following section.

*Forgiveness and reconciliation: An ethos of maintaining bullying*

The value of forgiveness in promoting peace was highlighted in formal and informal ways within the school. Formal ways included the school's daily routines: among these, the prayer to the Lord that took place in the pupil's morning assembly emphasized the value of forgiveness. This prayer is compulsory in all schools in Greece (P.D 201/98 par. 5). The value of offering forgiveness is also taught through the formal Curriculum. However, the ways in which aspects of the religion might support and reinforce acts that fit the typical definitions of bullying needs to be stressed. Extract 5 cited below indicates the point. It comes from the reading book on Religion issues prepared for and distributed to the pupils who attend the sixth year of primary schooling in Greece (Goulas et al., 2006 ,p. 38).

Extract 5

When Petros asked Jesus 'How many times my Lord should I forgive my brother if he persistently hurts me? Are seven times enough? Jesus answered to him: 'Not only seven times but countless times.

(And the story continues).....

...Jesus forgave even those who crucified Him.

Emphasising the value of offering forgiveness to the wrongdoer bore the intention of restoring relationships between the pupils ‘who had been involved in conflicts’, as the teachers commented. At times, offering forgiveness seemed to de-escalate counter-aggression. However, for the bullied pupils it was an ineffective attempt to minimize bullying. In fact, it encouraged the perpetuation of bullying, as the children reported.

### **Introducing the sixth graders: Friends above all**

Thirty five children aged 11-12 years were enrolled in year six, which forms the last year of their primary schooling, and attended the classes ST1 and ST2. Twenty nine of them were Greek. Miltiadis, whose parents were immigrants from Albania, and Aris, who was recorded as “*tsigganos*” in the register book, also attended the classes ST1 and ST2 respectively. The remaining four children were called the “*tsigganakia*”, and did not attend the school during the time the present fieldwork was conducted. The teachers of their classes informed me that it was only in the first week of the school year those four children came to school, and they additionally criticized them for not having turned up again since then. However, as the fieldwork proceeded, the majority of the pupils commented that the “*tsigganakia*”<sup>13</sup> abandoned their schooling because ‘no one had ever paid attention to them’. Such a comment offers indicative evidence that the social alienation that the “*tsigganoi*” experienced within the local community (as described in the previous chapter) was reproduced within the school.

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<sup>13</sup> Tsigganakia: children whose parents are tsigganoi (see, chapter four)



Data from my observations and the pupils' reports shows that friendship was a recurrent theme within the discourse of the sixth graders: for the boys in particular it was an issue of great importance. In the quotes of the boys, the word 'friend' was substituted for the 'classmate'. Whenever I asked a boy to nominate his friend(s) in the classroom, I got the same answer: 'all of them'. The children's reports emphasized that friendship was conceptualised as including any kind of interaction between pupils who were not enemies. Such a conceptualisation further confirms that the ethos of cohesion existing among the adult members of the local community was being reproduced within the children's relationships.

Friendship was defined in terms of longevity of acquaintance, living in the same neighbourhood and meeting regularly, going to the same class, or playing together. It also involved quarrelling, fighting, and the disclosure of secrets. However, above all it included covering up and offering forgiveness. In cases, friendship bonds could be broken and re-established very easily amongst peers, as extracts 6 and 7 indicate, which are from individual interviews I had with Perikles and Ermis respectively.

#### Extract 6

...and I felt bad because they all beat me and they had not me as their friend. But later we became friends again and we played together.  
( Perikles)

#### Extract 7

...first they called me '*banana*' and then they stopped and they called me Ermis and then they were my friends again.

(Ermis)

The extracts, cited above, suggest that that beating, social exclusion, and name-calling are inadequate to destroy long-lasting friendship bonds between the pupils. Instead, they made part of interactions that were expected to occur amongst friends. Consequently, what was expected from friendship affected the ways in which pupils interpreted bullying, as well as their reactions to it. It also seemed to affect the representation of selves and of others when bullying incidents were talked about. These points are explored in the following chapters of the present thesis.

Whilst friendship signified a generalized relationship with a relatively stable nature, ‘best’ friends or ‘true’ friends made the basis of a hierarchical system upon which the group of boys were organized. As the graphical representations (presented in Appendix A) illustrate, best friends usually ran a group together or appeared as a dyad within their class. Boys called their best friends “*philarakia*”<sup>14</sup> to define their masculine gender and the loyalty expected from them, as well as the amount of time that they spent together. Likeability was the dominant criterion the pupils offered for choosing who their best friend would be. Best friends never bullied each other; instead, they either followed or helped each other when initiating bullying interactions (Salmivalli et al., 1998).

Offering to ‘cover up’ in any case and at any cost was viewed by the pupils to be the crucial characteristic of a close or real friendship between boys. In fact, best friends provided for each other’s emotional and practical needs (Schneider, 2000). Such a conceptualisation of friendship

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<sup>14</sup> *Philarakia*: buddies (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.936).

on the part of the boys was not irrelevant to the Greek culture (Papatrehas, 1986). Furthermore, it seemed to affect the pupils' explanations about the roles that their classmates took up in bullying incidents. It also affected the ways in which the participants talked about their friends in the interviews I conducted with them. This point is discussed in detail in chapters eight and eleven.

Girls defined friendship in quite similar ways; however, 'covering' had a different meaning for the girls compared to the one offered by the boys. Best female friends were expected to keep personal secrets and offer emotional shelter to each other in cases of personal discomfort. Disclosure of secrets and gossiping were acts that did damage to a close friendship between girls. However, these were expected from other girls who were nominated simply as 'friends'.

### **The Social structure of the group of the sixth graders**

The pupils of year six formed identified groups: the composition of each group is described below in order to indicate that the way the peer group was organized related to the roles that pupils tend to take up in bullying happenings. In fact, as the data indicated, the leaders of the groups tend to act as initiators of bullying acts. On the other hand, those pupils who are either temporary members or not members of the groups of the leaders-bullies tend to be picked on by their classmates. Data offered from observation and the sociogram suggests that bullying is a phenomenon around which the peer group is organized (Salmivalli et al., 1998; Estell et al., 2005). Each group is described below, and appendix A additionally

offers indicative evidence of the sociometric status that each child held within the peers group. Additionally, more information about some pupils who were central figures among their classmates owing to their characteristics is offered in Appendix B. This information indicates some specific characteristics that those pupils hold, as well as how these characteristics relate to the roles the pupils took up in bullying incidents that occurred in the school.

### *ST1 class*

#### Group A: The “*magkas's*” group

Priamos, Cleonas, Solonas, Platonas, Erato and Clio, constituted group A. The fact that it was the only mixed gender group made it quite outstanding. Five out of the six members that the group consisted of were highly liked by their classmates (as Appendix A illustrates). Priamos was also highly reputable for his macho-type tendencies. These three factors, as described above, gave the group a significant social centrality amongst the rest of the groups (Young et al., 2006). Priamos was well known by the majority of the sixth graders as someone who “*kanei ton magka*” because he often hit, swore at, called names, and threatened other classmates. The boys who were not members of group A believed that it was Priamos who influenced the three boys to affiliate with him. However, the girls of the class reported that it was the membership of Erato and her friend Clio that kept the four boys united around the two girls. The group had a strong hierarchical structure, with Priamos setting the rules which the other three boys followed. Membership was exclusively shared among the six children, except for in the football games in which all the boys of the class played together.

#### Group B: The ‘targeted’ pupils

Perikles, Miltiadis, Alexandros, Apollonas and Thiseas were members of group B, whose structure was very loose. Not one of the five boys reported to have a ‘best friend’ within the class. Their classmates added that the boys were continuously searching for any opportunity to gain membership to group A, although Thiseas was the only exception to this, and was usually observed wandering alone. As far as bullying is concerned, the children who belonged to group B were often being picked on by Priamos (group A), or by members of their ‘own group’. The boys of group B were either unpopular or of average sociometric status (Salmivalli et al., 1998).

#### Group C

Pythia, Kalomira, Eleni, Thalia, Ifigenia and Evridiki were members of group C. Although the existence of a leader within the group was denied by the six girls, data from observations and peer nominations showed that Pythia and Ifigenia were the central persons within the group. Pythia was often picked on by the boys of group A, whilst her co-members offered her emotional support. It was significant that Evridiki, who was involved in inter-group bullying according to her quotes, received not one positive nomination in the sociogram from her classmates (see Appendix A).

#### *ST2 class*

#### Group D: The group of the ‘small devils’

Group D was the most reputable group of the sixth graders. As such, it enjoyed high centrality on the part of the classmates, all members of the

ST2 class. Apart from its four main members - who made the bigger group of boys – it received positive choices from classmates outside the group. Group D had a cohesive structure, which was emphasized through the recurrent use of ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ in each one of the co-members’ articulations. It had a highly hierarchical structure: all the members recognized Zeus as the ‘leader’ in terms of his exceptional characteristics, as the boy himself also reported. Dionyssos was the leader of the group in Zeus’ absence. Both boys, who were self-nominated ‘best friends’, were appointed an equal number of positive choices on the part of their classmates; however, whilst Dionyssos seemed to have a slightly higher intra-group centrality, whereas Zeus enjoyed high social popularity from classmates who were not members of group A. The two boys, as central persons in the dominant group, were also the dominant figures among the boys in their classroom (Young and al., 2006). They were also reputable among their schoolmates for their exceptional skill in teasing, mocking, and making fun of their classmate Ermis. The two boys, whose acts were modelled, assisted, and reinforced by the rest of the classmates, were nominated as those who “*kanoun tous magkes*” by all the pupils who were not members in group A. In fact, Zeus labelled himself and his best friends as the ‘small devils’. More information about the two boys is offered in Appendix B.

#### Group E: The ‘tale tellers’

Odyseas and Iraklis nominated each other as ‘best friends’ and were observed to spend considerable time together during the fieldwork. The two boys appeared to be confined within this reciprocal relationship, although attempts to approach Zeus had also been observed. However, Odyseas and Iraklis received negative nominations from the members of

group A for being tale tellers, and for displaying a boastful and individualistic stance. According to Zeus' quotes, the two boys transgressed the norms of friendship according to which interdependence and covering up were the crucial characteristic.

#### Group F: The girls' group

Athina, Dimitra, Ira, Afroditi, Persephoni and Sophia appeared to be a group according to their reciprocal nominations as friends; however, it appeared as if their physical proximity in the classroom made them appear to be a group. This is because three dyads were in fact identified according to their responses to the sociogram, and data from my observations. The boys of the class recognized Afroditi as the leader of this group of girls. However, analysis of the data from the interviews I conducted with the girls indicated that Persephoni was the dominant figure among her female classmates. She was the one to take decisions then ask for compliance from the rest of the girls, which in most cases she succeeded in obtaining. Persephoni and her 'best' friend Sophia were accused of initiating exclusionary practices against Ermis by their classmates. In fact, the two girls did not receive one positive nomination on the part of their classmates in the sociogram. (For more information and a detailed description of the two girls see Appendices A and B)

#### The loners: "*Loustros*" and "*Bananas*"

The labels above are substitutes for the names of Aris and Ermis respectively, as this is what they were persistently called by their classmates. Aris, the "*tsigganos*" boy, was observed to constantly run after the leaders of group D, whom he always followed in their bullying

activities. In showing compliance to the two leaders, the boy paid the price of being a temporary member of group A, as the majority of his classmates confirmed. Ermis, on the other hand was a typical case of the 'passive victim' (Olweus 1993, p.56), since his appearance and mannerisms did not fit the existing norms of physicality and of masculinity, as his classmates consensually explained. A detailed description of each of the two boys is included in Appendix B, and the case of Ermis is analytically explored in chapters ten and eleven of this thesis.

## **Summary**

The school, through formal and informal processes, reproduced the atmosphere of interdependence and cohesion that existed among the inhabitants of the local community. Firm discipline was difficult to maintain within such a family atmosphere, and did not in fact exist at all. This can also be explained by the fact that the teachers reported some expected childish naughtiness to exist in the school, rather than any acts of aggression or violence. The teachers emphasized that aggression and violence were not allowed in the school. Occasional and short-lived incidents of name-calling were practiced by the teachers themselves: these were legitimised as pedagogical tactics, as well as regarded as offering class relaxation. When name-calling was practiced on the part of the pupils, its harm upon the recipient children was undermined: the latter were recognized as oversensitive, overprotective, or as having problems for which their families were responsible. Few teachers viewed name-calling as a distressing phenomenon or expressed concern for its persistent nature and their own lack of knowledge of how to deal with it.



The gendered norms that penetrated the local community were both reproduced and reinforced within the school premises, in which ‘power’ was both recognized and valued as a male characteristic. The discipline administered by the school was restricted into general value statements articulated on the part of the teachers towards the naughty children. These overemphasized tolerance, compassion, interdependence, and group harmony. Forgiveness of naughty children was a means by which to restore pupils’ distorted relationships and friendships, which made the basis upon which the pupils’ relationships were built. Friendship allowed for occasional or persistent acts of bullying to occur between friends, whilst close friendship did not. The sixth graders formed seven identifiable groups. The peer ecology that was reflected in the inter-group structure was not unrelated to the roles that the pupils tended to assume in bullying incidents. The leaders of the groups, who were called “*those who kanoun tous magkes*,” often initiated incidents of bullying against peers who were not co-members in the group. Their co-members both followed their leaders and supported them in their reprehensible acts. On the other hand, there were those children who were temporary members or non-members of the groups who were often bullied. This chapter indicates that the school as a cultural institution reflected and reproduced the adults’ norms that pervade the local community, of which the school was only a part. The following chapter explores the reactions of the sixth graders to the phenomenon of bullying which was introduced within the school through the use of a video tape.

## CHAPTER SIX

### How the children reacted to the video tape on bullying

*'I heard that in the video there were some children whom the other children 'koroidevan' and 'perifronousan' because those were different.'*

Robinio

### Introduction

The present chapter explores how the participants responded to the video representations of bullying that they watched in the video room of the school. It aims to offer an understanding of the meanings assigned to bullying when it is a phenomenon not directly related to the pupils' personal experiences. The chapter explores the issues that the children referred to within the letters they wrote for me, as well as in the discussions they had with me. It consists of six sections: the first section explores the pupils' awareness of bullying as a phenomenon that exists within Greek schools. The second sections deals with the occurrence and the nature of specific bullying acts that the pupils recognized, and specifically indicates how the pupils situated these acts within their own socio-cultural context. In the third section, the criteria that the pupils considered in their definitions of bullying, as represented on the video tape, are explored and discussed. The fourth section examines how the bullying seen in the video tape was explained by the participants, and describes how the explanations offered for the bullying in the video representation expanded to include the pupils' real life experiences. The fifth section highlights how bullying was 'personalized' through the participants' disclosures of their own bullying experiences. The

final section sums up the key points and links this chapter to the following one.

### **Awareness of the phenomenon: situating bullying within the Greek context**

Analysis of the data from the participants' written and oral accounts offers clear evidence that the pupils recognized bullying as a phenomenon occurring in Greek schools. Not one of the pupils reported feelings of surprise about the scenes of bullying represented in the video; on the contrary, both the content of their letters and the comments they made in our conversations confirmed that the participants were familiar with the phenomenon seen in the video. Moreover, some of them situated the behaviour represented in the video tape within their own school reality.

After the watching of the video tape, information about it quickly disseminated amongst the pupils of the school. A significant number of pupils who attended different classes in the school approached me in order to 'confess' that bullying was a reality in their school. They characterized their experiences as 'the same behaviour' to the one projected in their school. This finding confirms findings from previous research studies conducted in Greece (Kalliotis, 2000; Pateraki and Houndoumadi, 2001; Sapouna, 2008).

The following extract is taken from a conversation I had with Robinio, a boy who attended the fifth class within the school. The conversation took place in the playground during the break time on the same day that the video tape was played for the sixth graders to watch. Extract 1 suggests that video is an effective material for identifying the existence of bullying within schools in a non-threatening way. This is because pupils are not directly asked to disclose information, and peer nominations are avoided. The effectiveness of the video to elicit discussions about the meanings of bullying on the part of the children has been supported (Rigby, 1996; Baldry, 2005).

#### Extract 1

Robinio: I heard about these things in the video, Miss

V.N       What things do you mean?

Robinio: I heard that in the video there were some children who '*koroidevan*'<sup>1</sup> and '*perifronousan*'<sup>2</sup> some other children because they( the bullied) were different.

V.N       Yeah...

Robinio   But these things happen here (in this school) many times with some children who are different and these children (the bullied) are very much worried

Robinio raises four important issues here: the first relates to the terminology he uses in order to characterize the specific acts; the second is concerned

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<sup>1</sup> Koroidevan: teased in a nasty way ; made fun of (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.934)

<sup>2</sup> Perifronousan: looked upon (them) with contempt and excluded (them) from groups for being inferior (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1388).

with the boy's perception of the negative effects that the acts inflict upon the recipients; the third takes into consideration the systematization of attacks; and finally, Robinio constructs a broad category of the 'different' children who are nastily teased and despised by their peers (Sweeting and West, 2001).

The systematization of attacks, as well as the negative feelings of the children who are bullied, adds to the non-retaliatory nature of the acts and situate them within the phenomenon of bullying (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Griffin and Gross, 2004). Definitions and labelling of specific acts, as well as the explanations offered for these acts by Robinio, made the two areas the sixth graders focused upon. The comments of the pupils are examined in detail in the following section.

### **Cultural sensitivity to bullying: acts of nasty teasing and social exclusion**

#### *Identification of experience-related acts*

The children who watched the video offered narratives that shared characteristics in both content and form. All of them talked or wrote in their letters about two categories of acts, whereas they omitted others that were

also represented in the video tape. The first category was articulated through the verb “*koroidevo*”, whilst the second was communicated through the phrases “*den paizo*”<sup>3</sup> and “*parato*”<sup>4</sup>. According to the terminology the pupils used, it was clear that they had recognized verbal and social ways of bullying within the video tape. Data derived from the second letters that the pupils wrote, as well as from the interviews I conducted with them, indicate that the participants themselves experienced these acts. This may explain why the destruction of personal property or acts of physical violence were absent from the participants’ responses, even though these acts were also represented in the video tape. This finding indicates that children who watched the videos on bullying do not merely respond to the bullying representations; instead, invoke their own social representations of the phenomenon, as well as their personal experiences of it.

This finding is confirmed by the fact that more than half of the pupils described the acts they had watched in the video tape as nasty teasing and social exclusion, with both coexisting within the same incidents. Therefore, it appears that the participants aimed to communicate that when a child is teased in a nasty way, he/she is also left alone or excluded from the peer games. Extracts 2 and 3 that follow are taken from the letters of Apollonas and Platonas, and indicate this point as raised by the pupils.

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<sup>3</sup> Den paizo: I do not play with (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.642)

<sup>4</sup> Parato: leave someone out of group activities or ignore someone (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.665)

## Extract 2

‘...It is bad not to take into games a fat child and to tease him.’

( Apollonas)

## Extract 3

‘...They did not play with these children and they teased them because...’

(Platonas)

Such a perspective views bullying as a combination of acts rather than as a sole act, and the pupils’ perspectives confirm the findings of the study by Kowalski (2004), who argued that nasty teasing is often accompanied by additional types of bullying.

In fact, I myself could not obtain any clear evidence of such a message when I watched the video tape. However, the exploration of the case of Ermis (discussed in chapters ten and eleven) confirms that both teasing and social exclusion may be conducted against the same child within real life incidents. Responding to the video bullying representations, the participants situated specific bullying acts within their own socio-cultural context and within their own life-experiences. This finding confirms those of Monks and Smith (2006), who found in their study that perspectives of bullying are experience-related.

## Definitions of bullying

### *Bullying: an immoral behaviour*

The children defined the bullying acts from a moralistic perspective, although the words 'moral' or 'immoral' were found in only two of the sixteen letters. However, they stressed the distressing feelings of the bullied children, thereby constructing nasty teasing and social exclusion as moral transgressions. Highly emotive words such as 'bad', 'very bad', or 'mistake' were used by the participants within their letters or articulations in order to characterize the acts seen in the video tape. These words were taken as an indication of the children's negative attitudes towards bullying, as extract 4 from the letter of Thalia shows.

#### Extract 4

'...I call this behaviour bad because those children did the wrong thing to other children and these were worried.'

(Thalia)

Houndoumadi and Pateraki (2001) also found evidence of the negative attitudes Greek pupils display towards bullying that extract 4 indicates. However, the context within which bullying was represented in the video tape (e.g. sad music, facial expressions, crying, etc) may have affected the participants' attitudes and cannot go without consideration. This is because, as will be discussed in the following chapters, these attitudes and specific



types of acts (as referred to above) were modified in different contexts. This point aims to signify how defining acts as bullying or non-bullying is contextual.

The difference between the ideal and the real is implied in the words of Apollonas, cited in extract 5. The phrase ‘we should not’ the boy used indicates the ‘ought-is’ discrepancy: from this perspective, bullying is normalized in so much as it is expected to occur in everyday interactions, and the discrepancy existing between attitudes and behaviour is emphasized.

#### Extract 5

‘...I call this behaviour very bad because we should not ‘*koroidevoume*’ (tease in a nasty way) others and leave them out of our games because they feel bad and are very much worried’.  
(Apollonas)

#### *No justifications for name-calling and social exclusion.*

Analysis of the pupils’ reports showed that no particular label was used to describe bullying as a phenomenon with unique characteristics (Griffin and Gross, 2004). Instead, the participants used the words ‘this behaviour’ in order to refer to the bullying representations in the video. This finding highlights the lack of specific terminology to label the phenomenon, or the inadequate attention paid to bullying on the part of Greek pupils (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Sapouna, 2008).

All the participants consensually used the word “*aparadekti*” as an evaluative term to define the phenomenon watched in the video. This fact indicated that the pupils did not view bullying as holding discrete characteristics other than being morally unacceptable. This is why more than half of them started their letters by stressing that bullying is “*aparadekti*” behaviour, as the following extract taken from the letter of Cleonas reveals.

#### Extract 6

‘I call this behaviour “*aparadekti*” we should not *koroidevoume* <sup>5</sup> no one.’

(Cleonas)

“*Aparadekti*” was the word that most of the pupils who heard about the video also used in their conversations with me. The Oxford Greek-English Learner’s Dictionary (Crowther, 1988, p.90) gives a number of terms to translate this Greek term into the English language. These are ‘unacceptable’, ‘objectionable’, ‘impossible’, and ‘inadmissible’. However, in the discussion that followed the writing of the letters, participants affirmed that the term was used to denote a behaviour that should in no way be justified. Words such as “*magkia*”, “*ntais*” and “*plaka*” that were abundantly used in previous research studies (see chapter two) were absent

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<sup>5</sup> Koroidevoume (we) tease in a nasty way (see chapter seven)

from the responses of the participants. This is an important finding to consider when nasty teasing is defined in a non-personalized context

Extract 7 cited below comes from a conversation I had with the pupils of ST1 class after the writing of their letters. It indicates that in defining the behaviour displayed within the bullying representations, the negative feelings of the bullied were considered the basic criterion. Such a finding supports that the participants defined nasty teasing and social exclusion as bullying (Olweus, 1993) in a depersonalized context.

#### Extract 7

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| V.N              | So, how would you call that behaviour then?  |
| Cleonas          | It is " <i>aparadekti</i> "  |
| Erato            | yes...totally unfair   |
| Thalia           | And you cannot forgive those children who maltreat some other children because when the teachers see them they will probably ask for sorry but.. |
| Apollonas        | Yes, they say sorry but they don't mean it and the other children (those being bullied) still feel very bad.                                     |
| V.N              | Can anyone " <i>koroidewei</i> " just for fun?   |
| Erato            | He can...but how the child (who is teased) feels? No, we shouldn't do that.  |
| V.N              | Does every one agree with Erato?   |
| Class (in choir) | YES.   |
| V.N              | Do you think that this (to tease someone) is an " <i>epithetiki</i> " <sup>6</sup> behaviour?  |
| The class        | NO, NO.  |

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<sup>6</sup> Epithetiki: aggressive (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.321).

V.N           What is an “*epithetiki*” behaviour. Give me examples.  
 Alexandros   Hitting, kicking someone...  
 Periklis      Punching, pushing...  
 Alexandros   No, no pushing is not. Just punching.  
 V.N           What do girls say?  
 Erato         I don’t know. I don’t think these are aggressive acts...  
                   but it is hurtful if you have not done something wrong.  
 V.N           Can you tease someone accidentally?  
 Erato         No, you cannot. But I don’t think it (teasing) is an aggressive act  
                   such as hitting or punching is...I don’t think so

Extract 7 additionally indicates that the pupils’ perceptions of aggression do not seem to fit the scientific definitions offered by researchers (Rigby, 2002; Griffin and Gross, 2004); instead, all participants viewed aggression as being restricted to intentional physical assaults. Artinopoulou (2001) refers to the difficulty of children have in defining aggressiveness, and states that they tend to associate it with hostility and physical assaults. This may be explained by the fact that the Greek words “*epithetiki*” and “*epithesi*<sup>7</sup>” are quite similar phonetically, which might cause children to confusedly view the two terms as overlapping conceptually. Therefore, this leads me to assume that nasty teasing and social exclusion cannot be labelled as aggressive acts, even though they are undesirable, distressing, or even painful. This finding suggests that when bullying is represented to pupils as a subtype of aggressive behaviour (Griffin and Gross, 2004), nasty teasing and social exclusion might be exempt from the pupils’ conceptualizations

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<sup>7</sup> Epithesi: attack, usually used to describe physical assault (Stavropoulos, 1988,p.321).

(Arora, 1996). Therefore, the need to clarify how pupils view specific types of acts, rather than include them in pre-set bully/victim questionnaires, needs further consideration.

Whilst both boys and girls similarly viewed nasty teasing and social exclusion as moral transgressions, three girls and one boy further elaborated the meaning of those acts to include a human rights issue. Such a perspective was supported in the literature of bullying (Greene, 2006) as an effective perspective to be included in anti-bullying school policies. The terms, such as 'unfair', 'non respectful', and 'non-human', used by pupils to characterize the acts indicate their awareness of the rights of any child to be respected, accepted, and fairly treated as a human being. They also indicate that bullying is viewed as an unfair activity to onlookers, which is also supported in the literature of bullying (Monks and Smith, 2006).

The participants described the nasty teasing and social exclusion represented in the video tape as immoral and unfair acts. As distressing, painful and unjust as those acts might be for the recipients, they were not viewed to be aggressive acts. Given the lack of a specific Greek word, the word aggression did fit the definitions of bullying offered by pupils. As a result, it is worth understanding what additional criteria the pupils considered when they defined the acts, and this issue is explored in the following section.

*Frequency, intention, and imbalance of power: Are they considered?*

The analysis of data generated from both the participants' letters, and the discussion I had with them regarding the video representation of bullying, made it clear that the frequency of attacks was overlooked. Not one of the participants referred to it as characterizing the reprehensible behaviour, even though some scenes in the video were shown more than once. In contrast, when I raised the element of frequency, a significant number of pupils claimed it was not the frequency of attacks that characterized an act as hurtful. Instead, in the definitions they offered, they stressed that the feelings of the bullied children mattered most. La Fontaine (1991) has supported such an approach to defining bullying, stating that for the victimized children who called the Child Bullying Line, frequency seemed to be an issue of minimal importance compared with their own feelings. However, in real life incidents, frequency seems to matter and confirms concerns raised by researchers (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993). This issue will be further discussed in chapter twelve.

The power imbalance between the bully and the victim, that has been characterized as 'the key to bullying' (Elinoff et al., 2004, p.888), seemed to be fully grasped by the participants, contrasting with the findings of previous research studies (Hantler, 1994; Bosacki et al., 2006). Although not explicitly quoted, it was communicated in three different ways, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, it was represented in numerical terms, with participants using sentences whose grammatical form constructed bullying as a phenomenon where a group of perpetrators acted against one child, as the following extract illustrates:

#### Extract 8

‘...If a child comes from another country and has a different colour this does not mean that the others should not include him/her in their games.’

(Thalia)

The power differentiation between the bullies and the victims was also understood in terms of the victims’ need for support, as highlighted by the following extract.

#### Extract 9

‘ I saw a video with very bad behaviours.... We should support those children who need help’.

(Solonas)

Extracts 8 and 9 suggest that pupils of this age can observe or infer power imbalances, and can distinguish between an ‘ordinary’ conflict and an ‘uneven’ interaction. However, whilst the attitudes expressed indicated that support should be offered to the victims of bullying, the pupils’ actions in real life incidents did not accord with the attitudes expressed here. It was for

various reasons that, in the participants' experiences, no action was taken in favour of the victim, nor was the imbalance of power reported. This point is raised in the following chapters of the present thesis, in which the reasons for such an attitude-behaviour inconsistency are explored.

The intention of the bully to hurt his/her victim has been supported to be a basic constituent in the literature on bullying (Tattuum, 1989; Griffin and Gross, 2004), and appears to distinguish 'malign' from 'non-malign' bullying (Rigby, 2002, p.49). However, it is worthy of consideration that not one of the participants mentioned it, even though they could understand that teasing and social exclusion were neither conducted for reasons of retaliation, nor were they accidental. This point is emphasised in extracts 10–14 cited in the following section. This finding could be anticipated, since no additional contextual cues (e.g. who the perpetrators were, what their relationships were with the victims, what factors preceded the incidents watched in the video, etc.) were communicated. This suggests that intent is a problematic issue that is constructed within specific contexts differently. The issue of the perpetrator's intent and its role in maintaining bullying, as well as tolerance to victimization, will be analytically discussed in the chapters eight, nine, ten, and eleven.

### **Explaining the video representations of bullying**

It was noteworthy that all the participants included in their first letters those explanations of bullying that had been represented in the video. This finding



indicates how important it was for the participants to explain the phenomenon. In fact, few children used the word 'because' to attribute bullying to factors that preceded the occurrence of the bullying in a direct way. However, an analysis of the data generated from their letters and verbalizations offers evidence that the pupils' explanations were focused upon a 'pathologized/different' victim. Indeed, there were specific characteristics of the bullied children which the participants referred to in order to explain why bullying happens. According to the pupils' reports, these characteristics were responsible for the bullied being constructed as 'different' by their peers. This finding confirms findings from previous studies (La Fontaine, 1991; Mooney et al., 1991; Frisen et al., 2008) and is illustrated by Extract 1, which is cited in the present chapter.

Considering the bias conveyed through the videotape on bullying, it could not go without consideration that bullied children are also represented in the video tape in particular ways. In fact, they were represented as possessing characteristics that made them distinguishable from others in particular ways (e.g. being fat, wearing eyeglasses, having a different colour). Additionally, the word 'different' that flashed out in the video tape might have affected the pupils' explanations, and raises the question of whether or not visual material on bullying can be leading in terms of affecting and shaping the children's views of bullying.

However, the important issue to be explored is why participants singled out these specific characteristics (e.g. being fat, wearing eyeglasses) as causes of

bullying. As discussed in the following chapters, the answer to this question seems to be concerned with the issue of the existing norms that dominate a particular society, and how these norms affect the perceptions of the people who live and socialize in this society. For example, the responses of Solonas and Apollonas, represented in Extracts 10 and 11 respectively, indicate that bullied children do not fit the normative standards of appearance. The following two extracts illustrate that being overweight is viewed as explicitly or implicitly ‘triggering’ nasty teasing. Such a view accords findings from previous studies (Pawluck, 1989; Jones and Newman, 2005).

#### Extract 10

‘I saw (in the video) a child whom they “*koroidevan*”<sup>8</sup> because he was different because he was fat’  
(Solonas)

#### Extract 11

‘It is not fair to tease a fat child’  
(Apollonas)

Not fitting the existing norms, and thus being a ‘problematic’ child, seemed to constitute an over-generalized reason for the children to explain bullying

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<sup>8</sup> Koroideva n: they teased in a nasty way (see extract 1, cited in this chapter)

within the context of the video representations. Furthermore, the ways in which problems are constructed in the participants' viewpoints are represented in extracts 12 and 13 respectively. Such an approach to explaining bullying confirms similar findings from previous research studies (La Fontaine, 1991; Mooney et al., 1991).

#### Extract 12

'...because they should not "*koroidevoun*"<sup>9</sup> some children and "*paratoun*" them because they have a problem.'

(Ifigenia)

#### Extract 13

'...because if a child had a problem and he was fat or wore eye-glasses they "*koroidevan*" him and did not take him into their company.'

(Clio)

However, the explanations of bullying offered by participants also went beyond the specific context of the video representations. In her letter, a part of which appears in Extract 14, Thalia pointed out the existence of racial bullying within the Greek schools. The girl regards ethnic and racial

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<sup>9</sup> Koroidevoun: (they) tease in a nasty way (see extract 1, cited in this chapter).

background as constituting additional reasons for some children to experience practices of alienation on the part of their schoolmates. Her allegations support previous concerns expressed by Mastoras (2001), who views a climate of fear for the foreigners that pervade Greek society.

#### Extract 14

‘When in the Greek schools come “*Alvanakia*”, “*tsigganakia*” and children from other countries they don’t take them to be their friends they “*koroidevoun*” them and they make them worried.’

(Thalia)

#### Personalizing bullying

Familiarity with the phenomenon was more evident in the written accounts of those children who related the bullying video representations to their own personal experiences. In this way, they situated bullying within the context of their class. These pupils may have taken the letters they wrote about the video tape as an opportunity to disclose their own bullying experiences within a context of privacy and safety, as the children’s first letters were anonymous. Extract 15 indicates the ‘personalization’ of bullying.

#### Extract 15

‘This thing with this behaviour has happened to me many times and the children had not me as their friend...’

(Perikles)

Alexandros went a bit further, and additionally explained in the private context of his letter why his classmates had teased him nastily. The blame he assigned to himself in order to explain why his classmates were bullying him confirms the miserable reality that some bullied children find themselves in (Mooney et al., 1991; Scambler et al., 1998). Extract 16 indicates this point.

#### Extract 16

‘ ...because they “*koroidevan*” me because I could not speak well’. (Alexandros)’

Self-disclosures by more and more pupils who attended different classes in the school continued for several days after the playing of the video tape. However, as Extract 17 highlights, the construction of a deserving victim seemed to be the dominant, albeit very simplistic, explanation of bullying that most of the children offered.

