

## The Hurt Self



*Örebro Studies in Social Work 18*



KARIN HELLFELDT

## **The Hurt Self**

**Bullied Children's Experiences of Social Support, Recognition  
and Trust at School**

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## **Abstract**

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The aim of this dissertation is to add to the development of the knowledge base of bullying research with particular focus on processes of victimization within a Swedish context. The goal is to contribute to understanding the consequences of being bullied by examining patterns of change in bullying victimization over time and how potential positive social interactions and relationships might promote the well-being of bullied children. A mixed-methods research design was used, including quantitative data from a one-year longitudinal study, using individual data, from 3,347 pupils (grades 4 to 9, in 44 schools) and five in-depth qualitative interviews with former victims of bullying. From an overview of the research field it was concluded that there is a general shortage of theoretical perspectives within the field of bullying research. Correlation studies have linked negative health consequences with bullying. However, this kind of research design provides few insights into how and why bullied children experience the kinds of problems that they do. By adopting a theoretical understanding of how 'self' is realized through interactions with others, this dissertation moves beyond correlation-based explanations of the mechanisms behind the link between bullying and its consequences in order to be able to offer more targeted support for those schoolchildren who are, or have been subjected to bullying. An argument is made for the importance of understanding the social processes behind bullying. It is argued that being subjected to bullying victimization is a transient life experience for about three quarters of the small cohort (about 7%) of Swedish schoolchildren who are victims of bullying at any one time. The trajectories of bullying experiences these children are unstable. However, the negative consequences are likely to remain even after the bullying has ceased. For others, the persistent victims (1.6%), the state of being bullied may become stable and continue over periods of years. Nevertheless, peers and teachers may serve as important resources in supporting transitory and continuing victims of bullying.

*Keywords:* Bullying victimization, stability, consequence, relationship, recognition, social support, teachers, peers.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of a number of people. Without mentioning all and risking leaving some out, I would like to mention a few that has been of great significance for me during this process.

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Karin Hellfeldt  
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## List of articles

- Article I** Hellfeldt, K., Johansson, B., & Lindberg, O. (2014). Mobbning och social stöd från lärare och klasskamrater: En longitudinell studie av barns erfarenheter av mobbning. *Sociologi i dag*, 44(4).
- Article II** Hellfeldt, K., Gill, P., E., & Johansson, B. (2016). Longitudinal analyses of links between bullying victimization and psycho-somatic maladjustment in Swedish school-children. Resubmitted, *Journal of School Violence*.
- Article III** The importance of recognition: teacher-pupil relations from the perspective of the bullied child. Submitted.
- Article IV** Bullying and well-being: Social support from teachers as a buffering factor for bullied children. Manuscript.

Articles have been reprinted with permission from the journals and publisher.



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# 1. Introduction

School is fun for me – but it’s the loneliness. I seem to be worth less and that makes me feel bad. I don’t understand why? Why I’m not OK, what have I done? I just feel bad and cry all the time. (17-year-old girl, former victim of bullying)

Negative actions between children within school contexts have been the subject of news-headlines the world over. Headline news about school shootings and suicides of victims of chronic bullying has led to increased public concern about bullying in schools (Juvonen and Graham, 2014). ‘Bullying’ commonly refers to repeated negative actions of one schoolchild toward another, with an intention to cause hurt or harm and where the victim lacks the capacity (is powerless) to defend itself (Olweus, 1993). Bullying has been described as the most common form of youth violence involving negative actions between peers within or related to the school context (Craig et al., 2009; Due et al., 2005, 2009; Elgar et.al., 2015; Finkelhor, 2014; Rigby & Smith, 2011). Bullying can take many forms, ranging from physical attacks, such as kicking and hitting the other person, to name-calling, spreading malicious rumors, excluding someone from peer-groups or sending embarrassing pictures or comments online. Irrespective of type of negative action, being a victim of bullying has proven to have a range of negative consequences (Juvonen and Graham, 2014; Nansel et al., 2001; Hawker and Boulton, 2000). Large-scale meta-analyses and comparative studies (Due et al., 2009) involving samples from different parts of the world have established how damaging these actions are: for children’s self-esteem; school adjustment; somatic health and capacity to shape positive relationship(s) with others in their immediate environments. Bullying, quite clearly, poses a threat to children’s health and well-being. Thus, preventing bullying in order to reduce the negative consequences, revealed by international research, is an important public health goal. In trying to understand the negative consequences bullying, it is vital to gain new knowledge into how bullied children can best be helped and supported.

The school environment is the setting, with the exception of their own home, where children in general spend most of their time (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008). The school, in addition to being a place of formal education, is also an important place where children learn to deal with and engage in different forms of social relations. The school years are an important period in a child’s life, a time when identity and concepts of self are shaped.

While this ‘identity project’ is an ongoing process throughout life, the foundations of ‘self’ are shaped in childhood through social interactions with those close to us, such as friends and family (Mead, 1976/1995; Honneth, 1995; Scheff, 2000). Participation in social interactions, positive and negative, is important in developing a notion of the self. Mirroring oneself through the eyes of significant others provides a foundation for developing a sense of self and interacting with the attitudes of group members in shaping a self-concept (Honneth, 1995; Scheff, 2000). Thus, positive social relations are crucial in the development of a positive feeling of self-worth. However, children often struggle when grappling with their peer-relationships within the school environment. Insults, social exclusion, rumors spread about them, threats, pushes and punches, being made fun of, for some children, is all part of their school day. For these children, social interactions and relationships, while at school, become problematic. It is understandable how their mirroring of themselves in these interactions and relationship can easily lead to a negative and troubled sense of self (cf. Honneth, 1995).

In Sweden the prevalence of bullying is low compared with other countries. In a study of 28 countries, using similar measures to estimate bullying behaviors, Sweden reported the second lowest levels of bullying (Currie et al., 2012). Sweden, as well as the other Nordic countries, has a long tradition of working with bullying prevention. Sweden also has an extensive legislative framework for regulation of schools’ strategies for prevention and coping with bullying (Skolverket, 2012). In spite of this, given the heightened obligation on Swedish schools to deal with the problem of bullying, thousands of schoolchildren still fall victim to such behavior. Therefore knew knowledge is needed on how low levels of bullying may be made even lower and on how bullied children may best be supported.

### **The importance of positive relationships**

While Swedish schools have come a long way in their anti-bullying policies, there is still a lack of detailed knowledge about how best to support those children who have, or are experiencing bullying. Focus has been on detection, prevention and intervention in order to stop the bullying. However, once the bullying has ceased, children are often left to deal with the consequences on their own. Not a lot is known about how these children can best be supported (Baldry, 2004). While bullying has proven to be a problem the world over, and across all school grades, little is known about the stability and persistence of victimhood, nor about how different experiences of vic-

timhood differentially affect aspects of children's lives. To be able to support and help victims of bullying more research is needed to understand how bullying may vary, over time, as a result of short or long-term exposure, or how new or persistent victims experience and react to being bullied. While there is considerable consensus in bullying research that being a victim of bullying increases the risk of maladjustment and subsequent health problems, less is known about how to support victims. Understanding what factors might promote positive outcomes for these children has been stressed (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Some studies have investigated social support as one important positive factor mediating the negative consequences of bullying (Cohen, Gottlieb & Underwood, 2000; Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Social support may be described as having positive relationships with others, feelings of being cared for and being valued, which enhance children's ability to tackle obstacles in life. Little is known about how social support, from different sources, affects children who are, or have been experiencing repeated negative actions from their peers. Is it possible for victims of bullying to restore relationships with their peers and teachers when the negative actions have ceased? Do negative experiences of bullying affect children's ability to benefit from the positive aspects of social support? How does social support change in relation to longer periods of bullying victimization? It is important to generate research evidence about how victims can best be supported by and benefit from social support, particularly in relation to variations in victimization over time and about how different experiences of being subjected to bullying relate to variations in subsequent maladjustment issues and psychosomatic health consequences.

Schott & Søndergaard's *School bullying: New theories in context* (eds., 2014), has been one inspiration for the formulation of the aims and arguments made in this dissertation. They describe how there is a general shortage of theoretical understanding and perspectives within this field. Bullying has mainly been studied using large, cross-sectional samples that generate quantitative data, with theoretical explanations usually based on psychological theory. Correlation studies have linked negative health consequences with bullying. However, this kind of research design provides few insights into how and why bullied children experience the kinds of problems that they do. The lack of theoretical understanding is especially evident in the sociological field. By adopting a theoretical understanding of how 'self' is realized through interactions with others, it is hoped to move beyond cor-

relation-based explanations of the mechanisms behind the link between bullying and its consequences in order to be able to offer more targeted support for those schoolchildren who are, or have been subjected to bullying.

## **Aim of the dissertation**

The overall aim of this dissertation is to make a contribution to knowledge and understanding of the consequences of being bullied by examining patterns of change in bullying victimization over time and how potential positive social interactions and relationships might promote the well-being of bullied children.

## **Research questions**

- How can different experiences of being subject to bullying over time relate to different aspects of children's emotional and psychosomatic adjustment?
- How do different experiences of being a victim of bullying over time influence perceived social support from peers and teachers?
- In what way might social support from teachers and peers protect bullied children against negative outcomes in their lives?
- How do bullied children view and interpret any support offered by their teachers?

Notwithstanding the obvious fact that teachers can bully children, and children can bully teachers (Twemlow et al., 2006; Whitted & Dupper, 2007), the focus of this dissertation is on peer-to-peer bullying among Swedish schoolchildren.

## **Disposition**

Following the introduction and stated aims (above), the comprehensive summary of this compilation dissertation is presented below. The comprehensive summary begins with an introductory chapter. *Chapter 2*, describes Swedish legislature relating to bullying prevention and anti-bullying interventions. The most important regulation, The Swedish Education Act (Skollagen 2010:800) strives to protect children from discrimination, harassment and degrading treatment at school, and demands that schools in Sweden work proactively and reactively against such actions. From this chapter it will be evident that Swedish schools have a long history of prevention of bullying and peer-victimization.

Based on this circumstance, i.e. the Swedish context as a tradition of bullying awareness and active prevention, in *Chapter 3*, I problematize both the definition of bullying and challenges in estimating the prevalence's of bullying victimization. Even though studies comparing cross-national prevalence estimates that Sweden has one of the lowest prevalence rates of bullying victimization, certain problems related to measuring and comparing prevalence between countries are discussed. Besides measurement difficulties, estimates of bullying victimization have mainly been made from cross-sectional studies which tend to mask how bullying victimization may vary throughout the school years. By referring to studies that use a longitudinal design, arguments are made for the importance of further study different patterns of bullying victimization over the school years in general, but also in relation to different outcomes related to being bullied.

In *Chapter 4*, the extensive research on the relationship between bullying victimization and negative outcomes are reviewed. Bullying has been linked to emotional, somatic, academic, and relational maladjustment. Two main problems with prior research are identified. Studies, in general, are based on correlation research designs, which give little insight into how lived experiences of bullying, over shorter or longer periods of victimization, relate to negative outcomes, and previous research has been dominated by one research paradigm at the expense of other, possibly more fruitful, theoretical approaches.

*Chapter 5* reviews studies that indicate the importance of supportive relations within the school environment for children experiencing bullying. Previous studies repeatedly emphasize the negative impact that bullying might have on its victims regarding perceived social support. These chapters stress that both peer and teacher relations could serve as a significant source for both enabling, and ending bullying victimization, as well as offering ameliorative support for victims who are experiencing bullying.

In *Chapter 6*, two dominating research paradigms within the field of bullying research and literature are described. The field of bullying research has mainly been dominated by one paradigm - a 'first order' perspective on bullying, where the main focus is placed on individual traits. Here, bullying is explained by characteristics and dysfunctional behaviors of single individuals. The second paradigm - a 'second order' perspective on bullying, highlights the importance of understanding bullying as social processes which occur within a wider context in which different norms and structures interact with bullying behaviors. I argue that there is a need for a third paradigm in which knowledge and methodological approaches from both perspectives

are incorporated and extended. A definition of how bullying is understood in this dissertation is also presented.

In *Chapter 7*, a meta-theoretical approach, devised as the foundation for analyzing the empirical material in this dissertation, is presented. The concept of social support is discussed, relating this term to a wider theoretical approach describing the importance of significant others in developing a positive sense of self. Honneth's (1995) concept of recognition (1995) is presented and related to bullying research.

In *Chapter 8*, the design of the study is outlined. Methodological considerations as well as the concrete data collection methods and ethical concerns are described. The dissertation is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining data from a one-year longitudinal survey of approximately 3,300 school children, in grades 4 to 9, short stories from open ended questions and thirteen hours of transcribed responses from five qualitative in depth interviews with former victims of bullying. Analytical strategies for combining these empirical sources are also discussed.

*Chapter 9* includes a short review of the four articles that are included in the compilation dissertation. Article I shows how stability and change in bullying victimization relates to perceived levels of social support from teachers and peers. Article II examines how short-term (one year) longitudinal trends in bullying victimization are related to somatic and emotional adjustment. Through use of the theoretical concept of recognition as defined by Honneth (1995), Article III covers how former victims of bullying experienced support from teachers. In Article IV the positive potential of social support from teachers is studied, by looking into the potential buffering impact of social support from teachers on bullied children's well-being. The four articles reprinted in appendix I to IV.

The final section of the comprehensive summary, *Chapter 10*, gauges to what extent the aims of the dissertation have been reached by combining the empirical results as presented with previous research within the field, and analysing this by applying the extended theoretical approach. Profiles of victimization over the one year follow-up are discussed in the Swedish regulatory context. Psychosomatic outcomes related to these profiles of bullying victimization are highlighted. The crucial importance for victims of the period after bullying has ended is discussed, as well as the importance of peers and teachers as a sources of positive, and negative, social support. Practical implications of results and conclusions are presented. Further research is suggested.

## 2. The Swedish context: A tradition of bullying awareness and prevention

School attendance is compulsory for all children resident in Sweden. The compulsory school extends to nine years and is funded and administrated by local municipalities or private providers (Prop. 2009/2010:165; SFS 2010:800, kap. 7). The school year consists of an autumn and a spring term. School is compulsory from the autumn term of the year in which a child reaches the age of seven, through to the spring term of 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Swedish schools have a long history of prevention of bullying and peer-victimization (Agevall, 2008; Eriksson, Lindberg, Flygare & Daneback, 2002). Throughout the last decades, anti-bullying and harassment prevention strategies have been intensified, including new legalization and guidelines concerning the school environments. Swedish schools are legally obligated to have anti-discrimination and prevention of degrading treatment policies (Skolverket, 2015). In the 1980s, the concept of bullying was introduced into Swedish primary school curricula (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980) with the expectation that all schools formulated and introduced anti-bullying plans. Guidelines indicated that these plans should include procedures for detection, prevention and intervention against bullying (Skolverket, 2012). When any degrading act is detected, schools are obliged to investigate, take action and intervene in order to stop the bullying or harassment. In 1994 these requirements were strengthened and, since 2006, school authorities can be held legally accountable if they cannot prove that they have taken decisive action against any degrading treatment or harassment that has come to their attention.

Two different legislative frameworks regulate and guide schools in these areas. The Swedish Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567) and The Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) both strive to protect children from discrimination, harassment and degrading treatment at school. Three particular terms are used in these documents, namely, *discrimination*, *harassment* and *degrading treatment* (in Swedish *diskriminering*, *trakasserier* and *kränkningar*). Discrimination relates to where a child, directly or indirectly, is subject to any discrimination regulated by law (SFS 2008:567, Chapter 1, 4§) including gender, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, transgender identity or expression, disability or sexual orientation. Included in this conception of unfair treatment/discrimination is the notion of a power imbalance. Thus, discrimination only arises through the actions of persons holding 'power' within the school, such as, school principals or teachers.

Harassment on the other hand, relates to negative acts that violate a person's dignity and which may be related to any of the grounds for discrimination stated above. Degrading treatment is specifically defined in the legislature (SFS 2010:800, 6 kap 3 §) and relates to all other kinds of negative actions that violate a person's dignity but which cannot be linked to the various grounds for discrimination. Thus, 'bullying', as a concept, or indeed, the term is not used within the Swedish legalization. *Bullying*, understood as repeated acts of discrimination, harassment or degrading treatment is not regarded as a specific case, since the law, as written and implemented, is aimed at protecting school children from single actions with negative consequences. The law is based on a principle of zero tolerance, where schools are obligated to investigate and take action at the very first occurrence of any incident, and, therefore, any element of repetition, as in the general understanding of bullying, need not be established.

To create safe school environments and to protect children from harassment and degrading treatment, the legislative framework goes beyond just forbidding these actions and demands that schools engage proactively and reactively in their prevention strategies. Both ordinances consist of three parts that relate to how schools should deal with degrading treatment and harassment. First and foremost, schools must promote equality within school, in a broad sense, that is, without necessarily being linked to problems related to harassment, degrading treatment and discrimination. Schools have to develop strategies for creating safe school environments, positive interpersonal relationships and a school environment that promotes equality.

Secondly, schools must implement prevention strategies for protecting children from degrading treatment and harassment. Such preventive strategies must be based on risk factors identified within general school contexts and within the particular school. Promotion and preventative work ought to be age- and context-adapted and should be implemented on the basis of school plans for anti-discrimination and degrading treatment. The Discrimination Act (Chapter 3, 16 §) stipulates that every school, under the direct responsibility of the School Principal, must formulate an anti-discrimination plan, similar to the plan against degrading treatment (SFS 2010:800, Chapter 6, 8 §). It is recommended that the separate plans should be integrated into a single plan, incorporating strategies for dealing with and preventing the stated actions (Skolverket, 2011c, 2012, 2015). The strategy must include an annual evaluation survey to detect risk factors within the school,



and revised plans should incorporate appropriate measures for reduction and prevention of risks, as identified in the evaluation.

Thirdly, schools are responsible for investigating and taking appropriate measures to stop single acts of discrimination or degrading treatment. All staff within schools, where harassment and/or degrading treatment is detected, are obliged to report it to the School Principal (SFS 2010:800, 6 Chapter 10 §). Individual teachers have no right to adjudicate the severity of any actions uncovered. All negative actions, indicated by any child, must be reported to the Principal. They are also obligated to act when such negative behavior between students is detected. Steps to deal with the situation must be taken quickly and be based on information collected from an investigation of the situation. The investigation and steps taken must also be well documented (Skolverket, 2012, 2015).

The party with formal responsibility for the running of a school, that is, the local municipality, a designated School Principal (Headmaster), or a private operator running an academy school, is legally responsible for the quality of education and outcomes in each particular school. This responsibility also includes guaranteeing a safe school environment. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate has formal responsibility for scrutinizing and monitoring how schools function, including assessment of how schools deal with various wrongdoings (Skolinspektionen, 2014). The inspectorate also provides schools with guidelines and advice on how best to follow the obligations of the various school ordinances.

In 2006, the first office of a special ombudsman for school children (Barn- och elevombudet: BEO - Child and School Student Representative) was incorporated (Skolinspektionen, 2015). BEO has an independent role within the Schools Inspectorate, and is appointed by government with the specific task of supervising that part of the Swedish school system that deals with all forms of degrading treatment. BEO makes decisions based on complaints from school pupils relating to degrading treatment in schools and is also responsible for spreading information regarding legislative protection from degrading treatment in school. BEO has powers to investigate how well a school, the principal and staff, have followed the specific guidelines, acting impartially and not specifically representing any of the parties involved. However, BEO is specifically charged to defend the right of schoolchildren not be subject to degrading treatment. Whenever a child makes a complaint about degrading treatment, discrimination or harassment in school, BEO has powers to represent the child in court and, on the pupil's behalf, seek damages from the relevant school authority.

As stated in this chapter, Swedish schools have an extensive obligation to work against different forms of negative actions between peers at school. Differences in legislations between countries may be of great importance for how bullying manifests within the school context. To put the issues studied in this dissertation into context, this go through of Swedish regulations relating to bullying behavior are there for of great importance.

### 3. Bullying: definition and prevalence

#### Different types of bullying

While bullying has been gaining increased attention from international researchers in recent years, Swedish bullying research began four decades ago. In 1969, Peter Paul Heinemann, a Swedish doctor, wrote an article expressing worries about his son, who had been subject to an experience which Heinemann referred to as “mobbing”, a form of group violence directed at an individual, singled out by the ‘mob’ (Agevall, 2008). Heinemann felt that no Swedish word could capture his son’s experience so he chose an adaptation of the English word. A few years later Heinemann (1972) published a book titled *Mobbing: Group Violence among Children and Adults* (my translation). By this time the original concept, mobbing, had been rendered into a Swedish verb as *mobbning*. Heinemann’s intention was to capture the notion of group harassment of an individual. It is therefore somewhat ironic that the Scandinavian use of that term, emanating from Heinemann’s writings, is often translated back to English as “bullying” or, sometimes as “mobbing”, that is, Heinemann’s own use from 1969, though not from 1972, when his book was published. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that some confusion has arisen in regard to the nomenclature of “bullying”. For instance, Crawshaw (2009) titled her article: “Workplace bullying? Mobbing? Harassment? Distraction by a thousand definitions”.

