

Man up!' Bullying and Resilience within a Neoliberal Framework.

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Abstract

This study investigates perceptions in relation to bullying, with a particular focus on discussions around resilience, drawing on data from focus group interviews with young people (mean age 14 years old), parents and teachers (**N=40**). We view self-conduct and the governance of human behaviour as situated within a neoliberal framework, locating accountability and responsibility within the individual. Our methodological framework consists of a multi-level 'synthesized' discourse analysis. Firstly, drawing on discursive psychology, we focus on the interactive accomplishments of talk, such as managing facts, blame and accountability. The second level of discourse analysis focuses on the wider discourses that participants draw on to make sense of themselves, including common sense discourses and ideologies. In their narratives, the participants construct resilience in relation to bullying in terms of individual empowerment, responsibility and 'manning up'; a skill that can be taught and acquired. Not only that, long-term implications of bullying are negated in favour of a neoliberal approach towards self-responsibility in the here and now. This has implications for strategies in relation to bullying and supporting young people in building resilience. More research is needed to establish key notions in relation to resilience, and the multidimensionality of protective factors in relation to bullying.

Key words: *Bullying, Resilience, Neoliberalism*

Introduction

Bullying has been widely researched, from moral reasoning and emotion attributions of bullies, victims and bully-victims (Menesini et al. 2013; Perren et al. 2012) and school-adjustment (Betts et al. 2012), to interventions, such as peer-support (Cowie 2011) and zero-tolerance (Bray and Lee 2007; Ttofi and Farrington 2011). Yet, as Boulton and Boulton (2012) suggest, this form of systematic aggression continues to be common in schools, with students becoming more and more unreceptive to teachers' antibullying lessons. Not only

that, research has shown that bullying can have long-term mental health implications (Copeland et al. 2013; Wolke 2014).

The Department of Education in the UK defines bullying as:

‘behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally’ (DfE 2014 p. 6).

Under the Children Act 1989, bullying is perceived as a child protection concern in the UK, and schools are expected to draw on a range of services to tackle this. At the same time, there is evidence that some children use (learned) strategies to modulate their sensitivity to bullying (Baird et al. 2010). Resilience has been pinpointed as a key strategy in coping and adapting here (e.g. Masten et al. 1990; Rutter 2006). With wellbeing now an ‘overarching policy objective’ in the UK (NEF 2014 p.10), and bullying identified as something that continues to impact on the wellbeing of young people, there is a need to gain more insight into the role of resilience here.

In this paper we explore narratives in relation to bullying and resilience. We treat self-conduct, and the governance of human behaviour as situated within a neoliberal framework, that proposes that human wellbeing can best be understood through the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional structure (Bauman 2000; Harvey 2007). According to this account, sustaining the self, without ties which tell us who we are, involves having the resilience to withstand the sense of lack of context, of belonging (Giddens 1991). Schools and the classroom in particular, which provide the context for this study, are critical spaces in which this task is managed.

Resilience as a concept has been the property of well-intentioned researchers with a specific focus on defining a particular set of outcomes, behaviours and processes as indicative of

well-being (Rutter 1985;1999; Ungar 2004). Yet, viewed through a neoliberal lens we argue that current understandings of resilience emphasise individual responsibility and adaptability (Joseph 2013). As such, the political ideal of individual freedom and choice that lies at the heart of this, is being reproduced in the classroom and social lives of the young people. From this viewpoint, social wellbeing rests on individual choice and responsibility, with individuals being 'empowered' to look after themselves (Webb et al. 2013). Drawing on the above, we examine how contemporary talk in relation to bullying and resilience is managed.

A Neoliberal approach towards Bullying and Resilience

Resilience theory (e.g. Masten et al. 1990; Rutter 1999) provides a framework for studying how young people adapt in the face of life challenges, such as bullying. This is not a discrete or fixed quality, and children may be more or less resilient at different points in their lives, depending on the interaction and accumulation of individual and environmental factors (Rutter 1985). As such, resilience is perceived as a dynamic process that varies over time, where an individual displays positive adaptation in the light of adversity or trauma (Driscoll 2013; Kolar et al. 2012). Moreover, children may develop resilience in one area of their lives but not in others (Kim-Cohen et al. 2004). However, following Rutter (2006) it is not strictly social competence or positive mental health. Protective factors in building resilience include a supportive relationship with at least one competent adult and positive educational experiences (Chen et al. 2012; Luthar et al. 2000). Thus, protective factors are perceived as 'internal assets', i.e. individual attributes, and 'external strengths' which reside in the context of the family and community/school. The more protective factors that are present the greater the likelihood of resilience; protective factors, like risk factors, are cumulative in their effect (Howard 1999; Losel and Bender 2003). For example, children who have a parent for support do better with social hardship than children whose parents are either not available, or too reactive about the subject (Bowes et al. 2010). It follows that the study of resilience focuses specifically on biological, psychological and social adaptation processes in the face of adversity (see Kubiliene et al. 2015).