#### Extract 17

‘This has happened to me and the children in my class ‘*koroidevan*’ me because I am fat...but now I listen to my parents’ advice and do not hear them and I do not fall into depression’

(Ioannis, attending class D)

In their letters, two pupils reported their anxiety at being future targets of bullying conducted on the part of their peers. The responses of Evridiki, cited in Extract 18, place the occurrence of bullying within the context of

friendship. They suggest that it is worthy of consideration the way in which bullying is normalized as an expected interaction among friends (see also chapter five). It is also worth gaining an understanding of how such normalization affects explanations of, and responses to, bullying as reported by the participants. These issues are explored and discussed within chapters eight, nine, and eleven of the present thesis.

#### **Extract 18**

‘...because some children behaved very badly to some other children and I wouldn’t like this to happen to me. I wouldn’t like my friends do this to me.’

( Evridiki)

#### **Summary**

The children’s responses to the video snapshots of bullying offer evidence that the participants were not only aware of the phenomenon, but also situated it within their own socio-cultural context. This is because they identified nasty teasing and social exclusion as realities within their school life. The participants condemned the acts as transgressing moral values and human rights. The definition of bullying offered by the children was based upon the negative feelings of the bullied, and recognized their need for support. Neither frequency of attacks nor motives of the perpetrators were mentioned in the pupils’ definitions. Despite the anti-bullying attitudes that the participants showed, the bullied children were consensually regarded as provoking their happenings in some way. Specifically, the bullied children

were placed within societal categories that appeared to be “different, and therefore susceptible to victimization. For some children, the video tape on bullying was a means by which they channelled their frustration or fear of bullying. In order to get more situational understanding, and to transfer bullying from the video representation into a specific real life context, the experiences of the bullied children will be discussed in chapters seven, eight, and nine. In particular, chapter seven explores the specific acts bullied children were recipients of and how they contextualized the meanings of their experiences within the local, as well as within the broader Greek, socio-cultural context.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Being bullied: Acts, words, and images

#### Introduction

The present chapter has three basic aims, the first of which is to understand the issues the bullied children highlighted both within their letters and the interviews they had with me. Secondly, it aims to understand the role that culture and the related terminology plays in the definition and maintenance of bullying. Finally, it aims to understand how the children viewed social exclusion and gossiping through the lens of their cultural background. The chapter consists of six sections: it starts by offering evidence of the situational nature of the roles that children take up in bullying episodes. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of considering the context in which these roles are self-assigned. The second section describes how the participants who reported to have been bullied constructed their stories to communicate their issues of concern within their letters. The third and fourth sections set the interviews as a context in which the meanings of specific terms that the participants used to describe their bullying experiences are able to be clarified. In particular, the third section focuses upon the Greek verb “*koroido*”, and aims to specify what types of bullying-related experiences the word referred to. In doing so, the third section points to the need for the meanings being conveyed through the use of inclusive terms, such as ‘bullying’, ‘picking on’, or “*koroido*”, to be unmasked. The fourth section is exclusively concerned with the act of name-calling, describing its



types and how each type is used in order to offer indicative evidence that the meanings assigned to the act are context and culture-bound. Within these contexts, name-calling is constructed as being either a bullying or a non-bullying activity. The section aims to point to the role that the terminology related to name-calling plays in reproducing existing cultural meanings. It also aims to highlight how the terminology used highlights the existing norms. The fifth section explores gossiping and social exclusion as viewed by those pupils who talked about it in the interview sessions. The section indicates how current societal discourses on gossiping were reproduced within the quotes of the interviewees, and highlights the significance of gossiping for a cohesive community of people. The final section sums up the key points and links this chapter to the next one.

### **Changing roles within changing contexts**

Analysis of the data generated from the participants' second letters and the interviews I conducted with them, revealed that a number of pupils were recipients of bullying by their peers. Seven out of the thirty-three pupils either wrote or stated in their individual interviews that they were teased in a nasty way, sworn at, or were targets of untrue rumours. However, in the interviews that followed the writing of letters, more children confessed that they were the recipients of distressing or painful acts conducted on the part of their classmates. Three girls in the interviews stated that they had experienced verbal and social bullying, even though they had self-represented as onlookers of bullying incidents within their letters. Alexandros was the only child who reported in his letter that he had been a wrongdoer,

and acknowledged his regret for it. However, in the later interview I had with him he disclosed his suffering at being called ‘lisper’ by some of his classmates.

According to the participants’ reports, some children who are involved in bullying take up different roles in different incidents. Therefore, assigning *stable* labels such as ‘bullies’, ‘victims’, or ‘followers’ to the pupils seems to be unproductive. However, these labels are useful in as much as they characterize the roles that children take up in *specific* bullying incidents, as used in this thesis. The situational nature of the roles that children take up in bullying episodes is also supported by previous research studies (Stephenson and Smith, 1989; Olweus, 1993).

The pupils’ reports also raise two important issues: the first issue relates to the gendered nature of the roles that the pupils reported; the second relates to the context in which these roles are self-reported. As far as the first is concerned, it is clear that the boys reported to have been involved in incidents of physical and verbal bullying either as perpetrators or as recipients. The girls on the other hand self-defined either as observers or as victims of bullying. This issue confirms findings from previous research studies in which the gendered nature of involvement in bullying is supported (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Olweus, 1993; Pateraki and Houndoumadi, 2001).

With regards to the context, it is helpful to understand in what contexts the specific roles which children take up in bullying incidents are reported. From the impression I got during the fieldwork, as well as from the analysis of the data from the pupils' reports, context does matter. This is because most of the participants disclosed their most private and painful experiences in the interview sessions, which were conducted in the latter stages of the fieldwork (see chapter three).

This finding suggests that both the longevity of relationships, as well as the reciprocity that is developed between children and adults, may encourage disclosures of the former which are otherwise difficult to elicit. Therefore, ethnographic studies are highly recommended for exploring the most secretive experiences of the children who are bullied.

### **Letter writing as a context for the bullied to report**

Letter writing is a private activity, especially when it refers to the writer's personal issues. However, when the reader is other than the writer himself/herself, letter writing is a social activity too (Engel, 2005). Within the second letters that the participants wrote for the researcher, they were free to choose what they wanted to communicate, thus avoiding a face-to-face interaction. Therefore, not only is it important to explore what the children had written in their letters, but also how they communicated their stories. Both the content and the form of narratives convey meanings about acts and persons, as discussed in the following sub-section.

### *Control over the letters*

In their second letters, the participants were offered guidelines (see Appendix C) which dictated to them in some way what their stories would be focused upon, as explained in chapter three. However, it was interesting to note that most of the participants took control over their narratives, not strictly following the pre-set guidelines. Therefore, they took personal decisions regarding what they viewed as being important for them to communicate, as well as how to communicate it.

The participants' stories were brief and shared features both in the content and the form. All the boys who wrote referred to incidents of nasty teasing conducted by other male classmates against them in order to describe a behaviour which they labelled as "*koroidia*"<sup>1</sup>. It was an important finding that the Greek term the boys used was the same one that had also been used by all the participants to describe the bullying represented in the video. No more details were offered in order for the children to specify what specific acts they were recipients of. I suppose the boys assumed that the word "*koroidia*" would be a self-explanatory term to a Greek researcher. However, the analysis of the data generated in the interviews revealed that some boys hesitated to specify what personal experiences the Greek term "*koroidia*" referred to. This point will be analytically discussed in the following section.

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<sup>1</sup> Koroidia: (the act of koroidevo), nasty teasing, the act of making fun of someone (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 934).

On the other hand, the girls reported to have been recipients of verbal and social bullying on the part of both boy and girl classmates. In contrast to Ermis and Apollonas, who stressed the systematization of the attacks (as shown in extracts 2 and 3), the girls stressed the longevity of the psychological pain they suffered because of their experiences. Extract 1 indicates this point.

#### Extract 1

‘A girl friend of mine whom I knew for many years used to say bad things about me and I felt terrible for a long time’ .....

(Evridiki)

According to the descriptions of the incidents the participants wrote about, the frequency of attacks and the longevity of harm were equally stressed. This suggests that the temporal dimension of bullying, that is not emphasized in a non-personalized context (see chapter six), does matter in real life incidents for those being bullied (Lane, 1989; Roland, 1999). Considering also the non-retaliatory nature of the attacks, as well as the pupils’ distressing feelings as represented in Extracts 2 and 3, the pupils’ experiences did fit the typical definition of bullying (Olweus, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Scambler et al., 1998).

#### Extract 2

‘There is a boy in my class who laughs at me without reason and he “*koroiderei*” (tease me in a nasty way) me ...I do not pay attention to me but he continuous to “*koroiderei*” me. This gets on my nerves’.

( Apollonas)

### Extract 3

‘Everyday when I come to school all the time they “*koroidouvoun*” me (tease me in a nasty way) and I tell them not to “*koroidouvoun*” me but they do it all the time...and I am very much worried.’  
(Ermis)

In their letters, both the boys and the girls represented themselves as having no responsibility for their bullying experiences. They stressed that it was the bully who held the agency and responsibility for their happenings. The explanations they offered within their first letters regarding the bullying video representations were not identified within their second letters. Therefore, the discourse of a provoking victim that the participants used to explain bullying in a non-personalized context was absent from the pupils’ second letters. Instead, when explanations were offered, they attributed the causality of the pupils’ own experiences to the bully.

Most of the participants reported their feelings at the end of their stories as if their feelings constituted the central point the children intended to communicate (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). In reporting that they experienced negative feelings, the children represented bullying as a problem for which a solution was sought. This is why all of them included within their letters what they had done in order to deal with an unwelcome, distressing, or even painful situation. This suggests that responses to bullying, rather than explanations of it, are what really matter for the children who are picked on by their classmates.

In terms of feelings, the letters of the boys reported feelings of anger, rage, and even indifference, rather than pain for their bullying happenings, as extract 2 above, and extract 4 below show. Ermis was the only exception to this, as Extract 3 has indicates.

#### Extract 4

‘I hit someone because he swore at me and he “*koroidevei*” me (teased me in a nasty way). I know I shouldn’t have hit him. But (this is because) I was very angry.’  
(Alexandros)

Evridiki and Sophia, who self-defined as victims of untrue rumours conducted on the part of female friends, reported that retaliation was an effective response. The covert nature of the girls’ aggression is clearly stated in Extract 5, which indicates how ‘tit for tat’ (Owens, 2000a, p.370) is a common tactic of bullying conducted between girls. Moreover, it indicates how Evridiki constructed her act as ‘a lesson of justice’.

#### Extract 5

‘A girl friend of mine whom I knew for many years used to “*koroidevei*” me and said bad words for me to others and I coped with it. I pretended that I did not know anything and I started to say to others that she hates me very much and (that) she wants to keep me away from the others (friends). Then she became an enemy to the others and I gave her a lesson.’

(Evridiki)

Boys and girls wrote in their letters that they were recipients of verbal and social attacks, which they specified as “*koroidia*” and rumour-spreading respectively. However, no explanation for their happenings was adequately reported, nor was the meaning of the verb “*Koroidevo*” clarified; although, in the interviews I conducted, the participants shed light upon the act of “*koroidevo*” and offered more explanations for their experiences. In the following section, the findings from the interviews I conducted with the bullied children are discussed. In particular, the meanings conveyed through the use of the Greek word “*koroidevo*” are explored.

### **Contextualizing “*koroidevo*”: Richness of meanings**

Apollonas, Ermis, Poseidonas, Alexandros, Miltiadis, Afroditi, and Pythia, who said in the interviews that they were recipients of “*koroidia*”, were asked to clarify the meanings of the term. Most of the participants did it without hesitation, and from their reports it was obvious that the Greek word was used in order to describe acts that not only were negatively evaluated by the interviewees, but they were also distressing for them.

However, for those pupils who need a generic term as a smokescreen, behind which their specific experienced of being bullied might be obscured, the use of the word seems to offer the best opportunity. Extract 6, from the interview I conducted with Apollonas, demonstrates this point and shows what kind of bullying the specific label stands for.



## Extract 6

- V.N        You wrote that a boy “*koroidevei*” you sometimes.  
Apollonas    Yes. He did it more in the past.  
V.N        You mean he does not do it any more?  
Apollonas    Not so much now...and he does this to others  
              NOT only to me.  
V.N        What do you mean when you say that he  
              “*koroidevei*” you? What does he do to you?  
Apollonas (lowering his head, his face looking down) Eh...  
              different BAD things.  
V. N        Could you tell me some?  
Apollonas (his face still looking down)...He says BAD words and  
              does BAD gestures. I cant say... they’re BAD words...  
              (and then keeping his voice very low and coming closer to me  
              he almost whispered):  
              (He calls me) ‘Jerk’ ... and things like that’.

Extract 6 emphasizes that the specific term both stood for and masked the existence of homophobic bullying within the school. Girls of ST1 class confirmed the existence of homophobic bullying amongst the boys of the sixth grade class. The girls stated that some boys (which they also nominated) “*koroidevan*” both Apollonas and Ermis. They also specified that the act was conducted through the assignment of the teasing-name “*aderfes*”<sup>2</sup> to the two boys, who were often picked on. Furthermore, it was clear that all the girls of the ST1 class understood the derogatory nature of this particular label, as Extract 7 shows.

## Extract 7

- V.N    So, you say that they call Ermis and Apollonas “*aderfes*”

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<sup>2</sup> Aderfes: sisters. The word is used metaphorically to describe a man who is either homosexual or simply deviates from what is considered as the normal masculine characteristics (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 67)

Pythia Yes, Priamos and Alexandros

Eleni and Periklis, DOES

V.N But they didn't tell me...

Eleni Yes, they 'hide' it because they are ashamed... because they are to be  
(are considered to be) like GIRLS, that's why.

The richness of meaning involved in the act of "*koroidevo*" was described by many of the sixth graders. It was linked to homophobic bullying, racist bullying, bullying against disability. This richness of meaning seems to accord with the collectivistic nature of the words 'bullying' and 'picked on', which mask the different methods of harassment (Tattum, 1989; Arora, 1996). This finding may explain why verbal types of bullying, which probably incorporate a number of subtypes, are regarded to dominate in Greek schools (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001; Sapouna, 2008, Deliyianni et al., 2008). However, it is clear that the acts described with this particular word "*koroidevo*" exclude any type of physical assault. Extract 8, from the interview I conducted with Poseidonas, indicates the point.

#### Extract 8

V.N Tell me more about that. What happened in the camp?

Poseidonas Oh. I spent an awful month. All (the children) they  
"*koroidavan*" me.... (they did) different bad thing

V.N such as?

Poseidonas Eh...different things...bad words, swearing, things like that

V. N Did they hit you or kick you or throwing things at you, or anything  
like that?

Poseidonas Oh, no. No. ONLY \*they "*koroidavan*" me.

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\* Capital letters represent loud voice

All participants related name-calling to what they called “*koroidia*”; however, close analysis of the pupils’ reports indicates that not all nicknames assigned were perceived to being distressing or hurtful. The children could understand the different meanings that different kinds of nicknames were intended to communicate. These meanings are discussed in the following section.

### **Name calling as reproducing adults’ and children’s cultures**

#### *Paraphrasing a name: a non bullying activity*

Athina, Afroditi, and Poseidonas offered examples in the interview sessions in order to indicate how a pupil’s name could be paraphrased. In most cases, assigning a nick-name which was phonetically similar to the real name of the child to whom the nickname was assigned was perceived as a childish routine. The children specified in their quotes that specific kinds of nick-names were occasional and short lived. They also added that they could be assigned to anyone of the pupils within a context of fun. This kind of name-calling falls outside the area of bullying, as Extract 9 cited below indicates.

#### **Extract 9**

- V.N     I heard that they call you ‘Pitsina’.  
Athina   Yes because my real name is “Christina” and it (the nick-name) looks like it (my real name) that’s why.  
VN       Do they “*koroidevoun*” you, then?  
Athina   No, no. They just call me ‘Pitsina’ for fun  
V.N       Do you mind for being called “Pitsina”?  
Athina   No, not at all. Besides, they will forget it later. They don’t “*Koroidevoun*” me

However, there were cases in which even this kind of name-calling caused feelings of embarrassment for the children, as it was perceived as some kind of “social punishment” imposed upon the recipients on the part of the peers, as extract 10 demonstrates.

#### Extract 10

- Poseidonas They used to call me “*papa*” when we were in the previous class because it (the nick-name) looked near to my surname.
- VN How did you feel about that?
- Poseidonas I didn’t mind because they do it with other (pupils’) names too but for some time and then they do it for some other names. And then you know it will be for some other names. It will stop for you and will start for another boy.
- VN So, this is a game, among boys as far as I can understand
- Poseidonas Boys do it most of the times. But, this is a game for them. They do it for fun. Sometimes it is IN a game. If we play for example and someone loses then we find a name for him. Something near to his (real) name. It happened to me once in a game.
- VN So, did you have fun that time?
- Poseidonas Mmm...Not so much.. Even though I knew it was a game I didn’t feel very well when my turn came. I didn’t like it. But it was just the rule (of the game).

Close consideration of the pupils’ quotes shows that the pupils used the word ‘call’ instead of the word “*koroido*” to separate name-calling from bullying. This separation is more explicit in the quotes of Athina (see extract 9, cited above). This finding indicates the power of the terminology to convey meanings that are culturally unique to those who share a specific socio-cultural environment (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995; Smith et al., 2002).

The humorous nick-names exchanged among the pupils, mostly initiated by boys, reflected the ethos of cohesion and familiarity of the broader community which was promoted through the joking and teasing between men. Therefore, such activities could be viewed as reproducing culture, especially when conducted by boys. From this perspective, teasing and making fun of someone could be viewed as leading boys towards a 'proper' manhood. In fact, they were normalized as such by the participants, as discussed in chapters eight and eleven.

Name-calling as reproducing culture is more evident within those nick-names that were assigned by adults to children. These were understood by the latter as cultural codes that aimed to communicate conformity to the existing norms. These nick-names were far from being experienced as bullying; in fact, they were perceived as cultural codes that aimed to communicate, and encourage conformity to, the existing norms. Therefore, the pupils' reports confirmed the teachers' reports, who claimed that they assigned nicknames to pupils for reasons of pedagogy and class relaxation, as discussed in chapter five. The following section illustrates the point.

*Name-calling: conformity to the existing adult norms*

In their interviews, the children further clarified the meanings of nick-names ritually assigned to them by either their teachers or their parents. The children understood these names as underlying the

adults' cultural norms that the children were themselves aware of through socialization.

It was this cultural awareness that enabled the children to decode the meaning of the nick-names that were communicated through a figurative language. Extract 11 below is from the interview I conducted with Afroditi. It suggests how the Greek culture, as a 'collective subjectivity' (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 25), affects and shapes the meanings of acts that can be considered as constituting bullying in different cultures.

#### Extract 11

- Afroditi Sometimes, YES I tell you I shout and "*vrizo*"<sup>3</sup> (swear at) so much that the teacher calls me "*glossou*"<sup>4</sup> but I can't stop it at that time ( I am doing it) because they (peers) piss me off. I don't mind that time if I am a girl. NO, No. Because when boys "*vrizoun*" me I "*vrizo*" them (back). I admit I DO but not without reason.
- VN So, are you telling me that you shouldn't do that?
- Afroditi Well, the teachers call me "*glossou*". (She laughs)  
But when a boy DOES they NEVER call him "*glossou*"
- V N Why does this happen?
- Afroditi (It happens) because he's a boy. That's why.

Afroditi's quotes indicate that the children have a sophisticated ability to understand the distinction between 'personal insults' and 'ritual insults' (Pawluck, 1989, p.153), with the latter being perceived as highlighting cultural norms.

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<sup>3</sup> Vrizo:swear, talk to someone using rude language (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1378).

<sup>4</sup> Glossou: a girl who has big tongue (big mouth), the one who talks back (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.429).

In the interview sessions, pupils offered a list of culture-grounded nicknames which were circulated within their school. These are as follows: “*koufiokefalakis*”<sup>5</sup>, “*glossou*”, “*agorokoritso*”<sup>6</sup>, and “*gries koutsomplotes*”<sup>7</sup>. They indicate cultural stereotypes concerning gender expectations, which in turn relate to the normalization of specific acts that in another context could be labelled as bullying. Therefore, according to the list of nicknames that the pupils offered, it appears that verbal bullying was expected by males. On the other hand, talking back was antithetical to girls’ expected social behaviour, in which gossiping seemed to be the norm.

In her account, Afroditi (see Extract 11) openly criticized cultural stereotypes; however, she appeared to still be influenced by the existing cultural conventions. This is because she felt the need to excuse herself for conducting an act that did not accord with her female identity.

Eleni, Pythia, and Kalomira, who shared an interview session, also stressed the gender bias that was communicated on the part of the adults through the particular nick-names they assigned to children. Extract 12 indicates the point, and highlights how the interpretation of name-calling is highly culture-bound.

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<sup>5</sup> Koufiokefalakis: empty-headed (see chapter five)

<sup>6</sup> Agorokoritso: a girl who behaves as a boy does, a naughty girl, an overactive girl (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.61).

<sup>7</sup> Gries koutsomplotes: old women who gossip (see chapter four).

## Extract 11

- Eleni They (the teachers) call us “*gries koutsompoles*” when I talk with Pythia (pointing the girl who is standing next to her. Both laugh)
- Pythia YES. But once the headteacher called Alexandros like that and all the boys (in the classroom) laughed at him
- Eleni Yes, because he (Alexandros) told secrets to Thiseas  
And then the boys in the break time started to call him ( Alexandros) ‘*gries koutsompoles*’ and he got very angry and he hit them And the other boys still “*koroidevan*” him.  
Sometimes they (still) call him so when they remember it.  
And Alexandros is very much angry.
- V.N Why is he so much angry since YOU were not?
- Eleni Boys are not like girls. They shouldn’t gossip.
- Pythia But they do ...they just hide it so that not others (boys) to call them ‘girls’....
- Eleni Yes, they do. They do (gossip). I’ve seen them whispering bad things about us

Apart from the nick-names that were understood by the children as communicating the adults’ culture, the interviewees articulated a number of nick-names that were initiated by children, as discussed in the following sub-section.

### Peer culture nick-names: codes and rules

Whilst nick-names assigned by adults were criticized by some children, it was obvious that the children themselves constructed their own nick-names. Reproducing the adults’ culture of “*paratsoukli*” (as discussed in chapter four), the meanings assigned to these nicknames were exclusively shared among the children, and underlined their own culture. Name-calling in this case was viewed by the participants as aiming to safeguard the rules that the group of peers set. As such, name-calling was understood as a social punishment upon those who



transgressed these rules in different ways. Therefore, by assigning particular nicknames, the pupils who participated in the present study aimed to remind the recipients of what was collectively depreciated. This is a common tactic for pre-adolescents, as Jones and Newman (2005) support. Pythia's statement, in Extract 13, sheds light upon the meaning of the nick-name "*karfi*"<sup>8</sup>.

### Extract 13

- VN And then what happen when you told the teacher?
- Pythia Then the boys ( names the boys) started to sing "there are "*karfia*"<sup>9</sup> in the classroom..." and things like that...and they were staring at me and they sang the song and the other children looked at me and then Lambros came near to me and he whispered: "Did you "*karfoneis*"<sup>10</sup> my friend?"
- And I said to him: "If you open your mouth I will open mine too". And they called me "*karfi*", "*karfi*". When the teacher says my name and asks me to go to the blackboard they whisper: "*Karfi*", "*karfil*".
- V.N Do you think the teacher can hear them?
- Pythia No. Mr. X is very strict. He does not allow such things (to happen) within the classroom. But if I tell him then they will call me "*karfi*" again.
- VN Why do they call you like that?
- Pythia Look. To call you "*karfi*" is bad. It means that you "*roufianeveis*"<sup>11</sup>
- VN What do you mean "*roufianeveis*"?
- Pythia To tell the teachers what your classmates do and "uncover" them. Then they (the peers) say that you "*karfones*" them.
- V.N So, do you think that you did the wrong thing?
- Pythia (Pause, head lowering) ...They shouldn't have done what they did. They SWORE at me.

<sup>8</sup> Karfi: nail (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.419. The word is used metaphorically to describe a preson who grasses (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.845).

<sup>9</sup> Karfia : plural form of the word "karfi"

<sup>10</sup> Karfoneis: you nail, metaphorically is used to denote that you grass (Mpampiniotis, 2003, p.846)

<sup>11</sup> Roufianeveis: disclose that someone else has done something wrong to those who can punish him (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1556)

Pythia stressed how an anti-grassing ethos made possible an alliance to those who aimed to get away with their conduct. Such an ethos is related to the maintenance and perpetuation of bullying, since it prevents disclosures (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

“*Phyto*” and “*psonio*” were two more nick-names that were circulated among the participants. The meaning of the first nick-name was clarified in the interview I conducted with Evridiki and Kalomira. Their quotes, included in Extract 15, indicate that bullying may be conducted against pupils who excel in their school attainment, which confirms the findings of previous studies (Besag, 1989; La Fontain, 1991). However, in the specific group context, the nickname “*phyto*” seemed to indicate masculinity when assigned to girls since, according to the quotes of Evridiki, it separates the boys from the girls.

#### Extract 15

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Evridiki | They (the boys) call us “ <i>phyta</i> ” sometimes.   |
| V. N     | <i>Phyta</i> ? How it comes?  |
| Kalomira | Because they say we study too much.   |
| V. N     | So, if you study too much you are a ‘ <i>phyto</i> ’. A flower, a tree.                             |
| Evridiki | It is because (they say) you grow roots on the chair if you sit there ( and study) for a long time. |
| V N      | So, is it bad for you to be called “ <i>phyto</i> ”?  |
| Evridiki | Well, some children believe that we are stupid if we study too much                                 |
| V. N     | What do you think?  |
| Evridiki | Well, all the girls study more (than boys). Boys say they don’t study too much.                     |

Displaying contempt and attitudes of self-superiority were strongly criticized by the participants. Those who displayed such attitudes were viewed as worthy of social punishment, since these children were claimed to inflict feelings of self-devaluation upon the rest of their peers. Those children were called ‘snobs’ by their peers and were also known as the “*psonia*” within the peer group.(see chapter five as well as Appendix B). Since bullying can be displayed as an attitude that devalues others (Besag, 1989; Askew, 1989), this particular nickname seemed to eliminate rather than generate bullying, as Extract 16 shows.

#### Extract 16

- V.N                   What does this “*psonia*”<sup>12</sup> mean?  
Poseidonas       Sophia and Persephoni, that’s what it means  
Zeus               (laughs) ...they think that they are the best of all  
V.N               Are they the best?  
(All the three boys) NO, NO. Absolutely NO  
Dionyssos       But especially Persephoni thinks she is the best because her  
                          parents are secondary school teachers and she says they have a lot  
                          of money and she can buy expensive cloths and she shows off all  
                          the time. I think that nobody likes her except from her friend  
                          Sophia  
Poseidonas       Because she (Sophia) is stupid. That’s why. But it gets on my  
                          nerves because they (both girls) think they are superior. But they  
                          stop (behaving in this way) when we call them “*psonia*”  
Dionyssos       Yes, they don’t like it

Apollonas and Ermis were often assigned the label “*aderfes*”, whose meaning has already been clarified (see Extract 6). This label brought the boys’ “non-masculine” characteristics to the attention of their

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<sup>12</sup> Psonia Plural form of the word ‘psonio’ which is metaphorically used to describe someone who believes that he/she is a very important person (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1997).

peers, and inflicted feelings of anger, rage, shame, and embarrassment upon the two boys, or any other boy who was picked on. This issue is analytically discussed in chapter eight.

In fact, the nick-name “*aderfes*” attacked a social category of boys whose appearance or mannerism did not fit with male stereotypes, rather than a sole person (Meyer, 2008). However, neither Ermis nor Apollonas, nor any other boy within the school, ever disclosed to me that he had been assigned this particular label. Instead, those boys who spoke about it took the opportunity to confirm their masculinity, as Extract 17 implies.

#### Extract 17

- Alexandros: Well...if they call me “*gaidouri*”<sup>13</sup> (donkey) I don’t mind. Even if they call me “*aderfi*” (sister) I don’t mind.  
V.N You don’t?  
Alexandros No, I don’t mind because I know I am not (an “*aderfi*”) and THEY know I am not. Because if they do (call me), I will “*plakoso*”<sup>14</sup> them

The use of the word ‘even’ within the quotes of Alexandros emphasizes that being called ‘donkey’ is better than being called ‘gay’. Furthermore, extract 16 emphasizes the ‘strategies’ that boys employ in order to make their masculinities clear, such as physically assaulting other boys, for instance. Therefore, the quotes of Apollonas

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<sup>13</sup> Gaidouri: donkey, metaphorically used in order to characterize someone who is ill-manned, rude (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 395)

<sup>14</sup> Plakoso: assault physically (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1415); also see chapter nine.

(see extract 6) and Alexandros (see extract 16) indicate that homophobic bullying was either concealed by the bullied boys, or generated more masculinity manifestations as a defensive mechanism. This point is discussed in more detail in chapters eight and nine.

### *'Innocent-looking' nick-names as bullying acts*

According to the pupils' claims, the nick-names "*karfi*", "*phyto*" "*psonio*" and "*aderfi*" communicated meanings that were stable across contexts. Furthermore, they could be assigned to any pupil who was criticized for their characteristics or conduct. However, the nick-names "*banana*" "*Loustos*"<sup>15</sup> and "*Tsirokos*"<sup>16</sup> were exclusively assigned to Ermis, Aris, and Miltiadis respectively. This is because they were used with the aim to communicate meanings related to the three boys' characteristics. These nick-names may be viewed as playful and value-neutral to those outside the specific group of peers. However, the sixth graders shared an understanding of the unique meanings that the nick-names conveyed. Extract 18 is taken from the interview I had with Miltiadis, in which the boy reported negative feelings because his classmate, Perikles, frequently called him "*Tsiroko*". Although "*Tsirokos*" was actually the surname of Miltiadis, the boy experienced such name-calling as a typical kind of racist bullying.

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<sup>15</sup> Loustros: a person whose job is to polish others' shoes. This was usually the job of "*tsigganoi*". The word is currently used metaphorically in Greece to characterize someone who is worthy of no respect because he/she is considered to be inferior than other people (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1024)

<sup>16</sup> Tsirokos: a pseudonym that stands for the surname of a boy who attended the ST2 class.

## Extract 18

VN Tell me why you said that he (Perikles) calls you *Tsirokos*?  
Miltiadis Who of them?  
VN How many (pupils) do they call you like that?  
Miltiadis Only two. Periklis and Alexandros. Especially Periklis “*vrizei*”<sup>17</sup>  
my surname  
VN What do you mean by that? Could you tell me more?  
Miltiadis Because I am “*Alvanos*”. That’s why  
VN So?  
Miltiadis WELL DONE for me that I am “*Alvanos*”. IN FACT, I am not  
“Alvanos” My PARENTS are. I have been born in Greece.

The boy’s quotes indicate how a label assigned to someone that appears “innocent” or “normal” can be defined as bullying if the recipient perceives it as such. Extract 17 emphasizes that subjective interpretations, rather than objective criteria, construct an act as bullying, confirming findings from previous studies (La Fontain, 1991; Gumbel and Meadan, 2000).

Miltiadis’ allegations seem to further imply that “innocent-looking” nick-names generated and exchanged among peers can communicate social bias in an indirect way. Moreover, the boy’s quotes signify how racist bullying conducted against children can cause them to deny their ethnicity in order to gain the “social approval” they crave. The linkage of the Greek word “*vrizei*” to his surname indicates that the boy perceived himself as being assigned a derogatory social identity because of his ethnic background. This finding confirms the feelings of self-devaluation that immigrants experience within the Greek context (as discussed in chapter four).

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<sup>17</sup> Vrizei: he swears at, he uses rude or insulting language to verbally assaults someone (Mpampiniotis, 2002,p.387).

“*Loustros*” was the nickname that was assigned to Aris, the tsigganos boy, for as long as the present fieldwork lasted. Although the particular word seemed to simply describe the job of shoe polishing, the pupils of his class understood the nickname “*Loustros*” to convey a devaluation of the boy’s racial background.

When considering the constructions of nicknames and their interpretations on the part of the pupils, it can be claimed that both are context-bound. This finding is more evident in Extract 19, which represents how the folk term “*paratsoukli*” may be used by Greek children in order to separate humorous name-calling from bullying. This suggests that cultural knowledge should not be undermined when interpretations of acts are made within specific socio-cultural contexts.

#### Extract 19

V.N Do you mind that they call you “Pitsina”?

Athina Not at all. They do it for fun

Dimitra This is not a “*Koroidia*”.

Athina Yes, it is not the same for Ermis because They “*KOROIDEVOUN*” him.

V.N Ehmm...In what way is it different?

Athina...(pause, looking at Dimitra)...This (Ermis’ label) is a “*paratsoukl*”

Dimitra...Ehh...yes, this is a “*paratsoukli*” (she’s looking at the floor)).

According to the participants’ quotes, the verb “*koroidevo*” is used to define a variety of “negative” actions, strictly excluding physical means of assault. Name-calling is a basic constituent of the it; however, not all kinds of name-calling were viewed as bullying acts by the participants. On the other hand, the participants could

understand that innocent-looking nick-names communicated racism and bias. These were masked under a symbolic language exclusively shared by the pre-adolescents. This section of this chapter emphasizes the power of language in masking taboo issues, in so far as they are articulated through either collectivistic words or coding. This suggests that attention should be placed upon the sophisticated ways in which bullying is being conducted within the children's cultural worlds.

The following section explores bullying conducted between girls. The comments made about gossiping and social exclusion are by those girls who reported that they had experienced the acts discussed. Comments that some boy interviewees made about these acts are also included in this section.

### **Being gossiped about and excluded: The girls' bullying**

Being gossiped about, as well as ignored in games or intentionally being left out of them, seemed to be a "feminine" experience, since not one of the boys reported that they had experienced the specific acts. Evridiki, Sophia, Pythia, Kalomira, and Eleni claimed in the interviews that they were had experienced social exclusion and malicious rumour-spreading at the hand of other girl classmates. The interviewees' described their experiences as hurtful. Additionally, they made it clear that in no way did they provoke their hurtful experiences.



Pythia, Kalomira, and Eleni also stressed the systematic nature of the acts they experienced, whilst Evridiki and Sophia pointed to the longevity of the psychological hurt that was inflicted upon them. The descriptions the girls offered typified social exclusion and rumour-spreading as bullying acts in terms of the criteria considered (Owens et al., 2000a; Rigby, 2002). The following extract is from the interview with Evridiki in which she expands upon the content of her letter (described in Extract 4), and makes the points raised above clear.