Three and a half years after Heinemann, Olweus (1973) published a book on the same subject where he linked systematic acts of aggression by a stronger child toward a weaker child as an explanation for bullying, using the terms *bullies* and *whipping* boys. In his early research, Olweus (1973), studying boys exclusively, estimated the prevalence of interpersonal aggression among five large samples of sixteen-year-old Swedish school boys. With this book, the first of many from Olweus, began the modern era of bullying research. While Olweus’s pioneering work focused mainly on physical aggression, the importance of various kinds of indirect forms of bullying began to be highlighted within the research field (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Salmivalli et al., 1996). His original conceptualization of bullying is still the most widely used definition. Olweus (1999) gave the following definition:

A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons. A negative action is when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another...” (Olweus 1999, p.10)

While a large body of research has been created since Heinemann first wrote his debate article, there is still no consensus on how bullying ought to be defined (Smith et al., 2002; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). In spite of this, current definitions generally include the main characteristics of Olweus’s conceptualization. Bullying generally includes three main characteristics: (i) *intent*, the actions are intended to harm the other person; (ii) *repetition*, the actions tend to be repeated; and (iii) *imbalance of power*, where victims are regarded as being unable to defend themselves.

While the definition above may seem straight forward, the basic tenets can be queried. For example, how ought intent be interpreted? Does intent simply mean an intention to act in an aggressive and hurtful way, without understanding the consequences? From whose perspective ought intent be determined: the person experiencing the negative actions or the person inflicting the pain? The notion of imbalance of power is also problematic, especially since it is hard to operationalize (Finkelhor et al., 2012). While frequency and repetition are almost always included, some argue that repetition may not be a necessary condition since a single event may prove as traumatic as repeated attacks by raising fears of continued harassment (Juvenon and Graham, 2014).

In the decades since Olweus’s pioneering research, bullying, to a large extent, has been conceptualized as a sub-category of aggression (Smith, 2014). The early research focused on different forms of direct, physical aggression, mainly by boys, largely because physical aggression is stereotypically male and is more easily observed. Subsequent research has drawn the attention to other forms of aggression, widening how acts of bullying ought to be understood. Three general categories of bullying have been distinguished (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Smith 2014): *Direct physical aggression*, involving face-to-face physical confrontations such as hitting, kicking and pushing victims; *Verbal aggression*, involving spoken insults such as name-calling, insulting remarks and threats of violence (Björkqvist et al., 1992); and, *Relational or Social aggression*, referring to actions aimed at disregarding or damaging the victim’s relationships and status within social groups, for instance through rumor-mongering or social exclusion. Physical and verbal aggression are also referred to as *direct bullying* since the action take

place face to face, while relational or social aggression is referred to as *indirect bullying* (Skolverket, 2011a). Direct bullying usually involves humiliation or intimidation in front of an audience of peers or bystanders whereas indirect forms of bullying, aiming to damage a victim's social status or reputation within a peer group, often involves a third party (Juvonen and Graham, 2014; Smith, 2014).

A group of Japanese researchers (Naito & Gielen, 2005; Taki, 2001), in the 1980's, identified a form of negative behavior at Japanese schools that extends the concept of bullying to *ijime*. *Ijime* may be compared to the notion of indirect aggression, referring to actions such as deliberately ignoring, excluding from a peer group, teasing and other forms of social isolation (Naito & Gielen, 2005), usually by more subtle means. While *ijime* might include ostracization and verbal abuse, the forms of these actions, as observed by Taki (2001), are much harder for third parties to detect and identify and, thus, are more problematic to punish by law since both the actions and their consequences often remain unnoticed. Victims of *ijime* suffer in silence, and, because of feelings of shame, are often unwilling to reveal or verbalize their experiences. While single actions within the sphere of *ijime* might be described as minor wrongdoings, Japanese schoolchildren, as victims of *ijime*, have described a cumulative pattern amounting to serious threats (Crystal, 1994). In a collective society like Japan, subtle ostracization by peers can cause serious psychological and emotional damage since group membership and collective acceptance can be crucial for schoolchildren's well-being.

## **Are children, teachers and researchers talking about the same thing?**

Even though Olweus's definition of bullying has been widely used within and beyond the research community, some studies have indicated a discrepancy between children's, teachers' and researchers' use of the term and understanding of bullying. The three criteria accepted by researchers, intent, repetition and imbalance of power, are rarely found in children's definitions of bullying (Frisén, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008; Naylor et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2002; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). For instance, Vaillancourt (op. cit.), in her study of 1,767 Canadian school pupils, aged 8-18, found that Olweus's three criteria were rarely incorporated into children's definitions of bullying. Almost all (92 %) mentioned negative actions in their definitions. However, power imbalance was mentioned by 26 %, and repetition and intentionality only by 6 % and 1.7 % respectively. Similar results were

found in a sample of 877 Swedish 13-year-olds. where 19% reported power imbalance as a factor in their definition (Frisén et al., op-cit.).

Children's definitions of bullying also vary with age. Younger children tend to focus more on physical aggression while older pupils have a more complex understanding, incorporating both verbal and relational forms of aggression in their definitions (Boulton, Trueman & Flemington, 2002; Naylor et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2002). Frisé and colleagues' (2008) study had a longitudinal design with a cohort of school pupils being sampled at different ages. At age 10, only 8 % mentioned indirect bullying in their definitions, whereas, at age 13, 40 % included such actions in their definitions.

Studies have shown that teachers' and children's perceptions of the circumstances of bullying also differ (Menesini, Fonzi & Smith, 2002; Naylor et al., 2006). Their definitions are broader than those used by researchers (Smith et al., 2002; Naylor et al., 2006), and children's perceptions vary as they get older. Naylor (et al., 2006), in a study of 225 teachers and 1820 secondary school children, found that only 4% of pupils and 25% of teachers included intention to harm in their definitions. Repeated actions were included by 18% of teachers and 8% of pupils. Regarding imbalance of power, 40% of pupils and 75% of teachers included this aspect (op. cit.). In semi-qualitative interviews with 166 primary school children, Guerin and Hennessy (2002) also found repetition to be less important. Actions occurring only once or twice could be defined as bullying according to some pupils, whereas nearly half said that the action had to be repeated over time to be regarded as bullying

In sum, the accepted definition used by researchers is not easily translated to children's and teachers' conceptualization of bullying. Pupils' age, gender and personal experiences influence how they define bullying.

## **The terminology of bullying behavior**

Definitions of bullying, particularly when some notion of stability (see below) of roles or behavior is incorporated, lead to some terminological difficulties. The phenomenon of stability is important since different terms imply different assumptions as to how stability, or lack of stability, of victim roles ought to be understood. Terms used to describe changes in bullying status, for instance from victim to non-victim have varied. One example is the term "desisters", used by Goldbaum (et al., 2003). Another is "escaped victims" used by Smith et al., (2004) and Smith (2014). This use of the term "escaped victims" is unfortunate since it implies an assumption that a victim

must act to escape his or her victimhood, somehow shifting a degree of responsibility for intervening against bullying from the perpetrator to the victim. In this dissertation, as in other studies, the term “persistent” will be used when referring to pupils who experience a continuation of bullying (Lien & Welander-Vatn, 2013). Where a victim ceases to be a victim I use the term ‘ceased victims’.

## **The prevalence of bullying victimization**

While bullying is a matter of international concern (Due et al., 2005, 2009; Cook et al., 2010), there is considerable difficulty in establishing reliable prevalence estimates, not least, as has been shown above, because of difficulties in defining target behaviors. While prevalence involves statistics for victims, perpetrators, bully/victims and bystanders (Salmivalli, 2014), the focus of this dissertation is on victims. Irrespective of what target behavior is being assessed, inconsistencies in measurement and sampling strategies and definitions of the dependent variable complicate comparisons of prevalence estimates of victimization in different studies (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). Some meta-analyses have attempted to generalize prevalence estimates. Cook et al., (2010) analyzed 82 studies, covering a total of 100,452 children and adolescents aged 3 to 18 from 16 countries, the majority of which were European, with a smaller proportion from USA (26 %) and other locations (19 %). Significant variability was found between countries, with prevalence for victims ranging from 7 % in Switzerland to 43 % in Italy. Of these, 11 countries reported higher victim prevalence for boys than for girls. Similar between-country differences have been found in other meta-analyses. Currier et al. (2012) combined data from national representative samples of 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds from 38 countries, revealing an average rate for victimization of 11.3%.

Gender differences and bullying is another contentious research area. Some have argued that boys are more involved in bullying, both as bullies and victims (Olweus, 1993; Nansel et al., 2001; Seals & Young, 2003). A general idea is that different forms of physical aggression are associated more with males whereas relational aggression is associated with females (Olweus, 1993; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann & Jugert, 2006). Some studies support these notions, indicating that, irrespective of age, social class, culture and ethnicity, boys are more involved in physical aggression such as kicking and hitting, than girls, also, that most physically aggressive girls never reach the same levels of aggressive behavior as boys (Card et al., 2008;

Dodge et al., 2006). There appears to a research consensus in regard to gender differences for physical bullying, but less so for indirect forms of bullying. Two separate meta-analyses (Archer, 2004; Card et al., 2008) and one narrative review (Archer and Coyne, 2005) all question conclusions regarding gender differences and indirect forms of bullying. Results from these meta-analyses show that although girls use more indirect forms of bullying compared with physical bullying, gender differences in use of indirect forms of bullying are not large. Boys are just as likely as their female peers to use tactics such as rumor and mongering and exclusion as a means of damaging victims' status in their peer groups.

Potential gender differences may also be explained by gender role stereotypes (Phillips, 2000; Simmons, 2000). Cultural constructions of male identity may create cultural scripts in which physical aggression form part of being male (Phillips, 2000). Similarly, constructions of female identity, such as discouraging aggression and meanness among girls, may encourage females to hide their use of aggression, thereby making their bullying harder to detect in survey research (Simmons, 2000).

Some have argued that age may be more important than gender when exploring differences in prevalence of bullying (Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby 1996). Archer and Coyne (2005) argue that physical violence becomes less socially acceptable in middle adolescence as relational harassment become the norm for both genders, indicating that gender differences for indirect bullying may diminish as children grow older. Being a victim of various forms of bullying, verbal, physical and indirect, tends to decrease with age, according to Rigby (1996), who found, in a sample of 4,229 Australian schoolchildren aged 10 to 17, that victimization was higher among younger pupils (Rigby, 1996). Similar results have been found in other studies. In a representative sample of 15,686 US school pupils, 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Nansel et al. (2001) found that frequency of bullying was higher among 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> graders than among 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders.

In sum, earlier research concluded that boys were more involved in physical/direct forms of bullying. Such gender differences have been found not to be as prevalent for indirect forms of bullying. Girls and boys are relationally aggressive and rumor and monger in equal amounts, though girls are more likely to use such strategies against their peers. Age rather than gender seems more important when comparing prevalence of involvement in bullying.



## Stability of bullying victimization

Regardless of actual prevalence rates and shortcomings in assessing them, as described above, it is relevant to ask how any given prevalence might stand over time. For one child, victimization might be comprised of a shorter series of incidents while for another bullying victimization might last for extended periods. Cross-sectional follow-up surveys based on aggregate data are unable to provide information on duration of victimization. Few studies have focused on different developmental pathways for bullying victimization. When considering the stability of bullying experiences, Olweus has written that:

“All of these results suggest that, without systematic and effective intervention, the levels of bully/victim problems characterizing consecutive, largely comparable cohorts of schools at different time points or a cohort of schools followed over time, will be relatively stable at least for a period of a couple of years” (own translation from Olweus, 2007, p. 61).

The hypothesis above would indicate that children, who end up either as victims or bullies, are at risk of retaining their respective ‘roles’. This conceptualization of stability of roles is linked to how bullying is explained. How various explanations of bullying have dominated the research field will be addressed subsequently. However, for now, I wish to argue that there is, what I term a ‘first theoretical paradigm’, dominating the field of bullying research, within which it is argued that bullying victimization may be explained by personal characteristics and traits, which may, to a certain degree, be relatively stable over time (Olweus, 2007). According to this perspective, characteristics of victims, such as being submissive or provocative makes some children more “suitable” targets for others to intimidate, harass or attack (Olweus, 1978). Even though personality characteristics may change to some extent throughout childhood and adolescence, the extent to which an individual is submissive or provocative, that is, where these characteristics are relatively stable, will put that individual at risk for bullying. However, notwithstanding the possible influence of individual personality characteristics, arguments have been put forward for the importance of aspects of the school environment and the larger social context of children’s lives as explanations for bullying (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000; Hong & Espelage, 2012a; Horton, 2016; Horton & Forsberg, 2015; Swearer et al., 2010; Thornberg, 2015a). From this theoretical perspective,

possible instability in patterns of bullying becomes more interesting and important to study.

An increasing number of studies have begun to question the stability of bullying roles, promoting the need for longitudinal research designs in order to examine the stability of different bullying roles (Juvonen and Graham, 2014; Smith, 2014). Within bullying research literature, most studies are cross-sectional which limits the possibility of examining stability over time. Cross-sectional statistics tend to mask different developmental pathways. Understanding how different experiences of bullying victimization, that is, over shorter or longer periods, is crucial, in understanding the negative impacts and outcomes of bullying, particularly how bullying relates to other factors in children's lives, such as negative health outcomes. For instance, is duration of victimization a factor in negative outcomes (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000)? Evidence for a 'stability hypothesis' is examined below.

Research results have indicated that some children show a stable pattern of being subjected to bullying, while for others, their victimization occurs over shorter periods of time, all of which points to the importance of being able to understand longitudinal changes in patterns of involvement in and being subjected to bullying victimization (Biggs et al., 2010; Boulton & Smith, 1994; Hellfeldt, Johansson, & Lindberg, 2014; Juvonen, et al., 2000; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Scholte et al., 2007; Skolverket, 2011a; Smith et al., 2004; Wolke et al., 2009). Only a few studies have used longitudinal, *individual-level* data to explore bullying and its impacts (Biggs et al., 2010; Goldbaum et al., 2003; Juvonen et al., 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Waldrop, 2001; Lien & Welander-Vatn, 2013; Skolverket, 2011a; Smith et al., 2004; Özdemir & Stattin, 2011). A common thread in these longitudinal studies is observed variability in the persistence of bullying and bullying roles. While there is some disagreement on how stable these roles are, in general, the victim 'roles' have been described as moderately stable (Salmivalli et al., 1998).

Victimization seems to be more common among young children and declines with age (Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001). However, even though cross-sectional prevalence of bullying victimization decreases with age, there is some evidence that stability of victim roles, on the other hand, increases with age. Kindergarten children indicate low levels of stability while victim roles become more stable during elementary school years (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2003). In a study of 380 children, as they transitioned from kindergarten, through first, second and third grades, stability of victimization was greatest for the highest grades. After following these children over four

measurement waves, Kochenderfer-Ladd and Wardrop (2001) found that only 4 % remained in a victim role throughout the entire measurement period. Similar low levels of stability for were found in a study of English children's transition from reception class to first class (Smith, Swettenham, & Monks, 2003) where 13 % of the sample was categorized as victims at both measurement points. Schäfer and colleagues (2005) found that bullying victimization in primary school did not predict victimization in secondary school. One possible explanation for lower levels of stability of victimhood for younger children has been proposed by Monks and colleagues (2003) who have argued that younger children may choose to harass a larger group of peers in order to identify which children might make the most 'suitable victims', that is, those characterized by poor coping strategies (Monks et al., 2003). Schäfer and colleagues (2005) have argued that peer relationship(s) among younger age groups may be more malleable, making it easier for children to fluctuate between different positions. In sum, these results would seem to indicate that victimization roles in the early years are fairly unstable with low risks of being "trapped" in victim roles.

In contrast to younger children, victimization roles would appear to be more stable in higher grades. Wolke and colleagues (2009), who followed 432 children, from ages 6-9 up to ages 10-11, found that children subject to direct bullying at first measurement were twice as likely to be bullied at follow-up. This pattern of stability was found particularly for girls and for direct bullying only but not for relational victimization. Scholte et al. (2007), studied 189 children's transitioning from childhood to adolescence and found that 43 % of victims in childhood, remained as victims in adolescence. This result was not gender specific. A smaller proportion of stable victims (28 of 106) was found in a one-year longitudinal study of 12-15 year-olds, where 26 % remained as victims at follow-up (Juvonen et al., 2000). Even less stability was found in Smith's (et al., 2004) two year study of 406 pupils aged 13 to 16, where 14 % were categorized as continuing victims throughout the two year period. In a long-term study of 580 Finnish children, almost all boys (90%), who were victims at age 16, had been victimized at age 8, more precisely, 27 of 30 victims (Sourander et al., 2000). For girls the proportion was smaller but still moderately high: 16 of 33 victims (48%) at age 8, were continuing victims at age 16. While there had been some drop-outs, and the data did not reveal if these adolescents had experienced periods of no-bullying in the interim, these results point to a persistence of victimhood, especially for boys, over an eight-year timespan.

In most of these studies, while the number of bullied children categorized as persistent or continuing victims is small, other bullied children most likely have escaped victimization – their bullying had ceased – or they may have moved between victim, bully or bully/victim roles. The few victimization studies, using longitudinal data, that do address stability, cover relatively short intervals, usually spanning one or two years (Scholte, Burk & Overbeek, 2013; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Juvonen et al., 2000; Skolverket, 2011a) or a little longer (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop 2001; Schäfer et al., 2005; Sourander et al., 2000). A common finding in these longitudinal studies is that bullying emerges as a much more dynamic phenomenon than previously observed; certain pupils are temporarily or intermittently exposed to bullying, while others, more permanently exposed, seem to follow a different trajectory.

As seen above, there is no general consensus regarding stability of victimhood. Some studies argue that victim roles are not stable (Skolverket, 2011a; Smith et al., 2004), Others (Juvonen et al., 2000) suggest that victim roles are moderately stable over a year or longer, and still others conclude that victim roles persist, since harassment and exclusion lead to negative consequences in the form of poor self-esteem and problems in social relationships, which, in turn, can lead to an increased risk of future victimization (Goldbaum et al., 2003), because of reputational damage for victims within their peer group (Wolke et al., 2009). In this way, a form of victimlabelling may result in a stigma of ‘being the bullied child’, which might make peers reluctant to identify with the victim (Thornberg, 2015b). This fear of being ‘infected’, by association, with a bullied child (see also Lindberg, 2007), may be one explanation as to why victim roles might become stable over time. If one follows this line of reasoning, it becomes increasingly important to understand why different victim roles may become stable and require explanations beyond personality characteristics of bullied children, where bullying is seen as a result of a complex system of relationships, patterns of social interactions, patterns and processes, such as labeling and interaction rituals, that might explain patterns of exclusion and inclusion over time (Horton, 2011; Lindberg, 2007; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003; Thornberg, 2011, 2015b). Similar arguments were raised by Schäfer et al. (2005) when explaining the low stability of bullying victimization among younger children. Since younger children’s relationships have been seen to be more unstable than those of older children and adolescents, their looser networks of relationships may make it easier for younger children not to get stuck in

a specific role, thus avoiding a label of ‘victim’ and subsequent negative connotations (Schäfer et al., 2005).

Also, age of victims, however victimization is assessed, that is, through self-, peer, teacher or parental nomination, extent of measurement interval at follow-up and number of measurement points may all constitute various explanations as to why stability of victimhood might differ between different studies (Smith, 2014). In sum, one could see from this line of research that how stable victimization is over time is not clear and more knowledge on stability of victimization of bullying is needed.

## 4. Bullying and its consequences

While longitudinal research generally points toward less stable trajectories of victimhood, this does not mean that consequences of bullying are transitory. In this section, research into short and long term impact of bullying will be discussed as well as different factors that might reduce or relate to negative outcomes.

Before outlining how victimization relates to different adjustment problems, it is important to note that bullying affects not just the victim. Bullying also impacts other parties involved in bullying situations, typically, the bullies themselves, and bystanders, both as ‘passive’ participants or as witnesses. The school environment is also affected, becoming an unsafe place for some or all other pupils (e.g. Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Cowie & Oztug, 2008; Modin, Låftman, & Östberg, 2015; Salmivalli, 2010; Unnever & Cornell, 2003). Social consequences may spread to and through other groups of children. One example is a Swedish study which found that the proportion of bullied children within a school class was related to health problems that extended beyond just those directly affected (Modin et al., 2015). In this section, where the focus is mainly on victims of bullying, there is not intention to diminish the fact that bullying does affect the general school environment and all the other children in a school. Schools, as institutions, also serve as arenas where different patterns of social relationships are tested and established (Wrethander Bliding, 2007). Different acts of inclusion and exclusion between peers may be seen and understood as important processes and parts of children’s social interaction and relationship building. For some, being a victim of or being involved in bullying is transient, for others, involvement and consequences may be more recurring or permanent. These aspects are important to keep in mind when reading the next section.