Yet, set against a backdrop of neo-liberalism, it could be argued that resilience involves seeking out opportunities and protective factors. Here, we explore, as a background to our discussion, the shifting landscape critically presented by Bauman (2000) and Bauman and Donskis (2013). Bauman's analysis of the shifting contours of identity formation and the way we live our lives in contemporary society suggests that what has emerged is a lightness or fluidity, where individuals are cast out by their wits to fend for themselves, but without the resources to do this. Individualisation, Bauman states, is now the task of everyday life where there is 'no rest nor satisfaction of arriving' (2000, 33). As such, notions of collective responsibility and actions have been replaced by notions of self-responsibility and determinism but without adequate tools for the task; 'individualisation is a fate not a choice' (Bauman 2000, 34). In this paper we present the key findings of our qualitative study on bullying and resilience, drawing on data from focus group interviews with young people (mean age = 14), parents and teachers.

Methodology

The study took place in the South-East of England; forty participants were recruited for eight focus groups in total, of which four were with young people, two were with parents and two with teachers. All focus groups consisted of between 4-6 participants, and lasted for roughly one hour. Participants in all focus groups were mixed gender; the focus groups with parents and students consisted of white British participants, whilst the teacher focus groups were a mix of white and BME (black and minority ethnic) British participants. This was a convenience sample, i.e. subjects more readily accessible to the researchers were more likely to be included. This will be discussed in more detail below.

Kitzinger (1994) argues that whilst focus groups can provide insight into the experiences of individual participants, the real value of group data is to be found from analyzing the

interaction between participants. A focus group is not to be understood as an extended form of an interview, and it is not the interviewer's role to ask questions directly to all participants. The focus group discussions were unstructured; the interviewer introduced the topic as 'bullying and the role of resilience' at the start. Care was taken to engage all participants equally, and to avoid leaders in a group dominating the conversation. In addition to this, methods that are used for adults cannot be used in the same manner with children. Factors that need to be considered here include the cognitive, linguistic, and psychological differences between children and adults (Gibson 2012). We aimed to create a trusting atmosphere between the participants themselves and between them and the moderator (the researcher conducting the focus groups); this was done by running the focus groups in familiar (to the participants) settings and/or through the involvement of gatekeepers.

The young people were recruited through a local voluntary youth centre. The youth worker in charge acted as gatekeeper. The interviews were carried out by one of the youth workers and co-author of this paper, who had already established relationships informally with the young people over the course of a year. Parents were also recruited through the youth organisation. Teachers were recruited through our partnership with local schools, and one of our lecturers functioned as gatekeeper here, and invited teachers to participate in focus group discussions; for logistical reasons (as all teachers came from different schools), the interviews took place at the University. It should be noted here, that as well as creating a trusting atmosphere, gatekeepers could in fact also diminish trust and are not always the most appropriate person to make the decision whether someone is capable of taking part in research or indeed capable of being asked whether they want to participate (Davies and Peters 2014).

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee. Ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study; informed consent (also from parents/guardians in the case of the interviews with the young people) was obtained and participants were informed of their right to withdraw. Participants were provided with information sheets in which the study was explained, including the fact that the topic itself can be perceived as sensitive, and/or may evoke an emotional reaction. In this case, it was explained to the participants, the interviews would be stopped, with the option to talk to an allocated confidant. Moreover, we also indicated that we would be able to direct the participants to specialist organisations and websites

Data Analysis

Our methodological framework consists of a multi-level 'synthesized' discourse analysis (Sims-Schouten and Riley 2014; Willott and Griffin, 1997). Firstly, drawing on discursive psychology, we focus on the interactive accomplishments of talk, such as managing facts, blame and accountability (Hepburn and Wiggins 2007). Discursive psychologists affiliate with conversation analytic traditions (e.g. Sacks 1992), and are primarily concerned with what people do with their talk, such as disclaiming and making extreme statements (Pomerantz 1986). For the purpose of this study unstructured interviews were utilised, but it should be noted that traditional discursive psychologists argue for what they call 'naturally occurring talk', talk that would have occurred if the research project had not existed (Potter 1997). The second level of discourse analysis focuses on the wider discourses that participants draw on to make sense of themselves, which includes common sense discourses and ideologies (e.g. Billig 1997).

We consider as a backdrop, the key analytics of accountability, stake and interest through Bauman's (2000) neo-liberal lens of individualism and responsibility for self-determinism. The extracts are transcribed in detail, drawing on Jefferson (1985) and Edwards (1997);

attention is given to aspects of talk in relation to intonation (↑↓ in the extracts for rising and lowering intonation), pauses, speeded up talk (> <), quiet speech (° °), to give a few examples. See appendix for transcription notions.