#### Extract 20

- V.N      How did you know that it was your friend that told bad things about you?
- Evridiki    I understood it...because my (other) friends did not play with me...and did as if they did not see me ...and I felt terrible...this happened for one month and then I understood
- V.N      Did you think for any other reason, to explain why your friends did as if they did not see you? For example had you quarrelled with them in the past or....
- Evridiki    NO, NO SHE did it by herself

The girls' quotes confirmed the gendered nature of bullying that is supported by previous research findings in different cultural contexts (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Owens et al., 2000a; Owens et al., 200b) as well as the Greek context (Pateraki and Houndoumadi, 2001; Sapouna, 2008).

The gendered nature of social exclusion is more explicit in statements by Kalomira and Eleni, which are included in Extract 21. The two

girls claimed that social exclusion is a female activity, even when the act is conducted by males. Extract 21 suggests the covert nature of girls' aggression as was viewed by the interviewees, whose claims further confirm the manipulative character of girls' bullying which is supported by the literature on bullying (Garanteau and Gillesen, 2006).

#### Extract 21

- V. N            Tell me about your relationship with the other girls.  
 Kalomira      They're okay. We are friends.  
 V.N            So, you play together and there is nothing that worries your  
 Kalomira      Well..just a bit earlier I went to play football and they said:  
                   "Are you coming now? We have started now. You can't play  
 V. N            Who said that you couldn't play?  
 Eleni           Priamos and Kleonas  
 V. N            Is this a rule? Aren't you accepted when the game starts?  
 Both girls      NO, NO!  
 Eleni           They just don't want us to play.  
 Kalomira:      without (our) having done something (bad) to them  
 Eleni           and other times when we play football all together the boys do not  
                   pass the ball to us.  
 V.N            Ehhm... And?  
 Eleni:           (they do it) because they will find an excuse that we do not play  
                   well and then they will play only with Erato and Clio.  
 V.N            So, the boys do not want you to play in the game?  
 Eleni           Erato influences them. She wants all for herself.  
 Kalomira      They (the boys) love her. Priamos loves Erato. That's why  
 V N            How would you label the act of denying someone to participate in  
                   peers' games?  
 Kalomira      Unfair.  
 V N            Is it an "*epithetiki*"<sup>18</sup> act?  
 Both girl      No...(although they seemed to think over the term)  
 V. N            Do you feel that those children want to hurt you?  
 Both girls      NO. NO.  
 V N            But how do YOU feel now?  
 Kalomira      "*Meiomeni*"<sup>19</sup>  
 Eleni           (she does not answer)

<sup>18</sup> Epithetiki: aggressive (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.321).

<sup>19</sup> Meiomeni: a female who feels devalued, or insulted (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1067).

In contrast to the definitions of researchers, the act of social exclusion was not defined as “*epithetiki*”, although it was seen as inflicting pain and being unfair to those who experienced it. The two girls reported that no malice motivated their peers’ acts. Instead, they constructed the act as stemming from feminine rivalry, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Therefore, it is important to point out that those pupils, who could be called “bullies” in different contexts, were nominated as “friends” in the interviewees’ quotes (also see chapter five). The specific term seemed to either normalize or undermine social bullying conducted between peers, and stresses the power of language to affect our reactions to bullying (Tattuum, 1989).

When the participants were asked to comment upon the act of “telling things about someone behind his/her back”, all of them recognized the act and defined it as “*koutsompolio*”. In this way, the participants highlighted the discourse on gossiping that existed in the local community (see chapter four).

Poseidonas also stressed the gendered nature of rumour-spreading, as he related the phenomenon to manifestations of femininity. He termed it as “*katiniasma*”<sup>20</sup> in order to confirm the implications that the nickname “*gries koutsompoles*” assigned to girls conveys (see chapter six). The contempt the boy placed upon the meaning of the act as contrasting masculinity is clear in his statement included in Extract 22.

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<sup>20</sup> *katiniasma*: the act of Katina. The word is used (metaphorically) to describe an act which is not worth of being taken into serious consideration (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.870). Katina is a Greek female name

## Extract 22

- V.N           Has anyone spread untrue rumours about you?  
Poseidona: I don't know. Maybe.  
V N           How would you characterize the act that a pupil says  
                  rumours about you behind your back?  
Poseidonas Very bad. Hostile.  
V N           If you had to compare it with name calling?  
Poseidonas SILLY .Name calling is silly.  
V.N           So, you find it hostile, if someone says things about you behind  
                  your back  
Poseedonas If a boy does it is "*katiniasma*" it is as if he were a "*Katina*"  
V.N           A "*Katina*", eh?  
Poseidonas Yes, he would be like a woman who gossips.

In fact, being the target of untrue rumours, labelled by the children as "*koutsompolio*", was the only act that they viewed as stemming from the gossiper's feelings of malice and hostility. This particular construction of the act is reminiscent of the "*sykofantia*" (see chapter four), that could be defined as a bullying act. This is because it was a threatening experience which also inflicted pain upon the persons targeted. Moreover, it included an element of power imbalance between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s). This is because the source of rumours was difficult to identify. In addition, gossiping was communicated in an indirect way, making those being gossiped about unable to defend themselves. Extract 23 makes this point clear.

## Extract 23

- V. N   If you had to choose between being called lisping –as you said you are- or being told rumours and things about you what would you think you wouldn't choose?  
Alex. Rumours. Not others to gossip about me.

- V. N    Would be worse than your name calling?  
 Alex.   Yes. Because I can't do anything...It's secretive (activity)  
           and they( the perpetrators) can say anything (about me) ...

The interviewees stated that having their family issues gossiped about was the most hurtful and insulting situation for them to face. The words of Afroditi and Priamos, presented in extracts 24 and 25 respectively, emphasize how a family's reputation permanently affects (and distorts) the social image of each separate member of it. More importantly, pupils indicated why someone would lose his/her good reputation: 'Madness' and 'drinking' were among those issues that underlined deviations from the existing cultural norms.

#### Extract 24

- V N                    So, what do you think is the most hurtful act for you. To be teased in a nasty way, or to be gossiped?  
 Afroditi:            To be gossiped. To call me "*vlaha*" <sup>21</sup> for two months ...it's ok. But to say that my father is mad...( pause). They know it ALL the children, all the teachers, the whole school. This will stay for all my life. And look. The little girl who attends the second year (of the school) knows now what is happening within my house... Besides I cannot bear it. Because it is NOT true. NOT true.

#### Extract 25

- V. N                    So, What do you think then about spreading rumors around?  
 Priamos            It is a very bad act. If they call me with a nickname.. well they laugh but later they forget. It looks like a game. But imagine now if everyone knows for example that her father is drinking  
 V. N                    Then what?

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<sup>21</sup> *vlaha*: a girl who lives in the country, a villager girl. The term is used metaphorically to characterize someone as inferior as he/she does not conform to the norm of the life in the city.

Priamos        This is not good for her. And this rumor will go with her for her. It will stay for her whole life.

Feelings of malice on the part of the perpetrators, hurtful feelings and fear experienced by the recipients, and the imbalance of power between the gossip(er)s and those being gossiped about were clearly stated in the children's reports. These constitute the typical criteria stated in the current definitions of bullying, thus situating gossiping within the area of bullying. This finding confirms previous findings in the study of Kalliotis (2000), which argues that Greek children tend to view bullying as including physical means of aggression.

## **Summary**

The children who were bullied reported within their letters their distressing feelings at being verbally or socially attacked by their classmates. The descriptions of their experiences offered by the pupils typified the acts they were recipients of as bullying acts. In fact, the pupils constructed bullying as a problem for them, and the need for it to be tackled was stressed within their letters. In the context of the interviews, the meanings of the term "*koroido*" were clarified, and the existence of racism and homophobic bullying within the particular school was unmasked. Further exploration of the word "*koroido*" highlighted a number of nick-names which were assigned to pupils, and pointed to their culture-grounded interpretations. This chapter highlights the unproductive use of inclusive terms, such as bullying and "*koroido*", in identifying the specific methods pupils use to

harass their schoolmates. It also suggests that attention should be paid to the clarification of the terminology used in different languages to specify acts that are not viewed as bullying under specific circumstances, even though they are included in bully-victim questionnaires (Olweus, 1993). This is why, as the present chapter indicates, the meanings of nick-names generated by pupils are context and culture-bounded. Therefore, instead of merely being classified as constituting bullying or non-bullying acts, it should be recognized that they convey socio-cultural mores through the use of a symbolic language. As far as gossiping and social exclusion are concerned, the participants' accounts offer evidence that the reproduction of the adults' culture affected their interpretations. The quotes of the pupils indicate that gossiping about families is a threat to people's social identities in collectivistic societies, as it entails the risk of losing face within a particular community. It is clear that acts have shifting meanings in different societies and between different groups of people. Therefore, instead of classifying acts as bullying or non-bullying acts, we should ask ourselves in what societies some acts are viewed as bullying acts and why this is so. The pupils who self-represented as victims of bullying were asked in the interviews to explain why they thought they had been picked on by their peers. In their quotes, the interviewees highlighted a number of interrelated factors to explain their experiences, which are discussed in chapter eight.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### How the bullied children explained their experiences

*I don't know Miss...  
Because others laugh...  
(Because) they say I play with girls...  
(Because) I say I know how to cook...  
Look. In the past I could not run quickly*

#### Introduction

The present chapter explores how the bullied children explained their experiences in the interviews I conducted with them. It aims to offer an understanding of how the children who are picked on by their peers view the logic behind such behaviour. An exploration of this is important, since research has suggested that whether a child will continue to be the victim of bullying is affected by the way he/she explains why they are bullied (Kanetsuna et al., 2006). This chapter consists of six sections: it starts with a short section in which factors related to the explanation of bullying are briefly explored. The second section describes how bullying is understood by the interviewees as stemming from the characteristics of both the bullies and the victims. In this section, two types of victims are identified, whilst the implications concerning the difficulty of identifying bullying in 'sensitive' contexts are also discussed. In this section, I differentiate between causes related to the bullied, and the motives of the perpetrators. Moreover, the normalization of specific bullying acts on the grounds of gender expectations is also discussed. The third section focuses on the social context in which bullying happens, as well as how this context is understood by the bullied children. This section indicates that the participants view bullying as being the responsibility of an individual, whilst also emphasizing the power of social influence in



initiating group bullying. This section investigates how ‘passive bullies’ (Olweus, 1993, p. 34) are excused for their involvement in bullying, whilst blame is placed upon the ‘leader bully’ (Salmivalli et al., 1996a, p. 15). In the fourth section, bullying is explained as a reproduction of adults’ culture, therefore shifting responsibility for the occurrence of the phenomenon from the shoulders of children to adults. The fifth section is concerned with the role of the school in creating situations through which a bullying culture is encouraged and maintained. The final section sums up the key points and links this chapter to the following one.

### **Bullying: a multi-causal phenomenon**

The explanations that the bullied children offered highlighted a complex web of individual, social, cultural, and organizational factors. These were understood to be accountable for the occurrence, encouragement, and perpetuation of their distressing and/or painful experiences. Therefore, the explanations offered by children fit the multi-causal nature of bullying which is also supported by the research literature on bullying (Rigby, 2004; Frisen et al, 2008). However, the pupils’ contemplation over different, yet interrelated, factors indicates that they understood that the causality of bullying is difficult to explain (Yoneyamma & Naitto, 2003). The explanations that the pupils offered in order to explain their experiences focused upon the children’s personal characteristics and the peer group characteristics, as well as the school’s characteristics. These explanations are discussed in the sections that follow.

## **Explanations regarding the two ‘actors’.**

### *The deserving/faulty victim of nasty teasing*

Kalomira, Alexandros, and Miltiadis clearly referred to their own personal characteristics when asked why they thought they were teased in a nasty way. They related appearance, speech disfluency, and ethnicity to the nick-names “*kinezaki*”<sup>1</sup>, “*psevdos*”<sup>2</sup>, and ‘*Tsirokos*’ that were assigned respectively. This finding indicates that the children believed that appearance, disability, and ethnicity can elicit bullying from their peers. Their claims confirm findings from previous studies (La Fontaine, 1991; Mooney et al., 1991; Frisen et al., 2008).

Such self-attributions on the part of the bullied confirm previous findings and support the existence of their miserable reality (Hugh-Jones and Smith, 1999; Joscelyne and Holttum, 2006), since the bullied children view these specific characteristics that provoke such behaviour as impossible to change. Such an approach to explaining bullying seems to impose blame, although not responsibility, upon the bullied children who might see themselves as ‘failures’ and thus deserving what is coming to them. The statement included in Extract 1, below, is from the interview I conducted with Alexandros. It illustrates the points referred to above, and highlights the implied risk of such self-centred explanations to justifying bullying on the part of the victims themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Kinezaki: child from China, Chinese girl (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.448).

<sup>2</sup> Psevdos: someone who cannot pronounce all the phonemes well (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1985)

## Extract 1

- V.N      Why you said you hit Periklis?  
Alex.    I shouldn't have done. I regret it now  
V.N      But you said he "*koroideve*" you  
Alex.    Yes, he called me 'lispings'  
V.N      Why was that?  
Alex.    Because I can't say (pronounce) the 'R' very well, that's why.  
V.N      It doesn't seem to me something like that  
Alex.    No, I CAN'T... (head down) ...and they tell me sometimes 'Go to France, go to France'  
V.N      Ehmm....  
Alex.    Because I can't say 'R' very well ...and (that's why) they "*koroidevoun*"<sup>3</sup> me

Kalomira seemed to contemplate and question the 'faulty' nature of her disposition, although she did not hesitate to attribute the cause of her experience to herself. Her statements and her feeling of embarrassment offer indicative evidence that it is the bullying experience that affects the self-esteem of the bullied, rather than their characteristics. Extract 2 illustrates this point.

## Extract 2

- Kalomira    and sometimes they "*koroidevoun*" me "*Kinezaki*"  
V.N          "*Kinezaki*", eh"? Why was that?  
Kalomira    because my eyes are somehow... (stops for a while and smiles )  
V.N          (wait for the girl to continue, without asking )  
Kalomira    a bit 'different' and they say I look like a Chinese girl- (she's still smiling)  
V.N          Is this bad? That your eyes are 'different'?  
Kalomira    (head down) I don't know Miss...May be...

Some children seemed hesitant to offer explanations for their experiences,

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<sup>3</sup> Koroidevoun (they) tease me (also see chapter seven)

almost as if they had never thought about them before I asked. The following section explores what kinds of explanations these children offered.

### *The 'hidden' victims*

In the cases of Apollonas, Ermis, and Aris, self-attributions were not so straightforward. The three boys did not refer to the causes of their experiences, and when I asked to offer explanations about their bullying experiences, Ermis in particular looked as if he had not thought about it before the interview took place. Aris, on the other hand, said that he didn't know why he was called "*Loustros*", almost as if he could not find any relevance of his nickname to his racial origins (as explained in chapter seven). It was only when he related his nick-name "*gyftos*"<sup>4</sup> to his racial background that he did not deny his feelings of shame about it. Apollonas was the only one who denied being "singled out" by his peers, normalizing his experiences as a child's routine. Extract 3 that follows is from the interview I conducted with Ermis.

#### Extract 3

- V.N      You wrote in your letter that they "*koroidouvoun*" you everyday that you come to school
- Ermis    YES and I tell them not to call me like that and they continue to do it
- V.N      Tell me why do you think they "*koroidouvoun*" you?
- Ermis    I don't know miss...because others laugh
- V.N      Mmm...
- Ermis    and (because) they say that I play with girls...and (because) I say that I know how to cook... Look. IN THE PAST (but not now) I could not run very quickly...

It is of note that in his account, Ermis prioritized factors unrelated to him in order to explain why he was teased in a nasty way by his classmates. Furthermore, he did not mention the nick-name '*banana*' that he was assigned by his peers. More importantly, the boy placed his handicap as the last reason that he could be teased (see Appendix B). The responses of Ermis raise two issues, the first of which is concerned with the tendency of the teased to cover up their feelings, probably because they are trapped within a self-blaming circle (Boulton and Hawker, 1997; Joscelyne and Holttum, 2006). The second relates to the social nature of language (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) when used in order to construct social identities, rather than as a transparent means through which real thoughts can be seen. Through the list of explanations offered by Ermis, he seemed to position himself as deserving, although not 'faulty'.

The difficulty the three boys faced in offering explanations about their bullying experiences was also supported by research by Mooney et al. (1991). This difficulty suggests that particular types of bullying (e.g. racist and homophobic bullying) are difficult to identify in schools. Therefore, 'sensitive' anti-bullying policies should be adopted in schools in order to identify the specific types of bullying that are difficult to identify from the victims' disclosures.

The bullied children expanded their explanations in order to include comments regarding the bullies, which will be specified in the following section.

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<sup>4</sup> Gyftos: gipsy (see chapter four)

*“Kanei ton magka”: Boys’ bullying as normal*

Apart from viewing themselves as provoking their experiences, the bullied children also referred to additional factors which relate the cause of their experiences to the bullies themselves. However, interestingly no causality related to the bullies personal dispositions (e.g. a general tendency to aggression, anxiety, insecurity, or lack of empathetic feelings) were articulated by the interviewees, in contrast to the claims of other researchers (Olweus, 1993; Besag, 1989). Instead, all of them spoke about the motivation of the bullies to “*kanoun tous magkes*” (see chapter two).

The pupils’ responses in the interviews highlighted this folk phrase and its related words that are abundantly used within the Greek language .The Greek words “*magkas*” and “*magkia*” were used by children in association with behaviours that might be considered as constituting bullying within the Greek context, as previous research findings indicate (Pateraki, 2000; Smith et al., 2002; Kourakis, 2004).

Specifically, findings from the study conducted by Smith et al. (2002), identified that the phrase “*kano ton magka*” was selected by the Greek children as approximating the concept of physical bullying in Greece. However, my interviewee’s accounts expand this finding, since they emphasize that this specific phrase can both describe and explain *any* type of bullying that is conducted exclusively by boys. This is because it is viewed as representing the boys’ desire to confirm their gender identities. Extract 4, below, is from the interview I conducted with Odysseas, and

specifies the Greek folk terms that represent bullying conducted by boys. It also emphasizes that even when feminine-related kinds of bullying (see chapter seven) are conducted by boys, display of masculinity is their motivational basis. Moreover, it shows how the Greek terms “*magkia*”<sup>5</sup> and “*tsamboukas*”<sup>6</sup> are gender-bound, with the latter exclusively relating to physical bullying.

#### Extract 4

- Odysseas I was influenced by others’ behaviour  
V.N Who (are) ‘others’?  
Odysseas Zeus and Dionyssos. Those who “*kanoun tous magkes*”, “*poulane tsambouka*”<sup>7</sup> and sometimes they tell me: ‘Go away now, we have to say our secrets. What kind of secrets do they have to say? They just want to show that they are powerful.....  
And sometime they say to me: ‘Do you want “*tsambouka*”?’  
V.N When do they say that?  
Odysseas When they want to start fighting (with me)

The phrase “*kanei ton magka*” was also used by the participants in order to describe the verbal bullying conducted by boys against other boys as a means through which the former displayed their maleness to impress girls. Extract 5 highlights that power was viewed by the interviewees as relating to maleness. It also warns against the risk of verbal bullying flourishing within a context in which abuse of power can be legitimized as a male activity.

<sup>5</sup> Magkia: the behaviour of the magkas (see chapter two)

<sup>6</sup> Tsampoukas: the behaviour a magkas, displays. Characterized by the showing off toughness and masculinity (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1806) ; see also chapters two and eleven.

<sup>7</sup> Poulane tsampouka: they display power, kanoun tous magkes (see chapter two)

## Extract 5

- V N        You said that Periklis swears at your surname because you are from Albania.
- Miltiadis    Yes
- V.N        Couldn't be any other reason for his behaviour than this?
- Miltiadis    Yes. He "*kanei ton magka*".
- V N        Meaning?
- Miltiadis    He wants to show off to the girls. That he has power.
- V N        What do you mean "power"?
- Miltiadis    He can do anything he wants. He is the most powerful.
- V.N        Is this bad?
- Miltiadis    Every boy wants to do this.
- V.N        To do what?
- Miltiadis    To show that he has power

The ethos of "*antriliki*"<sup>8</sup> which pervaded the local community was not only recognized by the participants, but was also reproduced by some of them. Such an approach to explaining bullying by the bullied children confirms view of bullying as a 'socio-cultural phenomenon' (Rigby, 2004, p.292). Therefore, boys' verbal and social ways of bullying were constructed as normal by the interviewees on the grounds that they constituted part of the boys' social development, rather than viewed as deviant behaviour.

The desire of the boys to "*kanei ton magka*" was also considered by the interviewees in order to explain, and even legitimize, physical bullying against other male peers, which confirms previous research findings (Smith et al., 2002). Beating displayed on the part of and against boys was also normalized as happening "*gia plaka*"<sup>9</sup> which also confirms previous research findings (Deliyianni, et al., 2008). Furthermore, it

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<sup>8</sup> Antriliki: display of masculinity, magkia, toughness (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.215)

<sup>9</sup> Gia plaka: for fun (see chapter two)



confirms current public conceptualizations of acts within the Greek society (Diakogiorgi et al., 2006; Onisenko, 2008) which might be viewed as constituting bullying in a non-Greek context.

#### Extract 6

- V.N        You wrote in your letter: ‘There are some pupils who beat me and some others who help me. Can you tell me more about this?’
- Miltiadis Yes, there is Priamos who beats me “*gia plaka*”<sup>10</sup> and Platonas and Kleonas sometimes help me because they are real friends that time.
- V.N        Why does Priamos does it? Isn’t he your friend?
- Miltiadis Yes, he IS (my friend) but he wants to ‘*kanei ton magka*’ because he loves Erato, that’s why.

Whilst having fun is strongly suggested by the bullies as a reason to account for their conduct (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Rigby, 2002), it is interesting to note that the victims might also accept such an explanation as plausible. This is because Miltiadis nominated the bullies as his friends, although not his best friends (as emphasized in chapter five).

As the extracts cited above suggest, physical, verbal, and social incidents of bullying conducted by boys were explained by *all* the interviewees as activities related to gender. Such an explanation suggests that the ethos of juvenile “*magkia*” that penetrated the specific school atmosphere was difficult to combat. This is because the boys who acted as bullies were regarded by the victims as friends, whilst their acts were considered as a path to maleness.

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<sup>10</sup> *gia plaka*: for having fun, for enjoyment (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1415)

Such an explanation constructs bullying conducted by boys as a response to the socio-cultural demands of masculinity (Askew, 1989; Skeleton, 2001), rather than as an act that intends to inflict harm upon the recipients. In fact, the lack of malice on the part of the perpetrators towards their victims was strongly stressed by almost every one of the victims.

Having a long-lasting acquaintance, playing together, praising each other, sharing secrets, and hugging each other in football games were among the factors that bullied boys referred to in order to prove the validity of their interpretations. Extract 7 indicates how Ermis, who was systematically bullied by his classmates, represented them as his 'friends'. Moreover, the boy referred to scenes of intimacy in order to offer evidence that he was accepted and loved by those who systematically harassed him. Such a representation contrasts with the typical figure of bullies as cold, non-empathetic, hostile, and evil creatures (Besag, 1989; Tattum, 1989; Rigby, 2002). Therefore this masks any suspicions of bullying, thus contradicting the bullying-related material prepared for Greek schools (which was described in chapter two).

#### Extract 7

- Ermis. Sometimes I forgive my friends.  
V N Do you believe that they want to hurt you. Do you?  
Ermis NO! No. They love me.  
V N How do you understand that they love you?  
Ermis Because they take me in the football games and when I kick a goal they hug me and they say: Well done Ermis. Well done'.

Alexandros was the only one of the bullied boys that referred to the characteristics of the bullies, and assumed that irrationality and a lack of control on the part of some boys can explain the bullying conducted by them. Extract 8 highlights this point.

#### Extract 8

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Alexandros | Sometimes Periklis and Priamos swear at me or at Miltiadis. They just start (without our own provocation) and shout and do things like that. |
| V.N        | Why do you think they do this to you? Do they want to hurt you?  |
| Alexandros | NO. They don't think this time. But later they think (about their acts) and they come (back) and they ask for sorry.                         |

The explanation offered by Alexandros reproduces the discourse on an irrational and impulsive childhood that not only dominated within the local community, but also within the broader Greek society, as already discussed in chapter four. Such explanations seem to excuse the bullies for acting as they do on the grounds of being just 'children'. Therefore, bullying from and against peers is normalized in so much as it is expected to happen among children.

The analysis of the accounts offered by the bullied boys indicates that physical, verbal, and social means of bullying conducted against them by other boy classmates were normalized as 'boyish' acts. The victims who viewed themselves as deserving and/or 'faulty' excused the perpetrators for attacking them verbally or physically. Furthermore, they defined them as their friends rather than their enemies, and offered evidence to confirm their definitions. In the following section, the explanations that the girl

interviewees offered for their experiences are explored. The section emphasizes how the explanations which offered by the girls differ from those offered by the boys.

### *Girls' bullying: Normalizing feminine rivalry*

Girls who defined themselves as occasional receptors of shouting or name-calling on the part of boy classmates offered explanations for their experiences too, which were in some aspects similar to these offered by the bullied boys. Specifically, the girls stated in interview sessions that they recognized the perpetrators' motives to be 'showing off' and displaying their masculinity. In fact, this was the reason they offered to explain why they were occasionally picked on by their male classmates. However, in some cases the girls viewed themselves as deserving the code nick-names assigned to them by boys when the former felt they had transgressed the peer group norms. Furthermore, it is important to note that the bullied girls represented the boys as setting and preserving the peer group norms.

When the girls explained why they were targets of rumour-spreading or social exclusion from their female classmates, their explanations differed from those offered by boys. Evirdiki and Sophia attributed feelings of jealousy to those girls who had spread untrue rumours about them (as described in the previous chapter), whereas Eleni, Kalomira, and Pythia did not recognize any malice on the part of those girls who were to blame for their exclusion from the groups of peers. Instead, they attributed this behaviour to the existence of antagonistic relationships between females

(see Extract 20 cited in chapter seven). The explanations offered by the girls seem to support the findings of Besag (2006, p.371), who views bullying conducted between girls as an interaction occurring between 'friends' and 'foes'.

An analysis of the participants' responses showed that both boys and girls were involved in similar acts of bullying; however, close analysis of their articulations implies that these acts were interpreted differently by the participants. In fact, motives related to gender on the part of both boys and girls were emphasized by the interviewees as underlying the behaviour of the bullies. The explanations offered by the children normalize bullying conducted by and against peers, since the perpetrators' behaviour is regarded as conforming to the expectations of gender.

Extract 9, below, represents how Pythia, Eleni, and Kalomira understand the processes through which such gender conformity on the part of the bully-girl is achieved.

#### Extract 9

- V.N        You said Erato is the one who influences the boys who don't accept you  
              in the football game
- Eleni       Not only Erato...Clio does too.
- Kalomira   Yes, but Clio did not do this before Erato came into this school. It is since  
              then that boys do what she wants (them to do)
- V N        How do you think can she achieve this?
- Eleni       Because she is beautiful and puts on nice cloths and talks very gently  
              and she never shouts...

Kalomira She is always within the boys' groups and she never gets angry...and she is smiling...and (does) things like that. Pythia I myself "*den tous kathomai*"<sup>11</sup>, however. That's why they "*koroidevoun*" me

Extract 9 also suggests that being self-positioned as "conformist" girls protects them from being bullied by boys. Furthermore, it empowers girls to dominate over boys by manipulating them for their own advantage. Such a perspective implies that the smiling faces of the girls that are represented within the anti-bullying educational material prepared for Greek schools (which was described in chapter two) should be considered with scepticism. This is because they may mask the girls' aggressive tactics, as well as their dominance over the boys.

The explanations offered by interviewees emphasize that bullying was viewed as an individualized phenomenon. However, the participants also understood the peer group as forming the social context within which bullying incidents occur and are affected by. This point is made clear in the following section.

### **Explanations concerning the peer group**

Further analysis of the explanations offered by the children who were bullied indicates that they understood that bullying was conducted within a circle of peers. The children's claims confirmed the social nature of the phenomenon, which is supported by the literature on bullying (La Fontaine, 1991; Torrance, 2000). Salmivalli (1998) also emphasized that

responsibility for group bullying should be placed upon all those involved.

However, the findings of the present study reveal that the boys who were bullied by more than one boy assigned responsibility only to the leader-bully for their experiences. Based on their responses, it was clear that they saw those who helped or reinforced the instigators of bullying as conforming to the norms of a 'close' friendship. Extract 10 indicates this point.

#### Extract 10

V. N     You wrote in your letter: "There are some pupils who beat me and some others who help me. Can you tell me more about this?"

Miltiadis Yes, there is Priamos who beats me just for fun and Platonas and Kleonas sometimes help me because they are real friends that times.

V N     If they are real friends why don't they help you at any time?

Miltiadis Because they are friends with Priamos too. He is their "*kollitos*"<sup>12</sup>

Such a perspective not only excludes the peer group from their responsibility for encouraging, maintaining, or reinforcing bullying, but also values those who are actively involved in bullying as 'real friends'. Such a view of real friendship (see chapter five) seems to reproduce the discourse of real friendship that existed in the local community (as discussed in chapter four). Furthermore, it suggests that such conceptualizations of friendship amongst boys inhibit the development of peer group support mechanisms in Greek schools that have been

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<sup>11</sup> Den tous kathomai: I do not do what they want me to do (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.804).

<sup>12</sup> Kollitos: close friend (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.917).

successfully applied in different cultural contexts (Cowie, 1999; Smith et al., 2007).

In other cases, bullying was clearly represented as a group phenomenon within the participants' reports, which confirms findings from previous studies (La Fontaine, 1991; Olweus, 1994; Salmivalli et al., 1996a). However, even in these cases, accountability and blame were not attributed to the peers involved; instead, these were exclusively assigned to those pupils who initiated the bullying incidents. The roles of those peers who followed the initiators or modelled their behaviours seemed not to be fully understood by the participants. This finding is also supported by the literature on bullying (La Fontaine, 1991; Hantler, 1994; Bosacki et al., 2006). On the other hand, those children who followed the initiators of bullying were constructed as victims of social influence or showing compliance to the leader. These classmates were viewed by the bullied children as contributing to the maintenance of bullying in so far as they offered an audience for the bully to "show off" to. These points are illustrated by Extract 11.

#### Extract 11

- V. N     You said that 'all tease me in a nasty way'.  
Ermis    Yes, they do and I tell them not to call me like that.  
V. N     Why do you think they do it?  
Ermis    Well...First it was Zeus and then (it was) Dionyssos... but Dionyssos not so much...and then others started to call me '*banana*' because they wanted to look like Zeus. But Aris for example does it (calls me '*banana*') because he does what Zeus says him to do...But if Zeus were not here .....(they wouldn't call me '*banana*')



The bullied boys explained that group bullying stems from the influence the blameful leaders-initiators of the incidents exercised over the rest of their classmates. Such an explanation is supported by the literature on bullying (Olweus, 1994; O'Connell et al., 1999; Sutton 2001). It also reproduces the discourse on others' pathology, where blame is assigned to children for their reprehensible conduct (as discussed in chapter four). Adults were not beyond the children's criticism either; in fact, gossiping was viewed by some children as reproducing the adults' culture within the specific school, as the following section indicates.

### **Blame upon adults**

An analysis of the pupils' reports indicates that although nasty teasing, spreading lies and rumours about peers, or denying them participation in group activities were viewed as childish behaviours, they were also considered to be unacceptable. However, gossiping about family issues was regarded as adult behaviour, although it was also displayed by children.

Afroditi's responses, represented in Extract 23 cited in chapter seven, made clear that she was a target of rumours concerning the 'madness' of her father on the part of schoolchildren. Extract 12, which is cited below, indicates that the girl drew upon the culture of gossiping that pervaded the cohesive community in which she lived in order to explain why schoolchildren acted in the way they did.

## Extract 12

V.N      Why do you think children do this? (talk about your father)

Afroditi They are influenced by their parents

V.N      How are the children influenced?

Afroditi They say in the school what their parents say at home. They do it. They gossip all the time. THE PARENTS (gossip)

The explanation that Afroditi offered confirms research findings by Tipman (1989, p.111), who states that adults can encourage their children to develop specific attitudes towards bullying acts by acting as models. Furthermore, the role that the culture of a particular society, as well as parental practices, play in reproducing bullying in schools is supported by the literature on bullying (Warner and Richards, 1989; Espelage and Swearer, 2003; Nesdale and Naitto, 2005). However, this explanation implies that children who gossip may be exempted from responsibility for their acts as long as they live in a cultural context in which gossiping is viewed as part of the adult social world.

The school did not find itself exempt from the children's criticism either. The bullied children did not directly attribute the causality of their bullying experiences to the school; in fact, they reported that bullying was an issue to be dealt with by themselves. However, they recognized that aspects of school culture offered the structures that enabled bullying to flourish. These aspects related to the administration of loose or biased discipline on the part of the teachers. This discipline was viewed by the pupils as offering fertile soil for the development of an ethos of tolerance towards victimization within the school. The pupils' views are discussed in the following section.

## **Explanations at the school level**

### *A biased discipline*

The majority of the participants mentioned that the school staff administered discipline that favoured some pupils at the expense of others. In fact, they stressed that in cases of misconduct, advantageous treatment was directed towards those pupils who held an advantageous social position. Extract 13 indicates how the children recognized the existence of a bullying culture within the school by emphasizing that the privileged and non-privileged pupils were treated differently by some teachers.

#### **Extract 13**

Poseidonas     Periklis harasses the children all the time. He has problems because he misses his father. Nobody (no teacher) says something to him. If I had myself done something like that I would have been out of school BUT his mother is a teacher here...(and that's why his son is not punished) And you see...(pause)

Dionyssos, whose father works as a labourer, believed that the societal inequality that exists in wider society was reproduced within the school. Therefore, bullying was viewed as an attitude pertaining to the dominance of the 'powerful' over the 'powerless' (Besag, 1989) that was creeping into the school premises. Such a finding confirms findings from previous research studies conducted in Greece (Petropoulos and Papatylianou, 2001; Deliyianni et al., 2008). According to these findings, pupils who were involved in aggressive incidents reported that they felt unfairly

treated by their teachers. The statement by Dionyssos, which is extracted from a conversation I had with the whole class and represented in Extract 14, makes clear how power is represented:

#### Extract 14

Dionyssos: When Odysseas hits another younger boy the headteacher doesn't do anything to him. This is because his father is an oculist...