### Consequences for victims of bullying

The association between being subject to bullying and different adjustment problems has been well documented in numerous studies. Such results are usually generated from large, cross-sectional, surveys using self-report data from children and adolescents. Links between bullying and poor school adjustment, academic achievement, social skills, loneliness, depression, health problems and somatic complaints are described below. Key results from the large body of research linking involvement in bullying to negative life outcomes are presented. Thereafter, an argument is made for more research

that delves into how various health outcomes relate to patterns and trajectories of bullying victimization, that is, the content of this dissertation.

### **Internalizing associated problems**

Bullying victimization has been related to a panorama of internalized problems, i.e. depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, loneliness and somatic complaints. Numerous studies have shown how victimization relates to higher levels of internalized health consequences (Reijntjes et al., 2010; Swearer, Collins, Radlife & Wang, 2014). A large volume of research has revealed negative outcomes, linking a process of internalizing and bullying victimization. It is not clear whether this process of internalizing should be understood as a cause, or a consequence, of bullying victimization. Some argue that those factors contributing to internalizing responses to being bullied puts children at future risk for further victimization, whereas others lay emphasis on the fact that victimization is a factor that might cause adjustment problems later in life (e.g. Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

### **Depression and suicidal ideations**

Being bullied has been related to depression in many studies (Fekkes et al., 2006; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001; Seals & Young, 2003; Swearer et al., 2001). In a meta-analysis, including cross-sectional studies published between 1987 and 1997, the association between bullying victimization and psychosocial maladjustment was examined (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Results from this study showed that victimization was most strongly related to depression, with bullied children being significantly more depressed than non-bullied children. These results are supported in other studies. Craig (1998), in a study of Canadian elementary school children, found more depressive symptoms for children experiencing high levels of peer victimization than for non-victimized peers (Craig et al., 1998). It should be noted that these studies are based on cross-sectional quantitative data.

In addition to co-occurrence of bullying and depressive symptoms, being bullied also puts children at risk for depression later in life (Reijntjes et al., 2010; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel & Loeber, 2011). In a systematic review of 28 longitudinal studies, it was concluded that being bullied was related to higher risk of depression, even up to 36 years later (Ttofi et al., 2011). The risk for depression later in life was significant even after controlling for many known childhood risk factors relating to later onset depression. High-

est risk was among those children victimized in early school years. Depressed children or children with depressive symptoms often feel hopelessness (Brozina & Abela, 2006). How children experience feelings of hopelessness has also been described by children who have been bullied (Hellfeldt unpublished manuscript; Kvarme et al., 2010; Lindberg, 2007; Lindberg & Johansson, 2008). In a group-interview study of 12- and 13-year-olds, children described how they felt powerless in bullying situations since teachers seemed unwilling or unable to help them in their situation (Kvarme et al., 2010).

In its most severe manifestations, depression may lead to suicide. Studies have explored the link between suicidal ideation and bullying victimization. Generally, these studies indicate that bullying victimization is associated with a higher risk of suicide and suicidal ideation. These links have been found samples from different countries: Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1999); USA (Kaminski & Fang, 2009); Korea (Kim, Leventhal, Koh & Boyce, 2009); United Kingdom (Winsper, Lereya, Zannarini & Wolke, 2012) and the Nordic countries (e.g. Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Roland, 2002). Meta-analyses, including both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs have confirmed the links between bullying and suicidal ideation (Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Sourander & Madelyn, 2010), but there is some disagreement if this risk holds over time and for different patterns of victimization. Some argue that suicidal ideation is strongly associated with being bullied (Rigby & Slee, 1999; Kim et al., 2009), whereas others have not found such links. Klomek et al. (2008), having controlled for depression, found that victimization at age eight was not related to either depression or suicidal ideation at age 18 among Finnish boys, but was for girls. This gender difference was hypothesized to be explained by the fact that girls are more subject to relational bullying, which may have more severe and long lasting emotional consequences. Others have argued that boys are at increased risk. Amongst a group of adolescents, who had sought help, bullying victimization predicted suicidal ideation only among boys (Laukkanen et al., 2005). Thoughts of taking one's life have also been found in interviews with former victims of bullying. The emotional pain related to being bullied and the hopelessness related to their situation, may make some people regard suicide as the only way out (see also Lindberg, 2007).



## **Relationships with self and others - loneliness, rejection and the struggle for an identity**

Bullied children have poorer relationships with classmates and, in general, fewer friends (Pavri, 2015). The link between being bullied and having friends has been posited to be bidirectional, that is, fewer and weaker relationships with peers seems to both follow and precede exposure to bullying. Some studies have argued that fewer friends constitutes a risk factor for bullying and peer victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1996; Pellegrini, Bartini & Brooks, 1999). Being lonely and having few friends puts children at risk for bullying (Cava, Musitu & Murgui, 2007; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001). In a meta-analysis of 152 studies, social competence and peer status was identified as the most likely predictor of being a victim of bullying (Cook et al., 2010). Few friends and loneliness may also be the result of persistent bullying. For example, bullied children are less likely to have a best friend (Boulton et al., 1999) and are in general more likely to spend break times alone and have fewer friends and poor relations with other peers (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Eslea et al., 2004; Hellfeldt et al., 2014). In a quantitative study, including approximately 48,000 children from seven countries, Eslea et al. (2004) found a strong relationship between being a victim of bullying and not enjoying playtime, including having fewer friends. When 844 adults retrospectively recalled how bullying in primary and secondary school had impacted them later in life, feelings of loneliness and having problems maintaining friendships were mentioned (Schäfer et al., 2004) and results from a longitudinal study indicated that regularly bullied children's experience of loneliness became more severe over time (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001) .

## **Psychosomatic distress**

In addition to various forms of emotional distress, described above, links between being bullied and psychosomatic problems, such as headaches, sleeping difficulties, stomachaches, have also been established (Fekkes et al., 2004; Gini, 2008; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; 2013; Hjern, Alvé, & Östberg, 2008; Modin et al., 2015; Natvig, Albrektsen, & Qvarnström, 2001).

A meta-analysis, including a total of 152,186 children from age 7 to and 16, revealed that bullied children are at a significantly higher risk for psychosomatic problems compared with non-involved peers (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). This result was later replicated in a meta-analysis of 24 cross-sectional and six longitudinal studies (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013). Results from this

meta-analysis indicated that bullied children were at least twice more likely than non-bullied children to have psychosomatic complaints. Results from studies involving Swedish school children have also indicted negative psychosomatic outcomes for bullied children. Using data from 41,032 ninth- and eleventh-grade students, it was evident that bullied children displayed more psychosomatic complaints than both perpetrators of bullying and non-involve peers (Modin et al., 2015).

These research results show how factors within the school environment, such as bullying, may have negative impacts for schoolchildren psychosomatic health. Relationships with peers are one important element of functioning school environments. Problematic relationships with others, within this context, may serve as a stressor for children, causing health complaints such as those described above.

### **Consequences related to the school setting**

Developing positive peer relationships is an important part of adapting to the school environment. Being exposed to peer victimization has been linked to negative school outcomes such as school maladjustment (Juvonen et al., 2000; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010), school avoidance and truancy (Attwood & Croll, 2006), poor academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2010; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010) and low levels of teacher support (Hellfeldt et al., 2014).

Bullying victimization has been studied both as a predictor and outcome of poor academic achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). Olweus (1978) has argued that both underachieving and high academic performing children are more likely to become victims of bullying. Studies have shown that children with learning difficulties are at greater risk for experiencing bullying (Luciano & Savage, 2007; Nabuzoka, 2003). However, other studies have indicated that bullied children suffer distress in multiple domains, which has a negative effect on their school performance and abilities. From this perspective, the fact of being bullied may lead to poor academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2000). A meta-analysis of 33 studies, covering 29,552 participants, revealed a small but significant negative correlation between peer victimization and academic achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010), no difference between boys and girls. The strength of association between victimization and academic achievement was moderated by some methodological issues such the index of academic achievement that was used and if the study included peer self-reports or not.

School truancy has also been linked to bullying. Former victims of bullying described how they tried to avoid school in order to stay away from situations where they were at risk for bullying (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Lindberg & Johansson, 2008). Clearly, being bullied is linked to many different negative outcomes within the school environment. It is most likely that repeated harassment will increase risks for maladjustment at school.

### **Persistence of victimization and carry-over effects**

While the co-occurrence of bullying victimization and different negative outcomes in children's lives is well documented, less is known about how timing and duration of bullying victimization may play an important role in relation to adjustment outcomes. One reason is that many studies investigating bullying victimization regard the behavior as a temporary experience, rather than a recurring event with more or less stable developmental pathways and trajectories. Thus, differences in short-term or persistent experiences of bullying, and how such experiences relate to different outcomes, is poorly understood. Since this is the case, negative effects for children with different experiences of being bullied are not well documented (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Scholte et al., 2007). Some studies have indicated that the timing of, and duration of, peer victimization may play a crucial role in adjustment outcomes experienced by young victimized children (Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Haltigan, & Vaillancourt, 2014; Lien & Welanders-Lant, 2013; Goldbaum et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2004). There is, however, some disagreement regarding how such experiences might relate to different outcomes in children's lives (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Haltigan & Vaillancourt, 2014).

The few studies that have examined relations between persistence of bullying victimization, health and relationship outcomes indicate that persistence of bullying is linked to negative outcomes (e.g. Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Juvonen et al., 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Scholte et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004). There is a lack of general consensus on how stability of bullying victimization might relate to adjustment problems in children's lives, notwithstanding the fact that chronic victimization has been shown to be related to negative adjustment (Biggs et al., 2010; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Smith et al., 2004). Among kindergarten children, for persistent victims of bullying, their loneliness had increased at each measurement interval (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Similar patterns were found in a study of Swedish schoolchildren, where persistently bullied pupils had in-

creased level somatic and emotional distress at one-year follow-up (Hellfeldt, Gill & Johansson, in press). Other research indicates that new victims, when compared with persistent victims, show similar high levels of maladjustment, indicating that bullying victimization has probable immediate effects on children's health (Juvonen et al., 2000). Regarding problematic peer relationships, a Swedish study found that new victims and persistent victims had equal levels of problematic relationships with their peers (Hellfeldt et al., 2014).

Another research challenge is to study how shorter periods of bullying victimization might have lasting negative effects in children's lives. It might be assumed that once bullying ceases, negative consequences for victims come to an end and things return to normal. This would not be the case if it was shown that shorter periods of bullying have longer lasting effects, rather than a perspective where once victimization ceases, negative outcomes should also disappear (e.g. Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001). While few studies have targeted persistence effects, extant results are difficult to interpret (Juvonen et al., 2000; Scholte et al., 2007). Some studies have pointed to a recovery effect for former victims, once their bullying has ceased (Smith et al., 2004; Juvonen et al., 2000). There is some support for both arguments. In Juvonen and colleagues' (2000) study, stable non-victims did not differ from a previous victim group for estimates of self-worth, loneliness and depression indicating that problems occurred during the bullying period. Others have found partial support for a recovery effect indicating that former victims reported higher levels of positive adjustment than continuing victims, however, without reaching the same high levels as those never victimized (Smith et al., 2004). In contrast with these results, others have indicated that bullying victimization might have carry-over effects (Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001). In her study of kindergarten children, mentioned above, Kochenderfer-Ladd (1996) found that they felt just as lonely, one semester later, while in Kochenderfer-Ladd and Wardrop (2001), two thirds of former victims showed decreased loneliness once victimization had ceased, and, at two-year follow-up, former victims did not differ from non-victims in most respects. These results indicate a need for further research into how persistence of bullying victimization and variation in experiences of bullying relate to different aspects of children's lives.

## Final remarks

Firstly, there is an extensive body of research on correlations between bullying victimization and negative outcomes in children's lives. Some of this research has been presented above. It can be concluded from this research review that bullying has been linked to negative emotional, psychological, psychosomatic and academic outcomes. The following chapter takes as its starting point the conclusion that negative consequences of bullying have been well established, but also, that this research is not without limitations. First and foremost, these studies are based on cross-sectional quantitative data, resulting in significant correlations between bullying and some of the most common health complaints of bullied children, such as loneliness, problematic relationships with peers, negative self-concept and depressive symptoms. This knowledge is important. However, others have argued that bullying can be conceived of as an important of childhood ritual for establishing different social relations within school contexts (Wrethander Bliding, 2007). Some children experience bullying for short periods, for others, their bullying may evolve into a more stable pattern. Understanding how different experiences of bullying relate to different adjustment outcomes is vital. It is argued here that research within this field is not well developed. Gaining such knowledge would bring important insights into how various intervention strategies might best direct support for victims of bullying caught in different developmental trajectories.

Secondly, in this section, I have also uncovered a lacuna of theoretical approaches in trying to understand how, why and when different outcomes relate to varying patterns of bullying. The studies presented above are mainly correlational, using composite indices pointing to different relations between variables, offering little insight into why different negative patterns for bullied children arise. The importance of theorizing in this research field, in order to better understand the consequences of bullying, and, thereby, develop more effective intervention strategies, is evident in this section.

Thirdly, in order to understand, in detail, the etiology and consequences of bullying, more qualitative data from real cases is required. While some studies using qualitative data have been presented above, there is still a lack of studies within this research field, purporting to give a voice to the victims of bullying. Results gleaned from quantitative data need to be put into context, and help uncover cause and effect among variables (events) hidden in the statistical patterns.

Finally, stability of bullying victimization and how it might relate to different health outcomes has not been studied within a Swedish context. As

described above, Sweden has extensive legislation and school ordinances regarding harassment and degrading treatment within schools. Sweden has also been shown to have perhaps the lowest prevalence of bullying compared to other western countries (Craig et al., 2009; Due & Holstein, 2008). Studying stability of victimhood and how it relates to schoolchildren's health, within this context, is an important research challenge, especially since the stigma of being bullied might be argued to be even greater within a context where the prevalence of bullying is low (e.g. Modin et al., 2015).

## 5. The importance of positive relationship(s) within the school environment

Although the negative consequences of bullying have been well documented, little is still known about how children can best be supported or helped in order to prevent or ameliorate such negative outcomes. Much focus within the field of bullying has been directed on evaluating different strategies and programs aimed at reducing bullying (e.g. Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Olweus, 2004; 2005; Skolverket, 2011a; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). While prevention is crucial in helping children avoid ever being bullied, it is equally important to study how children who are, or have been bullied, can be supported. Sweden's long history, in international terms, of working against bullying has resulted in consistently low rates of bullying at schools. Low is not zero, thus, there remains a small cohort of children who experience bullying every school year, and who are at greater risk for presenting with various negative outcomes related to such experiences (Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Modin et al., 2015). While it is important to study the prevalence of bullying, its consequences and how such negative behavior may be reduced and prevented, it is equally important to study factors, circumstances and social relationships that may explain why some children are more affected by being bullied, and also, to study how children who experience such negative actions can best be protected from negative consequences. This dissertation aims to contribute to such knowledge by studying, particularly, one factor that has proven to have a positive influence in schoolchildren's lives, namely, the ameliorating effects of social support.

### The positive aspects of social support

The term social support generally refers to different kinds of supportive social relations or interactions that increase or promote an individual's well-being, act as a buffer against negative outcomes, and that may act to enhance the abilities and capacities of schoolchildren (Cohen et al., 2000; Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Kilpatrick Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Rigby, 2000). Also included in this definition is an individual's perception that he or she is valued and cared for by others in their social networks, including supportive behaviors such as helping a child with different tasks or obstacles in life (Demaray et al., 2005). There are two major theoretical explanations of how social support may be beneficial: the *main effect model* and the *stress buffering model* (Cohen et al., 2000). Both these theoretical perspectives are

described in more details in chapter 7 on An Emergent Theoretical Framework, where the theoretical assumptions underlying this dissertation will be described. Briefly, the *main effect model* states that social support is universally beneficial since stable supportive networks yield a sense of belonging and security. The alternative perspective, the *stress buffering model*, on the other hand, states that social support is most beneficial for persons under different kinds of stress.

Social support has been shown to have a range of beneficial consequences. Social interactions and positive relationships, that is, caregiving relationships within the different environments that constitute the lives of children and adolescents, serve as important sources of social support which are needed for healthy development (Turner, Turner, & Hale, 2014). A substantial body of research has established the relationship between social support and children's and adolescents' adjustment (Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012). For example, adjustment and behavior problems, delinquency, withdrawn behavior and a sense of hopelessness, emotional problems, depression and low self-concept have been related to low levels of family, teacher and peer support (Rigby, 2000). Positive social support has been shown to be related to higher self-esteem amongst adolescents (Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012) and to promote academic achievement (Brewster & Bowen, 2004).

Social support can derive from a number of sources such as parents, best friends, classmates, teachers and other adults in school (Cohen et al., 2000). Previous research has studied the differences in frequency of children's perceived social support, and there is some evidence that social support differs in relation to gender, age and ethnicity (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). For youth, the primary sources of social support are parents, peers and adults in school (Holt & Espelage, 2007). However, which of these sources serves as the primary resource for a child differs with age and varies over time. Studies have shown that older pupils report less social support than younger peers (Demaray & Malecki 2003; Harlow & Roberts 2010; Holt & Espelage 2007). Younger children receive their support primarily from parents. As a child approaches and enters adolescence, the role of parents decreases and that of friends increases. Studies have also reported gender differences in perceived social support, with boys generally reporting less social support than girls (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Demaray & Malecki, 2003, Rigby, 2000).



### **Social support at school – the importance of peer and teacher support**

Although much research has demonstrated the positive consequences of social support for young people's health and ability to handle different kinds of stressors, it is still unclear how social support, from different sources, may be beneficial to children who are the victims of bullying (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Harlow & Roberts, 2010; Holt & Espelage, 2007). In general, children subject to bullying report lower levels of social support (Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Rigby, 2000). Even though parents obviously constitute an important source of social support, especially for younger children, within school environments, teachers and peers act as important resources within children's social network (Flashpohler et al., 2009). Teachers and peers can provide children with multiple forms of social support, emotional, instrumental and informal, within school contexts (Tardy, 1985). However, victims have been found to report lower levels of both peer and teacher support (Furlong et al., 1995), this result, notwithstanding the fact that victims of bullying would appear to set a value on such relationships much higher than their non-involved peers (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). When considering how bullied children can best be supported, support from teachers and peer is crucial. These two important sources of support are considered below.

#### The role of friendship and peer relationships

In contrast to children deriving social support through their relationships with others, bullying can deprive children of such positive interactions within the school environment. Clearly, peer relationships are of great importance for children's and adolescents' development. However, negative peer relationships, such as in bullying, may act to exclude children from the benefits of positive relationships (Gettinger, 2003). On the other hand, besides being able to offer important emotional support when a friend is experiencing bullying, peers may also act as protectors in bullying situations, stepping in and intervening, to put a stop to the bullying (Lynn Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; Salmivalli, 2010). Support from peers and friends can lead to the development of an important emotional resilience for bullied children (Tanigawa et al., 2011). However, those actions, normally seen as constituting bullying, such as exclusion, harassment and name calling, are just the opposite of supportive relationships with peers. Being lonely, ignored and excluded has been described as painful by victims, since it indicates that victims are not being valued by the peer group (Hellfeldt, unpublished manuscript; Kvarme et al., 2010, 2013; Lindberg & Johansson,

2008; Merten, 1996; Søndergaard, 2012). Having friends, no matter what one is going through, was also described as an important component when children were asked to describe well-being within the school context (Souter, 2011). The importance of having a friend was even more evident when victims of bullying were asked to describe their 'dream day'. In these descriptions, having someone to spend breaks with and play with emerged as one important factor for having a good day at school. Bullied children also described how they missed having a friend throughout their school year (Kvarme et al., 2013). Bullied children, without a best friend, showed increases in internalizing behaviors, when compared with bullied children who had a best friend (Hodges et al., 1999). Bullied children, collectively, have been described as lonelier and socially withdrawn, when compared with non-involved peers (e.g. Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Holt & Espelage, 2001; Juvonen et al., 2000). These results indicate that while bullied children value friends and social support from peers highly, they tend to report experiencing less. Friendship can also act as a buffer to protect children from bullying and, especially, where friends choose to stand up for their bullied friends (Bollmer et al., 2005; Hodges et al., 1999; Kendrick, Jutengren, & Stattin, 2012). Unfortunately, bullied children's experience of support from friends and peers is weak, not least because their friendships often involve children who themselves tend to be victimized and who present with increased levels of internalizing problems (Hodges et al., 1999).