Talk and Narratives in Relation to Bullying & Resilience – Man Up; Confidence; Standing up for Oneself and Lollipops

In their narratives and strategies in relation to bullying and resilience, participants addressed notions concerning confidence, manning up, sticking up for oneself, and support through teaching specific skills and 'being there'. As such, attention was drawn to internal and external factors in relation to resilience, in line with common definitions. At the same time participants highlighted neoliberal notions of individual autonomy and self-responsibility. See below for examples from the focus groups with teachers, parents and students.

Teachers

The extract below appeared about thirty minutes into focus group interview 1 with teachers; all had more than two years experience of working as a teacher, and were working in different schools. The discussion is part of a conversation about a girl who had been bullied in the school of one of the participants:

Man Up!

1. M1: °A bit of° erm (1.0) a bit of a pep t↓alk. °I think she'd need° (2.0) 'cos I
2. think >if, if< you (1.0) >of course if you are being bullied, its nasty< and then (1.0)
3. >you're almost doing it to yours↑elf< I th↓ink [°she needs to be°
4. W1: [°Feeding into it, aren't they?°
5. M1: Y↓ea::h (1.0) It's like >I'm sorry you feel this w↓ay< (1.0) man ↑up!, >in in
6. the nicest possible way< (1.0) you need >need to teach that resilience< as they (2.0)
7. as y↑ou said erm, °this is life°, erm (1.0) sorry it happened this t↓ime, erm .hh
8. °you know, I'm sure it wasn't anything malicious°. I'd say, yeah (1.0)
9. W1: I'd say, do you want to be friends with these people?'

10. {agreement from others}
11. M1: [°Yeah and also that°]
12. W1: [If they make you feel] like th↓at, .hh are they the best people to be friends
13. with?
14. W2: [Yeah]
15. W1: [°That°]s what I' d say° and th↑en I'd, and then I'd say, °you know° (1.0) and I,
16. >and I always go back to this< (1.0) in °thr↑ee years time, this won't m↓atter°, .hh
17. which, which doesn't >doesn't really help them< but I like them to think that school
18. is, school's such a big thing when you're at school and then you look b↓ack and
19. you think 'I wish I didn't waste so much time w↓orrying about it', >but it's ha:rd< its
20. hard to give exp↑erience of that yours↑elf, isn't [it?
21. W2: [°yeah°]
22. W1: °sometimes°, s↑ometimes it helps, (1.0)I find, especially, when you are
23. t↓alking, when you are talking to g↓irls.

The extract starts with a reference to support in the form of a 'pep talk' (line 1, with emphasis on pep). Interestingly, instead of elaborating on this, the topic changes to a discussion based around the role of the victim (i.e. the person who is being bullied). This is signified by a two second break. What follows is a three-way-list completer (Antaki and Wetherell 1999), namely 'its nasty' (line 2), followed by the quickly uttered '>you're almost doing it to yours↑elf<' (line 3), and the softly spoken '[°Feeding into it, aren't they?°' (line 4), which collaboratively (other participants appear to agree) leads into the key argument of having to 'man ↑up!' (line 5). This is introduced as a disclaimer, '>I'm sorry you feel this w↓ay< (1.0)' - 'man ↑up!'. The initial sense of empathy that is created through the 'pep talk' and the issue of feeling sorry (line 5) for the victim is very quickly turned into a situation where the victim is made accountable, not for what happened to them, but for dealing with this. This reflects Bauman's (2000) notion of individual autonomy and responsibility for self-determinism, and also a notion of the victim as somehow defective and in need of support (in this case a pep talk), to enable them to maintain responsibility for their own life and process of socialisation. This then leads into a reference to 'resilience', '>need to teach that resilience<' (line 6). In the literature (e.g. Rutter 2006) resilience is defined in terms of protective factors that are perceived of as 'internal assets', i.e. individual attributes, and 'external strengths' residing in

the context of the family and community/school. However, by focussing on 'teaching', resilience is constructed in terms of a skill that can be taught. This confirms the role of the teacher as educator; someone who helps their students learn. Driscoll (2013) argues that schools have an important role in the promotion of resilient trajectories, e.g. through supportive relationships with staff. This is only hinted at in the extract above, where support is offered by down-playing the incident (again, through a three-way-list completer): 'this is life', followed by 'sorry it happened this time' (line 7) and 'I'm sure it wasn't anything malicious' (line 8). Moreover, the onus is put on the student by questioning why they would want to be friends with these people (line 9). As such, the suggestion is that there is a choice, indicated by 'if they make you feel like that', which is followed by the upshot 'are they the best people to be friends with?' (lines 12-14).

As suggested above, one way of dealing with bullying is by walking away from the friendship. Not only that, the significance of the bullying experience for the victim is downplayed by suggesting that 'in three years time, this won't matter' (line 16). This is introduced in the form of what Riley (2003) calls a 'sandwich argument', where the main argument, namely that in three years it won't matter, is followed by a counter-argument, namely 'which doesn't really help them' (line 17), after which the participant returns to the main point, namely 'I wish I didn't waste so much time worrying about it' (line 19). Here the participant claims ownership of the argument by referring to her personal experience (I wish), which serves to strengthen her argument and inoculate against doubt and disagreement (Speer and Potter 2000).