As most of the boys reported, the socio-economic status of their parents determined the social power of those children who bullied others. Extract 15 makes this point clear, and also implies that children may learn from school that there is little justice in society given how the principles of bullying may be reproduced within schools.

#### Extract 15

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Poseidonas | When your parent is a lawyer or a doctor then they (the teachers) make as if (pretend that) they don't see you (when you do something wrong) |
| V.N        | Why do they do this?   |
| Ifestos    | Because their (of those children who are treated in advantageous ways) parents are SUPERIOR  |
| V. N       | What do you mean SUPERIOR? In what ways are they superior?   |
| Ifestos    | They earn more money   |
| Zeus       | Yes, they earn more money and the(ir) children are boastful about it.  |
|            | YES! (The whole class confirms the claim of Zeus in a chore):  |
| V.N        | How does this make you feel?   |
| Dionyssos  | Inferior   |
| Poseidonas | It's unfair  |

The pupils' reports confirm the concerns that some female teachers

expressed regarding their effectiveness to deal with bullying incidents that occur between pupils (as discussed in chapter five). However, the pupils themselves criticized the unresponsiveness that some teachers showed towards their claims for support. The following section deals with the children's comments regarding the discipline administered by the teachers when different kinds of bullying episodes occurred within the school.

### *An ineffective discipline*

When the participants were asked about the role of the school, they seemed to have little trust in its effectiveness to deal with their experiences of nasty teasing. Recommendations for refraining from such acts were reported to constitute the teachers' common disciplinary practice administered in cases of nasty teasing. Such a 'simplistic' discipline may explain why teasing has the highest degree of prevalence above all other acts within Greek schools (Kalliotis, 2000; Sapouna, 2008).

According to the interviewees' reports, teachers tended to adopt a moralistic approach to bullying, reminding pupils of the stated values of the school to which they should conform (Rigby, 1996). In this way, they tended to overemphasize how children should behave rather than 'attacking' the behaviour itself. However, such a discipline was viewed ineffective to change the undesirable situation for the bullied, and enabled the perpetuation of bullying within the school, as the words of Ermis in the extract that follows demonstrate.

## Extract 16

V.N            Do you think that the school can do something for this?  
Ermis        I don't know miss. I have told Mrs. X that they tease me every day.  
V N           And then? What happened?  
Ermis        Mrs X told them it is not good and not to do it...and they felt a bit  
                 of shame...but they still continue to do it.

In other cases, the children reported that their claims of being either teased by peers, or socially excluded from their group were dismissed by the teachers. In fact, the pupils claimed that they were advised either to ignore the incidents, or seek other friends. The avoidance of direct confrontation fostered a climate in which victimization was learnt to be tolerated rather than confronted. Such a climate may lead to the reduction of bullying, yet may still leave the bullied children feeling lonely and unsupported to cope with their feelings. This point is further discussed in the following chapter.

Group cohesion, interdependence, empathy, mercy, and forgiveness were the uppermost values that the teachers referred to in order to encourage pupils to build and maintain healthy relationships with one another. Within a family ethos and an ethos of Christianity existing in the local community and the school, mutual love among the oppressors and the oppressed was recommended by the teachers, and was even expected of the pupils. Although such reconciliation 'tactics' might prevent the amplification of retaliatory responses on the part of the bullied, the interviewees pointed to the unrealistic nature of such reconciliation. This is because the bullied were not ready to accept that the world is experienced in unequal ways, as Extract 17 shows. Furthermore, the importance that Odysseas places upon the role of the head teacher, rather

than the class teachers, suggests that bullying needs to be considered as a whole school issue (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

#### Extract 17

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| V.N        | Do you think that the school permits nasty teasing to happen?  |
| Ifestos    | I don't believe it but they should do something  |
| Poseidonas | The headteacher should wake up.  |
| Odysseas   | Yes...he (the headteacher) keeps on saying to us when we go to tell him about some pupils (who bully us): "You shouldn't quarrel you must be united. You should love each other. |
| Ifestos    | I can't love Priamos for example because he always ' <i>kanei ton magga</i> '. He calls us cowards and things like that. He makes me feel inferior. How can I love him?          |

In the interviews, the pupils expressed serious doubts about the effectiveness of the school to tackle bullying unless immediate action on a whole school basis is taken. They criticized the promotion of a pro-bullying school ethos through the teachers' disciplinary practices. Furthermore, they viewed the 'moralistic recipes' recommended by the school staff as unrealistic and as unquestionably asking pupils to conform to them.

#### Summary

The analysis of the data generated by the interviews indicates that pupils who were bullied by their peers offered sophisticated explanations for their experiences. Their articulations highlighted a mixture of interrelated factors, thus emphasising the multi-causal nature of bullying, as well as the difficulty in determining why bullying occurs. Both boys and girls

viewed the gender expectations to be a significant factor to explain why some children bully. Therefore, bullying conducted by boys against boys and girls, as well as bullying conducted by girls against girls, were normalized as safeguarding the existing socio-cultural norms. The participants also recognized the social nature of bullying; however the role that peers played in the maintenance and the perpetuation of group bullying was not fully understood. Serious criticism was imposed upon the school for the ineffective discipline administered in order to tackle the problem. Moreover, the pupils hinted at the promotion of a pro-bullying culture within the school. In their accounts, the pupils specified that a biased discipline was administered that benefited those pupils “endowed” with social power. The bullied children seemed to construct a miserable reality around them, with the explanations offered by them indicating that they viewed themselves as deserving or ‘faulty’, and therefore worthy of victimization. What is important to explore further is how the pupils chose to respond to specific bullying incidents they were recipients of. This exploration is important, since it offers an understanding of the reasons underlying the pupils’ decisions to respond in particular ways. The following chapter explores this issue.



## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **Effective and ineffective responses: The children's perspectives**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the meanings that the bullied children assigned to the particular responses they adopted in order to deal with their experiences. Furthermore, it explores the children's perceptions of responses to bullying that are believed to be effective in eliminating bullying. Such exploration is important for two basic reasons: firstly, there is a need to understand the logic that lies behind specific responses that children adopt when they are bullied by their peers. Secondly, there is a need to understand what factors children referred to in order to explain why they abandoned those responses to bullying that are recommended by adults researchers of bullying. The chapter includes ten sections. In the first section, reactions of the participants to verbal bullying conducted by male classmates are explored, and differences in the meanings that the children assign to reactions are discussed in relation to the effectiveness of response and the gender of the bullied, as well as the type of bullying act. The second section deals exclusively with the girls' reactions to incidents of social exclusion and rumour-spreading conducted by other girl classmates. This section highlights the sophisticated methods girls use in order to act and react, and suggests that girls' bullying is a highly complicated phenomenon that is difficult to identify and tackle. The third section explores the bullied children's perspectives regarding talking to the bullies about feelings as a response to bullying. The section highlights factors emphasized by the

interviewees in order to reject the particular response, and discusses the related implications. Sections four, five, and six are concerned with the meanings assigned by the participants to the different sources of support that the children were asked to comment upon. These sections offer important insights concerning the relation of particular responses to bullying to a network of personal, social, and cultural factors. Sections seven and eight explore the adaptive responses that some pupils adopted in order to accommodate themselves within the roles of the victims of bullying. Section nine represents the voices of the bullied children, and aims to indicate their often overlooked need for adult support. The final section sums up the key findings and makes a link between the present chapter and the following one.

### **Responding to verbal assaults**

#### *Defending your family's honour*

Alexandros and Miltiadis were the only pupils who reported in the interviews that they sometimes hit, push, or throw things at Perikles. According to their reports, they reacted in this way when Perikles used insulting language against their families, which reports from the majority of peers confirmed.

However, the two boys confirmed that they viewed their responses as ineffective in terminating the hurtful act of which they were the recipients. In the best instance, these reactions had short-term

effectiveness, according to the boys' claims. In the worst instance, their responses were seen to elicit counter-aggression, as they resulted in a range of insulting verbal exchanges between Perikles and themselves. The interviewees did also not exclude the risk of being involved in physical aggression with the offender either; in fact, the capability of the bullied boy to physically assault the bully was emphasized, as Extract 1 indicates.

#### Extract 1

- V. N    Someone told me that you tried to throw your school bag to Periklis in the classroom during break time. Is it so?
- Milt.    He swears at me Miss. He swears at my father. He calls me 'Tsiroko'. That's my father's surname. I took my surname from my father. He swears at my father.
- V.N    And then...did he (Perikkis) stop?
- Milt.    He did (continued) a bit more but then he stopped. Other times he does not and then I swear at him too. But if he continues I might "*plakoso*"<sup>1</sup> him
- V.N    How does (swearing against family) it makes you feel?
- Milt.    "*Tsantila*"<sup>2</sup>

Findings from previous studies have suggested that insults against family members were experienced by children as the most painful type of verbal bullying (Mooney et al., 1991; Blatchford, 1998). However, the boys' quotes indicate that an angry, rather than a painful, self was represented by the two boys. The boys' reactions seemed to fit the community's cultural expectations from boys: by self-positioning as tough and resilient

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<sup>1</sup> Plakoso: folk term used metaphorically mostly by males to describe the act of physical assault (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1415).

<sup>2</sup> Tsantila: rage, ruffle (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.900)

rather than weak and hurt, Alexandros and Miltiadis confirmed their gender expectations by defending their families' honour

Analysis of the data indicates that insulting language about family on the part of the boys against girls was never reported; however, Afroditi, who viewed the rumours about her father as destroying her family's good reputation, used a different way to restore it. In the interview session, not only did she represent herself as being in pain, but as also being in need of support. This is because, as the girl said, she was trying in vain to persuade her peers of the untruthfulness of the rumours. Moreover, she criticized the lack of support from the school, which she seemed to regard as a given right. Extract 2 indicates these points.

#### Extract 2

- V. N      How do you react to these rumors about your father, then?  
Afrod:    I tell them the truth all the time. But I cannot bear it, I CAN'T say the same thing (the true story ) all the time because... LOOK! The little girl of the year one knows what is happening within my house. This is terrible.  
V.N      Do the teachers know that children tell you all these things about your father?  
Afrod.    Yes, they DO! ...but look ...they "*kanoun ta strava matia*"<sup>3</sup>

Considering Afroditi's statement, it becomes clear that the girls' reactions to rumour-spreading on the part of peers were ineffective in terminating it. The phrase 'all the time' that can be identified in her quotes indicates

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<sup>3</sup> Kanoun ta strava matia: folk phrase used metaphorically to describe the act of ignoring or pretending not being aware of something (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1056)

the persistency of the attacks on the part of her schoolmates. However, her reaction accorded with her explanation that it was the parents of her peers who spread untrue rumours about her family. Although her actions were in vain, Afroditi responded to bullying in a way that conformed to the existing cultural expectations of gender. This is illustrated in her emphasis of her need for support, as well as her weakness in opposition to the boys' demonstration of their power. Even when she admitted that she occasionally used swearing as a means to channel her indignation, she felt the need to justify her response as stemming from her unbearable pain. Extract 3 indicates this point.

#### Extract 3:

Afrod: Sometimes, I swear at them...I ADMIT IT. But it is ONLY when I can't bear it (the pain because of the rumours) anymore when I DO this..

Extracts 1, 2, and 3, cited above, offer indicative evidence that culture mediates the children's responses by shaping the ways in which boys and girls decide to react in similar looking types of bullying incidents.

Defending their families' honour seemed to be an important issue for the participants. Both boys and girls viewed their reactions as ineffective in bringing their distressing experiences to an end. Such a finding indicates that the bullied children could not handle the situation on their own unless some kind of support, either from school or from their peers, was offered. However, evidence exists to suggest that the pupils' reactions fitted the

cultural expectations regarding how a boy or a girl was expected to react. More reactions to bullying on the part of the victims that conformed to existing gender norms were also reported, as the following section describes.

### *Telling back: a rewarding response for the boy bullies*

Alexandros and Miltiadis additionally reported that they swore back at Priamos and Periklis when they were recipients of derogatory labels that conveyed implications about their masculinity (e.g. jerk, gay). The boys acknowledged the ineffectiveness of their responses in terminating the perpetrators' acts. Besides, they stressed that they understood that their own reactions resulted in the escalation of interpersonal aggression, as already supported by the literature on bullying (Cowie and Berdondinni, 2002). Their explanations regarding the perceived ineffectiveness of their responses offer some important insights.

Alexandros emphasized that his own physical or verbal reactions against Perikles were rewarding for the bully-boy, since it offered the latter further opportunities to show off his power and maleness.

The explanation offered by Alexandros was in accordance with the way bullying conducted by boys was explained (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, the bullied boys' decisions to react in ways that were apparently ineffective seemed to be informed by the existing cultural

norms, which dictated how boys should act, as well as how they should react. The following extract indicates these points, and suggests that the culture of masculinity reproduced by the bullied boys informs their reactions that in fact contribute to the maintenance of their problem.

#### Extract 4

- V.N      So, you mean that there is no reason for Perikles to swear at you.  
Alex.    NO, no... he just wants to do it.  
V.N      And then, what do you usually do?  
Alex.    Well, I feel as if I could "*plakoso*" <sup>4</sup>him, but then I just (pause)l  
Look! If he calls me "*aderfi*" <sup>5</sup>I say to him the same (label) and don't hit  
him because he just wants to "*kanei ton magka*" <sup>6</sup>and then he will continue  
V.N      So, you can't stop him from swearing at you when you swear back at him  
Alex.    Well he continues for a while but then he stops. And then I stop (too).

Pythia, Kalomira, and Eleni, who were occasionally shouted at by boys, said they reacted by *asking them* to stop doing it. The girls said their responses were quite effective, although short-lived. Extract 5 represents the girls' view, and from these, it can be assumed that the girls' responses fitted within their feminine roles. Therefore, the boys' need to be viewed as the 'powerful boys' seemed to be met through the girls' particular reactions.

However, the girls held a shared belief that the effectiveness of their responses was due to the fact that for a boy to quarrel with girls was

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<sup>4</sup> Plakoso: see Extract 1 of this chapter

<sup>5</sup> Aderfi: see chapter seven

<sup>6</sup> Kanei ton magka: see chapters two and eight

considered by their peers as an act that threatened a male's social image.

Extract 5 indicates this point.

#### Extract 5

- V.N      You wrote in your letter that you don't feel devalued when  
            a boy shouts at you without any reason  
Eleni     YES and I shout him back and ask him to stop  
V.N      You do eh?
- Kalomira When Perikles does this I tell him that I am going to tell the  
            teacher  
Eleni     No, I tell him to stop doing this  
V.N      And DOES he stop?  
Eleni     Yes because boys say: 'Real boys don't quarrel with girls'. And  
            then they go...
- Kalomira YES

Culture affected how boys and girls responded to verbal assaults, and also affected the ways the participants interpreted why particular responses were either effective or ineffective. However, this finding implies that such reactions on the part of the bullied boys mask bullying and the difficult situation in which they find themselves. This is because they over-project the existence of a symmetrical power interaction between themselves and the bullies. That power symmetry is, however, antithetical to the nature of bullying (Farrington, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Elinoff et al., 2004).

#### **Girls' responses: Fighting fire with fire**

The girls of year six neither in their letters, nor in the interview sessions, ever reported that they had faced an open confrontation with other girls.



However, in cases where they were either “targets” of untrue rumours, or experienced social alienation by other girl classmates, they reported revenge. The girls’ reports confirm Owens et al, (2000a, p.370), who advocate that ‘fighting fire with fire’ characterizes girls’ reactions to bullying conducted by female peers.

This finding indicates that girls’ aggression does not fall into the typical model of bullying behaviour that can be identified on the grounds of either the frequency of attacks, or the imbalance of power existing between the bully and the victim. since it is communicated in a covert way. Furthermore, as the quotes of the girl participants indicate, the imbalance of power shifts from the bully to the victim, and vice versa.

Unlike the boys who were bullied, the girls who were bullied by other girls did not claim power and superiority. On the contrary, even when they reported of their revenge upon the girls who had attacked them, they represented themselves as victims of considerable pain. Besides, they represented their retaliation as justice rather than aggression. Extract 6 indicates these points.

#### Extract 6

- V.N        You wrote about your friend who told lies about you.  
Evrid.     Yes.  
V N        And then what did you do? Can you tell me more about it?  
Evrid.     I said that my friend hates me and I told things about her.  
V N        Whom did you say these things to?

Evrid. To others (classmates) so that I had my friends on my side  
 V N How did you know that SHE said lies about you?  
 Evrid. Because my friends did not play with me...they avoided me.  
 ( I know) She was jealous of me and she STILL is.  
 V N But you wrote that you gave her a lesson.  
 Evrid. YES. Because I was feeling terrible but then my friends believed me  
 and did not play with her<sup>9</sup> (and) she got her LESSON

Extract 6 further suggests that girls use more sophisticated methods to inflict harm upon their classmates, as well as to justify their acts. Furthermore, by refraining from attacking their perpetrators in an open way, their aggressive acts can neither be observed by the school, nor claimed by their victims. Within such a context, aggression from and against girls seems to be a recurrent phenomenon within the schools.

The boys' and girls' reactions to verbal assaults conducted by other boys followed different routes; the boys' reactions escalated bullying, whilst the girls' reactions were viewed by the girls as leading to the de-escalation of the phenomenon. This is because the responses of the bullied children towards their experiences reproduced the typical gender norms which existed within the specific socio-cultural context in which the children lived. In their quotes, the boys were self-positioned as aggressive and tough, and girls as vulnerable and in need of support. The gossiping and social exclusionary practices that occurred between the girl participants were difficult to identify due to their obscure nature. This fact enabled the girls to perpetuate a circle of counter-aggression without being noticed by the school staff.

In the interview sessions, the participants were also asked to comment upon alternative ways of responding to bullying which they themselves had not adopted. This is because these responses are supported to be effective in eliminating the prevalence of bullying within schools. Findings from the analysis of the accounts offered by the children are presented in the following section.

### **Revealing feelings**

Talking to the bully about their hurtful feelings was viewed as an effective tactic for the bullied to adopt in order to restore the bully-victim distorted relationship (Maines and Robinson, 1992; Sharp and Cowie, 1994; Rigby, 1996). In the interview sessions, the bullied children were asked to comment on this way of responding to bullying. Olweus (1994) argued that signs of pain and suffering on the part of the victims may reward the bullies and encourage their behaviour. However, considering the great majority of the bullied had consensually reported that not one of the bullies aimed to hurt them, expressing their hurtful feelings was expected to be viewed as a response working for their own benefit. Unexpectedly, the analysis of the data generated in the interviews showed that not one of the children, except Ermis, had ever talked about his/her feelings to the bullies. As the interviewees supported, not only would such a response maintain bullying, but it would also reinforce it.

Both the girls and the boys explained in the interviews that either vulnerability or expressing one's distress would reward the behaviour of

the perpetrator(s). Such a view seems to challenge the effectiveness of 'quality circles' as a means to combat bullying in schools. This is where the victimized children are offered opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns to their peers in the context of the 'quality circles' (Cowie and Sharp, 1994, p.90). The interviewees were also asked to offer rationales for their claims, which are described and discussed below.

Being unaware of the effectiveness of a particular response was a reason for not adopting it, as the statement from Poseidonas, represented in Extract 7, indicates. Extract 7 suggests that the children having more awareness of bullying, as well as how it can be tackled, might lead the victimized children to use more effective ways to deal with their hurtful experiences.

#### Extract 7

- V N      What did you do then?
- Poseid.    At first I did nothing but then I started to throw things at them...the Towel for example...or threw their things away ...
- V N      And then did they stop teasing you in that nasty way?
- Poseid.    No, they continued ...because they liked it
- V N      Do you think that if you had talked to them about how you were feeling about all this would have brought any good for you?
- Poseid.    NO. No. It would have made things worse because they would have continued even more
- V N      So, you believe that they would have been happy to hear that you were feeling bad ?
- Poseid.    Well ...they wouldn't have burst into tears... ( if I told them) but they would continue to "*kanoun tous magkes*"
- V.N      Would you like to try to talk to all those who might harass you about the way you are feeling?
- Poseid.    I'd better not do it ... I don't know... I had never being thinking about it...

On the other hand, the girl interviewees tended to report that talking to female bullies about their distressing feelings would reward the perpetrators' feelings of jealousy (as explained in the previous chapter). However, their reasoning can also be explained as an attempt to either maintain their roles as victims, or to justify the covert aggressive responses they adopted. This point is illustrated in Extract 8, which is from the interview I conducted with Evridiki:

#### Extract 8

V N    What would have happened if for example you had talked to her about the way that you were feeling?

Evrid.    Ah, NO, no. ( If I had done so) she might have been thinking: 'Ah, good I've hurt her. And she would have continued "*me megalitero peisma*" <sup>7</sup>

V.N    Have you ever thought of asking someone else, the teacher for example, if there is something else that you could do about it? Talk to her, for example.

Evrid.    No, no. I decided on my own. I always count on myself.

Extract 8 also suggests that more research needs to be conducted in order for the criteria upon which girls base their interpretations of others' feelings to be understood. This understanding might eliminate the risk of aggression occurring between girls being justified and perpetuated.

Ermis was the only child who reported in the interview that he did reveal to his peers his suffering at being the recipient of the hurtful name-calling that they assigned to him. The boy reported that his pleas for them to stop

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<sup>7</sup> *me megalitero peisma*: satisfying her spite to hurt me (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.679).

the hurtful act was paradoxically accompanied by his own occasional laugh, as Extract 9 illustrates.

#### Extract 9

Ermis     I tell them every day. Don't call me like that because it makes me worried.  
              But they don't understand...I tell them: "Call me at least with my surname"  
V.N        And then what happens?  
Ermis     They laugh and they still do it.  
V.N        And...?  
Ermis     Look. Then sometimes I myself laugh too ...and they continue to do it  
V N        Is it because you laugh too?  
Ermis     it might be  
V.N        Then why do you laugh?  
Ermis     I don't know Miss what (else) to do

Laughing along with the teasers has been proposed as a response that some children adopt when they are teased by their peers (Scambler et al., 1998). The boy's laugh can be explained as an adaptive mechanism to re-define bullying as a game, in which his pleas were not effective in altering the situation. However, the boy's quotes indicate that he understood that his non-verbal message (his laugh) affected the meaning of the verbal one (his pleas). Furthermore, as the findings of this study indicate, such a reaction on the part of the bullied are handled effectively by the bullies in order to justify their acts. This point is analytically explained in chapter eleven.

Cowie and Berdondinni (2002) support that the ways in which victims of bullying express their feelings have a role to play on the perpetuation of

their experiences. Allowing painful feelings to be obvious, rather than simply talking about them, seemed to be an important way for the victims to terminate their bullying experience. At least if the victims allowed their feelings to be obvious, the bullies would not further maintain their allegations about joking and fun in the group of peers. On the other hand, evidence exists to support that such a response on the part of the bullied might activate the peer group's support mechanisms (Cowie, 1999; Smith et al., 2007). These points are discussed in the following subsection.

### *Crying: a threshold for stopping bullying*

The sixth grader's reports offer evidence that the victims' "crying" was a threshold for the peers to take action on their behalf. Both the boys and girls of ST1 class talked to me about the case of Thiseas (see chapter five), and aimed to communicate to me how the boy's crying was taken by them as a sign of his/her unbearable pain. In doing so, the children recounted an incident to me in which Alexandros had asked Thiseas not to take part in a group game, having also called him "*koimismenos*"<sup>8</sup> at the same time.

According to the reports of interviewees, all the children of the class had laughed; however, as soon as Thiseas burst into tears, the peers took action against Alexandros, and asked him to stop. The interviewees confirmed that not only had the bullying stopped right away, but an apology had also been offered to Thiseas by Alexandros. It was

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<sup>8</sup> *koimismenos*: the person who is asleep, sluggish.. It is used metaphorically to characterize someone who is not 'full of zip' and acts as if he were half-asleep (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.910).

noteworthy that Theseas' classmates expressed concern for his well being for as long as the fieldwork lasted. Data generated from my observations shows that his peers often accompanied Theseas when the boy was wandering about in the playground. Furthermore, some of his peers occasionally asked the boy to take part in their group activities. The children's actions, as well as the accounts they offered to me, contrast with their teachers' claims, who viewed nasty teasing as being incapable of imposing pain upon the recipient (as discussed in chapter five).

This finding suggests that when the harm imposed upon the victims of bullying is explicitly shown, peer group support mechanisms might develop. Moreover, it suggests that there is a need for teachers to show more empathy towards the children who are bullied in their schools, and to define nasty teasing as a type of bullying. In addition, the schools need to initiate activities, such as drama or circle time, in order to teach to the children how to communicate their feelings clearly to others (Maines and Robinson, 1992; Cowie and Sharp, 1994).

The case of Theseas indicates that a victim's crying was consensually considered by the participants to be an indication of unbearable pain. As such, it could lead to the termination of bullying. However, crying as a response was avoided by all costs by boys, and this finding confirms the findings of a previous study which claimed that crying was rarely adopted as a response to bullying by children at the age of seven to eleven years of age (Tapper and Boulton, 2005). Indeed, in the present study it is



impressive to see how strongly crying was controlled by the bullied boys, as indicated by extract 10.

#### Extract 10

- V.N You know some children told me that you are not worried when they tease you in the way they do. Why do you think they say that?
- Ermis No, no. I tell them: 'I am worried. Don't call me like that'. I am worried and sometimes I feel like I want to cry. But I don't do it. I "*sygkratiemai*"<sup>9</sup>
- V N Why do you do this?
- Ermis Look I am very sensitive...when a child falls off I run and ask him if he wants something....When I feel happy I tell them ( the class-mates). But when I feel like crying I don't show it to them.
- V.N Why?
- Ermis I don't want to...because I cry easily because I am very sensitive
- V.N Do you think that is it bad to be sensitive?
- Ermis ... ( looking at the floor, smiling) Look. Boys SHOULDN'T cry, I know it.

Extract 10 suggests that the culture of masculinity which pervades the local community is reproduced within the school, and affects the boys' responses to bullying. Ermis displays his strength by reporting resilience to his experiences, and the fact that he represents a sensitive rather than weak self within his quotes demonstrates that he views his endurance to suffering as a sign of toughness. In this way, he regards himself as explicitly conforming to what is expected from boys when they suffer.

Both boys and girls reported in the interviews that they had not revealed their hurtful feelings to the bullies. The rationales they offered to support such decisions indicate that not only was the effectiveness of the specific

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<sup>9</sup> Sygkratiemai: take control over the expression of my feelings (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1675).

response ignored, but was instead viewed as rewarding the bullies for their behaviour. Specifically, crying as an expression of unbearable pain was avoided by any means on the part of victimized boys, as it transgressed the existing norms of masculinity. Therefore, it could be suggested that anti-bullying measures taken by schools should fit the cultural context in which they are applied.

### **Classmates as a source of support for the bullied**

Researchers of bullying stress that the victimized children should be encouraged to ask for support. This is because they highlight the difficulty the bullied children face in defending themselves in this particular situation (Rigby, 1996; DfEE<sup>10</sup>, 2000; Smith et al., 2007). However, research findings indicate that the bullied children rarely ask for support in order to deal with their experiences (Camodeca and Goossens, 2005; Faye and Ramona, 2005).

Analysis of the data generated from the interviews with the bullied pupils and the rest of their classmates indicated that asking for social support was a gendered response to bullying. Four out of the six girls who self-defined as victims of bullying reported that they had occasionally asked for support. This finding confirms findings from previous studies (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Hunter and Borg, 2006). However, no other boy except Ermis ever reported to have asked for help in order to deal with his bullying experience. The boys referred to a number of factors in order to

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<sup>10</sup> DfEE: Department for Education and Employment.

explain why they had preferred not to ask for support. The rationales they offered were by and large in accordance with their views regarding the causality of bullying, as described in chapter eight. The issues that the pupils raised in the interviews are discussed below.

### *Boys' denial of being 'thymata'* <sup>11</sup>

In a cultural context where the boys' power is positively valued (see chapters four and five), the bullied boys flatly refused to position themselves as weak, and therefore in need of support. On the contrary, they self-defined as capable to 'sort things out for themselves' (Oliver and Candappa, 2007, p.77). The label "*thyma*" was never found within their self-definitions or in any account they offered to describe their experiences. Instead, they either reported how they were able to control their negative feelings, or normalized the situation in which they found themselves. Such accounts highlight the ways in which they shield their "powerlessness" (Elinoff et al., 2004), and allow their need for support to go unnoticed.

Extract 11 highlights one way of responding to a bullying incident, as recounted by Miltiadis in the interview session. Banging on the door was an obvious way used by the boy to show off his power. The boy's reaction was not unexpected on the part of males in the local community, as discussed in chapter four.

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<sup>11</sup> thymata:(plural form of the word thyma): victims (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.380)

## Extract 11

- Milt: Sometimes, I do not want to “*plakoso*” him...and  
I just go...and he continues, he cannot change  
V N But you still feel angry. Don’t you need someone to help you?  
Milt. Yes, (I feel) “*megali tsantila*<sup>12</sup>” and when I go(out of the classroom)  
I bang a fist on the door .

### *The influential figure of the “magkas”*

In their interviews, the boys said that they had never asked their peers to help them dealing with a bullying incident. According to their reports, the influence of the “*magkes*” upon other peers not only resulted in the shifting of allegiances that existed between peers (Rigby, 2004; Cowie and Berdondini, 2002), but also hindered them from taking sides with the bullied. Extract 12 demonstrates this point.

## Extract 12

- V.N You wrote in your letter: “Some pupils beat me and nobody was on my side.”  
Alex. Not ‘beat me’, they teased me and nobody did something  
V N What do you mean ‘nobody did something’?  
Alex. There were many children...and Priamos “*who kanei ton magka*”started and others didn’t do anything (to stop him from doing)  
VN Were any friends there?  
Alex. Platonas , Cleonas...but they didn’t do anything  
V. N Did you ask them to do something?  
Alex. No  
V.N Do you believe that teasing would have stopped if you had asked Platonas and Cleonas to do something for it?  
Alex: Platonas and Cleonas ...they had me as their friend but since Priamos came into this school they have changed ...and now they want to show

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<sup>12</sup> Megali tsantila: a lot of rage ( Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1808).

that they are “*magkes*” because Priamos influences them and they go after him all the time. They used to be very good children but now they want to look like Priamos. They want to show that they are “*magkes*”. They swear and do things like that...pretend that they smoke...and they say they have girl-friends...

V.N Did they swear at you or tease you?

Alex. Not that time ( he was referred to) but other times they do when Priamos is there (with them)

The rationale offered by Alexandros to explain why his peers did not defend him confirms previous research findings (Salmivalli, 1998; Rodkin et al., 2006). It also represents the perceived futility on the part of the boy to ask for help from his male friends (this rationale accords with the explanations of bullying offered by the participants which are cited in chapter eight). This finding suggests that if the attitudes of the boys towards the social figure of the “*magkas*” do not change, then group support mechanisms (Smith et al., 2007) cannot be properly developed within Greek schools. On the other hand, it raises the issue of understanding why the social image of the “*magkas*” exerts such influence upon his peers (see also Appendices A, B, D and E). This is because although no boy would like to be nominated as the “bully” in a non-Greek context (Kowalski, 2000; Hideki, 2002), for a boy to be nominated as the “*magkas*” seems to impose a very challenging and glamorous social image within the Greek context.

The girls on the other hand said that they always turned to other female friends to express their distress when being teased or shouted at by boys.

The pupils were also asked whether they turned to parents and teachers to ask for support when being bullied, since research studies suggest that children tend to express reluctance to confessing their experiences of being bullied to adults (La Fontain, 1991; Smith and Shu, 2000; Oliver and Candappa, 2007). Therefore, it seems necessary to understand how bullied children rationalize their choices to either tell or not tell parents and teachers, and to see what can be learnt from these rationales.

### **Telling parents: against the peer group norms**

#### *Supporting a non-grassing ethos*

Previous research on bullying conducted in Greece suggests that parents are viewed as a source of advice and support for a significant number of Greek elementary school pupils who are being bullied (Kalliotis, 2000; Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001).

When the interviewees were asked, it was only Pythia and Ermis who admitted to having talked to their parents about their bullying experiences. The two children seemingly recognised that parents could offer an emotional shelter to the bullied; however, both of them understood that asking parents to help them deal with bullying was a risky decision.

Pythia made it clear that parents taking action on behalf of their children worsened the situation, especially when the school staff did not take action after the parents' claims had been made. The girl also explained that involving parents in their children's affairs was against the peer group norms.

### Extract 13

- V.N Is it true that your father came to school and told the headmaster about all these things that happened to you?
- Pythia Yes.
- V N And then? What happened?
- Pythia These boys (Priamos, Cleonas and Platonas) continued to look at me and then they whispered secrets to each other about me ...and they laughed... and there was a day they sang a song...something like like 'ohh... "*karfi*" "*karfi*"<sup>13</sup>... it was when we were going up the stairs...and I know they said it for me because I brought my father to tell the headteacher about all those things they had done
- V.N So, do you think that you didn't gain from telling your father who informed the headteacher?
- Pythia NO I don't think they (the teachers) can do something... and Priamos and Cleonas said to me 'Ah. You tell the headmaster. Ahh, now we've got afraid'... And they laughed with their friends because they know nothing is going to happen.

Extract 13 indicates that the peer group's culture of secrecy was the strongest ally of bullying. Girls who 'grassed' were also at risk of peer retaliation (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Oliver and Candappa, 2007), as described in chapter seven. Pythia's claims confirm a previous research study in which it was found that Greek pupils confessed that they did not like being 'informers' (Pateraki, 2001, p.172).

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<sup>13</sup> karfi: (metaphorically) the person who grasses, who transgress a non-grassing ethos (see chapter seven)

Fear of reprisals on the part of peers, as well as conformity to peer group non-doping culture, constituted the two basic reasons that hindered the bullied children in asking parents to take action on their behalf. The interviewees additionally criticized the school for its effectiveness to take action against bullying in order to explain why they refrained from informing the teachers about it.