### Labelling and victimhood – victims as 'whipping boys'

A need to belong and be embedded in social situations, those which are the result of social support from peers, is crucial for human beings (Honneth, 1995; Schott 2014; Søndergaard, 2012). Being left out and feelings of rejection, on the other hand, are common experiences for bullied children (Hellfeldt, unpublished manuscript; Lindberg, 2007). Instead of experiencing validation from their peers within schools, victims of bullying are constantly reminded of their 'otherness'. Labeling victims as deviant has been shown to be mode of explaining or justifying bullying by other children (Frisén, Jonsson & Persson, 2003; Teräsahjo & Salmvivali, 2003; Thornberg, 2015b). The most common response from Swedish schoolchildren as to why children were bullied was that they had a different appearance (Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, 2003). Thus, this process of labeling bullied children as deviant may be one way that children themselves justify bullying, while, for those subject to bullying, the labeling process may act as a painful reminder of their otherness and how they are not valued or appreciated by peers.

Through the labelling process, children may become captive in specific roles, in this case, the role of victim, thereby making it harder for them to extricate themselves from the stigma of being the bullied, including all the negative connotations of that role (e.g. Thornberg, 2015b). For a child stuck in a victim role, it becomes harder to escape or to establish friendships or experience positive relationships with other peers.

Being subject to rejection or harassment by peers serves as a constant reminder that some individuals are viewed as different and deviant, someone to be relegated to the bottom of the school hierarchy (Lindberg, 2007). The constant reminding that they are not participants in social relationships within the school tends to make victims further withdrawn from social relations, not least, because of the fear of being rejected. This fear or rejection and what follows on from it, that is, further withdrawal from social relations, creates a negative spiral from which children find it hard to break their isolation (Hellfeldt, unpublished manuscript). This withdrawal from social interactions, together with the stigma of the victim label, makes it difficult for victims to break away from the negative labelling and their position in the social hierarchy, thereby reducing their chances of any peer support within the school environment. Other children's fear of social contamination, that is, a fear of getting a bad reputation or becoming a victim themselves, by association, with those who are being bullied, makes it even harder for children to escape their isolation and gain social support from peers (Lindberg & Johansson, 2008; Søndergaard, 2012, 2015; Thornberg, 2015b). Bullied children, in this way, lack both social support from their peers, and have a hard time gaining any support, when their being bullied creates a victim label that comes with a set of values that other children do not wish to be associated with.

Similar arguments about the difficulty of breaking the isolation of bullied children were raised by Kless (1992), who showed that pupils, perceived as having low status, did not want to socialize with each other since it would catapult them to the bottom of the social hierarchy. When new a new pupil begins in a school, they are made aware of who, within their new class, is to be regarded as the 'victim' and, therefore, ought to be avoided (Søndergaard, 2015). Children have also described how unpopular children lack the social skills necessary to climb up the hierarchy (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Popular children, seen through the eyes of other pupils were described as socially skilled children who knew how to get what they wanted. Unpopular children, on the other hand, were described as children lacking an ability to socialize with others. Even neuroscience has started to stress

the importance of belonging and having the support of peers. Vaillancourt et al. (2007) argue that the social pain brought about by actions such as exclusion feels similar to how physical pain is perceived.

### **Teachers matter**

The social process by which children becomes labelled with victim status makes it difficult for other pupils to lend social support to victims for fear of contamination by association. There is a concomitant dynamic at work for bullied and former bullied children, fearing to put their trust in others, which may go some way to explain why bullied children indicate lower levels of social support from peers. In such cases, where social support from peers is lacking, within school environments, one important source of support should be from teachers (Flashpohler et al., 2009; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). Teacher support and how it relates to schoolchildren's emotional and social adjustment has been well documented (Birch & Ladd, 1997; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Sakiz et al., 2012; Meyer & Turner, 2006). Caring relationships with teachers, feelings that a schoolchild is being valued, respected and cared for is an important motor for children to experience well-being at school (Thomas et al., 2016). Situations where teachers care, show respect and are concerned for their pupils have been correlated with increased self-esteem and decreased depressive symptoms among early adolescents (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Social support is a valuable resource for bullied children within the school environments.

Teachers have important roles to play in preventing, identifying and intervening in bullying situations (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Voeten & Sinisammal, 2004). Where teachers offer important emotional support for victims of bullying, especially since victims often lack support from their peers, there is a general dearth of studies linking social support from teachers to outcomes for bullied children (Demaray et al., 2005).

Even though teachers play an important part in anti-bullying strategies and in offering emotional support for victims, some studies have suggested that teachers are often unaware that bullying is taking place (Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Craig & Pepler, 1998). In relation to bullied children's capacity to deal with their situation, those who report higher levels of social support from their teachers, also indicate lower levels of internalizing distress (Davidson & Demaray, 2007).

A number of victims of bullying do not tell anyone about their victimization. Of those who do tell someone about their victimization, school staff was the least chosen group to report to (Smith & Shu, 2000). Encouraging

students to report bullying at school is one important part of anti-bullying strategies, especially since teachers are those who can best mobilize resources to bring bullying to an end (Smith, 2014). However, since some teachers may have a tendency both not to recognize all bullying and harbor doubtful private attitudes, their willingness to intervene may be affected. Even though the importance of telling a teacher about being bullied has been stressed, few pupils report bullying to teachers. One important aspect of victims' decisions to seek help from teachers, or not, is how they view teachers' possible reactions (Newman, Murray & Lussier, 2001), where any lack of perceived social support from teachers may have a negative effect on bullied children.

Besides children's possible unwillingness to speak to teachers about their victimization, individual teachers' normative beliefs may also affect their willingness to intervene, or their denial of support, in situations where children require it. Teacher's attitudes towards bullying and bullies do influence their decisions to intervene or not (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Yoon & Kerber, 2003), and many myths, such as bullying is just a part of growing up, still persist (O'Moore, 2000). Such myths and opinions play an important role in understanding teachers' reactions to bullying, but also, why bullied children may experience low levels of support from adults. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) showed that some teachers expected students to handle their victimization on their own, whereas others described bullying as being a normal part of childhood. Similar results were found by Troop-Gordon and Ladd (2015) who linked normative and admittance belief systems held by teachers to how they dealt with peer victimization. Teachers with normative beliefs about peer victimization, that is, the view that aggression and victimization are a normal part of growing up, were related to using more passive interventions. These interventions could be to advise the victim to deal with the bullying him or herself, to choose not to sanction the bully or to tell the victim to avoid the other pupils who were being mean to them.

It is clear that teachers' views on victimization shape their responses to victims (Troop-Gordon and Ladd, 2015) and that schoolchildren's views of their teachers shape their willingness to report victimization (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). The perception that victims can be blamed for their victimization is most likely to lead to undesirable consequences for victimized children. In the field of victimology, and especially in relation to different kinds of abuse, the negative impact of secondary victimization has

been stressed (Orth, 2002). Here, by secondary victimizations is meant negative reactions such as showing mistrust, hostility, rejection, or shaming, and so on. Fear of being treated in this way might lead victims to not talking about or to concealing their victimization. It may also result in more negative emotional outcomes for victims. According to this perspective, expressions of sympathy for and trust in victims may help them to recover from and make them more willing to report bullying. For instance, students who perceived their teachers as being supportive showed more positive attitudes towards reporting bullying (Eliot et al., 2010).

In contrast to support for victims, using semi-structured interviews, Mishna and colleagues (2005) found that teachers held normative beliefs where some children were seen as being responsible for their victimization. This research also showed that teachers may lack empathy for the bullied child, dismissing their stories as “wanting to be a victim” or simply not agreeing with the child’s interpretation of the situation where the ‘supposed’ bullying occurred.

In interviews with former victims, mistrust and lack of empathy shown by teachers was an important reason why adolescents described not feeling the support of their teachers (Hellfeldt, unpublished manuscript). Feeling sympathy towards victims has been linked to teachers’ likelihood of intervening and reporting bullying (Mishna et al., 2005; Yoon, 2004; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). In situations where teachers are willing to offer support, for some victims of bullying, the very act of telling a teacher may lead to even more difficulties for the child. Smith and Shu (2000) reported that, although telling a teacher led to an improved situation for many children, telling a teacher was also linked to the highest risk of making the bullying worse. To understand teacher-student relationships and how they may relate to children’s perceptions of their teachers, of their willingness to tell to their teachers and of how their teachers can help them cope and recover from bullying, it is vital to study how social support from teachers relates to bullied children’s ability to deal with their victimization.

In sum, we can conclude that while bullied children report lower levels of experiencing social support from their teachers, they also rate support from teachers more highly than children not involved in bullying (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). However, for those children who are being or have been bullied, relationships with their teachers may be problematic since it has proved difficult for them, both to feel and accept support from their teacher, while at the same time trying to regain their trust in teachers even after the

bullying has ceased (Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Hellfeldt, unpublished manuscript). Caring and supportive teachers have been shown to be an important resource for children's general development, but also in relation to the well-being of bullied children. Thus, it is important to delve deeper into the mechanics of teacher-pupil relationships and how aspects this relationship may help and hinder the well-being bullied children. One aim of this dissertation is to study how aspects of relationships between teachers and schoolchildren may impact on the circumstances of bullied children.

## 6. Understanding bullying - from personality traits to the complexity of school contexts

Much effort has been made throughout the last decades to reduce bullying, but bullying continues to part of the school experience of some children. Those children who are exposed to bullying remain at higher risk for short- and long term negative consequences. Bullying prevention programs has been designed, developed, tested and implemented but all the while bullying at school continues to be a reality. It has been argued that it is not limitations in bullying prevention programs that are the problem, but, rather, how bullying is understood and explained (Walton, 2011). If bullying is to be addressed, it is of vital importance to begin with how we understand bullying (Horton, 2016). In this section, two theoretical explanations that have dominated bullying research will be outlined, leading to a formulation of the theoretical basis for understanding bullying on which this dissertation rests.

### **A first paradigm: individual perspective**

Two theoretical traditions has dominated the research field, elsewhere described as first- and second order perspectives on bullying, or, first and second paradigms (Kousholt & Fisker, 2015; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Horton, 2016; Schott, & Søndergaard, 2014; Thornberg, 2015a). In the early research, bullying was describes as a process of group violence, where children reinforced each other's behaviors (Pikas, 1975). While the importance of peer groups and school norms had initially been stressed as crucial to understanding bullying, most of the research published in the early stages of studying the phenomenon focused on individual characteristics as the main explanation for understanding bullying. (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014; Salmivalli et al., 1996) Even though bullying, initially, had been described as a social activity, the early research rarely converted this perspective into empirical data gathering. The research field, with its focus on individual traits, created explanations for bullying based on individual characteristics and the dysfunctional behavior of single individuals (e.g., Olweus, 1993).

This first paradigm was deeply influenced by the work of Olweus. His empirical work and understanding of bullying has dominated the research field for many years. He conducted the first large scale study, exploring characteristics and personality traits of individuals involved in bullying.



This led to a focus on trying to establish which individual traits could be associated with either being subjected to or being the actor doing the bullying. In this first order perspective, research explored biological and personality traits that correlated with children's involvement as victims and bullies, explaining the causes of bullying from an individual perspective. Olweus (1997) found that victimized children, in general, were more anxious, insecure and had lower levels of self-esteem than not bullied children. These victims were labeled as 'passive victims', since their submissiveness and insecurity signaled to others that they were 'easy' targets and were unlikely to resist a possible attacks. Besides passive victims, Olweus (1978, 1999) also identified what he termed 'provocative victims'. These children, described as hyperactive, irritating, hot-headed and aggressive, triggered other children to initiate negative actions against them. Research from this perspective has mainly focused on the bully and the victim, but also, on how these roles overlap, thereby generating a third group, namely, bully/victims. This category has been described as the most problematic and, in keeping with this research paradigm, studies have tried to identify factors relating to those children who are categorized as bully/victims (Veenstra et al., 2005).

According to the first order perspective, since bullying is explained by schoolchildren's individual traits and characteristics, research focuses on finding risk and protective factors, that is, finding factors and characteristics that increase or decrease the risk for children ending up as either bullies or victims (Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). Subsequently, interventions are aimed at achieving changes at the individual level, such as offering bullied children appropriate coping strategies in order to deal with or manage the situation they find themselves in (Naylor, Cowie, & del Rey, 2001). From this perspective, the individual pupil is made the core focus for interventions, rather than, say, the social processes, environments or institutions into which actions, such as bullying, may be imbedded. This perspective has been criticized as being too individualistic, tending to overlook the contexts in which bullying is situated. By not addressing these social contexts, possible institutional constraints, wider societal norms and interaction processes, there is a risk of stigmatizing children involved in bullying as pathological (Horton, 2016; Kousholt & Fisker, 2015).

Within this perspective a movement has begun to study the microsystems close to the parties involved, nuancing victim and bully roles, but also including the nearest peer groups (Salmivalli, 2010). A wider *dramatis personae* of different roles that children may take in bullying situations has been identified, where, particularly, the importance of bystanders has been

stressed (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Aside from the bully or bullies, children can act in different ways that reinforce a bullying situation. For instance, children could be involved either as ring-leaders, initiating and organizing the bullying, or as followers, joining in and participating in the negative behaviors when they have begun, reinforcing them, not through active participation but through passive support, merely watching, laughing, sniggering, and so on. In addition to these roles, so-called ‘outsiders’ and ‘defenders’ have been identified, that is, children who may be actually unaware of the bullying, or who act in different ways to protect or help the victim or hinder the bully. While research into microsystems surrounding bullying has extended research in this field, the first order perspective, nevertheless, continues to focus on actions taken by individuals or groups of individuals, rarely relating such actions to wider contexts, such as factors within school environments. How pedagogical practice, the interaction between the school and the family, curriculum content, or how socio-culture norms such as gender norms might frame these individuals or groups of individuals has tended to be overlooked (e.g. Horton, 2016).

## **A second paradigm: social processes**

Where the first paradigm focuses on individual dysfunction, the second paradigm understands and explains bullying as social processes which occurs within a wider context in which different norms and structures interact with bullying behaviors. This paradigm focuses on social dynamics, stressing the importance of understanding bullying, not as a phenomenon explained by individual traits, but rather as something that is socially and culturally complex.

This second paradigm argues for the importance of integrating different approaches and, especially, focusing on different social relations, interpretations and constructions of the social context in which bullying emerges (Eriksson et al., 2002; Ellwood & Davies, 2010; Frånberg & Wrethander, 2011; Hansen, 2011; Hellfeldt, Johansson & Lindberg, 2014; Lindberg, 2007; Lindberg & Johansson, 2008; Mishna, 2004; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014; Thornberg 2015a, Wrethander Bliding, 2007). According to this evolved paradigm, bullying must be understood as a complex reality, where children are not reactive actors, internalizing the contexts that surround them. Children are, rather, seen as actor, as part of different social interactions and structures, and no single explanation is sufficient to understand the dynamics behind a phenomenon such as bullying. In the first research

paradigm, bullying research has been dominated by the psychology of the individual which can explain the domination of individual aggression or social violence as the main explanatory models. The second paradigm focuses on social relations and contextual factors, stressing the importance of social relations and interactions, norms and regulations in order to understand bullying. (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). When other research disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy and anthropology, began to study bullying, new perspectives and theoretical explanatory models were added to the research field, widening our understanding of bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Schott, 2014; Thornberg, 2015a). This new paradigm brings together a range of theoretical, methodological, epistemological and ontological approaches which widen an understanding of bullying and go beyond the parameters of the first paradigm. By adding multiple theoretical understandings of bullying, a wider complexity of the phenomena is captured. Schott & Søndergaard (2014) describe how contributors to this new paradigm:

Share an analytical ambition to understand bullying as a complex phenomenon that is enacted or constituted through the interactive/intra-active entanglements that exist between a variety of open-ended, social, discursive, material and subjective forces. (p. 10)

Thus, instead of understanding bullying as explained through the first paradigm, that is, as a phenomenon explained, in general, by one factor, namely aggression, bullying has to be put into context and problematized from a range of perspectives, both theoretical and methodological. The significance of micro contexts for levels of bullying or peer victimization, such as, school-class norms (Hansen, Henningsen & Kofoed, 2014) and school culture (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009; Unnever & Cornell, 2003), stigmatizing and labeling processes that describe how bullying and its participatory roles are socially interpreted and constructed (Thornberg, 2015b, Teräsohjo & Salmivalli, 2003), how interaction rituals might explain negative patterns within peer groups (Lindberg & Johansson, 2008) and how bullying could be understood as a result of children's friendship and relationship building (Wrethander Bliding, 2007), are all examples of research that seeks for other explanatory models that might go beyond, replace or add to those posited in the first paradigm.

## Time for a third paradigm?

The first and second paradigms stand in contrast to each other and proponents of each paradigm stress the importance of their perspective in understanding bullying. Other researchers have called for a more open ended understanding of bullying, not limited to, or by, a single explanatory model (Espelage & Swearer, 2011; Horton 2016, Thornberg, 2015a). Thornberg (2015a) argues that, although the second order paradigm offers new theoretical understandings of bullying and more flexibility in methodology, it is important to keep an open dialog between the different perspectives. Thornberg (2015a) has called for an ‘epistemological fallibilism’, that is, an open dialog between different perspectives that embrace pluralism within the research field, going on to argue for a theoretical dialog that would include the perspectives of the first and second paradigms.

A social-ecological theoretical framework has gained increasing importance (for a review, see Hong & Espelage, 2012a). According to this perspective, bullying may be the result of many different developmental pathways where a confluence of different experiences and factors contributes to the experience of bullying (Swearer & Espelage, 201). Inspired by Bronfenbrenner (1979/1992), social-ecology theory posits that bullying is multi-determined and influenced. Individual characteristics, classroom- and school related factors, all imbedded in wider macro-systems, contribute to the prevalence and explanation of bullying (Horton, 2016; Saarento Garandeau & Salmivalli, 2015). From this perspective, interactions between different factors are studied in the hope of determine which factor, or factors, in different combinations, might contribute to bullying behavior (see, for example, Wei, Williams, Chen & Chang 2010).

Bullying research and explanations of bullying, as shown above, have moved from the domination of one paradigm, toward an understanding of bullying as something more complex, something beyond individual characteristics, but in need of both methodological and theoretical widening. It is hoped that this dissertation will meet that ambition by adding knowledge to how social relations and interactions within school environments are important for our understanding of bullying, for how both victims understand and interpret their situation and how new understandings may offer new insights into how to deal with the consequences of bullying, particularly for victims. In the dissertation, bullying is to be understood as a phenomenon in context, where different forces, together shape how bullying should be understood. I, along with others, argue that it is not sufficient to study and

search for single factors and individual characteristics in order to understand and intervene against bullying. My approach is based on a socio-ecological perspective, where the aim is to incorporate a range of explanatory factors, and the application of a more comprehensive understanding of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2011). If the goal is to understand bullying, through how it is perceived by those subject to such treatment – the goal of this dissertation – then an understanding of bullying that allows for alternative and wider explanations and methods needs to be adopted. School environments are complex social systems, consisting of a multitude of social processes and dynamics. Formal regulations for schools, different students varied backgrounds, local norms and value systems within schools, and also within smaller groups such as classroom culture, have to be taken into consideration (Hansen et al., 2014). Bullying unfolds and manifests itself within all these systems. Schott and Søndergaard (2014), in their definition of bullying, describe the social concept as follows:

Bullying occurs in relation to formal institutions, such as the school, where individuals cannot easily leave the group. The ongoing process of constituting informal groups through the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion provides a social context for bullying. Changes in position are dangerous to the group order, becoming a source of fear and anxiety since all members of the group risk being excluded. Bullying occurs when groups respond to this anxiety by projecting the threat to group order onto particular individuals; these individuals become systematically excluded as the ‘other’. Although these processes may appear to be functional to the group, they deprive individuals who are bullied of the social recognition necessary for human dignity. In this way, being bullied may be experienced as a form of physical torture. (Schott, 2014, p. 39)

This quotation captures the notion of the complicated social context of bullying. The definition involves many important aspects needed when trying to understand the complexity of bullying and how it is perceived by those experiencing it. This understanding of bullying is used as the starting point of this dissertation. Firstly, it moves on from the earlier, unidimensional paradigm for understanding bullying, by stressing the importance of a social conceptualization of bullying. Secondly, Schott and Søndergaard (op.cit.) underline the importance of the place where the bullying occurs, in this case, within the formal institution that is a school. This formal institution is guided by regulation but also, as stated above, by the compulsory element of schooling which means that children cannot easily depart the formal collective. Bullying was one of the causal factors uncovered when a group of

persistent truants was interviewed (Attwood & Croll, 2006). Others have shown that the compulsory element of school attendance is important when seeking to understand the consequences of bullying (Eriksson et al., 2002; Lindberg & Johansson, 2008). In these studies, respondents described a pattern of not being able to escape bullying, because the consequences of skipping school were too high.