However, the reference to it being 'hard to give experience of that yourself' (line 20) shows that the participant has some trouble with the subject. The 'isn't it?' that follows suggests that this perspective is subjectively derived but reflexively negotiated (Giddens 1991), where the assumption is that others are in a position to agree (Edwards 1997). Nevertheless, the approach works ('sometimes', which is said softly), as the participant suggests in the bit that follows; this is followed by a gender specific argument namely that it

helps when 't↓alking, when you are talking to g↓irls' (line 24). Here the stressed 'especially' hints at the fact that the teacher speaks from experience.

As well as constructing resilience in terms of 'manning up' and something that is teachable, the teachers also tended to construct parental influence as interfering with resilience building in children. The extract below comes from the second focus group with teachers; all teachers came from different schools and were newly qualified. The extract follows from a discussion on the role of the tutor in bullying (15 minutes into the interview):

Teaching Resilience

1. W4: I think you're r↑ight (1.0), at the, >at the same t↓ime, we↑ do have to
2. enc↑ourage th↓e::m< (2.0) 'cos we're not, we're not their parents, ◦ I know it's sort
3. of, sort of ◦ (1.0) we're supp↑osed to be taking the >guardian role while they're
4. under our duty of care< .hh but we're not, we're not their parents (1.0) and h↑ow
5. they are brought ↑up, >we have to content with< ◦ whatever is instilled ◦ with them
6. at h↑ome (1.0) is that we do have to teach th↓em that >sometimes you have to<
7. (1.0) work through .hh because you're not always gonna have an adult th↓ere every
8. step, >every time you feel a little bit hurt to jump in and save you< (1.0)
9. >s↓ometimes they have to learn how to work through some of these situations by
10. themselves< and, act↓ually .hh sometimes I think if we're constantly j↓umping in
11. (1.0) 'Kirsty, stop doing that' and stop it all the time is that actually (1.0) >we put
12. ourselves into situation when you're going to become to dep↓end< on that
13. ◦ member of staff ◦, .hh and we're not always going to be th↓e::re.
14. W3: That's exactly what we said (1.0)
15. {all talking at the same time}
16. W4: ◦ Its, it's the word, its the word resilience ◦ (1.0) not teaching them to::
17. (2.0) suck it up, and like (1.0) be bullied (1.0) and accept that you are b↑eing
18. bullied, >not at all th↑at< (1.0), but it is (1.0) a f↓:ine line between erm
19. interjecting when it is necessary and over involving ourselves, because
20. sometimes they have to lea↓rn to::
21. W3: ◦ Be the bigger person ◦
22. All: {yeah}

The participant above makes a clear distinction between the role of the parent and the role of the teacher (see line 2 'we're not their parents'). Here, teaching young people to 'work through' (line 7) is formulated as a category-bound activity (Silverman 2001) of the teacher, and is also used to counteract '◦whatever is instilled◦ with them at h↑ome' (lines 5, 6). As

such, encouraging them (see line 2) to work through things is constructed as an upshot of the guardian role of the teacher, where the guardian role facilitates the students' learning. Within this context, resilience is formulated as a balance between not sucking it up (see line 17) and to be 'the bigger person' (line 21). There is no mentioning of protective factors here (Rutter 2006). Instead, resilience, under the 'duty of care' (line 4) is constructed as something that can be taught (see lines 6 and 16). In addition to this, the family is constructed as a hindrance, something that gets in the way of and prevents young people from building resilience (lines 5 and 6).

Parents

Like the teachers, the parents in the extract below also referred to 'standing up for oneself' as a skill that can be taught; about 40 minutes into the interview:

Learning to be Confident

1. W3: But y↓ea::h (1.0) I think it is g↓ood to learn (2.0), you kn↓ow (1.0)
2. °t↓actics, isn't it° to be (1.0) °you know° I °know what you said about° about
3. t↓oughen up a bit. But I just think that [some]
4. M1: [yeah], but that is a, is a Tory Tory thing
5. >to swipe another problem under the carpet , °Michael Gove°
6. W3: I think it's, ↑its good to l↓earn to be self-c↑onfide[nt]
7. M1: [Ye]ah, there is but
8. (1.0) there ↓is, you know. I (1.0) °I was very lucky as I wasn't bullied°
9. W3: I mean, you're less likely to be bullied, aren't you, if you're a, a
10. c↓onfident person, I would say.
11. {Everyone agrees}.
12. M2: So (1.0) you're saying that the >youngsters need to be taught resilience
13. and stand up for themselves< but you're [saying]
14. W3: [I'm not] saying they should be bullied and
15. st↓and for that at all .hh but I think bef↑ore that happens, you know (1.0) °yeah,
16. maybe it's good to learn to stand up for yourself and not be fr↓ightedened to°, you
17. know
18. M1: Taught to stand up for yours↑elf. Yeah
19. {Everyone agrees}
20. M2: But do you think (1.0) do you think all kids are c↑apable to stand up for
21. themselves?
22. M1: °Not the majority of them are° erm but if they're taught how to (1.0)
23. W2: Not all of them are, no