### *Against the norms of masculinity*

An analysis of the data generated from the pupils' comments indicated that every one of the participants knew that a pre-adolescent child who asked their parents for help was negatively viewed by their peers. The children talked in the interviews about the “*mamothrefto*”<sup>14</sup> child, with all of them confirming that this was a degrading label assigned to a child who asked their mother for help to deal with their own issues. In particular, the word “*mamothrefto*” was understood as a humiliating label assigned to a boy who could not stand up for himself. The feelings of contempt and disguise that this particular label bestowed upon any boy to whom it was assigned is further confirmed in chapter eleven.

The interviewees additionally criticized the school for its lack of effectiveness in taking action against bullying in order to explain why they refrained from informing the teachers about it. The pupils' critical comments are presented in the following section.

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<sup>14</sup> Mamothrefto: (mummy's boy) a boy who is dependant upon his mother. (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1043).



## **Telling teachers**

Anti-bullying intervention programs strongly advocate that the bullied pupils should talk to their teachers, thus combating the silence that surrounds their experiences (DfEE, 2000). However, apart from Pythia who reported no faith in the role of the school, almost every one of the sixth graders confirmed that the school staff did not take their claims of teasing or social exclusion seriously. Their claims confirm findings from the study of Deliyianni and her colleagues (2008) conducted in Greece.

Extracts 14 and 15 are from the interviews I conducted with Poseidonas, and with Eleni and Kalomia. They indicate that the pupils' decisions to tell teachers were affected by their perceptions of the possibility of the support being asked for being offered (Faye and Ramona, 2005). Extract 14 also emphasizes the importance that pupils placed upon the head teacher's role to take action against school bullying.

### **Extract 14**

V.N Did you tell the teachers that you were being teased in a nasty way?

Poseid. No, no

V N What would have happened if you had told the school about your experience?

Poseid. Oh, (they would have done) NOTHING

V N What do you think the school can do about it?

Poseid. The headmaster should WAKE UP.

According to the pupils' reports, their teachers failed to recognize the bullied childrens' need for support (see also chapter five). Neither could

they understand that offering support to the victimized children was not unrelated to their own roles (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1994). Eleni, Kalomira, and Pythia offered retrospective accounts of their experiences of asking support from a teacher in which not only did they aim to describe how their claims for support had been dismissed by the teacher, but also how they had been viewed by him as incapable of taking action to deal with their situation. The girls' statements in Extract 15 stress that the teacher constructed social exclusion as a childish affair, and the three girls as incapable of handling their own issues.

#### Extract 15

- V. N      Did you tell the teachers about it (denial of participation in a group game)  
Eleni      Yes, I said this to the teacher of physical education  
Kalomira But he didn't tell anything to them (those who denied us participation) and  
            He (the teacher) said: 'Oh. Don't get me involved into your own affairs.  
            You should be able to deal with them on your own.

Extract 15 suggests that the teachers' definitions of bullying, as well as their understanding of their own role in the elimination its occurrence, can affect the way in which they handle the phenomenon (Boulton, 1997; Siann et al., 1993).

Using an interview methodology, Deliyianni and her colleagues (2008) reported similar findings. Both primary and secondary school children who were interviewed reported that they perceived a unsupportive climate for the bullied within their schools. The pupils criticized the teachers as

being either uncaring, or as undermining the seriousness of the phenomenon. Therefore, it seems that those being bullied within Greek schools may be unsupported and left to experience feelings of fear, sadness, or humiliation at the hands of their peers.

### *Self-defining as 'faulty' and deserving*

The attribution of blame to the self (as also described in chapter eight), especially for non-changeable characteristics, was an additional reason that the children referred to. In doing so, the bullied children explained why they remained silent instead of disclosing their experiences (Faye and Ramona, 2005; Joscelyne and Holtum, 2006). Extract 16, a part of the interview I conducted with Aris, highlights this point.

#### Extract 16

- V N Has anyone from your peers ever teased you in a nasty way?  
Aris No.  
V N Never?  
Aris ...When I was in the fourth year  
V N How did they tease you?  
Aris They called me “*gyftos*”<sup>15</sup>  
V N How did you feel about that?  
Aris (he lowers his head, his face looking at the floor) I didn't want them to call me “*gyftos*”  
V N What did you do then about it?  
Aris .....(silence)  
V N Did you tell your teacher about it?  
Aris No.  
V.N Did you tell anyone else?  
Aris No  
V N Why not?

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<sup>15</sup> Gyftos: gipsy (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.204), also see chapter four

Aris ....I was ashamed (smiling still looking on the floor)  
V N Ashamed of telling to them?  
Aris ...because I was being called “*gyftos*”.

Aris’ disclosure suggests that unless schools foster an anti-racist culture, those pupils who are attacked by racism will avoid disclosing their experiences. This is because it is only in such a school climate that pupils will be persuaded that not one child is worthy of being unequally treated because of his/her race or ethnicity.

The children who experienced social exclusion at the hands of their peers said that they resorted to other friends in order to enjoy membership within the group of peers. In the interviews, the children commented upon this response, and their comments are discussed in the following section.

### **Turn to another group to enjoy new membership**

The cohesion and interdependence that existed between the adult inhabitants of the local community were reproduced within the school (as also discussed in chapter five). In fact, it was rare for me to observe a child walking or playing alone for as long as this fieldwork lasted.

However, some children confirmed the existence of social exclusionary tactics against them. They also reported that it was a common response of those children who excluded from group games to turn to ‘other friends’.

The 'other friends', as the bullied children called the peers to whom they turned, offered emotional support to those children who had been either ignored or excluded from a particular group of classmates. Data from the pupils' reports, the teachers' reports, and my own observations confirmed that an informal system of peer support existed in the school. This system appeared similar to what has been called the 'circle of friends' in a non-Greek context (Thompson et al., 2002, p.140), which was found to protect and offer emotional support to bullied children (Naylor and Cowie, 1999; Smith et al., 2007).

However, in the particular context in which the present fieldwork was conducted, being offered membership to join in other friends' games was viewed as offering temporary relief to the children. In fact, it seemed to be the only choice left for children who were socially alienated. However, as Extract 17 illustrates, it does not compensate for the psychological pain that the socially excluded child feels.

#### Extract 17

- V.N        So, you ask them to play and do they say "No"?
- Ermis     Well, look it is only Persephoni who says to me that I cannot play but I am going to tell you something. When we had gone for an excursion with the whole school then we played and I went and asked the girls (of my class) to play with them and then Persephoni said: 'No' and then I went to some other girls-friends and I played with them.
- V.N        So, you found new friends, didn't you?
- Ermis     No, these girls live in my neighbourhood and I know them...but look (face looking at the floor) still I am worried when they (the girls in my class) say 'No' to me.

Therefore, teachers need to be more concerned with combating social exclusion (Boulton and Hawker, 1997), rather than recommending that the excluded children join other friends' groups. The restorative justice principle suggests that reconciliation rather than punishment is effective in the amendment of the bully-victim relationship (Rigby, 1996; Ahmed and Braithwaite, 2006). However, the participants' quotes indicate that methods employing tactics of reconciliation were not so straightforward; in fact, the sixth graders viewed the act of offering forgiveness as ineffective in tackling bullying, as explained in the following section.

### **Acts of reconciliation**

Offering forgiveness, not necessarily after apologies were offered, was a typical response that boys reported to adopt after an incident of bullying was terminated. The participants' quotes indicate that offering forgiveness was a face-saving activity for the bullied, rather than an effective response which could bring their painful experiences to an end.

The act of offering forgiveness was constructed within the children's accounts as being an act that characterized friendship. In the extract that follows, a 'friend' was seemingly used by the victimized children as a label that substituted for that of 'victim'. As Extract 18 indicates, it was through being self-positioned as friends the bullied children masked their victimization. Moreover, they placed themselves within a group of friends of which their bullies were members.

## Extract 18

- V N    Tell me Ermis, how do you feel towards these children who tease you in a nasty way. Talk to me about your feelings.
- Ermis   Of course I do not feel well but .look! Friendship comes FIRST. When they do something (bad) to me I forgive them.

Religion seemed to constitute a resource on which the bullied could safely draw upon in order to restore their social images that were distorted by their peers' maltreatment. Extract 19 illustrates the point and highlights that within an ethos of Christianity, tolerance and forgiveness offer fertile soil for systematic victimization to continue. In addition, showing endurance to victimization seems to fit well within an educational context in which being tolerant to suffering is taught and learnt through the official educational material (see chapter two).

## Extract 19

- V.N        Would you like these pupils who treat you unfairly, as you said. to be taken into the next door classroom or even to another school?
- Pythia    No, no
- V. N        Why not?
- Pythia    (silence)...We should forgive those who make mistakes God said. We must forgive our friends and all of us (the children) to be friends.
- V N        Is it because –I can assume- you love each other although you get into trouble sometimes?
- Pythia    Yes. We love each other. And we SHOULD love each other
- V.N        Why should you do this?
- Pythia    ...in order to take the Holy Communion, this is the basic (reason)

The bullied children consensually believed that asking for and being offered forgiveness constituted a routine for the bullies, and in no way signified the end of re-offending. Afroditi drew upon a Greek metaphor to emphasize the culture-grounded belief that “*sygnomi*”<sup>16</sup> was a meaningful act for the offenders. As the girl explained, bullies could get away with their offences without any further consequences. In other words, the children understood that saying ‘sorry’ was a way of maintaining bullying. Extracts 20 and 21 emphasize this point.

#### Extract 20

Afroditi: “*Ap tin ora pou vgike to sygnomi hathike to philotimo*”<sup>17</sup>

#### Extract 21

- Milt. But if they can think a bit after a while they will regret it (the way they acted against me)  
V.N Do they come sometimes and say ‘sorry’ to you ?  
Milt. Yes. MANY times. Cleonas, Platonas...  
V.N And...?  
Milt. I say to them ‘It’s okay’.  
V N You forgive them, don’t you?  
Milt. Yes.  
V.N And after this does their behaviour change?  
Milt. ...Well, ok. They might do it again once or twice but not any more.

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<sup>16</sup> Sygnomi: 1.a word used to denote that someone (who uses it) express remorse for his/her wrongdoing (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1671

2. say sorry: Stavropoulos, 1988, p.833)

<sup>17</sup> “Ap tin ora pou vgike to sygnomi hathike to philotimo:since ‘saying sorry’ has been invented the philotimo was lost. (<http://www.athlitiki.gr/vortal/content/view/8524/37/lang.el/->) accessed 5-3-2009

Philotimo: it is a Greek value that has to do with the sense of self-dignity, the social self. Mpampiniotis (2002) claims that ‘philotimo’ is a Greek word that is difficult to translate in other languages. It relates to someone’s willingness to gain social approval, especially for his empathetic feelings and generosity. As a result, it strongly relates to someone’s concern about how others are thinking about him/her. Although not strictly confined to men philotimo is a value strongly related to masculinity.



V.N        So, do you regret that you forgive them?  
Milt.      I don't know...I think we have to be "*philotimoi*" <sup>18</sup>

### **The pupils' suggestions: cries for help?**

In the final stages of the interview sessions, the bullied children confessed to me that although they offered forgiveness to the bullies, their own emotional restoration was largely ignored by the school staff. They strongly expressed their need for adult support in order to confront the problems they faced within the school. According to their quotes, the bullied children viewed the present fieldwork as a means to channel what I define as their 'cries for help', as these are highlighted by the following subsections.

#### *Emotional unloading: let the pain go out*

Alexandros and Ermis used to accompany me when I was walking within the school premises or in the playground, and by doing so, they took any opportunity to talk to me about their experiences. Alexandros kept on asking me right from the initial stages of the fieldwork when he was going to be interviewed. Extract 22 is from a conversation I had with the boy in the playground, and represents his need to let his feelings come out through the interview.

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<sup>18</sup> Philotimoi: those who value and adjust their behaviour to fit the norms of philotimo (Mpapiniotis, 2002, p.1886).

## Extract 22

- V. N     Why do you ask me so many times when you will be interviewed?  
           It seems to me that you have a lot to say.
- Alex.     YES. I have a lot to say ...but... besides I want to open my heart  
           to you

Miltiadis also found the interview to be a means through which to unload his emotions. Extract 23 indicates this point and unmask the boy's suffering that is ignored by the school staff.

## Extract 23

- V. N     Tell me, Miltiadis do you like that we are discussing here together  
           about all these things that happened to you?
- Milt.     Yes. Because it helps me
- V.N     How does it help you?
- Milt.     Because I don't keep all this (that happened to me) inside my heart. I take  
           it out.

## *Someone I can trust*

Evridiki seemed to have found in me someone she could trust to disclose her feelings to. She also stressed the need for the school to appoint a person to whom the pupils would talk about their feelings and concerns.

## Extract 24

- V. N     Do you talk about all this with your friends?

Evrid. Well, not everything. But it is very difficult to find a real friend...The one I can trust to talk to. Friendship is very valuable. I  
I don't think I can find a real friend to talk  
V. N Do you like that we're talking together now?  
Evrid. Yes, very much...  
V N Would you like someone to be in the school whom you could talk to as we are doing now?  
Evrid. Yes, very much...But I don't think teachers can do this...as you do.

*Someone who is willing to listen*

Pythia expressed in her interview her need to talk about her problems to someone who would really pay attention to her. In her response, she criticized adults for underestimating childrens' need for their voices to be heard.

Extract 25

Pythia Sometimes I talk about all this with Kalomira  
V.N Who else?  
Pythia (silence)  
V.N To your parents?  
Pythia NO.NO. Because my mother is going to say: 'Oh, come on Pythia stop it now. You say nonsense. But you know what I am doing? I go to my room close the door and I talk to my tape recorder. And then I feel better.  
V.N Would you like someone in the school that you would be talking to as we are talking right now?  
Pythia Yes, VERY MUCH

*Someone who can help me*

Although I never said I would, I had the feeling that the children who talked to me about their bullying experiences expected me to do

something about their problem. However, Alexandros and Miltiadis expressed this opinion openly in the final stages of the interviews I conducted with each one of the two boys. Therefore, it is clear that the two pupils had abandoned the self-images of the “tough boys” that they had assigned themselves during the early stages of the interviews. The extract cited below indicates this point, and further suggests that the children who experience bullying need to break their silence and ask for support in a non-threatening and caring atmosphere.

#### Extract 26

- V.N        Why do you like to talk to me?  
Milt.       Because you can understand me.  
V.N        and for what else?  
Milt.       *silence*  
V.N        Is it because you think that I can do something about your problem?  
Milt        EXACTLY.

#### Summary

The participants who were bullied by their classmates talked in the interviews about a number of ways in which they used to respond to their bullying experiences. These differed in order to fit both the situation at hand, and the existing cultural norms. The pupils' responses were ineffective in tackling the bullying that existed within the particular school. On the contrary, the boys' reactions to bullying were viewed by all of them as reinforcing rather than eliminating bullying. On the other hand, girls, conforming to the existing cultural norms, assigned

themselves the roles of tormented victims seeking out justice. Through their responses to bullying conducted by other girls, they were engaged in a vicious circle of counter-aggression. In this context, the bullies and the victims constituted roles that were taken up by girls interchangeably and in a covert way. Revealing their hurtful feelings or asking for support was denied by the boys to be an effective response in terminating bullying incidents. This is because it was viewed by the boys to contradict the norms of an ideal masculinity to which the boys conformed. The girls on the other hand abandoned the idea of asking for help, as they seemed to sort things out by ‘fighting fire with fire’. Asking for peers’ help was viewed to be a futile response by the bullied boys, as they saw the influential power of the “*magkes*” as holding peers back from taking sides with victims. The children’s culture did not allow for adults to enter into the children’s daily realities. Therefore, disclosures to parents, and the involvement of parents within their children’s affairs, were avoided by the bullied as a response to terminate bullying. The participants rarely asked for support from the school, as they either viewed the teachers to be unresponsive to their claims, or the discipline administered to be ineffective in tackling bullying. Considering the issues that the children raised, it is clear that the majority of them had to tolerate their victimization. Through the routine of offering forgiveness, the bullied co-existed with the bullies, whom they also nominated as their friends. The labels “*philotimoi*”, merciful, compassionate, and good Christians that the bullied assigned themselves seemed to compensate for their suffering. However, it was in the final stages of the interviews that the children articulated their need for support from adults.

Chapters ten and eleven explore the case of Ermis, which constituted a typical case of group bullying (Farrington, 1993) that existed within the school. The rationale for exploring this particular case is to understand what it means to account for being personally involved in a specific case of group bullying. Such an understanding is important as it relates the perspectives of the bullies to a real life context, and therefore expands upon findings of research studies that aim to understand the perspectives of children when these refer to either hypothetical scenarios or to video representations of bullying (Tulloch, 1998; Baldry, 2005). If anti-bullying policies are to claim effectiveness, ignoring such information may have adverse consequences.

## CHAPTER TEN

### **Bullying Ermis: Excuses and apologies within the bullies' letters**

*'My words are my weapons'*  
*Trosky*  
(Quoted in Nelson and Lambert, 2001, p.92)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter refers to the letters that the children who systematically bullied Ermis wrote to me. It aims to offer a deeper understanding of how the children who acted as bullies accounted for their acts, as well as how they represented themselves in relation to their acts. Therefore, close attention is paid both to the content, as well as the structure, of the pupils' letters. This chapter also highlights the roles that culture and language play in the ways in which the bullies construct their acts. Furthermore, it foregrounds the letters as the context in which rhetorical devices were generated by the pupils with the aim to represent themselves in a favourable light. The chapter includes six sections. It starts with a brief description of the context in which the pupils' written accounts need to be considered. It then continues by describing how the participants represented themselves within their letters, and discusses the related implications. The third section explores how the children represented themselves in relation to the boy they bullied within their letters. Significance is placed upon the children's definitions of their acts, which they represented as 'couched in certain socially approved vocabularies' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.76). The fourth section focuses upon the explanations that the participants offered for their involvement in this specific case of group bullying in order to separate themselves from the

role of the culprit bully. The implications stemming from such a separation in terms of personal blame and the responsibilities of the bullies are also discussed. In this section, I also draw upon the concept of ‘excuses’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.75) in order to emphasize their role in constructing specific identities for the perpetrators that are culturally fit. The fifth section discusses the future orientations of the bullies, as reported by the bullied boys within their letters, as the means through which things would be sorted out. The final section sums up the key points and links this chapter to the following one.

### **Setting the framework**

Ermis attended ST2 class (as described in chapter five), and in the first days of fieldwork, when the topic of this study was communicated to the sixth graders, ‘his case’ was brought to my attention. Rumours and disclosures made by the pupils who attended different classes in the school made me aware that the boy was well known amongst them as the “*banana*”. Data generated from the interview with the class teacher, as well as from confessions made by some pupils, confirms that Ermis was constructed as different or as weird by them. This is because, as the informants stated, the boy walked and behaved in a way that looked abnormal or not the right way. Although a detailed account of the boy’s profile is included in Appendix B, it is important to stress here that not one of the school children reported that they wanted Ermis to be hurt in any way. Data from observations also offered no signs of hostility against the boy. On the contrary, feelings of sympathy for the boy’s distress at being assigned the unwelcome nick-name were declared by most of the school children during the fieldwork period.



## **Letter writing: a context to choose roles**

Eight out of the fourteen pupils (excluding Ermis) who attended ST2 class during the fieldwork period wrote that they harassed their classmate Ermis within their letters. Those pupils who were absent on the day the letters were written, or preferred to talk instead of writing, also reported that they teased Ermis in a nasty way. Persefoni, Sofia, and Afroditi, as well as Odysseas, did not include such a report within their letters. Instead, the four pupils described in their letters incidents of bullying in which they positioned themselves either as victims or observers. However, in the interview sessions conducted after the writing of their letters, the case of Ermis was raised. It was in this context that all the pupils who attended ST2 class, the classmates of Ermis, admitted that they bullied the boy, although stressing that this only happened occasionally. This finding suggests that the contexts in which accounts of bullying are offered play a role in what is said, as well how much is said, as also emphasized in chapter seven.

The pupils' stories were short and included a blend of descriptive and evaluative elements. As far as the content is concerned, three basic themes were identified: the children offered definitions of the particular case; explanations for their acts; and ended their stories by referring to their future orientations. The themes identified within the pupils' letters broadly accord with the guidelines that were offered to them (see Appendix C).

The pupils who attended ST2 class started their accounts by self-defining as members of the group of pupils who bullied Ermis. They then continued by offering a number of explanations in order to rationalize their involvement within the bullying episodes that they described. This finding differentiates the bullies' accounts from those offered by the bullied children. This is because in the letters that the bullied children wrote, explanations of their bullying experiences were omitted. The bullies added final sentences to their stories in order to communicate their future orientations as far as their behaviour was concerned. These final sentences seemed to be a crucial concern that the children aimed to communicate. It is worthy of note that, whilst the letters which the bullied children wrote focused on how to terminate their undesirable experiences, the accounts of the bullies indicate that the restoration of their distorted social identities was their main concern.

The following section presents the opening paragraphs of the letters that eight of the participants wrote. It offers insights into the definitions of the particular case to which the pupils referred, as well as how they positioned themselves within this case of group bullying.

## **Description of the situation**

### *Trustworthy writers*

All the participants began their narratives by affirming that they used to harass their classmate Ermis. 'Denial of agency' as a tactic that is often used by bullies to account for their behaviour (Hideki, 2002, p. 4) was not

found in any of the letters written by the pupils. Such affirmations on behalf of the participants were not unexpected since the case of Ermis was a well-known case of group bullying within the school. Therefore, it seemed that in placing these affirmations at the beginning of their stories, the pupils aimed to cause me to consider the veracity of what was going to be reported next. In using such tactics, the participants may have aimed to position themselves as trustworthy. Extracts 1 and 2 cited below indicate this point, and are from the letters of Zeus and Poseidonas respectively.

#### Extract 1

Yes, I have done something like that...(Zeus)

#### Extract 2

Yes, I dare say that I have done something like that to a boy. (Poseidonas)

In the letter of Poseidonas, the word ‘yes’ may have been used to emphasize the image of trustworthy boys who do not hesitate to articulate agency for their acts, thus challenging the culture of secrecy that was identified by the sixth graders. However, the close analysis of the pupils’ narratives reveals that the acts that the boys referred to were not clearly specified. This finding could lead to the assumption that the boys avoided labelling a behaviour that they considered reprehensible. This assumption suggests that the words that are either used within or omitted from the

bullies' accounts need to be considered with caution. This is because they may be used 'strategically' in order to affect the reader's interpretation of the bullies' social identity and conduct (Shrauf, 2000). The words that the pupils who bullied their classmate used to characterize their acts are specified in the following section.

*Defining bullying: Deviant acts... but not "aparadektes"*

Within their letters, most participants used the word "*koroido*" and described their act as 'calling Ermis a *paratsoukl*' or 'calling Ermis a name', but clearly excluded any attempts of physical assault against the boy. Incidents of social exclusion conducted by a group of girls attending ST2 class were also reported. For example, Dimitra included the Greek phrase "*den paizo*" within her letter. The Greek terms that the participants used within their letters in order to define their acts were those that they had also used to describe the representations of bullying within the video (as these are explained in chapter six).

However, despite the fact that the acts represented in the video tape on bullying had been consensually defined by the children as "*aparadektes*"<sup>1</sup> this word was not found in any of the letters written by the pupils. This finding can be explained as an attempt on the part of the bullies to downsize the unjustified nature of the same acts that they *themselves* had committed. This finding indicates that definitions of bullying are contextual, especially when they concern a personalized context.

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<sup>1</sup> Aparadektes: socially unacceptable and in no way justified in terms of fitting the social norms and rules (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 224); also see chapter six.

However, the children recognized the deviant nature of their acts and conveyed this by using the following words in their letters to define their acts: ‘a mistake’, ‘a horrible thing to do’, ‘a wrong thing’, or as ‘bad’. This point is clearly represented in Extracts 3 and 4.

#### Extract 3

For a boy to be teased and made to feel ashamed I know now it is a horrible thing to do’.  
(Zeus)

#### Extract 4

At first I used to tease him. But later, I realized the terrible mistake I had made.  
(Iraklis)

The pupils’ responses signify that teasing someone in a nasty way, calling someone a “*paratsoukli*”, and leaving someone out of games were recognized as bullying acts by the children who acted as bullies. This is because the criteria they considered when talking about their acts fit the typical definitions of bullying. The participants reported that their acts inflicted pain upon the Ermis and were conducted systematically, whilst any motives for retaliation on the part of the perpetrators were also excluded (Olweus, 1993). However, it is important to note that the children also stressed their own negative feelings within their letters, as the following subsection illustrates.

### *Bullying: a self-dramatic experience for the bullies*

Every one of the participants emphasized his/her negative feelings in the letters they wrote to me. Extracts 5 and 6 represent this point.

#### Extract 5

I feel very bad because I know I do the wrong thing  
(Ira)

#### Extract 6

When I started to “*koroidevo*” him I did not pay any attention (to my behaviour). However later on I did not feel well and I asked myself: Why am I doing it to this child who has never done something wrong to me?  
(Ira)

In their responses, the bullies tended to propose a point and a counterpoint at the same time within their letters. In doing so, they may have sought to draw my attention to their own plight, thus setting the context within which their acts should be ‘judged’. This is a plausible explanation, since the literature on bullying supports that the bullies usually represent their own suffering in order to defend their wrongdoing (Borg, 1998). This point is illustrated in Extract 7 below.

#### Extract 7

‘This is not the right thing (to do) and I know Ermis is feeling very bad and I am feeling very bad for this.  
(Dimitra)

Extract 7 also emphasizes that those children who act as bullies are skilful in constructing images of themselves and communicating them to their advantage. This finding is been supported by the literature on bullying (Sutton et al., 1999).

The children who bullied their classmate Ermis related their behaviour to feelings of self-punishment within their letters, thus positioning themselves within a context of self-dramatization. Emotive words such as ‘guilt’, ‘sorry’, ‘sad’, and ‘conscience’ were commonplace within their letters, as Extract 8 illustrates:

#### Extract 8

Yes, I have done something like that. I have done it to a boy who is very good and only for this I have pangs of conscience after that....’

(Zeus)

The specific words that the children included in their accounts indicate how skilfully they used language in order to manipulate the meaning of their acts (Liefhoghe and Davey, 2001). Nelson and Lambert (2001, p.86) wrote about the use of ‘sympathetic disclaimers’ as a tactic adopted by the bullies with an aim to avoid the imposition of sanctions for their acts.

It is of note that the feelings of enjoyment and outbursts of laughter that were reported in the interviews to accompany the pupils’ acts against Ermis (see chapters eight and eleven) were not reported within the

children's letters. However, joking and having fun as a means of offering self-gratification seemed to have been deliberately omitted from the accounts of the participants. It was Zeus, who was the only exception to this, as is made clear in the following section.

Of equal importance was the fact that none of the other children, except for Iraklis, specified in his/her letter the nick-name assigned to Ermis. This finding indicates that what is omitted from, as well as what is included in, the bullies' narratives merits particular attention. This is because it offers an understanding of the defensive tactics that the bullies adopt in order to construct versions of reality for their own benefit.

Eight pupils acknowledged teasing their classmate Ermis; in their letters, they defined their acts as deviant and reprehensible. However they seemed to communicate that their conduct should not be 'judged' without consideration of context. This may be the reason why the word "*aparadekti*<sup>2</sup>" used to characterize their behaviour was not found within their letters. In fact, the pupils pointed to a number of factors that aimed to render their acts intelligible, and themselves excusable for their behaviour. This point is discussed in the following section.

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<sup>2</sup> *Aparadekti*: socially and morally unacceptable (see chapter six)



## **Explaining the behaviour: culprit or followers?**

Although the children who were being bullied did not include explanations of why they were teased by their peers in their letters (see chapter eight), this was not the case with the bullies. Analysis of data from their letters indicates that the explanations that the bullies offered to account for their acts were the central theme of their letters. Gergen (1988) advocates that explanations are social actions used by those who offer them in order to position themselves and others in particular ways. Within their explanations, the children positioned themselves into two social categories, which will be described in the following subsections.

### *The culprit*

Zeus was the only one of the sixth graders who accepted full responsibility for instigating incidents of nasty teasing against Ermis. Interestingly, he also accepted responsibility for his classmates. The boy displayed the same attitude across several different occasions in which the boy voluntarily talked about his role in the case of group bullying conducted against Ermis.

The boy's claims were in line with the explanations offered by the bullied child, who saw Zeus as the only one to blame and assigned the rest of the teasers the roles of followers. Olweus (1993, p. 34) characterized these children as 'passive bullies'. The boy's attitude can be explained as an attempt to represent himself as powerful, thus exerting influence over his group of peers, as the following extract indicates:

## Extract 9

I do it because I laugh at him that time (I am doing it) but when I see others to “*koroidouvoun*” him I feel sad because I am thinking and say to myself that all this that is happening is only my own fault. (I created that situation) only for me to laugh just for a few seconds.

(Zeus)

The explanation offered by Zeus seems to fit with the social image of the boy who “*kanei ton magka*”, as his classmates represented him (see chapter eight). It also confirms those studies that argue that exerting control and influence upon others are tactics employed by to gain social prestige among peers (Askew, 1989; Olweus, 1994). However, it could be said that even in such a context of covert boastfulness, Zeus skilfully enwrapped his perceived power within personal feelings of sadness and remorse rather than satisfaction. This may be why he characterized his behaviour as being at fault rather than as a personal success. Such an interpretation accords the claims made by Sutton and his colleagues (1999), who advocated the skilfulness of bullies to manipulate the meanings of their acts to their advantage.

Nelson and Lambert (2001) warn that when bullies account for their actions, they choose to offer explanations that look sensible and acceptable within a specific cultural context. The statements of Zeus, represented in extract 9, indicate that the boy knew that no blame could be assigned to a child who just needed to laugh. Therefore, in his explanation, the boy offered a sensible motive which not only normalized his behaviour, but also excluded any evil from his motivation, as was also supported by the bullied boy himself.

References to their internal states is a common tactic that children who act as bullies adopt in explaining bullying when asked to comment on hypothetical scenarios (Smorti and Giucci, 2000). However, it seems that such references seem to be beneficial for the bullies when real life incidents are concerned. This is because claims about their feelings, intentions, or beliefs cannot be checked for their veracity. It was as a result of such claims that the children who bullied their classmate self-defined as victims of circumstance, as the following subsection explains.

### *Excuses on the part of the follower-bullies*

Within their letters, seven pupils brought up the issues of social modelling and group mechanisms in order to explain their involvement in the group bullying conducted against Ermis. These issues are supported by the literature on bullying as explaining the perpetuation of group bullying (Olweus, 1994; Espelage and Swearer, 2003; Rigby, 2004).

Olweus (1994, p. 1182) has emphasized the role of the ‘social contagion’ as a mechanism in maintenance and reinforcement of group bullying. However, such explanations, although they cannot be denied, seem to imply that children do not act out of free will, especially in cases where coercion is not imposed upon them, as Extract 10 highlights.

### Extract 10

When I koroidevo him (Ermis) nobody tells me to do so but

I see others doing it and I feel like doing it myself.  
(Dimitra)

Therefore, based on a social learning perspective, bullying was constructed by the follower bullies as a ‘learned skill’ (Tedeschi, 1984, p. 12). In line with the social learning approach of explanation, Extract 11 indicates that bullying was represented as a thoughtless and impulsive act by those children who conducted it. The words of Poseidonas, cited below, highlight that ignorance and a lack of self-reflection were the factors from which his behaviour stemmed. However, his claims seemed not to support the behaviour that was systematically carried out for over than one year, as the participants reported during the fieldwork.

#### Extract 11

We call this boy a name. I call him this “*paratsoukli*” not because I want to hurt him but....I can’t answer. I don’t even know how it (the name) comes out of me  
(Poseidonas)

Inability to resist group pressure and the fear of the consequences were also reported by Ira as factors to explain why she denied Ermis participation in the group games of which she was a member. Peer group pressure may explain why some children are involved in bullying (Rigby, 2004). However, the girl actually represented herself as a victim of her own fears rather than of external oppression imposed upon her by her classmates. As Extract 12 represents, what the girl really communicated was the separation of her intention from those of ‘others’. The use of ‘I-

we', as well as 'I-others', linguistic interplays signified she effectively diffused and displaced her responsibility upon those children to whom Ira referred. Furthermore, Extract 12 also shows how effectively the bully self-positioned as different from the culprits. The girl's tactics of exoneration confirm the findings of Nelson and Lambert (2001, p.101), who quote Douglas (1988) in order to argue that bullies often construct a moral image of themselves by 'morally downgrading others'.

#### Extract 12

Many times I myself have done things that I didn't want to do. For example sometimes ( *Ermis*) tries to come closer to us and asks if he can play with us and *we* say no. Deep inside myself I want him to play with us but others don't and so *I* cannot do anything.

(Ira)

Iraklis was the only child who disclosed within his letter that *Ermis* was called "*banana*" by his classmates. As can be seen in Extract 13, Iraklis constructed the bullied boy as problematic, although he also denied personal responsibility for his conduct.

#### Extract 13

I have done something like that. I have teased in a nasty way a child who is in our classroom. I called him "*BANANA*". I did this because this child is problematic and I wanted to "*peiraxo*"<sup>3</sup>. I believe I was drawn into it by the other children who called him so.

(Iraklis)

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<sup>3</sup> To *peiraxo*: to tease someone in a humorous way in order to have fun with his/her responses. The act excludes any malicious motives (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1366)

Extract 13 suggests that the culture of “*paratsoukli*” that characterizes the local, as well as the broader Greek society, culture is reproduced within the children’s groups. Exactly why Ermis was constructed as problematic, as well as how such a construction was used to justify the peers’ bullying against him, will be explained in the following chapter.

As already mentioned, the children who were involved in group bullying tried to make their behaviour understandable instead of attempting to present it as laudable. In doing so, they excused themselves for acting against their classmate, and were self-positioned as ignorant, impulsive, and vulnerable rather than as culprits. Childhood appeared to be flawed within their excuses, and they therefore constructed themselves as expected to be irrational and susceptible to external influences and personal fears. Such self-constructions fitted well within the cultural context in which they were offered (see chapters two, four, and five).

Austin (1970) views excuses as explanations that offenders produce in order to account for their acts. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 76) define excuses as ‘accounts which admit the relevant act was bad in some way, but their performance was influenced or caused by some external agency’. In their letters, seven participants put forward the discourse on others’ culpability in order to set the context against which their own acts needed to be examined. Their verbalizations reproduced the discourse on others’ pathology that was drawn upon when children’s misconduct needed to be justified within the local community.