The definition above includes the notion that bullying ought to be understood as systematic inclusion and exclusion of others that involves all members of a group. There is also an implication that relational vying for position occurs in order to establish and maintain group order. Bullying, understood as a result of relationship building between pupils, using strategies of inclusion and exclusion to build friendships and maintain order in school settings has been proposed by other researchers (Merten, 1996; Thornberg, 2015b; Wrethander Bliding, 2007). The relation-building described is based on a shared culture within the peer group and different acts of togetherness may be used to manifest this culture and its attendant set of norms. Acts of exclusion may then be used as sanctions for wrongdoers and as a way of creating distance toward any perceived transgressions (Wrethander Bliding, 2007). Descriptions of bullied children as being odd, or deviant from their peer group has been uncovered in a range of studies (Evaldsson & Svahn, 2012; Frisé et al., 2008; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003; Thornberg, 2015b, Varjas et al., 2008). Using labels or explanations that might justify the bullying were evident from a Finnish study, where group interviews with three elementary school classes were used (Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Using discourse analytic methodology, the authors were able to identify different repertoires used by children to describe and justify bullying. The most common justification for bullying was to construct the child as odd. Deviant appearance or behaviors were also used as explanation (op. cit.). Similarly, the most common explanation for bullying in a Swedish sample was that the victim had a deviant appearance (Frisé et al., 2008). Research has also shown how girls use different forms of indirect bullying, such as spreading rumors, excluding someone and gossiping, as a way of manifesting and maintaining friendships (Evaldsson & Svahn, 2012; Orpinas, McNicholas & Nahapetyan, 2014; Svahn & Evaldsson, 2011; Waldron, 2011; Watson, 2012; Willer & Cupach, 2008).

In Schott and Søndergaard's definition, above, fear of social exclusion is central, both for understanding why bullying occurs and for understanding feelings of victims. They remark that "although these processes may appear to be functional for the group, they deprive individuals who are bullied of

the social recognition necessary for human dignity” (op. cit., p.39). The key notion is that human beings are dependent on a sense of belonging. The pain of being rejected from desirable social embeddedness makes the bullying all the more severe for the person (child, adolescent or adult) being excluded. Fear of being excluded is always part of human social interactions since the need to belong is so central to the human psyche (Søndergaard, 2012, 2014, Lindberg & Johansson, 2008). Søndergaard (2012, 2014) describes how marginalization in a school context, in the worst case, may lead to a form of ‘social death’, a position as the ‘outcast’ designated by the ‘in-group’.

The different elements of bullying, outlined above, in many ways capture the essence of the proposed new paradigm on which this dissertation seeks to build. From this point in the text, bullying is to be understood as a social phenomenon that children interpret and co-construct, that takes place in the formal institution of the school, that involves all group members, that takes place through mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion and where a need of belonging and fear of rejection are central to understanding the consequences of bullying. The need to belong and to form positive bonds with others is something I will return to later in the text.

## 7. An emergent theoretical framework

When trying to understand and explain the consequences of bullying, different perspectives may be used. Depending on the perspective applied, our understanding of bullying will differ. As described in the previous chapters, early bullying research focused mainly on individual factors, on uncovering risk factors for victimization and on conducting large scale correlation studies to try and capture the effects of bullying. Fewer studies have tried to understand underlying mechanisms and why and how certain consequences arise. To better understand the negative consequences of bullying, as well as to be able to support victims, new theoretical perspectives, for example, that might explain how children's self-concept emerges, must be added to the research field. To this end, results from four pieces of empirical research (Articles I to IV) are included in this dissertation. Results will be analysed in relation to sociological theories of the importance of social relations, and recognition by others, as a means of establishing positive self-concepts. Two general theoretical approaches will be adopted, Honneth's theory of social recognition, and the concept of social support, both of which, it is argued, yield important insights into how identity is constructed and reconstructed through interactions with others.

These theoretical approaches need to be explored in order to analyze how understanding social relationships may yield a deeper understanding of the consequences of being a victim of bullying. The different theoretical concepts, which, taken together, may help explain certain patterns found in the empirical data, are discussed below. It is hoped that the theoretical framework, as outlined, will offer an explanation of how positive and negative concepts of self are made manifest through interactions with others. The aim is to present a conceptual tool for delving beyond empirical patterns in deepening our understanding of bullying victimization and its consequences and to offer new knowledge about how victims can best be supported (see also Danermark et al., 2001).

### **The concept of social support**

Social support has been proven to have a range of positive consequences, in general, but also, to be important for children's ability to cope with their social situations. The importance of social relationships in the treatment of disease and in the maintenance of good health has drawn the attention of scientists across a wide range of behavioral sciences (Cohen et al., 2000). Interventions to make positive changes to social environments have been



successful in enabling physiological recuperation, in extending the lives of persons with chronic diseases and in helping with recovery from traumatic events (Bauer, Briss, Goodman & Bowman, 2014). For victims of serious crimes, such as rape and repeated abuse, one of the most important factors for being able to recover has proven to be social support and help from informal networks such as friends and family (Gitterman, 2014). In this next section, an understanding of how social support is linked to health will be presented. Social support is generally referred to, in a broad sense, as “any process through which social relationships might promote health and well-being” (Cohen et al., 2000:4).

Tardy (1985) has described five important elements of social support. Firstly, there is the *direction* of social support, since it can both be given and received. Most research has focused on received social support and its relation to different positive outcomes in life. In this dissertation, the focus is on received social support. Secondly, the *disposition* of social support is seen as crucial, that is, if social support is perceived as being available and whether it is actually used. Availability can be understood both as quantity, many sources of social support, and quality, where support given is appropriate. Utilization, on the other hand, refers to, if available support is actually used. Thirdly, any support should include a *description/evaluation* of support received. Description indicates how frequently and what type of social support has been received, whereas, evaluation refers to the notion on how satisfied or how important any received support has been to the recipient. For example, a bullied child might receive a great amount of support from different teachers (description) but not value the support received as helpful (evaluation). Fourthly, there is the *content* of the social support. Support can take many different forms. The most common are: emotional support, i.e. different caring actions, such as listening; informational support, i.e. giving advice or information that is needed; instrumental resources, i.e. providing resources or time; and, appraisal support, i.e. giving feedback. Fifthly, social support emanates from a *network*, i.e., the source of the support such as parents, friends, teachers or other family members.

### **Social support as a coping mechanism**

There are two general ways of understanding how social support may promote health. The *first perspective* states that social support consists of emotional, practical or instrumental resources available to persons in a stressful situation (Cohen et al., 2000). Generally, these stressful situations are trau-

matic life events, such as death in the family, illness and so on. Social support, according to this perspective, is perceived or actual available resources provided from one's surroundings. The popular stress buffering model is found within this perspective. According to this model, support is related to positive health only for persons under stress. This perspective rests on an understanding of social support as a coping mechanism, which boosts an individual's perceived ability to cope with different demands (Cohen et al., 2000; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), where a person's ability to make use of available social support from their surroundings has a positive influence on their health. Supportive actions are thought to enhance coping performance and the perception of social support makes a person estimate eventual stressful situations as being more manageable (Figure 1).

Applied to bullying, high levels of social support can, in the same way, be an important source of support in the kind of stressful situation that bullying is. Of the few studies that have been conducted within this area, research results have been quite mixed regarding social support as a possible buffer between victimization and distress from bullying. While some studies have indicated positive buffering effects of both teachers, classmates, family and friends, the effect of support in buffering various negative outcomes for bullied children has been relatively weak, sometimes non-existent, and no clear patterns have emerged (David & Demaray, 2007; Rigby, 2000; Rothon et al., 2011).

In sum, perceived social support can, according to this perspective, reduce the possible negative effects of different stressors in individuals' lives, such as, when they are being bullying. These arguments correspond with arguments based on understanding bullying as described within the first paradigm of bullying research. Children are seen as having or lacking the ability to use appropriate coping strategies such as receiving support from adults or peers, in order to tackle bullying. In this way, social support becomes an individual responsibility linked to a schoolchild's ability to handle the network surrounding them, without understanding how different social processes and interactions within the school environment might reduce their ability to do so. Social support also becomes 'only' one source of support, important for those children under stress from bullying. Victims, in this way, may benefit from their relationships with others, since they can get advice or emotional relief from peers, teachers and friends when needed. However, I would rather widen the argument, that social support, i.e. social bonds and relationships with others, is important, not only in stressful sit-

uations but in general, as a means of developing self-esteem. Such a perspective, described in next section, makes social support and/or relations with others central to an understanding of how schoolchildren develop positive perceptions of self.

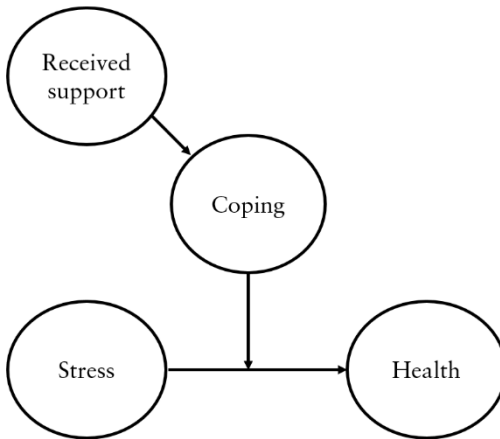


Figure 1. Social support as a coping mechanism (after Cohen et al., 2000)

### **Social support in the tradition of symbolic interactionism**

The *second perspective* states that social support promotes well-being, not only by offering resource in stressful situations, but also by promoting an individual's overall health through the positive side effects of participating in and feeling valued by one or more social groups (Cohen et al., 2000; Demaray & Malecki, 2003). This perspective may also be described as a 'main-effect-perspective', based on the supposition that everyone can benefit from social support. According to this perspective, relationships with others and belonging to different social groups, benefits an individual's self-concept and feelings of self-worth, thereby, promoting health, irrespective of being under stress or not. Being integrated into a social network has a general positive effect on a person's overall self-concept and general well-being. Belonging to and being integrated into a group gives a sense of stability, belonging and security, as well as recognition of self-worth because of a demonstrated ability to meet normative expectations within the larger

group. Positive interactions with others become crucial for developing a positive sense of self.

Where the first perspective rests on an individual psychological explanation of social support as a personal coping mechanism, the second perspective emphasizes the importance of the social group from a symbolic interactionist sociological tradition. The first perspective can be understood as being linked to the first order paradigm within bullying research, whereas the second perspective, is based more within the second order paradigm of bullying research. Building on a symbolic interactionist base is an important point of departure for understanding how 'self' is realized through interactions with others and how different collective social processes play a crucial part in understanding bullying and its consequences for victims.

This second perspective on social support emanates from symbolic interactionism and presents a different view on how to understand the benefits of social support. Based on the pragmatic philosophy and social psychology of Dewey (1916/1997) and Mead (1976/1995), this perspective conceives of reality, social support and the self as socially constructed phenomena. From this perspective, there is no clear consensus on what constitutes social support. Rather, people are seen as constructing theories about the world as it relates to their specific social context and their social relationships with each other. At the heart of this symbolic interactionism perspective lies a concept of identity and sense of self, as things created through relationships and interaction with others. Feelings of, and about self, of having a positive or negative self-image, arise from interactions and social bonds with others. This is especially important when trying to understand the consequences of bullying and the positive aspects of social support. According to this model, social support is universally beneficial since stable supportive networks give a sense of belonging, security and recognition. A network in which the individual feels valued provides a person, in this case a schoolchild, with feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy, since the network will tend to validate the school child's ability to meet normative expectations.

Individuals are constantly negotiating meaning with each other, and a sense of self is dependent and based on interactions with others, and especially, through interpreting the views of others about oneself. The self and how it is perceived to be of value to others is inseparably linked to the social world. The experience and estimation of one's self-worth is a reflection on how one is viewed by others. Social relationships, or social support, are, therefore, central to the development of a positive self-concept. This explanation, of the development of a school pupil's feelings of self, lays stress on

the importance of social relationships within the school context. In school settings, this perspective would imply that children's sense of self-worth is developed through interaction with teachers and peers (see also Lindberg, 2007; Thornberg, 2015b; Wei, 2005).

The symbolic interactionist perspective sees social support, regulated through social interaction, as the basis for upholding a positive identity, rather than any intrinsic value in social support per se. Therefore, social relationships with others promote health by making it possible for persons to make sense of their world and self (figure 2). Social support promotes health and well-being by creating and upholding an individual's self-identity and self-esteem. According to Mead (1976/1995), a person commits to a social context and to relationships with others as a means of establishing identity. This development pathway is a social process that emerges during childhood and continues throughout adulthood. The process involves grappling with the attitudes of others, both in relation to persons close to the individual, such as friends and family ('significant others'), and in a wider context, in relation to larger peer groups, or society as a whole ('the generalized other'). Through internalizing a concept of self that has emerged through relating with others, a dimension of identity, to which Mead refers to as "Me", is created.

What appear in the immediate experience of one's self in taking that attitude is what we term the "me". It is that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognized in the community, in so far as it recognizes the others. (Mead 1934/2015, p. 196)

"Me" could be described as a form of collective social supervision which has been integrated into the identity of the person. From this perspective, individuals regulate their actions in relation to expectations of others. Our understanding of our self is, therefore, shaped through social interactions and by an individual's ability to assimilate the perspectives of significant others. It is through this process, where a person is able to imagine the perspectives of others and to reflect on oneself, that a person's knowledge of, and sense of self are created.

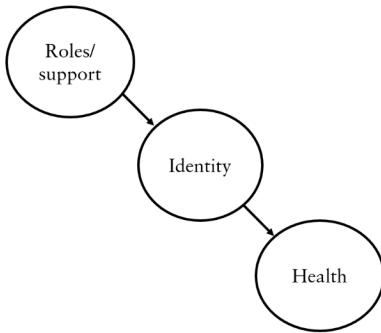


Figure 2. *Symbolic interactionism and social support (after Cohen, et al., 2000)*

## Recognition

Use of the term social support, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, highlights the importance of social bonds in developing a positive understanding of self. One might still wonder, what constitutes positive interactions, what ought to characterize social relationships in which a schoolchild or pupil would feel validated. Some ideas in symbolic interactionism have been criticized for being too focused on the interaction level, thereby missing how such processes might relate to different macro-structures (e.g. Thornberg, 2015a). While the interaction level is crucial for understanding school environments, social relations are also influenced by structures within the school context, such as school policies and regulations, as well as socio-cultural power structures such as different norms related to gender and appearance. In order to understand what constitutes supportive interaction, I propose to use Honneth's (1995) theory of social recognition as a means of helping to explain in what ways different social relationships may or may not be supportive of victims of bullying.

Honneth's (1995) theory describes how individuals strive for recognition through different social interactions and participation in groups, as a means of developing a positive sense of self. The theory can give important insights into understanding what constitutes supportive relationships within institutional structures such as a school. Within bullying research literature, the theory of social recognition has seldom, if ever, been used as a theoretical framework and Honneth himself has not addressed the school as an important sphere in struggles for recognition. Others have argued for promis-

ing theoretical applications for Honneth's theory within school environments (e.g. Möller & Danermark, 2007; Thomas et al., 2016). Thomas and colleagues have written that "schools appear to be important sites for struggles over recognition" (Thomas et al., 2016; 12). Where the theory has been used it has been from a perspective of children's well-being at school (Thomas et al., 2016). This dissertation may, therefore, be a first attempt to explore the use and potential of Honneth's theory applied to bullying research.

In addition to his overlooking of the school environment, Honneth has given little attention to children in regard to social recognition. In outlining his three modes of recognition, children are only mentioned in the first dimension, in relation to the importance of love in primary relationships (Honneth, 1995). It has been argued that Honneth is among the fold of social scientists who tend to understand children as "adults in waiting" (Thomas 2012; 458) and not as active participating individuals, with rights of their own. Some voices have been raised, pleading to understand children, not as passive subjects, but as active participants, contributing to their surroundings. According to this perspective, children should be regarded as 'rights-bearers', entitled to respect and self-esteem (e.g. Prout, 2011; Thomas 2007; 2012; 2016). This is the perspective of this dissertation. I will argue that Honneth's three different forms of recognition all become relevant when studying children, and, particularly, when studying bullying behavior among schoolchildren.

Honneth's (1995) theory of social recognition derives from the normative content of Hegel's social theory and from Mead's social psychological theory of pragmatism. According to Honneth, social relationships are central to our reaching self-consciousness and a positive relationship with ourselves, as individuals. The heart of Honneth's theory is the concept of personal identity, which demands three different forms of recognition, and which enables a positive relationship with self. Honneth's point of departure for his theory of recognition derives from Mead and Hegel and rests on the basic claim that social life is built on mutual recognition and on the fact that any sense of self is reached through our interactions with others. A positive relationship with self can only be reached when one learns to view oneself through the perspectives of others. In this sense, Honneth shares Mead's perspective, since significant others are central to reaching a positive identity.

Since it is a social self, it is a self that is realized in its relationship to other. It must be recognized by others to have the very values which we want to have belong to it. (Mead in Honneth 1995, p. 86)

Recognition is important in the development of a positive sense of self. A positive relationship with 'self' can be explained as an ability to feel and acknowledge the consent and validation of others to one's own way of life (Heidegren 2009; Strandberg 2009). Therefore, lacking the recognition of others would emerge as a barrier to the development of the self. For example, persons who feel ashamed of self, would not be considered as having a positive relation to themselves.

The different forms of recognition, that enable this positive feeling, are divided into three domains, made manifest through interactions with others. Recognition can be attained through interactions on three different levels. Recognition is based on social bonds and develops through "emotional bonds, the granting of rights, or a shared orientation to values" (Honneth, 1995:94). These forms of recognition are all related to three different levels of self-realization, which together enable the development of a positive self. However, these three different forms of recognition can be denied, or negated, through different actions both on individual, institutional and social levels. These forms of recognition can be threatened by three different forms of denial of recognition, all of which, in colloquial speech, might be defined as insults or disrespect. Since an individual's self-identity is dependent on the reactions of others and on support through social interaction, being disrespected threatens a person's entire identity with collapse.

The first form of recognition, termed *love*, is based on an individual's needs and emotional bonds in primary relationships. This form of recognition is reached through socio-emotional bonds with a few close persons, such as friends, family and partners. To achieve this form of recognition, a certain level of autonomy and emotional bonding needs to be reached. Honneth (1995) exemplifies this by comparing the process to a child's learning how to trust in their emotional relationships with their primary caregivers, even though he/she may not always be present in a given moment. Honneth turns to Winnicott's object-relations theory (Winnicott, 1953/1960) in order to describe how the child learns to bond to its caregiver and trust in their love even in situations when they are not present. Love, though, is not restricted to parents but includes all relationships that are close and important for the individual (Honneth 1995:99). Recognition at this stage is understood, therefore, as "a mature confidence that one's own needs will lastingly be met by the other because one is of unique value to the other"



(Honneth 1995:104). Love is crucial for human's self-confidence and lack of love and recognition within primary relationships will affect an individual's personal integrity. This form of recognition is the basis for the other two forms of recognition. Love, as recognition, lays a foundation of trust in a person's own abilities and self-confidence. Denial of the recognition of love is made manifest through physical maltreatment. Through physical victimization, such as rape, abuse and torture, a person loses control and power over their own body. Being subject to such treatment, leaves a person with feelings of total loss of control, of being totally subjugated to someone else's power. This kind of physical abuse makes the world an unsafe place leading to the destruction of a person's self-confidence.

The second form of recognition, *rights*, is centered on legal forms of recognition. To be recognized as a legal subject means that individuals understand themselves to be subjects according the law. This form of recognition is related to the historical development of legal rights. Honneth (1995) describes how different rights, historically, were restricted to certain groups. However, modern society rests on a basis of equality, where every person, irrespective of their status, has access to the same rights. This form of recognition enables a person's self-respect. Denial of legal recognition can arise through organizational or institutional denial of an individual's rights. This damages a person's self-respect since it signals that some individual do not have the same status as other members of society.

The third form of recognition is *solidarity*. Recognition in the form of solidarity centers on an understanding of persons as unique and valued, merely because of their individuality. In contrast to the second form of recognition, solidarity refers to those traits and abilities that persons do not share with others. Solidarity means being tolerant toward others and being appreciated for one's own uniqueness. This form of recognition enables development of self-esteem, and awareness that one possess skills that are valued by others within society. Recognition in the form of solidarity can be denied through different forms of insults and degrading actions towards individuals. Regarding insults, Honneth (1995) describes relatively innocent actions to the most abusive forms of stigmatization. Insults degrade individuals by making them aware that their abilities and personal traits are not valued within broader groups or wider society. Instead of embracing an individual's way of life, they are made to feel less valued than others. Insults, denigration and put-downs diminish an individual's self-esteem, depriving him or her of positive values in their personal lives, or, to put it another way – you are not appreciated for being just you.

According to Honneth (1995), experience of disrespect should be understood as the driving force for human beings' demands for recognition. However, emotions created when being misrecognized also lead to other difficulties for individuals, making them reluctant to engage in social interactions or even trying to avoid them. The different forms of disrespect described by Honneth (1995) lead to feelings of humiliation, denigration and shame, feelings that make an individual strive for recognition. Honneth (1995) states that:

In the concept of emotional response associated with shame, the experience of being disrespected can come to motivate impetus for a struggle for recognition. (Honneth, 1995, p. 183).