24. M1: No.
25. W2: But then they m↑aybe need, you know (1.0), those th↑ose ones can be
26. taught resilience because I do think (1.0) to some, some extent, if if you ↓ignore
27. stuff >not always< but sometimes °it does kind [of°]
28. M1: [Wh]en I was at school, you always
29. h↑ad to, you know (1.0) 'cos there w↓as bullying .hh it was different than now,
30. when I was at sch↓ool. And I, I, I s↓aw err r↑uthless bullying.
31. W2: It was a terrible bullying, °but it was years ago° (2.0), [but]
32. M1: [It w]as ruthless I
33. mean, °you know°, But, erm we used to break up and that was it (1.0) nothing else
34. about it (1.0) and carry on until n↓ext time. So y↑ea::h. But I think now it all comes
35. online.

A number of aspects in relation to bullying are tackled here, from discussing tactics (line 2), to confidence (lines 6 and 10) and personal experience (°I was very lucky as I wasn't bullied°, line 8 and 'when I was at school', line 28). This shows that bullying is a complex problem, even more so now, as 'now it all comes online' (lines 34, 35). The first point, namely the issue to do with ways of dealing with bullying (t↓actics, line 2) is introduced as a disclaimer (line 1), indicated by the 'But' at the start. The notion of 't↓oughen up a bit' (line 3) that follows is dismissed as a Tory thing (repeated and stressed twice) followed by the upshot >to swipe another problem under the carpet< (said very quickly to suggest that this goes without saying – i.e. sweeping things under the carpet is a category bound activity of Tory policy; see Silverman 2001). As such, 'toughening up' is constructed as an undesirable approach towards bullying. In the section that follows, 'confidence' is constructed as a membership categorisation device (Silverman 2001) of being 'less likely to be bullied' (line 9). The 'aren't you' that follows in line 9 suggests that others are in a position to agree (Edwards 1997). Moreover, confidence is constructed as something that can be learned, '↑its good to l↓earn to be self-c↑onfide[nt]' (line 6), which raises questions about how this skill can be acquired, which is not discussed by the participants. Instead, the focus turns to standing up for oneself (line 13), as a form of resilience (line 12). Not only that, this specific skill is constructed as something that is a useful skill to have 'bef↑ore that [i.e. bullying] happens' (line 15). This is discussed in the form of what Riley (2003) calls a 'sandwich argument',

where the argument to 'stand up for yourself' is introduced first, followed by 'not be frightened', after which there is a return to the key argument, namely that young people should be taught to stand up for yourself' (line 18).

As with the teachers, the focus is very much on a skill that can be learned. Not only that, to 'ignore stuff' (lines 26, 27) appears to be included in this notion of resilience. This is supported in the last part of table 3 (lines 28-35) when the focus turns to the participants' personal stake and interest (Speer and Potter 2000), 'When I was at school' (line 29), which serves to strengthen the argument; here an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) 'ruthless bullying' (line 30) is used to highlight the intensity of some of the bullying. This is repeated three times ('ruthless bullying'; terrible bullying; ruthless, lines 30-32). At the same time there is an indication that this might be different to what young people are experiencing nowadays, as now it all comes online' (line 34, 35).

Extract 4 comes from the second focus group interview with parents, and is part of discussion around supporting the child (20 minutes into the interview):

Resilience through Support

1. W1: °I think° .hh s↓ometimes it's th:e sup[port]
2. M1 [Yeah]
3. W1: []that they get at h↑ome (1.0)
4. W1: as well >might help them to develop [tha:t<]
5. M1: [Yeah]
6. W1: Y↑]ou know, .hh (1.0) that supp↑ort,
7. °that they get supported through things° (2.0) you know, bad, bad things d↑o
8. h↓appen, but they get supported through it (1.0) a::nd with y↑our help, °you find
9. another way or° (2.0) >they know you're always there< and you're going to back
10. them up what↑ever happens in the w↓orld.
11. M1: [Yeah]
12. W1: [°So::] they've got that° base to come back to .hh
13. M1: [Yeah]
14. W1: [That] you're ↑always th:ere, (1.0) looking out for th↓em, you're always there for
15. them, err supporting them (2.0) >so they do hopefully th[ink<]
16. W2: [But] if you do have

17. parents that are like 'oh well' (2.0)
18. M1: Yeah.
19. W2: But if you l↓isten, er, and you show that you're there for them (1.0) and give them
20. different ways to do this, or try th↑is (2.0) they just know that you're the people in
21. the world that they (2.0) You're th↑ere for them on th↑eir side, .hh and they've
22. got, erm someone to come back to.