### **Resolving the problem: the future orientations of the bullies**

Within their letters, the participants constructed bullying as a personal problem that needed to be resolved. Most of them ended their letters by emphasizing how they intended to resolve it, or how they did resolve it. By doing so, they represented themselves as determined to refrain from the reprehensible conduct in the future. However, some of them acknowledge that such attempts were not always successful in terminating bullying in the past.

In their letters, Iraklis, Ira, Dimitra, and Athina stressed the significance of reflection to stop them from bullying Ermis. They explained that after thinking back over their prior behaviour against Ermis, they realized the culpability of it and declared their commitment to change it. Such reports can make a significant contribution in the development of peer support group schemes (Smith, et al., 2007) that form part of a 'humanistic' anti-bullying school policy (Rigby, 1996, p.201).

Interestingly, the words of Athina, represented in the Extract 14, indicate that social exclusion is the result of placing pupils into social categories to which positive value and membership are unequally distributed (Rigby, 2004). Extract 14 indicates that children can understand the existence of societal inequality and how this is reproduced within their own relationships.

## Extract 14

Now, that I am thinking of it again (I believe that) all the children are the same. No matter rich or poor, clever or stupid. We should all play with them.

(Athina)

Chapter eleven will explain how this commitment made by the bullies is a utopia. This is because privileged and non-privileged societal categorization is produced and reproduced within the local community.

Offering apologies as a way of resolving the problem was also reported by Iraklis, Ira, and Zeus; however, the routine act that the three children wrote about in their letters was described by the bullied as far from effective in preventing them from re-offending. For the bullies, saying ‘sorry’ was used as an easy way to restore their social identities, as Extract 15 highlights.

## Extract 15

Now, I can understand this horrible mistake (I have made) and I want to say sorry (to Ermis) and set things right.

(Iraklis)

However, the words of Zeus, included in Extract 16, confirm the meaning of “*sygnomi*”<sup>4</sup>, as conceptualized by the bullied children (and explained

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<sup>4</sup> Sygnomi: say sorry (see chapter nine)



in chapter eight). Moreover, they confirm the findings of Wood (2004, p.567), who viewed the apologies offered by offenders as constituting the ‘honey-moon phase in the cycle of violence’.

#### Extract 16

After I was thinking about it (my behaviour) alone in my room the following day I went and said to him that I was sorry but I am still doing it (“*koroidevo*” him)

#### Summary

In their letters, the participants focused on what mattered most for them in their attempts to represent both their acts and themselves in ways that favoured them. Therefore, both the organization of their narratives and the discursive practices drawn upon were paid particular attention. As far as the description of their acts was concerned, they defined the nasty teasing and social exclusion conducted against Ermis as bullying acts. However, by using highly emotive words such as horrible, wrong, guilt, or conscience, not only did they confirm the deviant character of bullying, but they also positioned themselves in a self-dramatization context. In proposing a point and a counterpoint simultaneously, the participants skillfully displaced responsibility for their acts to others who acted as bad social models. Therefore, they assigned blame upon themselves only for acting impulsively and thoughtlessly, and for being victims of circumstance. The participants who bullied Ermis excused themselves for acting in such a way against their classmate by positioning themselves as children susceptible to the influence of bad social models. The

participants' use of excuses indicates that they understood the wrongfulness of their acts. Their reported commitment to resolve the problem, as well as the importance they placed upon self-reflection, offer important insights that need to be considered before an anti-bullying school policy is developed. However, attention needs to be paid to the manipulative nature of the act of 'saying sorry'. This is because the way the act is used by bullies may perpetuate the coexistence of the bullied and their bullies within the school through the wilful courting of forgiveness. In the interviews that followed the writing of the letters, the pupils were asked to clarify the case of the group bullying against Ermis. Interviews constituted the context in which the pupils' explanations were elaborated and modified. In a face-to-face interaction with me, and in the company of their friends, the accounts offered by the bullies changed. For example, they focused upon the construction of the bullied boy rather than upon themselves, as they had done within their letters. In this way, their acts were either normalized or redefined. Moreover, the excuses they had drawn upon in their letters were rendered into justifications of their reprehensible conduct in the interviews. The following chapter discusses the new themes that were highlighted in the interviews with the bullies.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Interviewing the bullies: a context for blaming Ermis

*They tease him just to have some fun  
because everybody knows that he is a  
“thyma”*

(Ifestos)

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the case of Ermis further. It explores the issues that participants did not include within their letters. Additionally, it explores the perspectives of those pupils who did not write a letter, but were willing to participate in an interview session. The chapter aims to gain a deeper understanding of how language, context, and culture support and shape the articulations of the bullies, as well as how important it was for them to defend their roles. In order to gain such an understanding, the chapter foregrounds the discursive practices adopted by the pupils in the company of their friends, and in a face-to-face interaction with the researcher. I define discursive practices as all those ‘accounting devices’ (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.102) that pupils used in order to normalize, legitimize, and justify their acts in order to make them look sensible and plausible. Therefore, I relate those practices to the local community context, as well as to the broader Greek context. In doing so, I intend to illuminate how cultural knowledge can be used in order to exonerate the bullies from their reprehensible conduct. Although I cannot claim that I could get to the ‘truth’, I drew upon Mckee (2003, p.18), who stresses that ‘there are limits on what seems reasonable in a given culture at a given time’.

The chapter consists of five sections. It starts with some introductory information in order to set the context from which the pupils' accounts were elicited. The second section describes the construction of teasing Ermis as bullying by the interviewees. This section aims to signify how the children shifted the focus of their account from themselves to the victimized boy. In doing so, they represented Ermis as deviant, provocative, and problematic, and also as offering an entertaining spectacle to those who teased him. The third section describes the tactics that the interviewees adopted in order to construct the teasing conducted against Ermis as normal and expected, and, more importantly, as enjoyable for the teased boy himself. In this section, the Greek folk terms and phrases used by the interviewees are highlighted in order to offer an understanding of how language, as a cultural 'tool', can be used to redefine bullying and mask its blameworthy nature. The fourth section points to the tactics used by the interviewees-bullies in order to justify their acts against Ermis. It aims to offer an understanding of how the bullied boy was constructed as deserving to be teased on the grounds of the rhetorics of normality and abnormality that were used by the interviewees. The section also refers to the way in which the specific construction of victimization fits the bullies' attempts at self-exoneration. Furthermore, it raises the issue of girls' bullying in order to emphasize the risk of considering it either as gentle, or even non-existent. The chapter ends by highlighting the main points that have been explored in it.

## **Facing the context of the interview**

The classmates of Ermis were all interviewed in the company of their friends, except for Aris, who was interviewed alone as no other child asked to sit in an interview with him. Zeus, who gave an individual interview, also accompanied his friends (his co-members of group D, see Appendix A) when they were interviewed, as will be described below.

The girls sat in paired interviews which reproduced the dyads they formed, as represented in Appendix A. More analytically, Ira and Afroditi were interviewed together, just as Athina and Dimitra were. Persephoni and Sophia, who had not written in their letters that they teased Ermis, also had a paired interview in which they talked about bullying the boy.

Odysseas and his close friend Iraklis were also interviewed together. Ifestos took part in two sessions, sharing interviews with both Poseidonas and Dionyssos. Zeus was interviewed alone as that was his wish. However, he also accompanied his friends/members of group D when they were interviewed, in keeping with his wish and the wishes of his friends. For reasons of informality, the pupils' choices were welcomed, particularly since the interviews were designed to look more like a natural conversation rather than a formal procedure of investigation, which nevertheless the interviewees had not faced before this fieldwork was conducted.

Although it had been made clear to the participants that interviews would follow the writing of their letters, it was obvious that the pupils found themselves in a difficult situation when interviewed. Apart from the fact that they missed the privacy, safety, and confidentiality that the context of letter writing had offered them, the interviewees had to face a researcher who was eager to learn more than they probably intended to communicate. The pupils also had to offer their views in the company of their friends, and therefore construct their talk in a way so as to fit in the situation at hand. This was more obvious for those pupils who were members of group D. This is because Zeus and Dionyssos, the leaders of group D, were those boys who instigated the bullying incidents against Ermis (see Appendices A and B). Nesdale and Scarlett (2004) stress that the membership of a pupil in the group of the leader-bullies affects the way he/she talks about the phenomenon. In fact, he/she tends to excuse the leader-bullies for their acts, tailoring his/her account to the group norms. On the other hand, those pupils who had not written a letter or had not self-defined as teasers of Ermis in their letters, had to talk about their new roles as bullies as those roles emerged throughout the process of the interview.

It was noteworthy that the groups that the interviewees formed accurately represented the social structure of the peer group, as described in chapter five. This grouping seems to have affected what each child said in the interviews, as will be indicated in the following sections

## Teasing Ermis as bullying

### *A deviant act and a moral issue*

Afroditi, Ira, Athina, Dimitra, Odysseas, and Iraklis, who were not members of group D, followed the same route they had followed within their letters, in the first stages of the interviews. In these early stages, they confirmed that teasing Ermis was a bullying act in so far as the criteria to which they referred fitted the current definitions of bullying (Olweus, 1993; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Such definitions offered by the children confirm the category of ‘illegitimate harassment’ that was used to define bullying in a previous study (Terasahjio and Salmivalli, 2003, p.142) In other words, the six children recognized the culpable nature of their acts, as they had also done in their letters. Moreover, they continued to ascribe blame to those *others* whom they had represented in their letters as agents of their *own* reprehensible conduct. The ‘I-they’ linguistic category that the children had used in their letters was also used in the interviews. This indicates the pupils’ continuous attempts to position themselves as different from those pupils who were blameful, as Extract 1 illustrates.

### Extract 1

Ira        I asked then Ermis when we were sitting on the bench: ‘Ermis do you want *them* to call you banana?’. And he said: ‘No. I have so many names. (surname, first name, pet name). Do *they* need to “*koroidevoun*” me “*banana*”?’ And he was very sad.

Apart from the tactic of displacement of responsibility used by, the diffusion of personal responsibility was also used as an additional tactic

of exoneration from personal blame (Bandura, 1986). Extract 2 shows this point.

## Extract 2

Ira        I was thinking (over my act) and then I said: ‘Why do I “*koroido*” him since he has done nothing bad to me’. Zeus and Dionysos started it and then *we all* started to call him like that. I don’t know... (why I did) probably *we* were influenced.

Extracts 1 and 2 indicate that the opening of the interview sessions constituted a context in which each one of the follower bullies could retain the face of a reliable informer. In this way, the interviewees compensated for the avoidance of assuming personal responsibility for their own acts.

Even Zeus, when interviewed alone, defined his act against Ermis as inflicting pain upon the boy who was teased in a nasty way. The leader-bully did not omit his own negative feelings and his remorse for acting as he did.

## Extract 3

Zeus    I feel bad...I feel responsible for (having done) something bad (that is) to “*koroido*” Ermis  
V N    How do you know that it is bad what you have done?  
Zeus    It is because I see after (my action) that boy (to be) unhappy  
V N    How do you understand that he is unhappy?  
Zeus    It looks (that he is unhappy) on his face



Laughing at a boy who could not defend himself, as Zeus reported he did, made his act fit the stereotypical definition of bullying. In his quotes, the boy highlighted the imbalance of power that existed between himself and Ermis, which is a crucial characteristic of bullying (Besag, 1989; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Extract 4 illustrates how Zeus defined his act as bullying when interviewed alone.

#### Extract 4

- VN        You wrote in your letter: Although I feel worried when I am thinking of it at home when I call him ‘banana’, at school I laugh.  
            Can you tell me more about it?
- Zeus       Well, when I come to school I laugh at the way he reacts. “*Ta hanei*”<sup>1</sup> He does not know what to do. He does funny things and (this is because) I laugh

As was already clear in the early stages of the interviews, children were left free to elaborate upon the issues they wrote about in their letters. They constructed the act against Ermis as illegitimate and reprehensible, for which blame on the culprit perpetrators was ascribed. However, as the interviews proceeded, the focus of their talk was gradually shifted to Ermis, who was represented as ‘faulty’.

#### *The myth of external deviations*

The new terms ‘unfair’ and ‘exploitation’ that the six participants (as indicated above) brought into the interview sessions confirmed the culpable nature of the acts conducted against Ermis. Although the boy’s

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<sup>1</sup> Ta hanei: (he) is embarrassed, he does not know how to react (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1933)

plight was not denied, the interviewees drew upon the personal characteristics of Ermis to make the teasing conducted against him understood. Not only were the words ‘problematic’, ‘his problem’, and ‘special needs’ related to the bullied boy, but they were also used to explain why Ermis was teased by his classmates.

In their reports, Iraklis and Odysseas communicated the message that acts of exploitation and ridicule conducted against children who are deemed as ‘problematic’ by their ‘non-problematic’ peers experience a miserable school reality, confirming previous studies (Besag, 1989; Hugh-Jones and Smith, 1999). Extract 5 makes the point clear.

#### Extract 5

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Iraklis  | I know I did a terrible mistake. I was influenced and drawn into it (teasing Ermis) but I didn’t want to hurt him. I just wanted to have some fun not because that boy is a problematic child but because he reacted in a funny way |
| Odysseas | He could not walk and talk so well when we were in the first grade  |
| Iraklis  | YES, and they exploit a child with special needs.   |

Extract 5 implies that viewing special needs as a good reason for persecution might cause a rush of justified attacks against a whole category of children, rather than just against Ermis.

The construction of the ‘odd student repertoire’ in order to explain bullying (Terasahjo and Salmivalli, 2003, p.147) was brought into the

interviews by the participants. This was evident in the explanations that Afroditi and Ira offered for why Ermis was teased, as Extract 6 shows. Moreover, the quotes offered by the two girls offers clear evidence of how a child who is teased about his 'handicap' can offer a joyful show for the rest of their peers (Salmivalli and Voeten, 2004). The context of self-dramatization in which the participants had placed themselves in their letters was absent from the interview sessions, as Extract 6 implies.

#### Extract 6

- V.N Tell me more about how you were drawn into teasing your classmate.  
Afrod. ZEUS. He is the one who does the most of it. He sends written messages about Ermis and (does) things like that  
Ira We laugh ( with all the things he does)  
Afrod. He imitates Ermis walking. The way Ermis walks. He "*koroidevi*" Ermis for the PROBLEM he has. We laugh. We laugh. Ermis did (once) some movements and Zeus made the same movements in a funny way. And we all laughed. But we (ourselves) laughed not at what HE IS but at his reaction.  
V.N What do you mean 'at what he is'?  
Afrod. Because he is walking somehow in a funny way and his legs are a bit curved ...and I think that's why he cannot walk so well  
Ira And that's why THEY call him "*banana*".

The contextualization of the 'innocent-looking' nick-name '*banana*' confirms the findings of Rigby (2002, p.186), who states that 'limb deformities' is a common topic for which a child can be teased by his/her peers. Furthermore, teasing Ermis was an act in which the peers exchanged meanings exclusively shared by them, thus enhancing their group identity (Land, 2003). This finding confirms the cruelty that an 'innocent-looking' nick name may convey, as argued in chapter seven.

Additionally, the disclaiming rhetoric that Afroditi used in her talk signifies that making fun of someone's physical handicap was a taboo issue in the specific cultural context. Considering both Afroditi's disclaiming rhetoric and Ira's direct explanation regarding what Ermis was teased about, particular attention should be placed on two important issues. The first concerns the fact that looking different was constructed as a problem in that cultural context. The second illustrates that the boy who did not accord with the norms of physicality set by the peer group was assigned a biased social identity (Lahelma, 2004). Jones and Newman (2005, p.435) claim that 'the power of the topic is most likely linked to the shared cultural values regarding the attribute and the importance that is placed on the attribute for self-evaluation'. Interestingly, the explanations offered by the two girls accorded with the explanations that Ermis offered regarding why he was called "*banana*" (as indicated in see chapter eight). Such an explanation contrasts with 'the myth of external deviations', strongly supported by Olweus (1994, p. 1178), to preclude the assumption that children with 'deviating' external characteristics are bullied more than others. Unfortunately, it confirms Griffin and Gross (2004, p. 390), who wrote that 'such myths remain in existence'. It also confirms my assumption that the bullied children viewed themselves as 'faulty' and deserving of what was coming to them (which was stated in chapter eight).

## Normalization of bullying

### *A status- gaining boys' activity*

The 'masculinisation' of bullying (Askew, 1989), a discourse upon which the bullied children drew in order to explain the behaviour of the perpetrators, was also strongly supported by the follower-bullies in the interviews. The boys who were not members of group D, as well as the girls who attended ST2 class, represented those who initiated incidents of teasing as performing in accordance with the existing socio-cultural norms of manly behaviour. Therefore, the interviewees 'masculinised' the phenomenon, a construction not incompatible with the public images of, and the current discourses on, bullying that exist in Greece (which were described and discussed in chapter two). According to the interviewees' quotes, bullying conducted by boys was conceptualised by boys as a representation of skilful and powerful manhood aimed at showing off power rather than hurting (Lahelma, 2002).

### Extract 7

- V N            You said they exploit Ermis.  
Iraklis        Yes. They laugh at him and they *koroidevoun* him  
V N            Why do you think they do it ? Is it funny?  
Odysseas     No, but Zeus and Dionyssos they want to *kanoun tous mages*.  
V N            Meaning?  
Odysseas     to show that they are the most clever, the most powerful, that's why  
Iraklis        And then Aris and Poseidonas they follow because they want to look  
                 like Zeus and Dionyssos.  
V N            Is this the reason why girls call Ermis "*banana*"?  
Iraklis        No, no. Girls just laugh. Its only boys that want to "*kanoun tous magkes*".

Such a representation of bullying confirms previous studies conducted in Greece (Pateraki, 2000; Kourakis, 2004). To emphasise their point, the interviewees made it clear in their articulations that the feminine was missing from the specific discourse of bullying. Considering the smiling faces of the two girls represented in the educational material on bullying prepared in Greece (Motti-Stefanidi and Tsergas, 2000), bullying conducted between girls appears to be masked. Teasing and taunting as practices exchanged by males observed within the local community (as described in chapter four) seem to support such a representation.

Sophia, who was nominated by her classmates as following Persephoni, who initiated acts of teasing and social exclusion against Ermis, also normalized bullying. The girl pointed out that being teased was enjoyed by the teased boy himself. By referring to Ermis' laughter Sophia deliberately left out of our conversation the boy's appeals for the teasing to be stopped. The girl also normalized bullying by pointing to its systematisation, thus representing it as a daily routine.

#### Extract 8

- V N      I saw that Ermis was playing football with the rest of boys during the breaktime.
- Sophia    Yes, they take him in the football play and they say: 'I am taking "*Banana*" with me and you take the other one'.
- VN        How do you label an act when a child is called with a name that is not his real name?
- Sophia    It depends how the child (who is bullied) takes it. For example Ermis likes it
- VN        How do you know that he likes it?
- Sophia    Because (if he didn't like it) when we call him ('*banana*') he wouldn't turn his head. But not only does he turn his head but he laughs too.
- VN        But Ermis told me that he is worried.

Sophia NO, NO! He LIKES it!

Extract 8 implies that selective referencing to facts, as well as representing personal opinions as facts, are tactics that bullies may adopt. In doing so, they aim to propose specific versions of reality for their own benefit. Besides, it implies further that persistency of bullying can facilitate its construction as a ‘normal’ and enjoyable phenomenon to be overlooked, rather than as deviant.

Persephoni, who attended the interview with Sophia, claimed like her friend that longevity of teasing can foster familiarity with the situation rather than suffering from it. Silencing, and avoiding taking the perspective of the teased boy, were tactics that the girl adopted in order to escape giving answers that would contradict the plausibility of her allegations. Extract 9 expands upon the implications discussed in the previous paragraph. Both extracts 8 and 9 show that girls who act as bullies can deploy highly sophisticated skills in order to defend their conduct in a face-to-face conversation with an adult who wants to learn about their acts.

#### Extract 9

- V N Why do you think people have a name?  
Pers. so that others can call them  
V N and be distinguished as human beings from non-human beings such as from fruit for example?  
Pers. (silence)  
V N How do you think a child feels when he is called by the name of a fruit?  
Pers. Good. Besides not only do *they* call him “*Banana*” when they play but

- (they do it) generally, in other places too
- V N      How would you feel if you were called “*Banana*” for a long time by your classmates?
- Pers.     I don’t know. It has never happened to me.

### *Bullying: a “kalampouri”<sup>2</sup>*

The use of ‘euphemistic language’ by offenders in order to shield the reprehensible nature of their conduct is supported by the literature on aggression (Bandura, 1986, p.378). The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (Crowther, 1995, p.394) defines ‘euphemism’ as ‘an expression that is gentler or less direct than the normally used to refer to something unpleasant or embarrassing’. As far as bullying is concerned, the related terminology needs to be scrutinized since it affects the meanings assigned to the phenomenon and the reactions to it, as supported by Tattum (1989).

When Zeus accompanied his friends in the interviews, he commented on his acts as well as on the acts of his co-members. In this context, he used the verb “*peirazo*”<sup>3</sup> in order to define the acts to which he referred. In that way, he differentiated his acts, as well as the acts of his co-members, from those described by the word “*koroidevo*”, which was used by all the participants to describe the bullying video representations (emphasized in chapter six). Instead, the boy used the verb “*koroidevo*” to define the acts of those children who were *not* members of group D.

<sup>2</sup> Kalampouri: fun, a joke (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.815); also see chapter four.

<sup>3</sup> Peirazo: tease for having fun, excluding motives to hurt or insult someone (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1366); also see chapter two.



## Extract 10

- Zeus Odysseas “*koroidevei*” him. I myself as well as Aris we do it just for “*kalambouri*”.
- V N What do you mean *kalambouri*?
- Zeus “*Asteia*”<sup>4</sup>. We don’t *koroidevoume* him. We *mono*<sup>5</sup> *peirazoume* him *philika*” fun. Just for having a good laugh among friends)
- V N Is Ermis among the friends who laughs too?
- Zeus ...Sometimes, he laughs too. Because he knows that we do it “*mono gia plaka*”<sup>6</sup>

As Extract 10 indicates, Zeus used the Greek folk words “*kalampouri*” and “*plaka*” to render the nasty teasing (Smith and Sharp, 1994) humorous and friendly. In this way, suspicions of hostility against Ermis were excluded. These words were also found to be used in Greece by those pupils who account for bullying their classmates in research by Deliyinni et al. (2008). They are also used by the Greek media to define teasing conducted by and against classmates (Onisenko, 2008).

In Zeus’s response (in extract 10, cited above), it is surprising how effectively the leader bully constructed the act of hurtful teasing as an activity that Ermis also enjoyed. Moreover, he constructed his act as strengthening the friendship bonds that existed between the boys, including the victimized boy himself. Furthermore, the word “*mono*”<sup>7</sup> that Zeus intentionally used seems to exclude any alternative explanation of teasing other than that claimed by the interviewee. The use of linguistic ‘games’ in order for the bullies to redefine their relationship with their

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<sup>4</sup> *Asteia*: for fun (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.132).

<sup>5</sup> *Mono*: only (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.561).

<sup>6</sup> *Mono gia plaka*: only for having some fun (see chapter four).

victims and furnish exculpatory motives was also supported by Kowalski (2000).

Extract 10 also emphasizes the role that the victims' responses play in the continuation of their victimization. 'Laughing along with the teaser' (Scambler et al., 1998, p.236) seems to be an ineffective response to terminating bullying. This is because it offers the bullies the opportunity to redefine a distressing behaviour conducted against peers as a joyful game shared among friends, as Extract 10 makes clear.

### *Shedding a supernatural light upon the instigator-bullies*

As the individual interview I conducted with Zeus unfolded, the boy named himself and his best friend Dionyssos (who were both instigators of nasty teasing) "*diavolakia*" <sup>8</sup> rather than "*magkes*", as the rest of the sixth graders labelled them. The specific label used by the boy is a cliché used within the Greek context by adults to represent very naughty, but very clever, children in a humorous way (Harami, 2009, p.84). The boy, who accompanied his 'declaration' with a burst of laughter, appeared to know how to use cultural knowledge for his own benefit. As extract 11 implies, in drawing upon the local cultural discourses of childhood, Zeus endowed himself and his friend with supernatural characteristics that only in games can children claim to possess.

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<sup>8</sup> *Diavolakia*: small devils (Stavropoulos, 1998, p.216).

## Extract 11

- V N Who is the leader within the class. Is it you or Dionyssos?  
Zeus No one (is the leader)  
V N But that's what your classmates told me. Isn't it so?  
Zeus Look. We (me and Dionyssos) just have more ideas (as compared to the rest of the classmates)  
V N What do you mean 'more ideas'?  
Zeus We think of things and others laugh  
VN such as teasing Ermis?  
Zeus Well, we're a bit of "*diavolakia*". And we say something (to do) and others agree.

The 'very excess' used to characterize bullying (Keltner et al., 1998, p. 1234), accompanied by the laughter of the boy in his story, seemed to situate the actors and their acts in a playful frame. Bullies could contradict any suspicions of aggression, harm, and humiliation that only appear in real life situations. Therefore, what needs to be emphasized is that culture makes the storehouse from which rhetorical devices are skilfully drawn by bullies in order to construct their behaviour as a childhood occurrence.

Dionyssos, Ifestos, and Poseidonas, all members of group D, offered a number of reasons to explain why Ermis was teased. They offered their accounts in the company of Zeus, who was recognized by them as the leader of group D. Although the three interviewees did not state directly that they used to tease Ermis, they represented the teased boy as deserving such an experience. Furthermore, the accounts that Persephoni and Sophia offered in the paired interviews indicate that girls' bullying might be crueller than adults believe it to be.

## **Justifying bullying: The deserving victim approach**

### *Teasing as a social punishment for lack of masculinity*

Research on bullying advocates that bullies tend to justify their acts by referring to various factors that make their behaviour look sensible in particular contexts (Hideki, 2002). Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.76) define justifications as ‘accounts that do not involve the denial of responsibility, instead they claim certain actions are in fact good, sensible or at least permissible in the circumstances’. Six children in their interviews tried to explain why teasing and making fun of Ermis were appropriate or reasonable acts in their own right.

Ifestos and Dionyssos drew upon the concept of ideal masculinity in order to explain how the behaviour of Ermis transgressed the existing norms of masculinity. Ifestos explained in the interview that for a boy to act as either a “*mamothrefto*”<sup>9</sup>, or a “*thyma*” and in any way to cajole his teacher was a transgression of the gender norms. The interviewee articulated derogatory remarks about Ermis in order to set the context in which his own act should be examined in order to be understood. On the other hand, Ifestos made an attempt to minimize the effect of his act upon the victim by minimizing its frequency. The points made by Ifestos are illustrated in Extract 12.

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<sup>9</sup> Mamothrefto: mummy’s boy (see chapter nine).

## Extract 12

- V N Do you say to him 'come here, *Banana*'  
Ifestos Not so often...but it gets on my nerves when I hear other children call him (like that) and I see him not to react. He does what others say him to do all the time. For example Zeus, who "*koroiderei*" him, says (to him) 'Go and get a pencil for me and he (Ermis) goes and brings him the pencil. I have never seen before such a "*thyma*"  
V N Mmm...  
Ifestos This boy Ermis is still "*mamothrefto*" (Besides) he "*glyfei*"<sup>10</sup> the teacher all the time  
V N Is that why you call him '*banana*'  
Ifestos (pause)... I don't think a boy should behave like this

During the interview, Ifestos, who was accompanied by his friends Dionyssos and Zeus, clarified that being a "*thyma*"<sup>11</sup> is sufficient in itself to elicit victimization, in particular nasty teasing. According to the boys' responses illustrated in extract 13, victimization was constructed as residing within the personal attributes of the victim. This claim contradicts the view of victimization as the result of an unfair and unequal interaction initiated by the bullies against the bullied (Olweus, 1993).

## Extract 13

- Ifestos I think that when some children are teased it is because other children are jealous of them. But in the case of Ermis it is not out of jealousy. They tease him just to have some fun because everybody knows that he is a "*thyma*"  
V N What do you mean (when you say) 'he is a "*thyma*"'?

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<sup>10</sup> Glyfei: he cajoles (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.424)

<sup>11</sup> Thyma: 1. the person who experiences pain and distress from others acts upon him, without his/her own provoking them.

2. currently used to describe someone who is exploited by others, fool, stupid.  
(Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.761)

Ifestos      Because they know he does not react  
V N          How do you see him?  
Dionyssos   Weak  
V N          Mmm.....  
Ifestos      The whole world can exploit him

As the interview proceeded, the boys specified what a boy should do in order to avoid being the recipient of victimization on the part of his peers. The absence of “*tsambouka*” displayed by Ermis was reported to be the main factor that legitimized the persistent bullying against him.

#### Extract 14

Dionyssos   (This happens to him) because he has no “*tsambouka*”<sup>12</sup>  
Ifestos      (sarcastically) He says: ‘Ehhh. I’ll say everything... (to the teachers)’  
Dionyssos   Instead of saying: ‘What right do you have to tease me’? He should beat them (the teasers). Why is he leaving others to “*koroidouvoun*” him?

The participants drew upon a Greek folk term with to emphasize that the lack of toughness on the part of the victim, which results in physical confrontation with the wrongdoers, can explain the perpetuation of bullying. In their statements, the preadolescent boys seemed to suggest that resorting to the norms of brutality is an effective reaction to bullying, thus confirming findings of a previous research study (Nesdale and Scarlett, 2004).

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<sup>12</sup> *tsambouka*: a folk term used almost synonymously with types of *magkia* used to describe physical assault. The term has been related to physical bullying and display of masculinity within the Greek context ([www.psych-e-gr/bullying.htm.derived](http://www.psych-e-gr/bullying.htm.derived) on 4-10-05); also see chapter two.

As Extract 14 also indicates, the four boys, members of group D, did not claim responsibility for teasing Ermis in a direct way themselves; however, when I asked them how *they* could help their classmate to avoid being exploited, as they themselves said, they also denied personal responsibility for doing so. Instead, they displaced personal responsibility for changing the distressing situation to the victim himself. Therefore, it seems obvious that their allegations contradicted their prior verbalizations in which Ermis had been represented as a weak boy (shown in Extract 13).

Poseidonas stated that he had advised the bullied boy to ask help from the school in order to indicate how he tried to help his classmate. However, the interviewees highlighted in their quotes that such support was in fact perceived as a utopia by them, thus supporting previous claims of the school's unresponsiveness to claims of bullying (reported in chapters seven and eight). Extract 15 indicates the contradictions contained within the bullies' attempts to reward themselves for bullying their classmate.

#### Extract 15

- V N            Why don't you help him to change that bad situation?  
Poseidonas   I tell him (when I see him being teased). Do something on your own. Go  
                  and tell (this) the headmaster  
V N            Do you believe that the school can do something about it?  
Ifestos       (seem to contemplate over it)... The school?  
Poseidonas   I don't think so  
V N            So are you saying that the school has not a role to play?  
Poseidonas   I don't think so (that it can). What can the headmaster do in that case?

Suggestions for macho-type responses to bullying, as well as the justificatory accounts articulated by the interviewees, seem to preclude hopes for the effectiveness of any peer group support scheme developed within Greek schools to counter bullying (Cowie, 1999; Smith et al., 2007).

It is noteworthy that not one of the bullies, members of group D, touched on the sensitive issue of Ermis' handicap in their accounts; instead the four boys either normalized or justified their acts against Ermis by emphasizing aspects of the boy's conduct that were amenable to change. However, the two girls Perspehoni and Afroditi offered accounts in which Ermis was represented as worthy of being subjected to ridicule and humiliation on the part of his classmates, as the following sub-section explains.

#### *Teasing as humiliation for Ermis' 'problematic history'*

Justifications for teasing Ermis were also identified within the accounts that Sophia and Persephoni offered in the paired interview they had with me. The girls related the cause of bullying conducted against Ermis exclusively to the boy's characteristics. The two friends either stressed Ermis' handicap, or criticized the boy's mannerisms in order to justify their own acts.

Despite the fact that no reference to teasing Ermis had been made in any of the two girls' letters, when the case of Ermis was raised in the



interview sessions, the two girls did not deny bullying him. Specifically, they admitted that they either made fun of the boy, or excluded him from taking part in the girls' group games. Instead, punctuating their articulations with bouts of sarcasm, yelling, and laughing, Persephoni and Sophia constructed their talk around the concept of an 'odd' child.

The oddness which their justificatory accounts were based upon was constructed both in terms of the child's physicality, and his mannerism, thus confirming previous studies (Scambler et al., 1998; Bosacki et al., 2006, Kowalski, 2000). What differentiated their accounts from those of the rest of their classmates was the fact that there was no visible sign of remorse for their acts. Neither were such verbalizations pronounced by any one of the rest of the sixth graders.

On the contrary, instead of showing remorse, the girls insisted on recounting how much they enjoyed the acts they had conducted against Ermis. By doing so, they seemed to attempt to introduce the researcher into a context in which Ermis was constructed as a person deserving to be ridiculed. Extract 16 represents how skilfully Sophia and Persephoni defended their behaviour, which conveyed connotations of the boy's deviant masculinity.

#### Extract 16

- V N      Some children told me that a girl from your class put some perfume spray on Ermis one day.  
Sophia    (bursting into laughs) Oh, Yes. Yes. It was me. I did it. (she laughs again)

Pers. It was not only to Ermis (that she put perfume on). She did it to Athina too.  
 V N Was it for women?  
 Sophia Yes  
 V N How it happened?  
 Sophia He was standing next to me and he stepped on my shoe and I told him 'If you keep on stepping on my shoe I'll put perfume on you (both girls are again bursting into laughs)  
 Sophia He was laughing too.  
 V N Can you imagine what Ermis might have been thinking?  
 Pers. Look. He enters into the girls' toilets. He follows us everywhere  
 V N Why do you think he is doing so?  
 (No answer. Laughs again from the two girls)  
 Sophia He is walking crookedly. He's got a problem  
 (laughter again from both girls)

Although Sophia constructed her act as a game, Persephoni offered additional evidence to suggest that she did in fact acknowledge responsibility for bullying Ermis for his anti-conformist mannerisms. Sophia additionally brought what she called Ermis' 'problem' into the conversation. Laughter seemed to conceal the girls' aggressive attitudes, and the paired interview was a context for the bully-girls to support each other's allegations.