Regarding bullying, on the other hand, it is evident from bullying research that some bullied children chose not to fight back in bullying situations, or chose not to report bullying behaviors (Kristensen & Smith, 2003). Honneth's proposition would imply that feelings related to misrecognition, such as being bullied, could generate actions aimed at achieving recognition. Even though some children do fight back, do report bullying to adults or do demand of bullies to stop, avoidance strategies, such as withdrawal or remaining silent, result with more or equal frequency (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Naylor et al., 2001). In order to understand the actions and responses of bullied children there is a need for additional theoretical considerations, beyond the scope of Honneth's concept of struggle for recognition.

Scheff (1997, 2000), like Honneth, believes that humans are fundamentally social in nature, with a need to create and maintain social bonds with others. Scheff has developed a theory of emotion in which he defines shame as the 'master emotion', the most social of all basic emotions. Scheff defines shame as follows;

By shame I mean a large family of emotions that includes many cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that involve reactions to rejection or feelings of failure or inadequacy (Scheff, 2000, p. 96)

In Scheff's understanding of shame, shame is closely linked to social bonds with (significant) others and to a wide range of cognitive states (cognates) that can be described as threats to those social bonds. Like Honneth (1995), Scheff believes that interactions and social bonds are the foundation of human being's development and identity projects. The experience of shame is, according to Scheff (2000), a consequence of the ability of humans to be able to see themselves through the eyes of another. Failing to live up to

expectations of others, or the fear of not doing so, causes feelings of shame, which, in turn, weaken our social bonds with others. If social bonds, in Honneth's terms, are characterized as acts of recognition, then meeting the expectations of others will result in feelings of pride.

If social interactions are marked by insults, exclusion, and other such gestures, then social bonds to others are weakened, and the emotional result is shame, thereby signaling feelings of failure because the individual did not live up to social expectations (Scheff, 1997, 2000). Shame is related to both exclusion and denigration and comes with a perception that bonds to some significant other have been shattered or disturbed. Shame is potentially present in all social interactions. Even if persons do not experience shame, the very expectation and possibility of feeling shame means that people are constantly anticipating it. The outcome of shame is silence, hesitation, withdrawal, and a reluctance to acknowledge shame that is the shame of shaming. Fear of shame makes us reluctant to engage in situations where social bonds may be threatened. By imagining how others view oneself, negative conceptualizations cause individuals to withdraw or avoid such relationships.

Scheff's description of shame, the negative impact on people's identity projects and how shame relates to social bonds is, in many ways, similar to Honneth's description of how recognition or lack of recognition in our interactions with different social actors negatively affects identity. For Honneth (1995), misrecognition, weakening of social bonds with others, and consequent feelings of shame are a foundation for taking political action. However, for Scheff (1997, 2000), feelings of shame lead to a negative relationships and a downward spiral for individuals. Feelings of shame may lead to destructive relationships with others or to relational failure, since people may develop destructive patterns of anger and of shyness, adding to a weakening of their bonds with significant others. From this perspective and as an additional element in this dissertation, I argue that it is important to use Honneth's theory of recognition as a means of understanding people's identity projects and how these relate to self, and complement this with Scheff's (2000) insight into how shame, as a 'master emotion', regulates our relationships with others and adds to our understanding of ourselves.

## 8. Methods

The design of the study is presented below. Methodological considerations, concrete data collection strategies and ethical concerns are described. Ethical permissions for the study were granted by The Regional Ethics Review Board, Uppsala, Sweden (100/339).

A mid-sized Swedish municipality funded the first two years of a doctoral program and asked specifically that the recipient (the author) develop a project aimed at studying bullying. The prospective doctoral student was free to design the project. Results from the project were expected to result in a number of peer-reviewed articles to form part of a doctoral dissertation. This dissertation, and the first two articles, is the return on the municipal funding. The remainder of the dissertation has been funded by Örebro University. Since the planning of a research design and specific focus of the research were entirely up to the author, and since results are presented as part of this dissertation, no conflicts of interest are deemed to have emerged.

### Research design

The field of bullying research has been dominated by two specific paradigms. A paradigm constitutes a set of shared beliefs by scientists, that state how problems should be understood, but also which suppose specific strategies that ought to be used in studying the phenomena (Kuhn, 1962/2012). Within the first paradigm of bullying research, which has dominated the field since Olweus's first publications, the main focus, using large-scale cross-sectional quantitative survey strategies, has been to identify different factors that put children at risk for bullying. The second paradigm stresses the importance of qualitative data in order to capture social relations and processes within the school. Proponents of this paradigm have argued for the importance of ethnographic studies, observational data and qualitative interviews, in order to move beyond the straitjacket of statistical patterns. Quantitative studies are useful when estimating prevalence, studying different relationships between quantitative variables or evaluating different anti-bullying prevention programs (experimental research). However, this methodology yields little insight into how to explain different prevalence rates or parametric links between variables that have been identified. Qualitative data provides insight into such phenomena, offering a deeper understanding of results and possible causal links identified within quantitative material. It also makes it possible to relate quantitative results to different contextual

conditions, by shedding light on which premises underlie the different experiences that emerge.

However, as outlined above, I have argued for a third paradigm in bullying research which could be a meeting place for dialog between the two perspectives. This third perspective on bullying, is not limited to the concepts, perspectives and methods found within the two separate paradigms. Both perspectives are important, and both have yielded important research results and theoretical perspectives, but there is a need for both a theoretical and methodological dialog between the two. This dissertation strives to present such a dialogic space, using and adapting methodology from each paradigm.

The two dominating paradigms within the bullying research has, as outlined above, been dominated by two the dominating research paradigms, arguing for their specific ways of studying bullying. In paradigm one, quantitative research methods has been dominated, in paradigm two, the need for qualitative methods has been argued. I argued for the need of a combination of those two. Thus, arguments have been made that quantitative and qualitative methods should not be combined since they represent different and non-compatible epistemological and ontological positions (Bryman, 2015; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002). However, in this dissertation, such differences have not been viewed as problematic but rather as a possibility for containing disparate views in the search for methods and strategies that would best provide answers to the research questions posed. As argued, the combination of paradigms are needed to answerer the aim of this dissertation. Both sources of data collection provide important tools for answering the research questions ahead. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, it is possible to gain a deeper and more competent understanding of the phenomenon been studied, in this case, bullying.

The argument for using mixed-methods is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are satisfactory in themselves (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). The school context is a complex setting where individual factors, social processes and macro structures interact (e.g. Swearer & Espelage, 2011; Thornberg, 2015a). To be able to move bullying research forward, methods able to capture the complexity of life for a child at school, are of great importance. Thus, in this dissertation, a mixed-methods design is used (Powell et al., 2008). Arguments have been raised that one method is not sufficient when trying to capture a complex phenomenon such as bullying (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011; Hong & Espelage, 2012a; Hong & Espelage, 2012b; Powell et al., 2008; ). In order to fulfil the aim of this

dissertation and to deepen our understanding of the experiences of those subject to bullying, an approach that captures a wide spectrum of experience is required.

Since the majority of studies on bullying have been quantitative, using cross-sectional designs, little is known about how being subject to bullying changes over time. Cross-sectional data is often easier to collect but offers little insight into changes over time, which is one of the main questions posed in this dissertation. Therefore the strategy used here is based on longitudinal, individual level data, making it possible to follow children's development over time (Singer & Willett, 2003). While there are some studies (described above) that have used individual data, more research of this kind is needed in order to better understand the details of how different experiences of bullying victimization might relate to health outcomes.

There are many different mixed-methods designs. Four major types can be identified within the literature: triangulation; embedded; explanatory; and exploratory (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Ivankova et al., 2006). This dissertation rests on a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, meaning that data are collected in two phases, quantitative data at first, followed by qualitative data within the same study (Creswell, 2009). The first step in this design is to analyze quantitative data relating to the research question in order to: (i) establish the prevalence of different trajectories of bullying victimizations, and (ii) how these different trajectories may relate to different aspects of children's socio-emotional lives. The second step in this design is to generate qualitative data that might help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results – to explain how and why different experiences of bullying victimization may relate to different health outcomes for schoolchildren. This design offers a possibility of exploring the quantitative results in detail, but also, makes it possible to move beyond a prevalence perspective and link into a wider theory on how to understand bullying.

Table 1. Overview of sources of data in the four articles.

	Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Quantitative data, cross-sectional, survey, Time 2.				X
Quantitative data, longitudinal, survey, Time 1 & Time 2	X	X		
Qualitative material, open end questions, survey, Time 1 & 2			X	
Qualitative in depth interviews with former victims of bullying			X	

## Data collection

To be able to answer the aims of this dissertation, a combination of questionnaires, material from open-ended questions in questionnaire and in-depth interviews was used. Each step in the data collection is described below. In table 1, each method of data collection, linked to the four articles included in this dissertation, is categorized according to the mixed-methods schemata. The issues of validity and reliability are of great importance when planning, conducting and presenting research (Bryman, 2015). Such issues will be discussed thought out this method section, relating such concepts to different parts of the data collection.

## The questionnaire

### Selection strategies

The quantitative data was collected through a survey in which children answered a questionnaire, separated by one year, during the fall of 2012 and the fall of 2013, hereafter referred to as Time 1 and Time 2. The quantitative data is both cross-sectional and longitudinal (see table 1).

Since one important aim was to study different developmental pathways for bullied children, individual-level data was used, making it possible to study changes over time for individual schoolchildren. Since Swedish

schools, in general, report low levels of bullying victimization, it was important to include a large sample in order to reach appropriate statistical power in the statistical analyses. Since the desorption was partially funded by a municipality, an extensive collaboration was developed inviting all public schools in the municipal area to participate in the study. While the municipality supported the project, and encouraged each school to participate, it remained voluntary for each principal to decide if the school should participate or not. Project meetings for all school principals within the municipality were held two months prior to the data collection. At these meetings, information was given about the project and schools were able to raise questions related to the project. The municipality consisted of 44 schools and all schools chose to participate in the study.

Forty four (44) schools in a Swedish municipality, with children from grades 4 to 9, from March to April, 2012 (Time 1), and from March to April, 2013 (Time 2) participated in this study. Response rates were: Time 1; 77.2 % (n= 4,950) of which 47.4% (n= 2,345) were girls: Time 2; 82% (n= 5,078) of which 47.6% (n= 2,417) were girls. Some pupils had moved during the measurement period, some declined to participate at either Time 1 or 2, while 9th grade pupils at Time 1 had finished school at Time 2. Thus, the final sample for this analysis was 3,347 pupils (1,571 girls; 1,776 boys) who completed the questionnaire on both occasions, yielding a response rate at 68.5 % over the two measurement waves. Spread between school grade-level, the average grade-level at Time 2 was 6.8 (over 5th to 9th grades).

## Procedure

The pupils answered a web-based questionnaire, during school hours and under supervision from teachers. The questionnaire was administrated by the responsible teacher for each class. Each teacher got an instruction paper with guidelines on how to administrate the survey. Teachers were told to tell the pupils to answer the questionnaire in silence, without conferring with each other. The pupils were also instructed by their teachers to remain in their seats until the time was up. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Pupils who didn't want to participate were instructed to remain in their seats and work with other school tasks. Members of the research team were available by phone, before, during and after the survey to answer any questions that teachers or students might have.

To be able to identify how each respondent's situation might have changed over the measurement period, each child was given an individual



ID. At each questionnaire administration, pupils were given an information sheet with unique login codes. The information sheets also explained the aim of the project, ethical guidelines and how to get in contact with the research team as well as contact information to different bullying-support groups. The research team sent a letter of passive informed consent to all pupils' legal guardians one month before the survey took place. Pupils were informed, both verbally, by their responsible teachers, and in writing, through their individual letters, that participation in the survey was voluntary and that they could terminate their participation at any time.

One of the downsides with a longitudinal design is the risk of large numbers of missing data which might inflict the validity of the study since those who do not continue in the study, or who have opted out completely, may differ significantly from their participating peers. Children may also move between the data waves (probably a random effect) or be absent of the day of the data collection (possibly a non-random effect, since bullied children tend to be absent more often). Different methods can be used to decrease attrition in longitudinal school-based studies (Epstein & Botvin, 2000). Two tactics were adopted in the data collection in order to keep pupils in the study. Firstly, additional data collection days were added and teachers were instructed to assemble all pupils, who were absent on the day of data collection, on a separate occasion. Secondly, to reduce drop-out between data collections, those children who could not participate at either the original or the extra data collection date, were given the possibility of answering the questionnaire at home. Even though a high response rate was of great importance for this study, participation was, of course, voluntary. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the questions, being absent might be a sign of children trying to avoid the survey since they might have felt that they are not able to decline to participate. There is a fine line between reminding and tacitly 'forcing' children to answer. When offering the renewed possibility for answering the questionnaire, teachers were instructed to once again stress the importance of participation being voluntary. Teachers did report that some children declined to participate, indicating that this ethical consideration was, at least to some extent, met.

One tactic for achieving high response rates is to make schools feel that a project is important, not just in general, but also in relation to their everyday work. Even though the 'gatekeepers', i.e. head of the municipality and school principals, had given formal access, it did not mean cooperation had been secured from informal gatekeepers, i.e. the participants and their teachers. To gain the acceptance of teachers and have their support, it was

important that they felt that any project they participated in would have practical consequences for their everyday work (Wanat, 2008). To assure this, two tactics were used. Firstly, in line with Swedish school ordinances, every school is required to carry out an annual school climate survey that includes accounts of bullying and harassment (Skolverket, 2012), where the goal is to use the data in formulating the anti-bullying strategies that schools are obligated by law to continually implement and evaluate. Since schools have trouble constructing valid and reliable surveys, they were offered data collected in this project, at aggregate level, receiving a summary of main results from both questionnaires. Each participating school received a report presenting key results, using standardized procedures, making it possible for school to compare results from Time 1 and Time 2, but also in relation the municipality as a whole. All school staff were also offered two separate half-day conferences after each survey. At these conferences, recent research within the field of bullying literature was presented, but also, some results and conclusions from the questionnaires. It was also possible for the schools to suggest different topics for these lectures. Schools were also offered, if they wanted, individual lectures on bullying-related topics. In total, besides the two seminars, approximately fifteen lectures were held, both directed to school staff, parents or students at school.

In order to maximize cooperation from teachers and informal gatekeepers, dealing with aspects of power is also important (Wanat, 2008). If intermediate gatekeepers or participants feel powerless they may be more reluctant to cooperate. To create a sense of collective participation for school staff, each school selected one or two contact persons, in addition to the school principal(s). These persons were responsible for distributing information to teachers, handing out the log-in information to class teachers and forwarding possible feed-back from teachers to the researcher. Before each data collection, all contact persons were invited to an information gathering on the university campus. Here, they could raise question and concerns and give their own feedback. They could also, for each individual school, request extra questions in the survey related to day-to-day work in their school. By this means, they were able to influence the project in a way that could be beneficial for their particular school.

## Measurements

The primary quantitative data that needed to be gathered required considerable deliberation, if the aims of the dissertation were to be met. The considerations involved are outlined below.

### Frequency of bullying and peer victimization

There is very little agreement, within the research field, concerning how bullying should be measured (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Different assessment methods for estimating prevalence of bullying, as well as different definition of the term, have resulted in a wide range of prevalence rates. In order to measure the prevalence of bullying in this study, self-report data were used. Self-reports have proven to be one of the most reliable measurements when estimate levels of victimization (Smith, 2014). Other methods of studying prevalence of bullying include teacher reports and peer nominations. Teacher reports are generally less reliable than self- and peer reports. Teachers tend to underestimate levels of bullying (Smith, 2014, Card, 2003). Self-reporting has been found to be one of the most valid ways of estimating bullying in schools, especially since a child besides the bullies and bystanders, may be the only person who is aware of the harassment (Demaray et al., 2013).

In everyday school contexts, pupils behave in ways that, to bystanders, might appear as inappropriate or insulting, but which ought not to be regarded as bullying. To distinguish bullying from other forms of perhaps unwelcome social interactions in school contexts, such as arguments, play-fighting, or pranks, an 18-item questionnaire, developed for an earlier Swedish study (Flygare, Gill, & Johansson, 2013; Hellfeldt et al., 2014; Skolverket, 2011a), was used. When developing this measurement of bullying, hierarchical cluster analysis and factor analysis was used to identify structural characteristics of negative acts carried out with malicious intent (viewed from the victim's perspective. (See The Swedish National Agency for education (Skolverket), 2011b, for detailed information on the psychometric properties of the measurements). It is important to note that respondents were never asked if they had been bullied which could decrease both validity and reliability. To avoid the kinds of complications found by Huang and Cornell (2015), regarding how definitions and question-order impact on prevalence estimates of bullying victimization, and by Smith (et al. 2002), who uncovered variations in meaning of the term in 14 countries, no stipulated definition of bullying was used.

Categories of bullying behavior were based on frequency (repeated negative acts) and intent (to cause harm), linked to six negative actions that pupils might have been subjected to during the previous two months. Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, how often (never, once, a couple of times a month, a couple of times a week, everyday) they had been subjected to any of the following: been (a) pushed; (b) held/kicked; (c) threatened with violence (physically bullied); (d) mocked; (e) called nasty names; or been (f) excluded (socially bullied). Respondents were categorized as bullied if they reported being subjected to one or more of these negative acts where the act (or acts);

- had been repeated almost daily, several times a week or month during the last two months (frequency), and
- where the act was perceived by respondent to have been carried out with the intention of causing harm or intimidation (intent).

### Health consequences

In order to gain a valid measurements for estimating student's well-being in relation to bullying, items were chosen based on prior research within the field. Two different indexes were constructed to estimate children's somatic and emotional well-being. Each index consisted of three items each. Selection of items when constructing the indexes were based on previous studies within the field (Due et al., 2005; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Modin et al., 2015). An international cross-sectional survey of 123,227 school pupils, from 28 countries, has shown how both emotional and somatic negative symptoms are consistently and strongly related to bullying victimization (Due et al., 2005). In that study, headaches, stomach aches and sleeping difficulties were associated with bullying victimization and are used in the present study to form the index of somatic problems. Similar measurements have also been used in another study of Swedish school children (Modin et al., 2015). Pupils, in the present study, indicated how often (*never, occasionally, often, almost always*) they experienced (i) *headaches*, (ii) *stomach aches* and (iii) *difficulty sleeping*.

Due et al.'s (2005) results also indicated that an association between bullying victimization and health problems was even greater for emotional consequences such as *feelings of sadness* and *nervousness*. Other studies have pointed towards how feelings related to shame, uselessness, being less worthy and so on, form a central negative emotion for bullied children

(Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Three items were used to gauge possible emotional consequences. Subjects indicated how often (*never, occasionally, often, almost always*) they felt *sadness, worry/nervousness* and *shame*. This combined index, *emotional problems*, also ranged from 3 to 12. In order to measure children well-being, a joint measurement including both these emotional and psychosomatic items were used.

### Social support from peers and teachers

Previous research has demonstrated a link between bullying victimization and negative peer relations (Boulton & Smith 1994; Hodges et al., 1997) and lower levels of reported social support from teachers (Hanish et al., 2004; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Rigby, 2000).

Subjects were asked about the quality of their relationships with teachers and the extent of their relationships with peers, indicating on a five-point scale, ranging from “totally agree” to “do not agree at all”, if they felt that teachers: (i) *care about them*; (ii) *treat them fairly*; (iii) *treat them with respect*; and (iv) *whether they can trust their teachers if they came to them with a serious problem*. This yielded a combined index: relationship with teachers (range 4 to 20 points, with lower scores indicating stronger relationships with teachers).

To assess extent of peer relationships, subjects indicated on a four-point scale (i) *how many friends they felt they had at school* (1=no friend to 4=four or more) as well as (ii) *if they had someone they could be with during breaks or spare time in school* (ranging from 1= never to 5=always). This index, termed peer relationships, ranged from 2 to 9 points, with lower scores indicating a low levels of support from friends.

To estimate the internal consistency for indexes used in this dissertations analyzes, measuring both health consequences (described above) and social support, reliability test Cronbach’s alpha was used (Field, 2013). Cronbach’s alpha measure to what extent an index items measure the same thing. Since such values vary due to the items included in each index, more information on this reliability tests are presented in the different articles included in this dissertation.

## The qualitative data collection

### Selection strategies

To be able to understand the phenomenon of bullying, voices of pupils ought to be included in the analysis. Earlier research into bullying has paid little attention to gathering and analyzing qualitative data (Rigby, 2003; Juvonen and Graham 2014). The quantitative survey aimed at gaining knowledge about how victimization changes over time and how these changes relate to different adjustment and health problems. However, to understand the ‘meaning’ of such outcomes, quantitative results need to be put into context. The qualitative material makes it possible to give these pupils a voice. Qualitative data makes it possible to capture the experiences of those involved in different social processes within the school environment, giving voice to the central actors in the school context. Gathering qualitative data has the power to deepen our understanding of complex systems by letting children, in their own words, describe how they interpret and construct meaning within school contexts.