The focus on 'support', which is repeated at various points (e.g. lines 1, 7, 8) does two things. Firstly, it constructs the parents as having a responsibility to always (see line 9 and 14) be there for the child; the repetitive nature of the use of the word 'always' functions to highlight the basic duties of care and support that parents have, and should have towards their child. The disclaimer that follows in line 16/17 (But if you do have parents...) serves to strengthen this. Second, through supporting the child, you can also help them through the issue ('find another way', lines 8/9) – again, like the word 'always' the notion of finding different 'ways' is repeated several times (see also line 20). As such, 'supporting the child' is discussed in terms of playing a role in building resilience in two ways, as a base to fall back on (stressed in line 12) and providing skills to deal with the issue. Unlike the teachers, specific protective factors, in terms of the relationship between parent and child are incorporated into the discourse around resilience. Yet, at the same time, it is not so much the bullying itself that is tackled here; instead the focus is on the actions performed by the young person as a result of this, framed within a supportive family network.

Young People

The focus group interviews with young people were slightly different from the focus group interviews with the adults, with a need for more probing to get the young people to talk about bullying, perhaps highlighting that this is a troublesome issue. The need to probe for answers, could have however also reflected the young people being distracted at times by peers, as they chose to hold the focus group discussions in the main hall of the youth centre, rather than in the side room suggested by the researcher. In addition to this, self-

preservation and self-presentation attempts could have played a part in what was discussed in the interviews

The extract below comes from focus group1 with young people, and follows on from a discussion around causes and solutions in relation to bullying behaviour (around 30 minutes into the interview). Girl 1 and boy 1 had just discussed name-calling and suggested that young people need to be resilient and help themselves. The interviewer initially clarifies his understanding of their position in order to encourage further open discussion;

Don't Need Help

1. M: Ok. Alright. Erm (1.0) So you think that, erm °ch↑ildren need se[lf-help°]
2. G1: [YE↑ah]
3. M: and resilience >in [order to feel positive about themsel]ves (1.0) and stand
4. B1: [COMpl↑ete, compl↑etely agr↑ee]
5. M: ↓up to bullies
6. B1: YEP. ComPLETELY agr↓ee.
7. M: Erm, >do you think<, .hh they should be ↓able to stand up to bullies by, by
8. thems↑elves
9. B2: YES]
10. M: A]nd they need help doing that.
11. B1: N↑a::h (1.0) I dont n↑eed help doing th↓at.
12. M: Yeah?
13. B2: °Our generation is t↑oo soft and [they°
14. B1: [NO they're not! Our generation is well harder
15. than the l↑ast generat↑ion!
16. {laughter}
17. B2: Yeah, but they're all like (2.0) they're like (1.0)
18. B1: .like l↓ollipops °and stuff°
19. B2: he flicked me so its bullying!

The initial comments made by the interviewer in relation to 'self-help' (line 1) and 'feel positive about themselves' (line 3) appear to be embraced by the participants, indicated by the loudly spoken and repeated use of the word 'completely' (lines 4 and 6). Interestingly,

the issue of 'needing help' (line 10), marks a change in the discussion. Here there is a turn in the participant's personal stake and interest (N↑a::h (1.0) I dont n↑eed help doing th↓at, line 11). By engaging in what Potter (1997) calls stake confession and making it personal, the participant distances himself from others who might need help. Ungar (2004) found that youth often perceive adult intervention as interfering with their identity construction. However, the young peoples' responses could also reflect their internalised acceptance of an imposed concept of the entrepreneurial self that is 'freed' from the nanny state and responsible for its own care (Foucault 2008). This is hinted at in the section that follows, where the participants refer to their 'generation', thereby distancing themselves from adults, as well as making indirect links with resilience. The banter and laughter that is evident in lines 13-19 suggests that the participants may have some trouble with the issue though (see Billig 1997). Bullying isn't a straight forward issue and research suggests that young people often don't tell adults about their experiences (Juvonen and Gross 2008). Instead, by placing distance between themselves and others, e.g. through the use of the metaphor 'l↓ollipops' (line 18) and the cynically uttered 'he flicked me so its bullying!' (line 19), the participants are trivialising the bullying.