Drawing upon cultural norms was a route through which the two girls justified their denial of Ermis' participation in their games, and made their behaviour appear to be sensible and conform to the existing social conventions. Not only did they represent themselves as attempting to impart social knowledge to the boy, but as also being conservers of cultural wisdom, as Extract 17 indicates.

## Extract 17

- V N      Do you play with Ermis?
- Pers.     Regularly
- V N      Because a girl told me that you don't take him into your games when he asks for it
- Pers.     Ehh, sometimes we play with him but he plays all the time with girls and this annoys us
- Sophia   YES (it does and it annoys us)
- V N      Don't YOU play with boys?
- Pers.     Yes, we do
- Sophia   But one boy to play with six girls? (is it normal?)
- V N      What is the problem with that? I can't understand
- Sophia   Six girls and one boy? (in a game) ehh... "*den paei*"<sup>13</sup>

As the interview proceeded, the two interviewees recounted a series of past events, perhaps with the aim to offer additional evidence that their acts needed to be understood in relation to Ermis' 'problematic history'. As Extract 18 makes clear, both Sophia and Persephoni offered accounts that overwhelmingly stressed the boy's deviation from biological norms and socio-cultural conventions.

## Extract 18

- V N      Do you call him with 'that name'?
- Sophia   The whole class call him
- Pers.     (when we were) in the second grade he asked the teacher to let him go to the toilet and she (the teacher) said 'No' and... (laughing) he peed on his pants
- Sophia   He did it again (when we were) in the third grade (they both burst into laughter again)
- V N      It might be the teacher's fault that she did not let him go to the toilet when he needed to
- Pers.     But the bell had already rung (break time had been finished)...And ... another time he shitted on his pants (laughing) and the whole classroom

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<sup>13</sup> Den paei: it is against the existing norms, it is not right (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1348).

stinked. It is clear that he's got a problem  
Sophia And he puts vinegar on his hair (both girls laugh)

Noteworthy is the fact that the two interviewees made a marked effort to attribute 'fault' to the bullied boy, and to bring it to the attention of the researcher. Drawing upon any one single characteristic of the boy, they seemed to have the aim to construct his 'deviance' as worthy of humiliation (Lahelma, 2004). Their laughter, a significant feature mediating their talk, reminded me of the girls' smiling faces represented within the educational material on bullying prepared by the Ministry of Education in Greece (described in chapter two). This finding suggests that girls' smiling faces do not preclude them from behaving more aggressively than the two red-faced boys who have just come out of fighting, thus overemphasizing their masculinity.

## **Summary**

An examination of the accounts that the children offered in the interview sessions, accompanied by their friends, showed that their talk was focused upon the victim rather than upon themselves. Ermis was represented as weird, deviant, and problematic, and thus worthy of being socially punished, ridiculed, or made fun of. In addition, the group of boys of which the leader-bullies were members redefined and normalized their behaviours through language games and culture based articulations. Within those articulations, the bullied boy became a friend, a weak and unsupported boy, and a child who shared in a joyful game with his teasers, thus reconfiguring the power relationships between themselves

and the victim. Justifications offered on the part of the leader-bullies in the company of their close friends were shaped by, and framed within, cultural discourses on gender, normality, and abnormality. In this way, the perpetrators of teasing self-positioned as ‘crusaders of societal canonicity’, thereby as conformists rather than deviants. The responses of Persephoni and Sophia revealed a feminine cruelty communicated through the representation of a conformist self. The girls’ deployment of highly sophisticated social skills suggests that girls’ bullying needs to be unmasked through highly sensitive methods, such as the examination of the linguistic and paralinguistic defensive mechanisms bully-girls employ. The following chapter discusses the general conclusions derived from the present thesis, and proposes the related recommendations. Furthermore, the limitations of this study are acknowledged through reflective considerations over the whole process, and suggestions for further research on bullying are made.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

#### **Introduction**

This is the final chapter of the present thesis that brings together the main findings of the research study. It aims to offer an understanding of how these findings relate to the research questions, but also goes further to discuss additional bullying-related issues of interest. In this chapter, suggestions are also made in order to link these findings to Greek society. The chapter consists of four sections. In the first section, the existence of bullying in Greek schools is acknowledged, thus confirming previous studies. This section focuses upon the issue of the definition of bullying, and critically discusses the importance that should be placed upon the related criteria and the Greek terminology used in order to highlight the complexity surrounding the conceptualization of bullying. The second section refers to the issue of the explanations of bullying in order to emphasize the implications conveyed through these explanations. In particular, it criticizes the relation of these implications to Greek schools and Greek society. In doing so, the second section argues that the role existing cultural resources play not only supports the bullies' allegations, but also their behaviour. The third section represents the bullied children's responses to their experiences, and points to underlying factors. Within this section, the issue of context is discussed, as well as how different contexts intersect and shape the meanings that acts of bullying are assigned in Greece. Furthermore, suggestions regarding the phenomenon of bullying are made with reference to the local societies and schools that make part of these societies. The last section refers to the

limitations of this fieldwork and makes recommendations for future research studies.

## **Situating bullying in the Greek context**

### *Awareness and definitions*

Analysis of the data generated from the pupils' letters, interviews and conversations I had with them and with their teachers confirm the existence of bullying within the Greek school (Sapouna, 2008). More specifically, the participants recognized nasty teasing and social exclusionary tactics that were represented on the video tape as constituting part of their school life. Although the absence of a specific Greek word to characterize the phenomenon seen in the video was clear, the pupils situated nasty teasing and social exclusion within the Greek context through the use of the Greek words "*koroido*" and "*parato*". Moreover, within their letters and in the interview sessions, the pupils extended their awareness of bullying by reporting systematic acts of swearing and rumour-spreading that they themselves had experienced. This finding suggests that it would be better for children in Greece to be offered a list of acts to talk about, rather than being asked whether or not they experience bullying or "*ekfovismos*" when exploring the existence of the phenomenon in the Greek schools (Kalliotis, 2000; Thompson et al., 2002).

With regards to the issue of definition, findings from the cross-examination of the participants' reports indicate that it is a highly

complicated issue. The complexity that surrounds the definition of bullying is highlighted in a specific case of teasing. Findings from the exploration of Ermis' case emphasise that teasing is constructed as a deviant, normal, meaningful, and meaningless behaviour, thus underlining the highly relativistic nature of the definitions offered (Pawluck, 1989; Smith, 2004).

However, as the findings indicate, the constructions of teasing are context and culture-bound. More specifically, in this study these constructions were found to be linked to the types of incidents the participants experienced and the gender of the participants, as well as the circumstances under which the definitions were offered. Besides, of uppermost importance was the fact that the definitions offered of real life bullying incidents also related to the actual roles that the participants took up in those incidents. This finding suggests that definitions of bullying offered at a general or hypothetical level might be different from those offered for a specific incident embedded within a real life context (Arora, 1996).

In other words, as the findings indicate, the definitions that the children offer for hypothetical bullying situations may not actually accord with the various subjective meanings that children assign to real life bullying incidents. Generally speaking, we could say that children can understand the difference between the 'ideal' and the 'real', and therefore modify their definitions across contexts accordingly. Therefore, it seems important that those concerned should consider the criteria that children draw upon when they offer definitions of bullying across contexts.



The pupils' responses to the representations in the bullying video clearly emphasized that the negative feelings inflicted upon the victims constitute a sufficient criterion for behaviour to be defined as bullying. Furthermore, such behaviour was strongly disapproved of and condemned. However, the participants' accounts indicate that their *own* bullying experiences, when described and explained, may be far from that simple. This is because in the participants' reports, the vocabularies, including contrasting evaluative terms, that were used and different criteria that were associated with the phenomenon were projected or shielded. Additionally, the children's narratives were structured in particular ways, and the use of specific rhetorical devices was found to contribute to the construction of shifting bullying realities.

The pupils' reports highlight that the negative impact specific acts have upon their lives on the one hand, and the motives underlying these acts on the other hand, form the two basic criteria that separate the definitions offered by the bullied and the bullies. However, this separation concerns definitions offered for real life incidents in which children take up either the roles of the victims or the bullies, rather than for hypothetical bullying scenarios.

Being teased in a nasty way, sworn at, denied participation in games, or being gossiped about bestow upon the children who are attacked feelings of unfairness, sadness, devaluation, anger, unhappiness, and even self-blame. For the leader bullies, in explaining their motives it seems adequate to normalize or justify their acts against their peers. The pupils who act as bullies, but do not initiate the behaviour itself, take up a

middle position. This is why they bring into their definitions their own negative feelings on the one hand, whilst on the other hand emphasising their non-malicious motives.

This finding may imply that a definition of bullying that includes both the intention to harm (Tattum, 1993) and real harm upon the victims (Olweus, 1993) is unrealistic when applied to real life bullying incidents. Here, the definition of bullying applied to a specific real life incident seems to exist in the accounts offered by those involved in it. However, the two basic criteria, referred to above, and the way these are used by the ‘actors’ might be useful conceptual tools to enable the identification of the different roles that children take up in the same bullying incident. Therefore, the question to be raised before asking for definitions of bullying is “*whose definitions do we ask for?*”

### *Does frequency matter?*

Analysis of the sixth graders’ reports indicates that no particular attention is paid to the frequency of the attacks when bullying is defined at a hypothetical or non-personalized level (Naylor et al., 2006). However, where real life situations are concerned, frequency has a significant role to play, for four basic reasons. Firstly, there are those pupils who are persistently teased or harassed who report negative feelings, such as anger, sadness and emotional misery. Secondly, the exploration of Ermis’ case indicates that it is the frequency of attacks upon a child that constructs him as a “*thyma*” amongst his peers, and as thus susceptible to, and worthy of, continuous victimization. Thirdly, the systematization of

attacks seems to affect the bullied pupils' responses to their experiences, as the participants viewed the futility of trying to alter the distressing situation of being bullied (Graig et al., 2007). Such a view in turn may lead them to adopt responses such as ignorance, tolerance, or re-definition of the situation, thus adjusting themselves to the role of 'continuing victims' (Smith et al., 2004a, p.565). Finally, frequency might be effectively used by the bullies in their discursive tactics with the aim to minimize the systematization of their attacks, thus downplaying the impact of their conduct upon the bullied.

From what is stated above, it is clear that although one-off bullying incidents can be experienced as highly distressing phenomena (Stephenson and Smith, 1989), frequency does make a significant contribution to the maintenance and the reinforcement of bullying, apart from the fact that it results in the bullied children's emotional distress (Graig et al., 2007). This finding justifies the current definitions of bullying offered by researchers, and the significance that they place upon frequency of attacks as a criterion considered when these definitions are offered (Olweus, 1993; Lane, 1989; Morita et al., 1999). In other words, the findings of this study indicate that schools in Greece need to include the frequency of attacks as a basic constituent of their definitions of bullying (Houndoumadi and Pateraki, 2001). Therefore, teachers need to ask pupils to specify the frequency of attacks conducted against them when they claim that they are recipients of bullying.

### *Imbalance of power: the difficulty of identification*

Findings of this fieldwork point out that systematization of bullying attacks is closely linked to the imbalance of power that exists between the bullied and their perpetrators (Smith and Sharp, 1994; Elinoff et al., 2004). However, this study indicates the difficulty of those boys involved in bullying incidents in identifying the existence of a power imbalance in real life incidents. Findings from the analysis of the accounts that the bullied boys offered strongly support that being viewed as powerless or as victims is denied and masked by any means. This is because such self-representation contradicts the peer group norms, as well as the norms of masculinity set by the local, as well as the wider, Greek society.

The 'case of Ermis' additionally implies that power and weakness are shifting positions that boys and girls assign themselves interchangeably. This is because they wish their allegations to fit contexts and fulfil personal goals. As a result, the picture of the situation at hand is often blurred, and the adults' attention is probably deflected from those situations in which the 'power' of the bullied children is abused (Smith and Sharp, 1994). In such a case, school disciplinary measures might be mistakenly taken to tackle conflicts among 'equals', rather than bullying. In practice, these measures seem unproductive in tackling bullying (Green, 2006).

However, the lack of power of the victimized children compared to the bullies is illustrated in the representations of the societal categories into which the bullied children are positioned. As discussed in chapters six,

eight, ten, and eleven, the children's reports reproduced the societal representations of the 'deviant' and the 'inferior' that exist within Greek society, as also discussed in chapter four. On the other hand, the participants who were bullied seemed to recognize the power of the bullies. This power was viewed as the latter's skilfulness to adopt a repertoire of tactics for gaining the approval of, or conformity with, a number of peers (Sutton, 2001; Rigby, 2004).

Therefore, school interventions that aim to disintegrate groups by separating the instigator bullies from their followers would not bring effective results if the school does not consider its own role in promoting cultures in which the leader-bullies' skills are developed, encouraged, and positively valued (Askew, 1989; Rodkin, et al., 2006). Besides, the bullied pupils' reports suggest that a bully without allies might find it difficult to bully. Therefore, the school should also place concern upon the role that the social structure of the peer group plays in the existence and maintenance of bullying (Rodkin and Hodges, 2003).

An important finding of this study is that children in Greece seem to recognize social ostracism as the most threatening and painful experience they can face. This seems quite expected in a collectivistic society in which group membership is of uppermost importance, as already stated in chapter four. Furthermore, this finding also reveals that social exclusion is a serious act of bullying, and it should be addressed by schools as such (Boulton and Hawker, 1997).

### *The construct of 'motives' in the service of different goals*

The present study emphasized that not one of the participants reported that those children who were nominated as those who “*kanoun tous magkes*” (see chapters, two, and eight) wanted in any way to hurt their targets. This perspective confirms that the perpetrators were viewed as acting in accordance with what Rigby (2002, p. 49) defines as ‘non-malign’ bullying. Non-malicious motives were claimed by all the participants to underlie the behaviour of the bullies. This seems expected in the particular local community. This is because such a view fitted well within the existing local discourses of “*paratsouklī*” and masculinity, which recognize teasing and taunting as practices of males’ socialization, as explored in chapter four. Furthermore, when interdependence and familiarity was viewed as characterizing the pupils’ relationships, such a perception can be quite legitimate.

However, the absence of the feelings of hostility and malice from those who “*kanoun tous magkes*” mentioned by all the children in this study, can be viewed as serving the different personal goals of the informants. For instance, it can justify why the victims reacted in particular ways rather than others. It can also be used by the bullies’ in order to normalize their behaviour, and by the follower bullies to exempt themselves from assuming personal responsibility for their involvement in bullying incidents, as discussed in chapters ten and eleven.

In fact, the context of cohesion and familiarity pervading the local and the school community may be considered to *mask* rather than prevent the

deployment of aggressive motives on the part of the bullies. Therefore, neither pupils' everyday contact, nor moralistic recommendations on the part of their schools, appear sufficient to safeguard interchanges of feelings of love and benevolence among schoolmates.

### *Terminology as either masking or clarifying bullying*

The ambiguity that surrounds the definition of bullying is obvious in the case of teasing and the related terminology. Highly emotive words, as well as what can be labelled as 'light-hearted' words, can construct meanings, roles, and contexts, as the exploration of the case of Ermis indicates.

The Greek terms "*koroidevo*" and "*vrizo*" frame the specific ways in which nasty teasing and swearing are deployed. Therefore, the need for these to be uncovered and clarified is necessary, since clarification will offer evidence of the specific types of bullying some children are recipients of. Moreover, it will also raise the question of why specific types of bullying are more prevalent than others, offering an understanding of the meanings specific acts take up in specific contexts.

Clarification of the code labels (e.g. *banana*, *Loustros*, *aderfi*) assigned to the bullied children should not be overlooked and underlying meanings left unexplored. Findings indicate that such exploration illuminates existing cultural norms (Pawluck, 1989; Elsea and Muchtar, 2000), thus highlighting what is valued or devalued within particular Greek

communities. Such a recommendation aims to point out that the ‘innocent-looking’ or childish terminology used by pupils is informed by culture, and brings to the attention of an audience what is viewed as deviant and unacceptable. In addition, it suggests that, through the use of figurative language, code labels shield children’s attitudes towards ‘sensitive’ societal issues.

The Greek words “*magkas*” and “*tsampoukas*” situate bullying within the local and the broader Greek context, as discussed in chapter two. Through the semantic connotations of these two words, the participants clarified how verbal and physical bullying are masculinised. Such ‘masculinisation’ seems to construct those boys who conduct physical and verbal bullying against their peers as conformists to, rather than deviants from, the socio-cultural demands of Greek society (Archer, 2001). However, the number of negative nominations that Priamos received from his classmates (see Appendix A) indicates that not all manifestations of “*magkia*” are viewed as conformist.

On the other hand, the labels “*gries koutsompoles*” and “*katiniasma*” assigned to girls normalize gossiping as women’s oral culture. Therefore, it may be right to say that gossiping is recognized in Greece as a means through which males are separated from females.



## Explanations of bullying

The various discourses that the pupils produced to explain bullying in a personalized context indicate that preadolescents can understand that the occurrence, maintenance, and perpetuation of bullying is rewarded by a complicated network of personal socio-cultural and school factors. This finding signifies the importance for the school to develop an integrated anti-bullying policy (Smith and Shue, 2000; Swearer and Doll, 2001), rather than placing blame either upon the bullies or the victims, or even upon their families.

Among the discourses produced by the participants in order to explain the acts of nasty teasing and social exclusion, the one referring to a deserving victim was the dominant one. Paradoxically, this explanation was found to exist across contexts and situations. The deserving victim perspective, which was so apparent within the bullied pupils' reports, is worthy of serious consideration. This is because it may create the category of 'hidden victims', who refrain from disclosing their distressing bullying experiences (Joscelyne & Holtuum, 2006), as described in chapter nine. A deserving victim who is worthy of being teased seems to accord with the cultural practice of "*paratsouklia*" supported by the local and broader Greek society, as discussed in chapters four and seven. Therefore, differences of the victims in terms of their appearance, ability, behaviour, or ethnicity, either conceptualized or constructed by the perpetrators of bullying, seem to reproduce the discourse on "*kousouria*", described in chapter four. Schools need to seriously consider the particular explanation, and how this is embedded within Greek culture. This is

because it may offer a sound rationale for those children who act as bullies to carry out their activities within Greek schools.

The interview session with Persephoni and Sophia showed that the discourse of a deserving or deviant victim that the two girls drew upon in order to justify their conduct, allowed them to continuously expand the borders of 'abnormality'. Such an expansion maximizes the risks for any pupil who is picked on to fall within these borders. Furthermore, it can offer legitimate rationales for bullying to be conducted against the societal notions of disability, race, and ethnicity, rather than against individuals per se.

The non-malevolent motives perspective, as consensually emphasized by the participants in this study, clearly normalizes, and even downgrades, reprehensible acts conducted by boys. Such a perspective framed by culture, as Ermis' case showed, may warn that the teasing and ridicule of some children constitute most of the ordinary activity within Greek schools. The 'masculinisation' of bullying that reproduces folk knowledge, combined with the discourse of the deserving victim, may construct types of bullying as being inevitable, legitimate, and probably unchangeable. This finding represents the miserable reality that may exist within a number of Greek schools. This is because it is supported by the discourse on "*kousouria*", and the one of the "*magkas*", that exist within Greek society, as discussed in chapters two, four, seven, and eight.

The criticism directed at schools for offering the enabling structures for bullying to occur, as well as for failing to offer support to the bullied children, signifies that the latter continued to place hope and positive expectations on the teachers' help. It was in the interview sessions that the bullied acknowledged their need for support, which suggests that when the children view schools as places in which they are listened to, respected for, and taken care of, self-disclosures of bullying experiences may be made.

The use of excuses and justifications as 'mechanisms' adopted by the bullies to explain their acts and defend their social identities, could serve as a warning to Greek society to reconsider the discourse of an immature, thoughtless, and innocent childhood. Analysis of data from the letters and interviews emphasises the children's sophisticated skills in negotiate their bullying realities. This finding suggests that children's accounts should not be considered as a transparent lens through which children's inner thoughts can be seen by adults. Instead, language should be viewed as a social means for accomplishing personal goals. Therefore, children's accounts need to be thoroughly scrutinized.

This perspective of viewing language suggests that Greek teachers' training to tackle school bullying should empower their skills so that they can identify and understand why multiple discursive practices are adopted by either the bullies or the victims.

The ‘case of Ermis’, described through the written narratives and accounts of the pupils attending ST2 class, set the context in which to understand how language and cultural knowledge are put together to fit the bullies’ individual and shared goals. Clearly, evidence generated from the letters and the interviews of the pupils who persistently bullied Ermis, highlights a number of language tactics used by the children in order to emphasize their importance in the multiple constructions of bullying. Moreover, what seems to relate children’s bullying to the broader socio-cultural context is the specific language tactics that are supported by the existing cultural resources.

What is referred to in the previous paragraph does not mean to imply that children passively copy adult culture in order to construct their own rules. Instead, what is implied here, as also emphasized in chapter eleven, is concerned with the pupils’ skills to draw upon the specific cultural resources available in order to produce accounts that look plausible to legitimise their acts.

The ‘case of Ermis’ indicates that children in Greece may not pay particular attention to group bullying. Analysis of the pupils’ accounts indicates that leader-bullies were the only ones to be assigned responsibility and blame for the phenomenon. The rest of the children who were involved in the group activity were viewed as either conforming to the norms of friendship, or acting under the power of social influence. Such an approach to theorizing group bullying confirms the social representation of the “*magkes*” within the Greek context, who is assigned responsibility for bullying conducted on a group basis

(Kourakis, 2004). This approach excuses the rest of the group members from assuming personal responsibility for their behaviour, a point that needs particular attention. Schools need to inform pupils about the roles that peers who act alongside the leader-bullies play in forwarding an anti-bullying or pro-bullying school ethos (Salmivalli et al., 1998; Graig et al., 2000; Twemlow, et al, 2004). Salmivalli et al. (1996a), as well as Rodkin et al. (2006), advocate that particular attention should be paid to the construction of the peer group, since it holds visible cues for the development of particular group identities. Olweus (1994) also views the peer group structure as developing mechanisms that promote the existence of group bullying within schools.

Explanations of bullying that exist amongst girls situate gossiping and social exclusion within the discourse of a feminine secretive and antagonistic culture, as the girls themselves reported. These explanations seem to be culture-informed, and in some way normalize the specific acts. The word “*Katiniasma*” used by boys to characterize girls’ behaviour, as reported in chapter seven, implies that the gossiping and social exclusion that stems from feminine rivalry are expected phenomena. However, the exploration of Ermis’ case signifies that girls’ non-aggressive image, as discussed in chapter two, might be a common myth that exists in Greece.

Owing to this indicative evidence, it is suggested that schools in Greece might need to develop more ‘sensitive’ processes, such as interviews, rather than administering questionnaires or adopting observation methods in order to identify bullying conducted by girls. This will deepen our understanding of the contribution of girls to the overall picture of juvenile

aggression that exists in the Greek schools (Petropoulos and Papastylianou, 2001).

### **Responses to bullying**

As the findings of the present study indicate, the children who reported being frequent targets of peer bullying responded to the attacks conducted against them in various ways. Analysis of the accounts that the pupils offered in order to rationalize their responses to bullying suggests that what adults view as effective coping strategies to bullying may not actually be viewed as such by children.

This is because the pupils' decisions to respond in particular ways seem to be informed by different, yet interrelated, factors (Hunter and Boyle, 2004; Mishna and Ramonna, 2005). The factors affecting and shaping the children's responses relate to the meaning assigned to the bullying act experienced, the outcomes expected from particular responses, and the availability of choices, as well as to the peer group norms. Moreover, they also appear to be informed and affected by the broader socio-cultural norms of the community in which the participants live and socialize. Cultural representations of what it means to be a boy or a girl, for example, seemed to override any other reason why a specific response was adopted. This was obvious, for instance, in the case of defending their family's reputation, as described in chapter nine.

Cultural representations of gender also were found to affect the ways in which pupils represented themselves when asked to offer rationales

concerning their responses to bullying. It is within those rationales that boys who were bullied, instead of defining themselves as weak, soft, or non-capable, represented themselves as friends, merciful', sensitive, and "*philotimoī*", as stated in chapter nine.

The girls, on the other hand, talked of justice and pain to justify their aggressive responses, or talked about their responses as conforming to religious values, as discussed in chapter nine. Therefore, it appears that culture, through the dominant discourses on acceptable social identities and religion, offer a sound resource for the bullied children to draw upon in order to base their self-representations upon sensible-looking rationales.

Peer group norms also affect a child's decision to avoid personal disclosures to teachers, thus refraining from breaking the ethos of secrecy surrounding the world of children. The bullied children were aware of the fact that that any one of them who facilitated adults' intrusion within this world would be called "*a karfī*" (explained in chapter seven,) by the rest of the peers.

What was stated in the previous paragraphs seems to suggest that teachers need to understand what factors underlie pupils' decisions to respond in particular ways, rather than those suggested by adults. The school also needs to reflect upon the values underlying the pupils' responses, and how these values are promoted throughout school's everyday routines (Leach, 2003).

The present thesis aims to communicate that the meanings of bullying are not idiosyncratic, and do not exclusively reside within pupils' heads. Instead, they are shaped and affected by a network of interrelated contexts; those being cultural, social, and organizational. Data from the pupils' letters and interviews additionally emphasised that the circumstances under which accounts and meanings are constructed make a difference to what is reported, as well as how it is reported. This raises the question of whether 'quality circles' (Cowie and Sharp, 1994, p.84) are an effective means to explore the pupils' perspectives, rather than identifying how pupils are influenced by the presence of peers or the leader bullies.

Greek schools might need to re-consider their roles in creating "*thymata*"<sup>1</sup> by overstressing group cohesion and interdependence through the processes of reconciliation that encourages submissive tendencies for the maintenance of group membership. Discourses on tolerance and forgiveness should re-set their limitations, otherwise the bullied will remain trapped within their miserable realities, hoping for a reward from God to compensate for their resistance to pain.

Reproduction of gendered identities and roles not only normalises and justifies acts of bullying, but also inhibits the identification of its existence on the part of the school. For instance, victimized boys who self-position as angry, tough, and non-submissive may mask their victimization, as well as the power of the bullies. Such a position

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<sup>1</sup> Thymata: victims (see chapter nine)



enhances the bullies' tactic of exonerating themselves from a culpable act, and shields the existence of the phenomenon.

Cultures dominating in local communities or the wider Greek society seem to affect the meanings of bullying (Hatty, 2000; Nesdale and Naitto, 2005). They offer the framework of pupils' references with regard to bullying. It is within those contexts that jokes, nicknames, practices, justifications, or excuses are used, and the responses adopted by children are rendered meaningful and acceptable. This raises the question of how social representations of gender, disability, ethnicity, and race are embedded within the discourses of normality and abnormality. The case of Ermis emphasizes the need for the discourses on normality and abnormality to be re-examined within the Greek society, and how these are promoted and reinforced through the practice of assigning "*paratsouklia*".

It is important for Greek society to reconsider how the social representations of the "*magkas*", or the ideal of a conformist female, constitute the core of much bullying that occurs between pupils. Schools' interventions to tackle bullying are deemed to be unproductive when the qualities attributed to the bullies are positively valued in a particular society (see Appendix D and E). On the other hand, such social representations may result in many boys affiliating with those who "*kanoun tous magkes*", and copy their behaviour out of fear of being viewed as non-masculine.

## **Limitations of this study and suggestions for future studies**

As with all research, the present study has some limitations, which will be described below. This thesis represents a fieldwork conducted in a specific school, at a specific place and time, with a specific sample of participants under specific circumstances. Considering these constraints, it is hard to know how far the findings of this study can be generalized. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to include a wider number of schools, participants, and socio-cultural contexts to ensure the applicability of findings in other cultural contexts, or in the broader Greek context.

Cuba and Lincoln (2000) advocate that generalization in qualitative research is not possible. Indeed, if generalization of findings is defined in strict statistical terms, it is clear that such generalization cannot be claimed in the present research study. However, in demonstrating the specific, this case study also says something about the general. This is because, although only a part of Greek society is represented in the present thesis, its relation to the broader Greek society was also made clear. Through the thick description (I offered) of aspects of the local community, which was embedded within the broader Greek context, the school, and the pupils, I moved progressively from a general socio-cultural frame of reference to the specific, in order to indicate how the latter is related to the former. The present study focuses on a local society in a rural area of Greece, where the macho-type model is quite strong and the “*paratsoukli*” is a dominant characteristic of the localized culture. Cross-checking of the data indicates that there is a correspondence between the pupils’ perspectives of bullying, and the cultural

representations of bullying in the wider community as discussed in chapter four, although this finding cannot guarantee that it will be the case elsewhere.

Therefore, instead of claiming to find causal explanations through the establishment of relationships between variables, as this was not the aim of the present study, I can say that I brought to the surface the relevance of the unique to the universal. From this perspective, I consider the findings of this study to be generalisable at a moderate level, whilst supporting issues of more general interest, such as how cultural differences influence the degree of tolerance towards social phenomena. Williams (2000, p.221) argues for 'moderatum' generalisations of qualitative studies in order to stress that generalisation claims in interpretive studies are unjustified beyond this level.

In the present fieldwork, the sample was purposive and convenient as in most qualitative studies. As such, it cannot claim representativeness, and thus guarantee empirical generalisations. Change in the focus of the present fieldwork, not pre-conceived, required the size of the sample to also change. In the exploration of Ermis' case, for example, only those pupils who were involved as bullies were interviewed. However, this decrease in the number of informants facilitated an understanding of their 'linguistic devices' and the processes through which these were generated. Therefore, although the nature and the size of the sample does not allow for 'typical' generalisations, it allows for the most plausible interpretations in focusing on depth at the expense of length. Further research needs to focus upon the findings offered in the exploration of

this particular case study in order to confirm or deny the plausibility of the present findings. For example, it should focus on whether or not cultural resources different from those used by the Greeks are drawn upon by pupils of non-Greek ethnic background in order to justify bullying.

Regarding the methods used for data collection, it could be said that the specific video tape on bullying may have affected the participants' responses to it. As also described in chapter three, the contextual cues, such as sad music and the sad facial expressions of the actors, as well as the words shown on the video tape, might have in some way lead pupils towards particular responses. The biased representations of the victims (wearing eye-glasses, being fat, being a different colour) might have resulted in the 'different victim' explanation of bullying offered by the participants. Thus, it would be useful for future studies to let children be free to draw a bullying incident in which their own representations would be depicted (Hantler, 1994). Furthermore, a questionnaire including more acts that are considered to constitute bullying would enable pupils to talk about more acts than those projected through the video tape (Boulton, et al., 2001). A different video tape can also be used in order to confirm or reject the findings gained from the playing of the one used in the present research study.

In terms of the analytical procedures adopted, the categorization of the roles that the pupils took up in bullying incidents was based on the existing literature on bullying. Therefore, they did not actually accord with the pupils' own self-nominations and the nominations they offered for their peers. This fact may have restricted or ignored the categories that

the participants themselves would have created. Besides, such categorization inhibited the emergence of more categories, such as the 'friend-bullies'. Moreover, it ignored the heterogeneity of the categories of the 'bullies', the 'victims', and the 'followers or follower-bulies' in which the participants were placed. However, this categorization was not regarded as stable and long-lasting; instead, it was used in this study for as long as it enabled me to understand a range of perspectives concerned with the participants' various bullying experiences that were conducted in a real life context. Future research needs to consider other variables than their roles, such as the pupils' personal characteristics, in order to offer different categories, and probably different findings. On the other hand, those pupils who were not involved in bullying incidents, but were self-defined as mere onlookers, were not included in the categories created. Future research needs to look at those pupils' perspectives on bullying in order for more aspects of the phenomenon to be illuminated.

The exploration of Ermis' case offers insights into a 'typical' case of group bullying in which a victim was a boy with a physical handicap and non-masculine mannerism, according to the participants' reports. Further research should focus on studying different cases, for example when a girl takes up the role of victim. Such exploration will indicate if the bullies' accounts differ and on what basis.

In the present research study, the bullies and the victims were classmates. Their feeling that they were friends, as explained in chapter five, might have affected the ways that the motives of the perpetrators were either interpreted or constructed, and the participants' subsequent reactions to

bullying. Further studies should be encouraged to explore cases of group bullying in which the victim(s) attends different classes from those of the perpetrators in order to explore whether the meanings of their experiences are different from the ones discussed in the present thesis.

The lack of a prolonged engagement with the pupils may have led me to offer biased interpretations of the pupils' meanings. This is because my Greek ethnicity and the knowledge of the Greek language can be assumed to have captured these meanings in a shorter period of time than it would probably be assumed necessary. The Ministry of Education in Greece should allow researchers who conduct fieldwork in schools more time in order to pursue their research goals with more confidence.

Being emotionally involved might have affected my attitude towards the bullies and the handicapped boy who was teased. This is because my studies in Special Education (MA in Special Educational Needs) might have affected my feelings about the victimized boy. This is why I saw myself as a bit threatening to those pupils who acted as bullies, particularly when I asked them 'why don't YOU<sup>2</sup> help him' in the interview session, as discussed in chapter eleven. Perhaps a researcher with studies in a different area of Education might have elicited different 'tactics' and responses on the part of the participants.

However hard I tried to keep myself distinct from the data, the familiarity I had with the local culture, and the one I have with the broader Greek

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<sup>2</sup> Capital letters indicate strong intonation, that the voice was raised

culture, may have affected my interpretations. Furthermore, it might also have affected my assumptions about the meanings assigned to bullying, even before this fieldwork started. This is because I was familiar with the “*paratsoukli*”, the “*koutsompolio*”, and the “*magkas*”, as described in chapters two and four. However, although how this familiarity was dealt with is also explained in chapter three, I kept in mind how being Greek could be a disadvantage in my interpretations. This is because I could not assume that I knew others’ meanings and realities, even within Greek society. This is because particular groups of Greeks develop distinct cultural characteristics. A non-Greek researcher conducting similar fieldwork in the Greek context would probably confirm how far my own interpretations can be trusted for their minimal subjectivity.

I recognize that the present thesis represents multiple voices. It represents the participants’ voices, the voices of researchers on bullying, and my own voice, which cannot be freed from my assumptions, sensitivities, bias, and inclinations. However, this account needs to be treated as ‘situated’, rather than as true or not true. In any case, this study should not be viewed as less ‘scientific’ because it does not match the ‘scientific’ approach in a strict sense. From my point of view, ‘science’ is concerned with openness and flexibility, particularly when humans’ social realities need to be understood.