In this dissertation, two different sets of qualitative data were collected, open-ended questions from the surveys at Time 1 and 2, and in depth interviews with former victims of bullying. The use of open-ended questions allows for the collection of a larger number of short stories from pupils who answer the questionnaires. In total, yielding about two hundred shorter stories and citations, from both Time1 and 2. These together with the in-depth interviews constitutes the qualitative empirical base in this dissertation. In this way, I was also able to connect different results from individual schools to stories within the questionnaires. Even though this sampling strategy yielded a large number of shorter stories, these were not enough to generate sufficient data for answering some of the goals of this dissertation. While these stories provided more detailed information than the multiple-choice survey questions, they do not offer enough depth (Silverman, 2015). To this end, additional in-depth interviews were conducted.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with former victims of bullying. Participants were recruited through advertising on the Instagram-account (social media platform) of one of the largest anti-bullying organizations in Sweden (*Friends Foundation*). The advertisement described the overall aim of the study, relevant ethical considerations and details about how to contact the researcher. Inclusion criteria for participation were also stated. Since the specific aim of the study was to understand, from schoolchildren’s

perspectives, during and after episodes of bullying, the sample was designed to include former victims of bullying.

Ten persons responded to the advertisement. Since five of these did not meet the inclusion criteria or had to cancel at the last minute, the final number of interviewees was five, one male and four females ( $n=5$ ). The in-depth interviews were carried out during the autumn of 2015. The male was aged 24, and the females were 16, 17, 17 and 18-years-old. These respondents are numbered 1 to 5. All had attended different schools in different parts of Sweden and all had experienced bullying throughout a majority of their compulsory school years. At time of interview the girls were attending upper secondary school and the male was studying at a Swedish university. Because of possible difficulties with recall in retrospective studies, one inclusion criteria was that experience of bullying had not occurred too long ago, thus limiting the sample to adolescents or young adults.

The aim of the interviews was to reach a deeper and contextual understanding of the underlying mechanism of the consequences and supportive functions for children victims of bullying (e.g. Danermark et al., 1997/2002). Therefore, the purpose of the sampling strategy was to attain depth and complexity, rather than quantity (c.f. Rubin and Rubin 2011). Therefore, it was judged to be more important for the purpose the dissertation to find a range of stories, with persons of different ages, attending different schools and subject to different kinds of bullying. The final number for interview was the result of ongoing considerations regarding the data collection, including practical reasons and time constraints. Since the topic of bullied children's need of support, and support given, is relatively under researched, it was hard to decide, in advance, how many interviews would be required to reach some sort of data saturation. Thus, this sample size evolved during the data collection and ended with five interviews (Silverman, 2015). Given that this part of study is based on qualitative data from a limited number of in-depth interviews, there was a surprising concordance in the patterns of interviewees' experiences. These results offer rich material, thick data (Fusch & Ness, 2015), on how bullied children retrospectively interpret their relationships with their teachers.

## Procedure

The first set of qualitative data was collected through the questionnaires. The procedure for questionnaire administration is described above. The open-ended questions allowed for pupils, who had experienced victimiza-

tion, to describe in their own words, if they told someone about their experiences and why they chosen to talk to that person. They were also able to describe their overall well-being. The questionnaire concluded with a general question where children could described their school situation and leave any other comments related to the subject of bullying. Even though the majority of pupils chose not to answer these questions, some pupils wrote shorter or longer descriptions and stories about their own circumstances at school, ending in about 200 hundred shorter stories.

The other set of qualitative data consists of the in-depth interviews. The aim of each interview was to reach a deeper understanding of and to capture the complexity of the phenomena being studied, in this case, bullying (Rubin & Rubin 2004:35, Silverman 2015:110, ten Have 2004:56). The strength of a qualitative interview lies in its flexibility (Silverman, 2015). Since little in known, from the perspective of bullied children, about what kinds of support and help they have received, the flexibility of the qualitative interview method makes it possible to allow the voice of the interviewee to be the guiding structure. Qualitative interviews are especially suitable for studies seeking to "explore voices and experiences which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed in the past" (Byrnes ref i Silverman 2015:114). Thus, these interviews, about thirteen hours in total, mark an appropriate addition to the data from the quantitative survey.

Interviews were preceded by phone calls and e-mailing in order for the interviewer to gain respondents' trust. All interviews were conducted in public places, such as cafes or restaurants, chosen by respondents. Interviews were recorded and took from two to three hours to complete. Three of the interviews were also followed by phones calls, in which some follow-up questions were asked to clarify and elaborate on topics from the initial interview.

### **The interview guide**

Interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide, consisting of different themes that allowed for flexibility in switching between topics, probes and follow-up questions not stated in the guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The interview guide was based on a set of main questions, that is a set of broad questions that are supposed to capture the respondents overall experiences of the topic ahead. Main questions helps "structure an interview by focusing in the substance of the research problem" (Rubin & Rubin, 2004, p. 164). In the interview guide respondents were asked to describe how a regular day within the school would look like, about their different



experiences of bullying, how the bullying might have affected them in different ways, how the bullying started and ended, their perception of how the school had handled their situation, as well as their views on their relationships with teachers and peers. In addition to these main questions, probes and follow-up question were used to gain depth and clarification. Probes were used both to clarify, encourage the respondent to keep talking or elaborate on a topic. These probes could be both verbal and non-verbal, covering actions from gestures aim at getting the respondent to continue to talk about the subject a head such as nodding encouraging, but also, shorter verbal statements such as “And then what?”, “What do you mean”, “Go on – this is very interesting ”and so one. Probes were also used to place what is said in order and context. I for example asked the respondent to tell me step by step what happened in different situation, in that way, using probes to put together a narrative.

Besides from those main questions and probes, follow-up questions were used to gain depth in different arias. Follow-up questions also assure you that you get nuances answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Follow-up questions were work out during the interview but also, after each interview, the transcript of each interview was gone through, looking for parts which should had been followed by more questions. Three of the respondents were contacted by phone after the first interview to answer some follow-up questions that arise from reading the transcripts.

## **Analyzing the data**

Different strategies for analyzing the data were used. The mixed-methods approach gives some insight into how the data were analyzed. In the first section of this chapter, I described that this dissertations rests on a mix-method design and I also described how the data was analyzed in sequences, the qualitative following the quantitative. It is important to keep in mind that the qualitative interviews are not based on the quantitative sample and I have given some arguments above into why. However, the qualitative material gives depth to the quantitative numbers, but also, the theoretical approach makes it possible to span over the different sources of data, moving beyond the empirical level to gain understanding into the situation experience by children experiencing bullying (e.g. Danermark et al., 1997/2002).

The quantitative material was the first to be collected and analyzed. All questions were coded in the IBMP, SPSS Statistics package 23. The first step was to create bullying victimization profiles by combining respondents' rat-

ings of bullying victimization experiences at Time 1 and Time 2. Victimization profiles were constructed by grouping respondents as victims or non-victims at Time 1 and 2. This categorization yielded four bullying victimization profiles; (a) non-victims, never subjected to bullying throughout the measurement period; (b) ceased victims, whose status changed from victim at Time 1 to non-victim at Time 2; (c) new victims, whose status changed from non-victim at Time 1 to victim at Time 2; and (d) persistent or continuing victims, categorized as bullied at both measurement points. One important aim was to understand differences in outcomes between different profiles of victimization. Statistical analyses were conducted to test for changes in different outcomes over time, between Time 1 and Time 2, and between the victimization profiles at time 2.

The process of analyzing qualitative data begins at the planning of the overall design and continues through the data collection process (Silverman, 2015). From the quantitative results, important patterns emerged which, in turn, served as an important basis for constructing the interview guide. Responses to the open-ended questions also gave important input to the interviews. After each interview, results were discussed and potential new themes were added for subsequent interviews.

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed, using content analysis, to establish categories and patterns in the material (Silverman, 2015). In this stage of the analysis, the material from the open-ended questions were also included. Qualitative data from the interviews and open-ended questions from the surveys were organized using *NVivo*, a qualitative data analysis software package from QSR International (2015). Data were analyzed by grouping similar experiences into themes. Such ‘Meaning encoding’ was used in order to identify common themes within the material. These themes were then reanalyzed using the different theoretical approaches included in the presentation of theoretical frameworks outlined above.

When creating themes, there is a risk of bias since selecting findings are in some way subjective. I could select citations that fits with my arguments or my preconceived notion of the issue, inflicting the validity of the treatment of the qualitative material. To avoid such bias, I used different strategies. For example, I search for deviant cases in the material but also, my coding schemas were discussed and scrutinized in different takes by my supervisors, looking for potential biases and discussion other ways to interpret my material.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations were of great importance in the data collection due to the sensitive subject, as well as the fact that children were participating in the data collection (see Cater & Øverlien, 2014). Ethical permissions for the study were granted by The Regional Ethics Review Board, Uppsala, Sweden (100/339). The four key ethical principles, to be taken into consideration when doing research involving humans, are voluntarism, consent, confidentiality and utility (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, 2011). Each of these principals was taken into consideration at every step of the research process.

The principal of voluntarism and consent relates to the capacity of participants to be able to decline participation, having being informed of the aims and procedures of the proposed study. Assessing capacity to decline should cover both the complete survey and responses to single questions. Since this dissertation builds on data collected from children between the ages of nine to fifteen years old consent from parents were required. For the purposes of the survey, passive informed consent was obtained from pupils' caregivers/legal guardians. Letters of consent, with information about the study and the questionnaire, were sent to every home. Letters in English were provided if demanded or deemed necessary. Caregivers who wished for their children not to participate, were required to complete and return by post, using a pre stamped envelope, a form to that effect. Pupils were also informed by their teachers, and in writing, before the survey took place that answering the entire questionnaire, or single questions was voluntary. If someone regretted their participation, once they had answered the questionnaire, they could contact the author, who would then delete all data, from either wave or from both, depending on the wishes of child or his/her parents.

For the qualitative sample, active consent was collected from participants. Ages were from 16 to 24. Participants were informed before the interview, at the planning stage, as well as at the time of the interview, that participation was voluntary and that they could, at any time, stop the interview or choose not to answer specific questions. A few days after the interviews had been conducted, each respondent was contacted by the author. They were informed once again about the study and how it was proposed to use the information. At this stage, if they wished, their participation could have been withdrawn. No respondent chose to do so.

One important ethical consideration was how to deal with any detection of children experiencing bullying, particularly since individual data was being used. Victims could be identified at each measurement, as well as those

who were persistent victims. It was also possible to detect children who might have indicated serious levels of psychosomatic trauma. Should these children be identified, as a means of helping schools with possible interventions? How likely would it be that school authorities, including schools' anti-bullying teams, would have no knowledge of children at risk from bullying? Since the study design is longitudinal and to avoid attrition, it was vital that participants would trust the author and the parameters of the project. To gain participants' trust, confidentiality was promised, including a promise that no third party would get hold of their responses. This promise was important to keep, both in respect to the children's integrity and in respect to their trust in the promise of strict confidentiality. If this promise were to be broken, the whole project would be threatened and children would rightly be reluctant to participate. In the individual letters to participants, a short text was included that dealt with bullying and harassment and encouraged every child to inform someone, if they had been subject to abuse of any kind. Contact information, for both local and national bullying support groups, was included. Contact information for the research group was also included.

Since it was intended to report general results to each school, it would be possible to give a general indication if serious harassment was detected. The information would allow for identification of particular schools and in which groups, within schools, (gender, age, grade and so on) where bullying was more prevalent. The requirements of Swedish School Ordinances are formulated so that gaining information of this kind is not just legal, but is a legal requirement, since all schools are charged with developing, maintaining and evaluating anti-bullying plans. The author also had an ongoing dialog with responsible persons at municipality level, who were grateful for being kept up to date with their formal responsibilities for dealing with and preventing bullying.

The principle of confidentiality is of major importance for quantitative and qualitative data. No schoolchild's story or responses must ever come into any public domain. This was the ultimate responsibility of the author and her research group. Since reporting the quantitative data would only be at aggregate level, presented as tables, with every cell based on aggregate results from at least ten respondents, teachers would not be able to identify the responses of individual children. For the qualitative interviews, confidentiality demanded that names of respondents, individual schools or cities

would be omitted. Other distinctive characteristics, which might have allowed for identification of any respondent, were omitted when presenting the qualitative data.

## 9. Summary of the articles

Below, a brief summary of the four articles that serve as the empirical base for the dissertation is presented. Article I shows how stability and change in bullying victimization relates to perceived levels of social support from teachers and peers. The summary of article I is more extensive since it is written in Swedish. Article II examines longitudinal trends, over one year, in bullying victimization are related to somatic and emotional adjustment. Article III examines how former victims of bullying experienced support from teachers. Results are analyzed using the concept of recognition as defined by Honneth (1995). In Article IV the positive potential of social support from teachers is examined by studying the potential buffering influence of social support from teachers on bullied children's well-being.

### **Article I. Mobbing och social stöd från lärare och klasskamrater: En longitudinell studie av barns erfarenheter av mobbing.**

English title: Bullying and social support from teachers and peers: A longitudinal study of children's experiences of bullying.

Previous research has argued that positive relationships with peers and teachers is important for child and youth development. Children that have experienced bullying victimization commonly lack social support from teachers and peers. However, such studies have mainly been conducted cross-sectionally and give little insight into how bullying victimization changes over the school years. Research has argued for the need of more longitudinal studies that would make it possible to capture patterns of change in bullying victimization; that is, understanding of how students might move in and out of bullying victimization and how such experiences pertain to relationships with teachers and peers. This article examines how bullying victimization changes over a one-year period during late childhood and early teenage years, and how different victimization patterns relate to experiences of levels of social support from teachers and peers. The article is based on longitudinal quantitative data gathered from Swedish schoolchildren ( $n=3,349$ ), in 44 schools from 4th to 9th grade who answered the questionnaire at baseline and one year follow-up.

### **Results and conclusions**

Four longitudinal trends for bullying victimization were identified: (1) non-victims, those not subject to bullying (88%); (2) ceased victims, children bullied at baseline but not at follow-up (4.7%); (3) new victims, children

not bullied at baseline but bullied at follow-up (5.7%); and (4) continuing victims, children subject to bullying at baseline and follow-up (1.6%). Non-victims as well as ceased victims reported higher levels of perceived support from peers than both new and continuing victims. Ceased victims did not, however, report as high levels of peer support as non-victims during the measurement period. However, there were no significant differences in the levels of perceived teacher support reported by ceased, new, and continuing victims.

These results indicate that bullying victimization is unstable, since only a small proportion of children remained in the same bullying category over the measurement period. Potential explanations for the unstable patterns are discussed. Possible explanations of the varying patterns could be the extensive regulations steering the Swedish school system regarding interventions that must be taken in bullying situations.

The results also indicate that bullying has some influence on children's relationships to both peers and teachers; that is, children who had experienced bullying still reported lower levels of support even after the bullying had ended. However, it seems that these bullied children could recover, to some degree, since they are 'better off' in regard to peer support than the small group of children who continue to be bullied, i.e. the continuing or persistent victims. However, similar improved relationships with teachers not found. Ceased victims continued to report the same low levels of teacher support as those children currently experiencing bullying (i.e. at the time of the survey). These results give important insight into the period after bullying has ended. It would seem that formerly bullied children, to some extent, are able to rebuild their relationships with peers. Relationships with teachers, on the other hand, would seem to require more active relationship building initiatives. The importance of rebuilding trust for teachers is clear from research results that point to the positive aspects of support from teachers in relation to schoolchildren's adjustment outcomes as victims and former victims of bullying.

## **Article II. Longitudinal analyses of links between bullying victimization and psycho-somatic maladjustment in Swedish school-children**

Being a victim of bullying has been related to a range of negative health outcomes for children. There is a lack of studies that examine the health outcomes persistent bullying, proven using individual-level longitudinal

data. Studying the persistence of children's experience of being bullied over longer periods, and what harm such experiences can cause, is extremely important since it gives import insights into appropriate supports. Cross-sectional studies of bullying mask variability in categories and persistence of bullying victimization. The aim of this article was to focus on persistence of bullying victimization over a one-year period and how such experiences might be associated with psychosomatic and emotional health status.

Longitudinal, individual level data offers a greater insight into schoolchildren's psychosomatic maladjustment as a consequence of bullying. This article includes Swedish schoolchildren (n=3,349) in 44 schools (4th to 9th grade). These children answered, at school hours under teacher's supervision, a questionnaire at baseline and one-year follow-up. The questionnaire included questions on bullying victimizations experiences and questions regarding somatic and emotional health status.

### **Results and conclusions**

Longitudinal trends for non-victims (88%), ceased victims (4.7%), new victims (5.7%) and continuing victims (1.6%) revealed that while somatic and emotional distress increased for all children at one-year follow-up, new victims had the largest significant increase, continuing victims a smaller though not significant increase, while ceased victims showed a small, (non-significant) decrease. It was also discovered that children not bullied at baseline, but bullied subsequently, differed from their never bullied peers in heightened somatic and emotional baseline stress levels. In line with previous research those children in this article who had never been victims of bullying reported significantly lower levels of somatic and emotional distress. Children within all profiles, with the exception of ceased victims, reported varying levels of heightened somatic and emotional distress during the period between the two surveys. The fact that new victims at follow-up showed heightened somatic and emotional problems at base line (that is, compared to their never victimized peers) may indicate a special vulnerability among this group which could explain their position at follow up.

These results also indicate a direct, immediate effect of bullying indicated in other studies, since new victims and continuous victims indicated about the same levels of reported somatic and emotional distress. The results also indicate the importance of duration in other aspects. Children, for whom bullying ceases, show only a small reduction in emotional and somatic distress. Irrespective of their improved situation, their distress did not reduce to the same levels as those children never subjected to bullying. In sum, this



article indicates that understanding the effects of duration of bullying is important in many aspects. Ceased bullying is directly related to some reduction in emotional and somatic distress, but there is lingering negative that would appear not to be related to the duration of the victimization.

### **Article III. The importance of recognition: teacher-pupil relations from the perspective of the bullied child**

Research has indicated that teachers have a vital role in implementing effective anti-bullying strategies, as well as in supporting children who are experiencing bullying. Research has highlighted how teachers deal with bullying, including the positive aspects and outcomes of teacher support. However, few studies have examined how bullied children understand and experience this support from their teachers. Also, there is a lack of theoretical approaches aimed at understanding this vital relationship. In this article, Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) is used to explore and analyse qualitative data gathered from interviews with former victims of bullying. The aim is to understand consequences of bullying by exploring how victims of bullying experience varying forms of social recognition by their teachers, during and after episodes of bullying victimization. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with youths who had earlier in their lives been victims of bullying.

### **Results and conclusions**

Results reveal how bullied children have a wide range of positive and negative experiences of their teachers. Teachers' reactions in a bullying situation, as well as the support they offer to bullied pupils can affect the bullied child's capacity to recover from the bullying both in negative and positive ways. Four general themes, capturing the experiences of former victims of bullying in relation to their teachers, were identified; (i) telling a teacher, (ii) bullying in front of teachers, (iii) period after bullying and (iv) teacher as positive support. The different themes were analysed using Honneth's three levels of recognition. Recognition is divided into three different spheres: love, right, and solidarity. These three theoretical concepts of recognition served as important concepts for understanding when and why teachers' support could be positive or negative for bullied children's ability to develop a positive sense of self. Recognition in the first domain, i.e. love, could be operationalized into the feeling of being valued and respected by teachers. This was important for children's decision to talk about their victimization and search for support from teachers. Also, recognition of children's legal

rights, the second form of social support, was also of great importance for children feelings of self-respect. The experience that teachers did or did not intervene in bullying situations, reassuring the child of their right to a safe school environment emerged as a salient theme. Lastly, the importance for victims and former victims of bullying to have their particular needs met could be explained by using the concept of recognition in the form of solidarity. Support from teachers who, from the perspective of the bullied child, had insight into the particular needs of the child after the bullying had ended, was described as an important factor for being able to recover from victimization.

The main conclusion, based on these results, is that bullying interventions and strategies must take teacher-pupil relationships into consideration, not least because these results show that some teachers may remain unused or under used resources in the prevention of bullying in schools.

#### **Article IV. Bullying and well-being: Social support from teachers as a buffering factor for bullied children**

A significant body of research indicates that being a victim of bullying increases the risk for negative health consequences, in the short term as well as throughout the lifespan. Social support has been proven an important factor for handling and dealing with different kinds of stressors. However little research has studied how social support, and especially social support from teachers, may influence bullied children's well-being. The aim of this study was to explore possible influences of social support from teachers on bullied children's health, and in particular whether there are differences in well-being between bullied children who experienced high or low levels of social support from teachers. An internet-based survey was conducted with 5078 participating pupils in grades 4 to 9 in a medium-sized Swedish municipality.