Resilience is a complicated and often misunderstood concept. Below are two more examples from interviews with young people, showing how they negotiate issues to do with 'self-help' and 'resilience' skills. Extract 6 comes from focus group 2. This is part of a discussion around feeling positive about oneself (15 minutes into the interview); again, the interviewer summarises the comments and suggestions made by the participants:

Talk to the Parents

1. M: Do ch↓ildren need resil↓ience skills in ↓order to feel positive about themselves and
2. stand up to bullies?
3. G1: Erm (1.0) n↓ot exactly, .hh c↓os you can just do the same b↓ack. If you, if you
4. st↓and up to your b↓ully, you'll probably bully them.
5. M: °R↓ight°
6. G1: Y↑ou can stand up to them, you'll b↓ully th↑em .
7. M: °ok°

8. G1: °And they'll do it° all over ag↓ain
9. M: So res↑ilience °makes that you just stand up to them and they'll keep d↑oing it°
10. S↑o (2.0) what do you think is the best way to deal with it th↓en?
11. G1: (3.0) er::m
12. G2: erm
13. B1: either (1.0) °you do [something°
14. G2: [contact their parents
15. M: Ok
16. G2: Becau::se then °the par° their parents >alth↑ough its not really the parents<
17. b↓usiness::
18. M: Yeah
19. G2: The parents can help ↓out with this

The participant above picks up on the word 'stand up', whilst the other notions to do with 'self-help and resilience skills' are ignored. Not only that, unlike the other interviews, here standing up for oneself is constructed as problematic and counter-productive, something that is equated to bullying (you'll b↓ully th↑em, line 6). This is followed by the upshot, °And they'll do it° all over ag↓ain. The question what would be the best way to deal with it (lines 9/10) results in long pauses indicating that the participants have trouble with the subject, leading eventually to a reference being made to the role of the parents as protective sources. Here, there is a sense that parents can support the child (help ↓out with this, line 19). As such, parents are constructed as playing a role in solving the bullying issue, whilst the bullying matter itself is not really their business (lines 16/17). Note that some of this also highlights gender differences in the way bullying and resilience are constructed, but this is not the scope of the current paper.

What is significant for the focus of this paper though, is that the bullying incident and responding punitively to the actions of those bullying is constructed as of secondary importance. A deficit in moral action is implied and placed at the feet the victim, rather than primarily with the bullies, where the responsibility of the victim is once again to man-up and take it on the chin.

Another focus group explored the same question; 15 minutes into the interview:

Sticking up for Oneself

1. B1: Yeah
2. {all mumble in agreement}
3. B1: C↓os ↓l::, >l'm a midget< y↓eah. And l'm, and l, so this kid trie d b↓ullying me,
4. and l >he's a fat shit<, sorry, l punched him, fuck off, °l'm sorry for fuck off°, l'm sorry
5. {someone giggles}
6. M: Right
7. B1: And like {interruption from others} l havent FINISHED. This kid called f↓at
8. p↑erson, and
9. M: Are you actually being serious?
10. B1: Yes, straight up.
11. M: Ok
12. B1: This fat person called XXXX, h↑e started me, .hh l said these elastic b↑ands. l
13. said these elastic b↑ands °so he like strangled me° so l punched him in the face, >l
14. broke his nose and l knocked him out and l got excluded for four days for it<,
15. but l was sticking up for mys↑elf

Here, the focus is on 'sticking up for mys↑elf' (see line 15). The participant sets the scene by introducing himself as a midget (line 3); the bully is labelled a 'fat person'. There is significant literature and research based around obesity and morality (e.g. Lupton 2013) and the participant in the extract above seems to tap into some of the key notions to do with these stigmas. The banter, swearing and laughter aside, there are a number of strategies being adopted, which all function to justify why and how this participant was standing up for himself. This is especially evident from lines 12-15, where a three-way-list completer (Antaki and Wetherell 1999) is used (l punched him in the face, broke his nose, and l knocked him out) to highlight that this participant was indeed sticking up for himself. In common with the interviews with the teachers and parents, here there is also a focus on the victim taking charge or control of the situation.

Discussion

Common interpretations of bullying incidents and interventions in the UK are located in a collaborative relational context (see Cowie 2011; Ttofi and Farrington 2011). Current policy

guidance states that 'successful schools should create an environment that prevents bullying from being a serious problem in the first place' (DfE 2014, 7). Creating an inclusive environment, which engenders respect for individuals and an understanding of how actions affect others, is central to this strategy.

At the same time, resilience has been pinpointed as a strategy for coping and adapting in the face of life challenges (Masten et al. 1990; Rutter 1999). Resilience is often discussed in terms of a process underpinned by support from others. In their discussions around bullying and resilience, the participants in the current study mostly placed the responsibility for developing those skills on the individual victim. In addition to this, here the focus was not on discussing how an environment free from fear might be created. Rather, responses focused on individual accountability and responsibility for developing resilience.

A key assumption made by the participants in the extracts above, was that resilience skills constitute a knowledge repertoire, a learned skill, as well as a prescribed notion of autonomous individuation and self, with its intrinsic acceptance of responsibility for self-care. For example, by referring to 'manning up' and making young people accountable for dealing with bullying (teacher focus groups), and by constructing the 'ability to ignore stuff' as something that can be learned (parents), thereby decontextualising young people as autonomous agents. In addition to this, the bullying itself was trivialised, placing responsibility for manning up and coping with this with the victim (e.g. see the young people focus groups).