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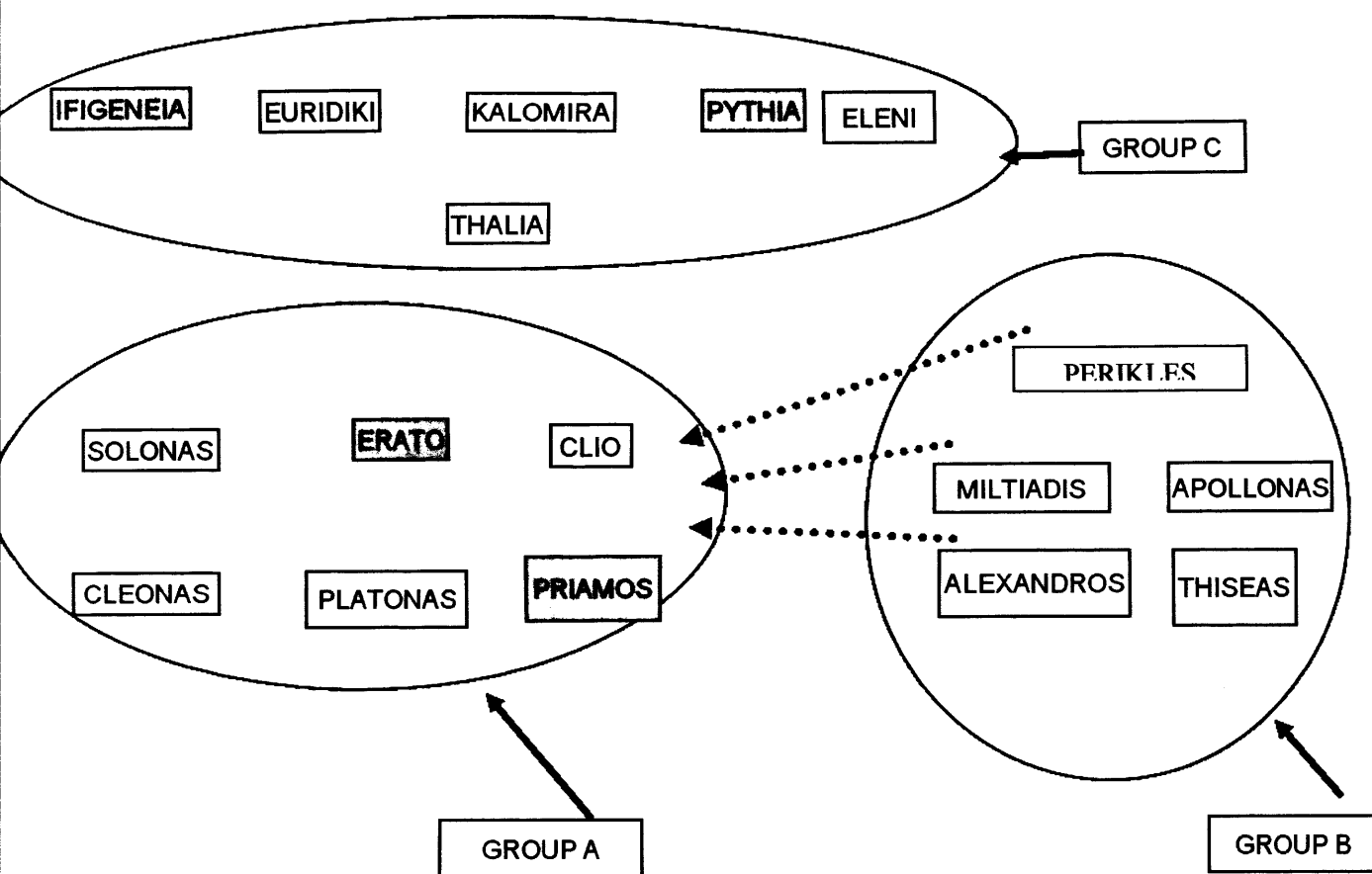
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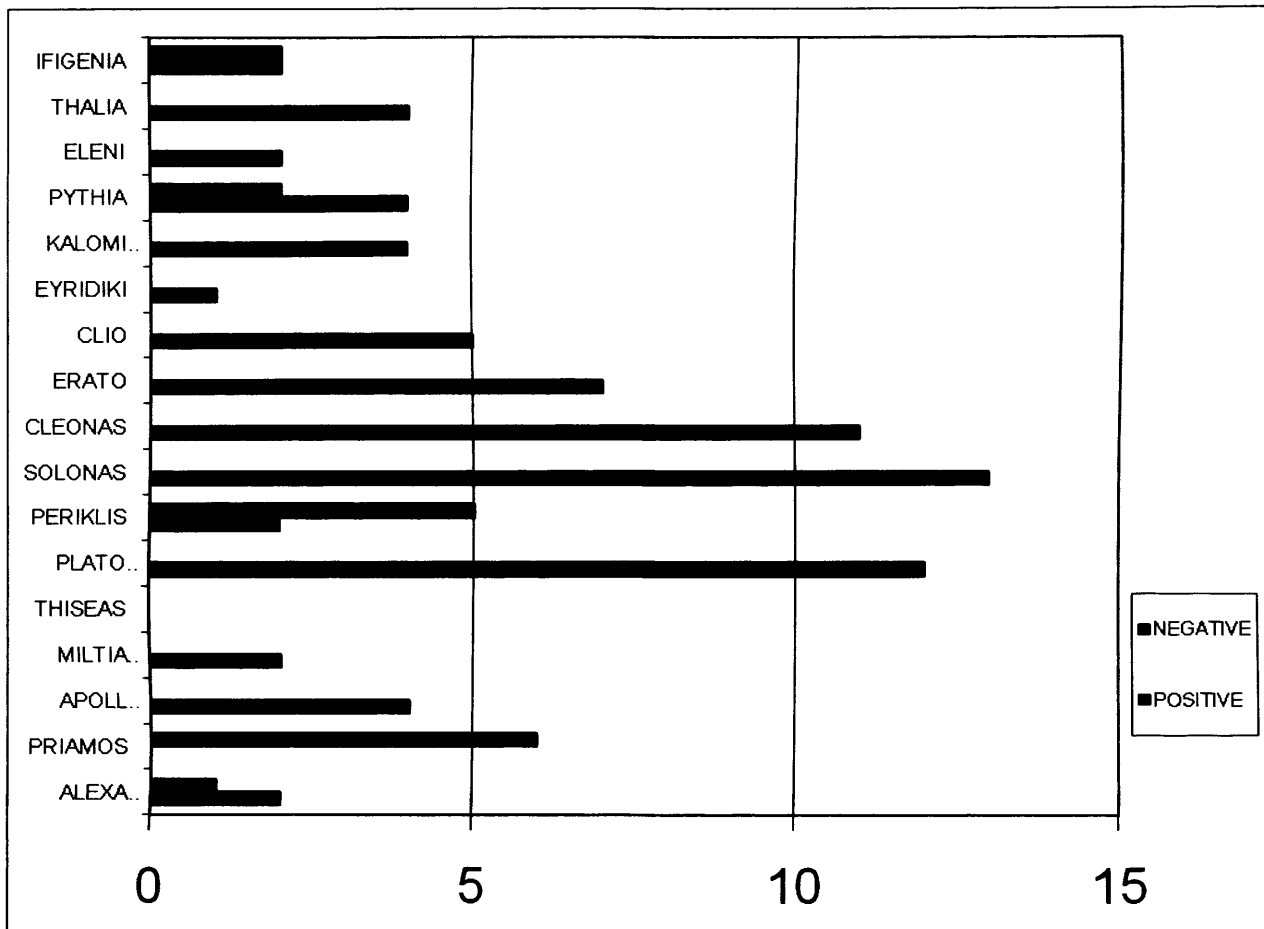
## **APPENDIX A**

Figures 1, 2, and 3 cited in this Appendix offer descriptive information about the social structure of the peer group who attended ST1 and ST2 classes. Through the graphical representations provided, Appendix one additionally offers indicative evidence to support that the roles that the pupils took up within bullying incidents may relate to the social and the sociometric status they hold within the peer group. Figure 3, in addition, further illustrates the hierarchies developed among the peers in order to offer evidence to support that the leaders of the groups might be the initiators of bullying incidents, assisted or followed by their co-members/peers. Appendix A represents and expands upon the information offered in chapter four. Information offered here is based on the analysis of the data from the sociometric questionnaires the pupils answered, as discussed in chapter three, combined with data collected through my own observations and the pupils' reports.

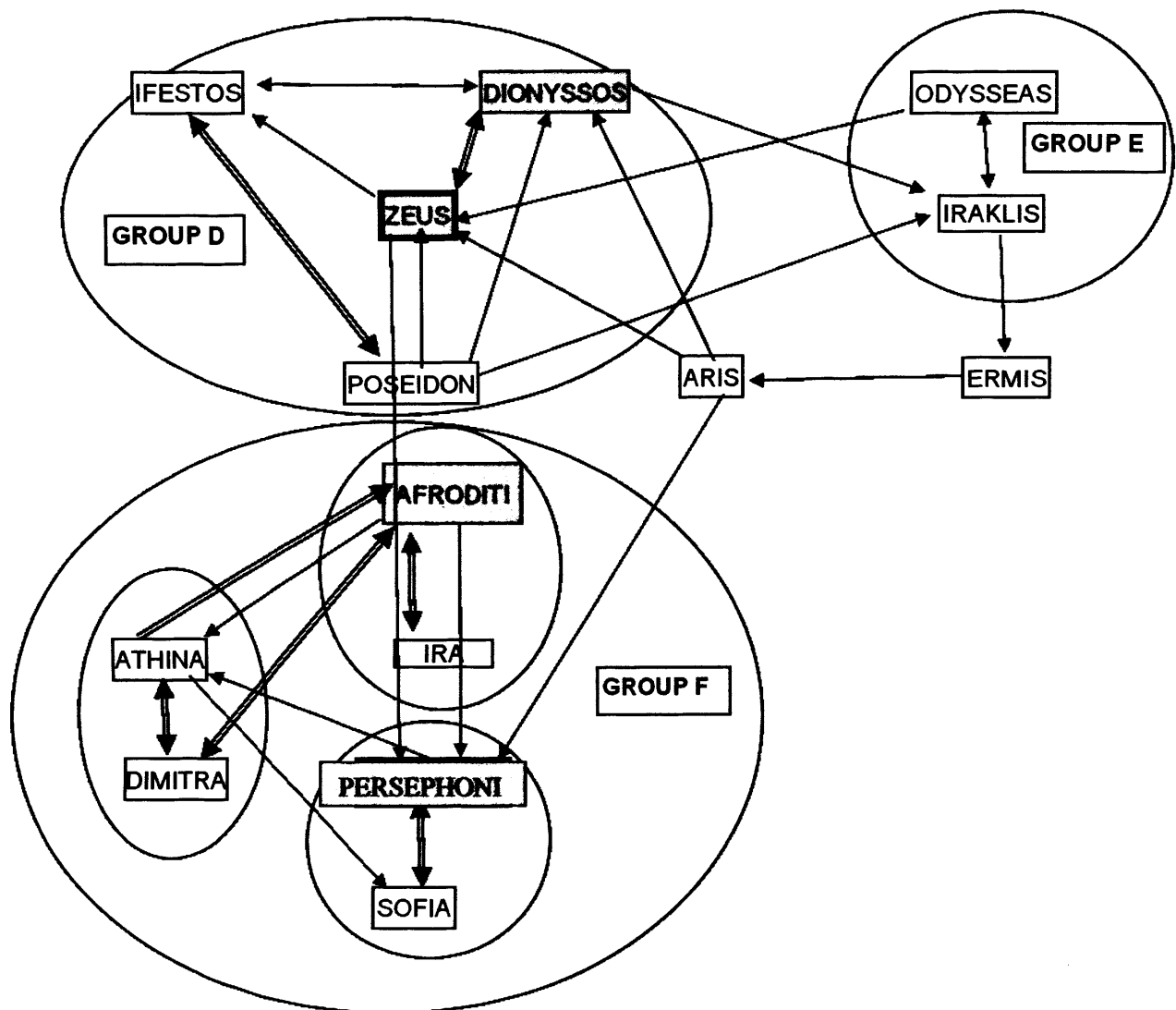


**Figure 1** represents the social structure of the peer group of ST1 class. The three circles A, B, and C stand for the three groups that the pupils formed. Within each circle, the names of each pupil-member of the group are represented within the rectangles. The names of those pupils who had a central status (leaders, reputable pupils) within each group are represented within the yellow rectangles.

The dotted lines represent the tendencies of some pupils to affiliate with pupils who are members of a group different from the one which they are members of. The direction of each arrow shows where such tendencies are directed.



**Figure 2** represents the sociometric status of each pupil who attended ST1 class. In the histogram provided, the length of each bar represents the number of choices that each pupil was offered on the part of his/her classmates. Blue bars stand for positive nominations, red bars stand for negative nominations.



**Figure 3** represents the social structure of ST2 class. In addition, it represents the sociometric status that each pupil holds within the class, as well as the nature of relationships developed between classmates. The circles D, E, and F stand for the three groups that the pupils of ST2 class formed, whilst Aris and Ermis are represented as loners. Within group F, that represents the girls' group, the three smaller circles stand for the dyads that the girls formed, whilst remaining members of the larger group. Yellow rectangles represent the leaders or the dominating figures within the pupils' groups, according to the pupils' reports.

The arrows represent the pupils' choices of their classmates. The direction of each arrow represents to whom the choice refers.

Single-lined arrows stand for non-reciprocal choices offered.

Double-lined arrows stand for reciprocal choices offered.

Black-coloured arrows stand for positive choices.

Red-coloured arrows stand for negative choices.

Figure 3 aims to expand the understanding of the social and sociometric status that each pupil of ST2 class held among his peers. Furthermore, with regards to the exploration of Ermis' case, it aims to indicate how the peer group 'ecology' relates to the roles the pupils took up in this specific case of group bullying, as discussed throughout chapters ten and eleven.

## **APPENDIX B**

Appendix 2 offers information about six pupils who were highly reputable among their peers for usually assuming either the roles of the bullies or of the victims in incidents occurring in the school. This information is concerned with the pupils' characteristics, as perceived by their classmates, with the aim of indicating how these may relate to the pupils' roles in bullying incidents. Data from my observations, as well as my feelings, also constitute an additional source of information, as follows.



### **Priamos: He “*kanei ton magka*”**

Priamos was a tall, fit boy. I could say that he was physically strong, as he was often chosen by the class teacher to carry heavy books up to the store room. The boy was observed to seek out any opportunity to display his (physical) strength, for which he was praised by Erato and Clio (the two girls were members of group A). He was described by all the sixth graders, except from his co-members, as someone “who *kanei ton magka*”. His classmates reported that the boy had continuous temper tantrums that they could not really face, as he often used hitting as a means to impose his orders. Indeed, data from my observations indicated that Priamos was what could be labelled as the ideal masculine within the Greek local context. He was very talkative, his voice always very loud and accompanied by gesturing. At break times, I could often observe him to ride down the handrails. I could also observe him jumping on the desks as I was entering the classroom. In the conversations I had with him, he seemed to enjoy his reputation as the “*magkas*”, stressing that the specific construct is related to positive masculine traits. This is because he admitted that he was proud to be assigned this label, and that he viewed himself as gaining kudos because of this amongst his classmates. Priamos seemed to use different tactics to maintain the reputation of the “*magkas*”. He often claimed to attract ‘girl friends’, imitated smoking with the use of a pen that he held between his lips, and used slang language bearing sexual connotations when he talked to his friends. He also admitted that he used to compliment the two girls, members of group A, and denied having ever threatened or physically assaulted any girl. According to his words, that was not ‘a man’s job’. The boy did not deny that he threatened his classmates, or that he threatened younger boys. However, he constructed his behaviour as applying justice rather than as bullying, even though his classmates seemed to disapprove and even condemn Priamos’ behaviour. This is probably why he was offered only negative choices by his classmates (see Figure 2). The fact that he was not offered one positive choice indicates that when “*magkia*” is manifested in threatening and physical means, it might be reputable but not approved by children.

### **Zeus: He “*kanei ton magka*”**

Zeus who was physically attractive, was reported by his classmates to be highly energetic and outgoing, also displaying signs of independence and risk taking. On the other hand he was also criticised for challenging the rules of the school and getting away with his behaviour. Although the boy-classmates saw him as the one who “*kanei ton magka*” the girls defined him as fun-maker.

His classmates reported that Zeus was the initiator of nasty teasing conducted against Ermis on a persistent basis. For this behaviour, he was viewed as impulsive and mindless by his classmates, whilst Odysseas and Iraklis, members of group E, characterized the boy who teased Ermis as aiming to gain prestige within the group of peers. Terms such as ‘aggressive’ or ‘hostile’ were never used by any of the pupils to characterize the boy’s behaviour against Ermis during the fieldwork. However, the pupils of ST2 class and Zeus himself did recognize that teasing Ermis was conducted against Ermis’ appeals for the behaviour to stop. Both in his interview and in his written account, Zeus used several tactics to present himself as sensitive, caring, and as affectionate towards his ‘target’. The class teacher confirmed the personal traits that Zeus claimed, stressing that Zeus loved and supported his peers. She added that

the boy was only “*ligo horatatzis*”<sup>1</sup>. The boy, when asked, admitted that he was the leader of group D, as described in chapter eleven.

### **Dionyssos : ‘The quiet boy’**

Dionyssos, the close friend of Zeus, was silent compared to his friend. He seemed to avoid any conversation with me unless it was necessary. However, he was eager to sit in on a group interview accompanied by his friends. His classmates described him as shy, and some girls ‘gossiped’ about his mother’s breast cancer to me. The boy was liked by boys and girls for the funny stories he recounted to them. The boy was systematically followed by Aris, although Dionyssos seemed not to place any positive value upon his relationship with him. Although his classmates reported him to be the deputy-leader of group D, he himself never admitted this role. In the interview he had with me, he claimed that the display of a macho-type behaviour could protect Ermis from being bullied.

### **Aris: The ‘clinger’, the ‘gipsy’, the ‘Loustros’**

Aris was a tsigganos boy: with his dark skin and black hair, he was tall handsome and fit. His peers’ characterizations constructed him as a ‘normal child’, as if that was not expected from a child who belonged to the Roma minority (discussed in chapter four). His teacher also defined him as a ‘very good child’. I could define him as sad and lonely. In a private conversation I had with him, he confessed that he was subjected to racial discrimination and racial name-calling by children who attended the school. His classmates called him “*Loustros*”, a term conveying intimidating cultural connotations about his racial background (discussed in chapter four). Although two years older than his classmates, the boy not only accepted his obedience to Zeus’ orders, but confirmed it without hesitation. He justified this obedience as stemming from the obligation of being Zeus’ ‘real friend’. His classmates, however, reported that he helped Zeus and Dionyssos in their behaviour against Ermis in order to gain membership within group D. For this obedience, as well as for being a skilful football player, Aris was a temporary member of group D, according to his classmates’ reports. They also characterized him as a “*kollitiri*”<sup>2</sup>) in order to describe the boy’s efforts to ensure peer-group membership. In that way, Aris was not assigned responsibility for his acts insofar as they stemmed from his fear of social alienation. Data indicated that he was ignored, rather than disliked, by classmates. During the process of the fieldwork, I gained the impression that being assigned the label “gipsy”, denoting his racial background, was something the boy tried to avoid at all costs.

### **Ermis: ‘The banana’, ‘the thyma’, ‘the friends’ seeker’**

Ermis was highly reputable among the school children. Shortly after my arrival at the school, and after the children had watched the video tape on bullying (described in chapter six), whispering and confessions on the part of the pupils brought Ermis’ case to my attention. Rumours on the part of the schoolchildren circulated that constructed Ermis as ‘problematic’, ‘a child with a problem’, ‘a victim’ ‘a very good child’, ‘a

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<sup>1</sup>Ligo horatatzis: a bit of fun-maker (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p. 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Kollitiri: someone who “clings” to others in order to gain membership within their groups (metaphorical meaning), (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.917).

boy displaying a provocative behaviour', 'a different child', and 'a weak child'. Ermis was the pupil I liked most from the first days of the fieldwork. My feelings were not far from what his teacher reported she felt for him. He was polite and gentle in his mannerisms. The boy self-defined as caring, affectionate, and sensitive to others' pain, although the boys defined him as 'soft'. Analysis of the data generated from his peers reports, but also from his teacher's comments, indicated that Ermis was perceived as a social misfit. This is because his behaviour deviated from what the rest of the boys and his teacher viewed to be 'boyish' behaviour. I never observed him running, although his idiosyncratic way of walking was noticeable from the first encounters I had with him. His peers often defined him as 'a child with special needs', although the boy did not have a special needs statement. Ermis had a smiling face, which seemed to be 'clouded' when he approached me to disclose that his peers called him "*banana*", a nickname that he was really unhappy to hear. The boy was in a way popular among the school children, as he was well known as the "*banana*" boy, yet was subjected to any kind of teasing on their part. However, all of them excused themselves, placing the blame on those who invented the nickname and initiated the teasing for the first time, the central members of group A. Ermis said that he was raised by his grandmother, although he never stated that his mother was not there. He talked to me about his sister, who was older than him and also teased by the children living in the neighbourhood. When he was asked whether or not he had talked to his parents about his bullying experience, he referred to his mother, although reference to his father was missing in his accounts. Ermis' sociometric status in the peer group was complicated. Nobody ever said that they did not like him, although he was denied participation in girls' games. However, my observations indicated that he was a member of the boys' football games, and it was there he was praised by them for his contribution. I observed him wandering in the playground asking for participation in girls' games, sometimes also approaching boys' groups, who seemed not to pay any attention to him. I could define Ermis as 'a friends' seeker', because having friends was what he was mostly concerned of according to his accounts. He viewed having friends as an indication of being socially accepted, as also supported by Besag (1989). This may explain why he insisted on being amongst all those children who made fun of him, sometimes also laughing along with his teasers, as stated in chapter nine.

#### **Persephoni : The 'tough hearted', 'snob' and 'arrogant'**

Persephoni, whose parents were secondary school teachers, was known by her classmates as 'tough-hearted', and a 'snob', and she was often nominated as "*the psonio*", as explained in chapter seven. Her classmates confirmed that the girl showed tendencies of dominance over the rest of the girls, from whom she expected conformity with her own rules. She was said to impose a sexist culture by asking the rest of the girls to exclude Ermis, or any other boy, from their games. Athina and Dimitra in the interview sessions reported that she had a bad reaction when the rules that Persephoni set were not followed. She either shouted at them or burst into tears in order to impose her will upon the rest of the girls. According to her classmates' words, Persephoni used various ways to represent herself as superior to her classmates. She often praised herself for excelling at school, and made claims about her parents' social position. Within a group the children, most of whom came from working class families, boasting about one's parents' University degrees seems to constitute a 'bullying attitude' (Besag, 1989, p. 4), since it makes the majority of children feel devalued. For this attitude, Persephoni was disliked by the majority of

her classmates. This may explain the fact that it was only her close friend Sophia who offered her a positive choice in the sociogram (see Figure 3), whilst she was the only child among her classmates who was offered three negative choices.

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## **APPENDIX C**

Appendix C aims to represent to the readers the guidelines that were offered to the pupils before the writing of the second letters, as explained in chapter three. It reveals how the format and the structure of the letters left children free to choose the roles they wished to ascribe themselves within the bullying experiences they wrote about in their letters. The guidelines on page C3 are written in the Greek language, whilst those on page C4 are written (translated) in the English language.

## Δημοτικό Σχολείο

Τάξη

Αγόρι----- Κορίτσι-----

Όνομα.....

Υπάρχουν περιπτώσεις που κάποιο παιδί ή κάποια παιδιά (αγόρια ή κορίτσια) ενοχλούν επανειλημμένα κάποιον συμμαθητή τους ή συμμαθήτριά τους χωρίς να φαίνεται ότι υπάρχει ιδιαίτερη αιτία. (Π.χ μιλάνε άσχημα, βρίζουν, φοβερίζουν, απειλούν, εξαναγκάζουν σε κάτι που δεν θέλει, διαδίδουν φήμες, τον/την αγνοούν ή τον/την αποκλείουν από παιχνίδια ή παρέες φίλων, τον κοροϊδεύουν, τον φωνάζουν με παρατσούκλια ή ό,τι άλλο).

Γράψτε για ένα μόνο από τα ακόλουθα:

**1.Σας έχει συμβεί ποτέ κάτι τέτοιο;**

Γράψτε τι έγινε, ποια νομίζετε ήταν η αιτία, πως το αντιμετωπίσατε, ποιοι σας βοήθησαν –αν σας βοήθησαν- πως νιώσατε και ό,τι άλλο νομίζετε ότι θέλετε να πείτε.

**Η γνώμη σας είναι πολύ σημαντική για μένα.**

**2.Έχετε κάνει εσείς ο ίδιος /η ίδια κάτι τέτοιο;**

Γράψτε τι κάνατε, γιατί νομίζετε ότι το κάνατε, σας παρακίνησε ή σας βοήθησε κάποιος ή κάποια, πως νοιώσατε τότε, πώς νοιώθετε τώρα που το ξανασκέφτεστε;

**Ό,τι γράψετε είναι πολύ σημαντικό για μένα.**

**3.Έχετε παρακολουθήσει ποτέ κάτι τέτοιο ανάμεσα σε συμμαθητές σας ή συμμαθήτριάς σας;**

Γράψτε τι έγινε, γιατί νομίζετε ότι έγινε, τι κάνατε εσείς ή πως νοιώσατε;

**Ό,τι γράψετε είναι πολύ σημαντικό για μένα.**

*Σας ευχαριστώ πολύ για την συνεργασία σας*

B. Νίκα

Primary school

Class.....

Boy.....Girl.....

Name.....

There are cases in which a child or a group of children often harass a classmate, apparently for no good reason. (For example, they may talk to him or her in an abusive language, threaten them, or force a boy or a girl to do things that would not be done without such oppression. Those children may also spread nasty rumours about another boy or girl, ignore or leave him or her out of games on purpose, call a boy or girl with names that are not their real names, tease them, or make them feel distressed in any other way).

Chose one category of the three following that are cited below and write about:

**1. Has something like that ever happened to you?**

Please describe what happened, why you think it happened, how you dealt with the incident, who helped you to deal with it (if you were helped), as well as what your feelings were. You can add anything else you think is important to write about. **Your opinions are very important to me.**

**2. Have you ever done something like that to someone else?**

Please describe what you did, why do you think you acted in that specific way, whether or not someone else forced you to do what you did. You can also write about your feelings. **Anything you write is very important to me.**

**3. Have you ever observed something like that between your classmates?**

Please describe the incident, why do you think it happened, how did you do or how did you feel about it? **Anything you write is very important to me.**

*Thank you very much for your cooperation*

**V. Nika**



## **APPENDIX D**

Two commentaries that appeared in Greek daily newspapers are cited in Appendix D. They aim to indicate the complexity surrounding the concept of the “magkas” and the related behaviour, the “*magkia*”, within Greek society. This complexity has already been discussed in chapter two. The two commentaries cited on pages D3 and D4, emphasize that the particular concepts are associated with either positive or negative evaluations on the part of the Greeks. This is an important factor to be taken into consideration when “*magkia*” and the related meanings are compared to the phenomenon of bullying, as conceptualized and represented in different cultural contexts. In the Anglo-Saxon context, for example, the terms ‘bullying’ and ‘the bully’ connote images of an aggressive behaviour conducted systematically by a person against another person (Smith and Sharp, 1994). Therefore, both ‘bullying’ and the ‘bully’ are assigned negative evaluations in Anglo-Saxon society. However, there is strong indication that this is not the case in Greece. What is emphasized here is that differences in cultural groups result in differences in the meanings of bullying, as emphasized in chapter twelve. These differences in the meanings that “*magkia*” and the “*magkas*” are assigned should not be overlooked, as they are informed by the particular societal attitudes of Greek society towards the two interrelated concepts.

**You should be a “*magkas*”, but in the right way**

**(Downloaded from: <http://www.evrytanika.gr/0181-0200/0188/chrono.htm>),  
accessed, 3-4-2009.**

George Tsatsaragkos, a Greek journalist, writes in the Greek daily newspaper “*Χρονογράφημα*” (*Chronographima*) of the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2006 about the meaning of *magkia*. In his column, the journalist stresses that the specific meaning the construct was assigned was represented in the letter that Katerina, a secondary school student, sent to him. The journalist aims to emphasize the ‘good’ aspects of “*magkia*”, as conceptualized by the girl who sent the letter. This why the columnist represents the exact words that the girl included in her letter in the title of his commentary: “*You should be a ‘magkas’, but in the right way*”(p. 1). According to Katerina’s letter, a ‘*magkas*’ is a (male) person who displays strong commitment to achieving his goals. The girl stressed that a “*magkas*” never uses socially unacceptable means; instead, he has the power to keep to his own way of life that strictly conforms to culturally acceptable social and moral norms.

George Tsatsaragas seems to direct the readers’ attention to the good qualities that the discourse on “*magkas*” and “*magkia*” entail. In this way, *magkia*-related behaviour is separated from that displayed by tricky and canny persons. The writer concludes that the latter are erroneously defined as “*magkes*<sup>1</sup>”.

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<sup>1</sup> *Magkes*: plural form of the word “*magkas*” (also see chapters two, five and eight).

### About “*magkia*”

(Downloaded from:

<http://www.ananeotiki.gr/readAuthors.asp?authorID=100&page=1&textID=1364>

accessed, 3-4-2009).

Kimom Hatzimpiros writes in the daily newspaper ‘Ελευθεροτυπία’ (Eleftherotypia) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2006 in order to comment on the concept of *magkia*<sup>3</sup>. The writer, who works as a Professor of Sociology in the Metsovio Polytechnio of Greece, emphasizes the contemporary meaning assigned to the construct within some groups of people in Greek society. He specifies that “*magkia*” is associated with what he characterizes as the ‘narcissistic attitude’ (p. 1) of some people in Greece, who assign advantageous features to the Greek construct. He then clarifies that, according to these features, “*magkia*” is conceptualized as the ability of some groups of Greeks to get away with acts that are deemed as unacceptable within broader Greek society. Therefore, according to the writer’s comments, “*magkia*” characterizes deviant sub-cultures that exist within the Greek cultural context. Kimon Hatzimpiros strongly criticizes this particular meaning of “*magkia*”, and advocates that such a meaning characterizes behaviours existing in what he defines as “*apolitistes koinonies*”<sup>4</sup>.

Kimon Hatzimpiros also emphasizes that such a way of living is praised by masses of laypersons in Greece. However, he adds that it is also encouraged and praised by a number of ‘intellectuals’, politicians, and journalists. Finally, he quotes Dimitrakos in order to situate the phenomenon of “*magkia*” within Greek society. Dimitrakos, in the daily newspaper ‘Το Βήμα’ (to Vima), issued on 14.04.1998), explains that “*magkia*” is a cultural trait of Greeks that was probably developed for reasons of survival during the period of four hundred years in which Greece was occupied by the Turks.

The writer obviously despises this particular meaning that “*magkia*” is assigned by a number of Greeks, and suggests that it should not be viewed as the ideal behaviour of the Greeks, at least nowadays.

---

<sup>3</sup> Magkia: the behaviour of magkas (also see chapter two)

<sup>4</sup> Apolitistes koinonies: uncivilized/boorish societies. (Stavropoulos, 1988, p.105)

## **APPENDIX E**

A song that is very famous in Greek society is cited in this Appendix. This is because it offers information about the positive value that the social figure of the “*magkas*” is assigned within Greek society. The song praises the “*magkas*”, and thus seems to encourage young boys to imitate this behaviour. On the other hand, this particular representation of the “*magkas*” is far from the person who is nominated as the ‘bully’ in different cultural contexts. The song is represented in the Greek language on page E-3, as downloaded from:

<http://www.greekmidi.com/songs/bithikotsis/touvotanikouomagkas.html> on: 17-6-2009 whilst is represented translated in the English language on page E-4.

Title of the song: The *magkas* from Votanikos  
Composer: Grigoris Mpithikotsis  
Lyrist: L. Tsolis



Listen to my web radio station with classic greek oldies

Title:  
Τίτλος:

ΤΟΥ ΒΟΤΑΝΙΚΟΥ Ο ΜΑΓΚΑΣ

Composer:  
Συνθέτης:

Γρηγόρης Μπιθικώτσης

Lyricist:  
Στιχουργός:

Λ. Τσώλης

Lyrics:  
Στίχοι:

Του Βοτανικού ο μάγκας  
πέθανε την Κυριακή  
και τον κλάψαν οι κοπέλες  
κι όλοι οι φίλοι οι καρδιακοί

Του Βοτανικού ο μάγκας  
το καλύτερο παιδί  
στα μπουζούκια στις ταβέρνες  
πια κανείς δεν θα τον δει

Του Βοτανικού ο μάγκας  
είχε ωραίο παρελθόν  
μ' απ' τα γλέντια κι απ' τους μάγκες  
θα 'ναι τώρα πια απών

- Ρεφραίν -

Πάντα όμορφα γλεντούσε  
και δεν έκανε κακό  
και τον αγαπούσαν όλοι  
μέσα στο Βοτανικό

- Ρεφραίν -

(The translated version of the song)

### **The Magkas from Votanikos**

The *magkas* who lived in *Votanikos* <sup>1</sup>  
died last Sunday  
and the girls cried for him  
and all his close friends

The *magkas* who lived in *Votanikos*  
was the best man  
but nobody is going to meet him again  
neither in the *mpouzoukia* <sup>2</sup> nor the *tavernes* <sup>3</sup>

The *magkas* who lived in *Votanikos*  
had been living nicely up to now  
He had fun and enjoyed life with other *magkes*  
but now nobody is going to meet him again

He enjoyed his life nicely  
and never did he do any harm to anyone  
and everybody loved him  
within the whole area of *Votanikos*

---

<sup>1</sup> Votanikos: an area near Athens in Greece

<sup>2</sup> Mpouzoukia: traditional restaurants with live folk music where Greek people visit in the nights in order to listen to the music, drink and dance (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1146)

<sup>3</sup> tavernes: traditional small restaurants in Greece where wine, beer and food are being served. People can go there at noon or evenings in order to have dinner (Mpampiniotis, 2002, p.1733); also see chapter four..