Not only that, the long-term implications of bullying were negated by locating this in the resilience skills that young people were expected to have and develop *in the here and now*; an example of this is the teachers' suggestion that 'in three years time this won't matter'. Within this, talk was managed by making the young person accountable, isolating the stakeholder from responsibility for intervention or blame. However, where intervention was favoured (see the parents and young people interviews), this was located within the context

of the stakeholders' relationships with the young person, with a specific focus on support and 'learning to be confident'. As such it could be argued that the general theme of 'Manning Up' is pervasive across the narratives, of not only the teachers, but also the parents and young people in this study. Examples of this are the themes 'don't need help', 'sticking up for oneself' and 'learning to be confident'. This though, highlights a further underlying assumption made by the participants in the extracts, namely that individuals have the capacity and relational infrastructure available to support the development of these skills. These decontextualized conceptualizations of bullying and resilience fail to take into account the way an individual's capacity to become resilient is influenced by 'internal assets', *and* 'external strengths' as protective factors.

There are a number of implications here. According to the Good Childhood report (Pople et al 2015), one of the most common responses to the question about what prevents a good life, is bullying. In addition to this, research shows that bullying can have long-term mental health implications (Copeland et al 2013; Wolke 2014). The Good Childhood Report suggests that effectively tackling bullying could have a substantial impact on children's subjective well-being and this is an issue which should be considered by all those concerned with children's quality of life – from national policy makers to children themselves. Yet, how this should be done is not addressed in the report – in addition to this, the notion of 'resilience' is not included here. Similarly, advice provided in Preventing and Tackling Bullying (DfE 2014) does not include notions of resilience; instead it provides general guidance on how bullying should be tackled and what a 'successful school' looks like.

There is evidence that current bullying interventions are variable in effectiveness (see also Ttofi and Farrington, 2011). One reason for this is because the cost/benefit ratio does not address the problem of bullying. In other words, bullies benefit more from their bullying behaviour than it costs them (see also Jacobson, 2010). A focus on 'manning up' may lead to the perpetuation of the bullying itself. Putting the responsibility on the individual (i.e. the victim), lets other players off the hook, and as such the bullying problem itself is not dealt

with. Here we also need to revisit the definition of bullying put forward by the Department of Education in the UK ('behaviour by an individual or group over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally', 2014, p. 6), which makes no mention of power imbalance between the bully and the victim and is instead more fitting with a definition of general aggression. Researchers such as Olweus (1993) have pointed to power imbalance as the major distinguishing feature of bullying. Asking the victims to 'Man Up' is untenable in a situation where victims cannot rectify the situation on their own, and can lead to re-victimization, as they simply do not have the power or resources to deal with this.

Nevertheless, if we want to tackle issues in relation to bullying, a consensus is needed on how to approach this. This includes the role of resilience, as the current study suggests that notions of 'resilience', are used to an extent to place responsibility of dealing with bullying, and further mental health and wellbeing implications within this, with the young person.

Conclusion

This study has sought to explore perceptions of bullying and resilience, and although exploratory, the findings reflect neo-liberal notions of self-determinism, placing responsibility of dealing with bullying incidents on the victims. This has implications for bullying interventions and policies.

Rutter (1985), discusses mechanisms that protect people against the psychological risks associated with adversity (i.e. 'resilience') in terms of four main processes, namely reduction of risk impact, reduction of negative chain reactions, establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and opening up of opportunities. As such the focus of policies should be on creating an environment where the holistic needs of the child are considered, and not just those which require immediate attention in order to fulfil academic goals.

The current study has some limitations, namely the fact that the data and analysis were derived from a small number of participants (forty participants in eight focus groups), and the use of a convenience sample which meant that subjects more readily accessible to the researchers were more likely to be included. More research is needed to establish key notions in relation to resilience, including the multidimensionality of protective factors, also in relation to gender and social class, and the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion within this.

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Transcription Notions

◦ ◦	<i>Encloses speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk.</i>
(1.0)	<i>Pause length in seconds.</i>
- Hyphen	<i>Word broken off.</i>
↑	<i>Rising intonation.</i>

↓	<i>Lowering intonation.</i>
CAPITAL LETTERS	<i>Talk that is louder than the surrounding talk.</i>
<u>Underline</u>	<i>Stress/emphasis.</i>
> <	<i>Encloses speeded up talk.</i>
()	<i>Encloses words the transcriber is unsure about. Empty brackets enclose talk that is not hearable.</i>
.hhh	<i>In-breath.</i>
[]	<i>Overlapping speech.</i>
[<i>Onset of overlapping speech.</i>
{ }	<i>Clarification, referring to tone or gesture, e.g. {laughs}</i>
:::	<i>Extended sound.</i>
=	<i>Marks the immediate 'latching' of successive talk, whether of one or more speakers, with no interval.</i>

(Edwards, 1997; Jefferson, 1985)