#### **Results and conclusions**

Results show that peer-victimization was correlated with both experiencing social support from teachers and social support. Children, not victimized by their peers, reported highest levels of well-being and social support from teachers. Children subject to negative actions from their peers on single occasions, reported lower levels of social support from teachers compared to non-bullied children, but not as low as bullied children who scored lowest on both social support from teachers and well-being. The results indicated a small increase in well-being for bullied children who had experienced

higher levels of social support. However, this effect was only apparent for bullied boys and the positive effects were very small.

From these results, it is not possible to conclude that social support is a buffer against the negative consequences of bullying. There are some indications that it might be the case, but more research needs to be conducted, using more robust measures of social support. It was also concluded that more qualitative data is needed where bullied children might provide important insights into how and when teachers could best serve as positive influences on bullied children's ability to deal with and recover from the bullying to which they had been subjected.

## 10. Discussion

The overall aim of this dissertation is to make a contribution to knowledge and understanding of the consequences of being bullied by examining patterns of change in bullying victimization over time and how potential positive social interactions and relationships might promote the well-being of bullied children.

### Research questions

- How can different experiences of being subject to bullying over time relate to different aspects of children's emotional and psychosomatic adjustment?
- How do different experiences of being a victim of bullying over time influence perceived social support from peers and teachers?
- In what way might social support from teachers and peers protect bullied children against negative outcomes in their lives?
- How do bullied children view and interpret any support offered by their teachers?

In this section, the results from the four articles will be reinterpreted in the light of previous research as well as the theoretical framework presented in the first chapters of the dissertation. Together, these interpretations and discussion of them, will go some way to answering the aims of the dissertation, as outlined above.

The goal of the dissertation can be formulated in three main themes. These are: changes in patterns of bullying victimization over time; outcomes related to being victim of bullying; and, how such outcomes can be understood and explained from the perspective of victims. This discussion will explore these different themes and how they might relate to each other by using the theoretical approach presented in the chapters above.

### Being caught in a category of 'bullied'

Articles I, II and III reveal important insights into the stability of bullying victimization within a Swedish context. While some international research has begun to study the stability of victim roles in bullying, less is known about the stability of such roles in Swedish schools. The context of bullying is crucial for understanding changes in patterns and stability of bullying victimization over time, at classroom, school and societal levels. Swedish

schools have extensive formal demands made on them to implement preventive strategies against harassment and degrading treatment (Skolverket, 2012). In addition, 'context', in Sweden, must be understood as a schooling system with one with, perhaps, the lowest prevalence of bullying in most international comparison. Given this backdrop, it is important to generate specific knowledge of longitudinal changes in bullying victimization within a specifically Swedish context. This is in relation to both understanding the consequences of bullying, where prevalence rates are low, and discovering what negative consequences are likely to ensue for bullied schoolchildren in this environment.

Articles I and II focussed on changes in victimization profiles over a one year period. A crucial finding lay hidden in the cross-sectional estimates of bullying victimization. These indicated similar percentages of victims both at Time 1 and Time 2. This could be interpreted as indication of stability in victimhood. However, thanks to the availability of individual level data, follow-up results indicated that few of children categorized as victims at Time 1, had remained on as victims at Time 2. Rather, the patterns of victimization revealed that some children moved from a bullied status, while others moved into the victim category. In articles I and II, four profiles of bullying victimization were identified. These describe how children remained or moved between categories from Time 1 to Time 2. They are shown in Figure 1 below. The four profiles are: (a) *non-victims*, those never subjected to bullying; (b) *ceased victims*, whose status has changed from victim to non-victim; (c) *new victims*, whose status has changed from non-victim to victim; and (d) *persistent or continuing victims* (bullied at both measurement points).

While some studies have indicated that bullying roles are somewhat flexible, results here indicate that these roles are less stable in a Swedish context. In two studies from USA, one third, in Juvonen (et al., 2000) and half, in Fox and Boulton (2006) remained in their positions as victims of bullying throughout the measurement period. Results here, based on responses from Swedish school children, point to a smaller proportion of stable victims, where about a fourth reported that they were still being bullied one year later. It should be noted that the proportion of continuing victims is drawn from a low prevalence, about 7%, of bullied children, as indicated in the cross-sectional data.

A number of explanations can be proposed as to why Swedish schoolchildren show less stability in persistence of victimization, than studies from other countries. These relate both to methodological issues and aspects of

the organisation and management of the Swedish compulsory school system. Even if it is not possible to conclude from articles I or II exactly what might have produced these differences, some suggestions may be made based on current knowledge within the bullying research field.

Firstly, discrepancies between length of measurement periods, sample characteristics, variations in definitions and measures of bullying make it difficult to compare studies cross-nationally. Stability has been indicated to be low at younger ages (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). In this material, it could be the case that children in lower grades were more unstable, whereas stability could have increased with age. Conducted statistical analyses does not make it possible to determine this. However, it is important to bear in mind that methodological issues are of great importance when interpreting my results.

Secondly, Sweden has one of the most extensive regulatory frameworks regarding proactive and reactive strategies against harassment and degrading treatment in school (Skolverket, 2012). The judicial demand for a systematic pedagogy against bullying, formulated in the form of anti-bullying strategies, adapted to actual conditions each school is one likely explanation. Systematic application has been shown to be an important element of successful anti-bullying strategies (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). However, results, from the qualitative material presented in article III, would indicate that in some cases there is a lack of action taken by teacher and adults in some Swedish schools. The explanation from former victims indicated that actions and interventions taken by schools were not the cause of changes in their situation. Even though all respondents had reported being bullied to school staff, none of them felt that their bullying had ended as a result of actions within the school. Rather, their explanations as to why the bullying had stopped were more related to changing positions in the social structure of the school, either by them or by those who had been active in keeping the bullying going. Changing schools or changing school class, away from the bully(ies), was described as the key contributing factor to the ending of their bullying.

It carried on until I left, yeah, just before eighth class. Halfway into the term in eighth, I moved, I couldn't take it anymore, it had become so serious that I couldn't stay, I was forced to escape. Escape – that meant that I had to change schools, I had to move to another town, just to get away from those guys. (Respondent I)

This quote provides a third explanation for why bullying might cease, not through some change within a school environment but a complete change of environment.

Moving from a state of being bullied to not being bullied, in these interviews, was described as quite a complex process. The qualitative data revealed how some respondents had experience bullying for several years, with more or less intense periods. Changing this position was described as hard. From the quantitative material, in articles I and II, it was obvious that a small cohort, 25 % of the 7% who are being bullied at any one time, are still being bullied one year later. These are the persistent victims. More longitudinal studies are needed in order to be able to understand the circumstances of this most at risk group.

It may be the fact that, this group, who could be termed ‘stable’ victims, have in some way been ‘cemented into their positions’ through subtle workings of the social psychology of interactions among children at school. Results from the interview would seem to indicate this. Even though it could be argued that teachers were failing, in not acting to intervene in these children’s situations, from the interviews, it was evident subjects used different strategies in order to protect themselves from the bullying and its negative consequences. Hiding oneself, or not showing emotions, were strategies used to avoid the bullying (see also, Thornberg et al., 2013). Respondent 2 described how she tried to hide in the toilets to avoid the other children and Respondent 3 told her she, early on, decided never to “cry in front of the bullies, since she didn’t want to give the bullies what they wanted”. Another ‘hiding strategy’, to avoid the bullying, was described by Respondent 4, who always tried to be at places where few pupils were present. Coping strategies such as ignoring or trying to endure the bullying have been noted in other studies (Naylor et al., 2001; Thornberg et al., 2013). By using strategies which may hide the bullying from adults in school, such as those described in the interviews, it is understandable that some bullying may be difficult for teachers to detect and stop.

Thornberg et al. (2013), using qualitative interviews described a ‘bullying career’ going through four different phases: the initial attacks; double victimization; exit from bullying; and, after-effects. As in this study, changing school class, or school, was identified as one turning point in bullying victimization. However, even though changing school circumstances was described as positive for some victims, it did not result in their gaining more friends or in an ending of their loneliness. Positive experiences of the climate

in their new schools and an experience of being accepted by their new classmates were success factors for changing their trajectory as bullied (see also Hansen, 2011, 2014). Respondent 1 described this as follow:

Interviewer: How was it when you began in a new class, in the new school?

Respondent: I was scared out of my life at first. I was really scared about what the others would make of me (---). After that, my school days were quiet, but I was really scared when I had to present myself to the class and the new people I didn't know (---). I actually made some friends for the first time, so I had someone I could talk to, who I could study with. (---).

Others did not have the same positive experience of changing school. One respondent described how she tried to change school but the bully found out and started to contact peers in her new school. Thornberg et al (2013) also described that changing school did not end the bullying for all victims. How they interpreted the climate of their new class was identified as one important factor for if the bullying continued or not at the new school. This was described by Respondent 3. She changes class but her situation only intensified which she explained by the fact that in the previous class, "at least, the class was OK, I was an outsider, but in general, people were nice to each other". In the new class, however, the climate wasn't as forgiving. Changing class or school in this sense is not always a success story. Even though changing schools may remove a child from one context and place him/her in a new, more positive situation where bullying might be avoided, the challenges of Internet, or cyberbullying waits in the shadows. This was explained by one of the respondents. She describes how, after she started a new school, the bullying by her former classmates continued Online. Cyberbullying is presenting new challenges to our understanding of how bullying unfolds in different social contexts. For some respondents, simply changing schools might have ended the bullying at school, however, for years afterwards, their bullying continued Online.

How children use different repertoires to justify their bullying, such as labelling the victim as deviant or odd, might help explain how hard it is for children to break away from continuing victimization (Merten, 1996; Frisé et al., 2007; 2008; Reäsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003; Thornberg, 2010, 2015). Stigmatizing, such as being labelled the odd one or deviant, is a powerful process (Becker, 1963/1997; Goffman, 1972/2010) and can be related to how bullying has been explained as a power status struggle within schools, where children strive to reach higher positions in the school hierarchy (Eriling & Hwang, 2004; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Varjas et al., 2008;



Wrethander Bliding, 2007). The stigma of being ‘the bullied one’, or ‘the odd one’ places children at the bottom of the school hierarchy, thereby reducing their social capital in the eyes of the other children (see also Lindgren & Johansson, 2008). Respondent 4 described how her label as the ‘whipping girl’ continued to condemn her to bullying, even though new children had come into her class.

I got some new classmates in 7th grade. So then the other pupils who knew me began to tell the new ones, OK we have in the class, she is bullied, have a go at her. The new pupils, who hadn’t a clue who I was, began to bully me, egged on by the others. So it became a vicious circle.(---) And so my old classmates, who had known me longer told the new ones, don’t hang out with that girl ’cause she’s – God only knows what! (Respondent 4)

Once again, the power of the stigma of ‘the bullied one’ is evident and Respondent 4 describes a victim career in a negative spiral. New pupils are quickly informed about who is who in the class, who is at the bottom, who is the bullied one. Hierarchy must be maintained. This quote captures the powerful process of labeling and might help explain why some bullying roles in schools are harder to break. Lindberg and Johansson (2008) make a similar argument, showing in their qualitative material how being a bullied child makes children less valued in the school hierarchy, making it even harder, for many victims, to break the social isolation that is the result of being bullied.

As proved by the results in this dissertation, where roles of victimhood seem flexible for some victims, for others, their victimhood seems more difficult to break free from. Even though one might hope that the strategies and interventions implemented by schools would be the most common response given to the question why their situation had changed, changing schools or class was the most common explanation why the respondents’ situations had change for the better. Social processes, such as labelling, may go some way to explaining why, for some, they became caught in their roles as victims.

The quantitative data in the dissertation indicates that for a majority of children bullied at time 1, 75%, their bullying had ceased within the one year period. For those for whom the bullying had not stopped, like the respondents who were interviewed, their period of bullying was likely to last for years. From the qualitative material, one could argue that the process of stigmatizing and the use of bullying to maintain social hierarchies helps explain how hard it is to bring an end to the bullying of some children. This

also highlights the importance of studying bullying as a social process. Even though children use different tactics to avoid being bullied, such as hiding or telling the bullies to stop, the label of being bullied, with its negative connotations, makes it difficult for these children to escape their victimhood. Supporting children to use coping strategies in order to make the bullying stop has been one important part of the first research paradigm within the field of bullying research. However, one can see, from the results and arguments presented here, why this strategy will not always work.

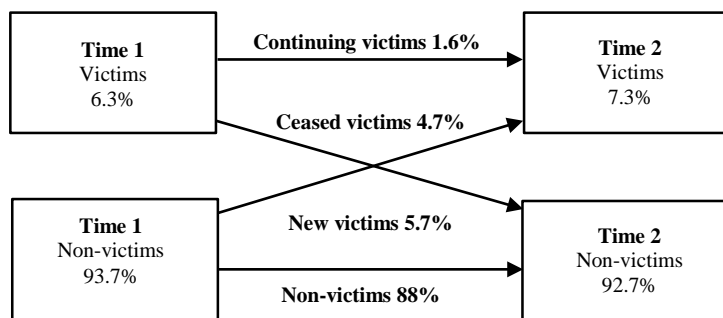


Figure 3. Bullying victimization profiles at one year follow-up

### Consequences of bullying, the pain of being excluded

The stability of bullying victimization constitutes an important part of this dissertation. Understanding the consequences of bullying is related to how severely schoolchildren experience bullying and what social supports might be needed for children who are or who have been victims of bullying. One aim of the dissertation is to understand how the negative consequences of bullying can be reduced. Answers can be found in correlation studies. Understanding how bullying hurts, and what consequences follow when bullying ceases, will provide important insights into the final theme of the dissertation, i.e. how can we best support schoolchildren who have been subjected to bullying. A first step is to study the consequences of bullying from a perspective that includes duration and trajectories of bullying on the basis

of theoretical explanations of how sense and value of self are related to social interactions with peers and teachers in the school context.

All the articles presented here underline the negative consequences for children of bullying victimization. Taken together these articles paint a picture, from the aggregate data, of how being bullied is linked to weaker bonds with peers and teachers and to higher levels of emotional and somatic distress. These results are in line with previous research pointing to the negative effects of bullying. Using cross-sectional data, in Article IV, it is clear that bullied children experience lower levels of well-being in general. This is nothing new. School bullying as its consequences has been well documented. In Article II, using longitudinal data, at individual level, significant increases in somatic and emotional distress for children who had become victims during the one year measurement period, was proved. In the interviews, an ongoing struggle with negative feelings towards oneself is a central theme and Article III gives flesh to the bones of the numbers presented in the other studies. These respondents describe how they have struggled with their self-esteem, and tell stories of how the pain of the bullying has affected them in others way. Headaches, sleeping difficulties, psychological scars and other physical reactions were described by the respondents. Respondent 1 told of how he still doesn't use public locker-rooms or toilets because of his negative experiences in these environments while at school. While all respondents had experienced physical bullying, in different ways, some still with physical scars on their bodies, they all described the verbal and relational bullying as the worst to handle. In the words of Respondent 5:

I could handle the physical, the punches, but the worst was the word and being ignored. Being no-one. (Respondent 5)

The 'pain of being excluded' is one salient theme from the qualitative interviews. From a social interactionist perspective, a need to belong and being embedded in a social context is central to an individual's self-identity (Honneth, 1995; Mead, 1976/1995; Scheff, 2000; Schott, 2014; Søndergaard, 2014; Wei & Chen, 2008). Being excluded or being subject to different forms of negative actions are a painful reminder for victims of how others put a value on self as not being adequate, not sufficient, not worthy (see also Lindgren, 2007). A person's sense self is the result of interaction with others and from interpreting the views of others about oneself (Mead, 1976/1995). Honneth (1995) argues that it is when others recognize us through different interactions, that we are able to develop a positive sense of self. In the first

domain of recognition (love), recognition arises through our primary relationships, such as, with friends and family. Being misrecognized in this domain may take the shape of different forms of aggression, such as that experienced by the all victimized respondents in this. Being ignored, or called nasty names becomes a constant reminder of how subjects view themselves as being unworthy or not an equal partner in social interactions. Respondent 2 described how he lost “his sense of humanity, I wasn’t human. I was just something to use for their own pleasure.” Lindberg and Johansson (2008) describe how the power of a ritual, such as bullying, creates a feeling of fellowship and positive energy within the group, but also means a form of dehumanizing, a process that makes the children involved in bullying blind to the consequences for victims. While this process may be functional for the group, providing status within school hierarchies (or promoting a positive sense of fellowship within a group, at the same time, it remove any chance of positive social recognition for the bullied child, which is the basis for developing any positive feeling of self.

Another salient theme in the stories of former victims, was their experiences of feelings related to shame. Being “useless, less valued, worthless, no body” were all epithets used by respondents to describe themselves and how they felt during their period of bullying. Scheff (1997, 2000) has nominated “shame, as the premier social emotion” and it was evident in the data for this dissertation that shame constitutes one important dimension for understanding bullying and its consequences. In the interviews, respondents provided the following descriptions:

Respondent 2: The shame one feels, and that you don’t want to put that load on your parents. That is the greatest fear. At least it was for me. I just didn’t want to land it all on my parents. (---) It’s shameful, absolutely. You begin to doubt yourself, your own abilities.

Respondent 1: You lay the blame on yourself, but now I think – it wasn’t my fault. I just hadn’t seen it.

Respondent 5: You feel worthless. I was worth nothing. Not a thing. I was so bloody miserable, I felt so bad.

Respondent 3: I felt that everything was my fault, I deserved all that had happened to me, and it wasn’t so strange that the teacher just looked on because I was so pathetic.

Being constantly fed with negative images of oneself shapes children's views of how they perceive themselves. Perceptions of how peers regard you become a mental image that pupils begin to internalize and the bullying becomes a constant reminder that oneself is not good enough for the others. Feelings of shame build up, as a result of an internalized evaluation of how "well" one is doing in relation to others (not very well). Shame, and its opposite, pride, are the result of social bonding with significant others (e.g. Scheff, 2000). Feelings of shame can be understood as the result of the self not being sufficient or valued by others. This pain of shame is easy to understand, if self are to be understood, as is argued in this dissertation, to be a result of social interactions with others. In the quotes above, it is evident that respondents are comparing themselves to others, and that this comparison provides a painful reminder that they are not fulfilling their expectations. Their sense of self is simply not sufficient, which may help to explain the negative self-images these adolescents and young adult have expressed in the interviews.

In the interviews, an ongoing struggle with relationships to others is described, and at the heart of this struggle is the fear of rejection (Scheff, 2000). This fear and constant negative evaluations of how others might be viewing them, makes victims fearful of new contacts and makes them withdraw from interactions with others. Self-isolation is one way of trying to handle and avoid painful interactions (e.g. Lindberg, 2007; Scheff, 2000; Thornberg et al., 2013). In Article I, evidence is presented for how children, who are experiencing or who have experienced bullying, have weaker ties to their peers at school. In the interviews, the loneliness that comes from being bullied is a central theme, not only during the period of bullying but years after the bullying has stopped. Respondent 4 described this as follows:

So you – you lock yourself in. You don't have anything to do with anybody because you're scared of being hurt. I can't be with boys or girls of my own age for fear of being judged. I use the backdoor to get to school because I don't want to meet anybody, I become scared of my age. I take round-about routes, then I take the backdoor to school, because I don't want to meet anyone, and then, I avoid being in the schoolyard during breaks. (---) I don't recognize anyone, I don't know if they'll, if they'll like me, will they point me out?

Feelings of shame can be understood as a sign of weakness and, thus, threaten social bonds with others. Social bonds are characterized by mutual trust and respect resulting in feelings of pride (Scheff, 2000). When social

bond are weakened, as in relationship networks where bullying is taking place, shame may be the result. These feelings of shame create a powerful force which might explain why respondents described how they did all they could to avoid interaction with others. Even years later, respondents described the fear and hesitation they feel in trying to make new friends. In the example above, one can see how fear of not fulfilling the expectations of others, or of being rejected, had this respondent withdrawing any from social relationships in which she might be reminded of this. In this sense, her decision to take other routes to school, to avoid meeting other pupils, is one solution to trying not to have these experience, to be reminded of the feelings of not being valued as an individual (see also Scheff 2000; Lindberg, 2007).

While this dissertation mainly focuses on face-to-face bullying within school contexts, the growing phenomenon of Online bullying (cyberbullying) cannot be overlooked when trying to understand the destructive impact of bullying. A focus on cyberbullying has extended bullying research. Technological possibilities and Internet use have extended children's arenas of social interactions and widen the possibility of carrying bullying at school beyond the walls of the school environment. This extended arena also involves new judicial and legislative challenges and new responsibilities for school authorities, including developing intervention models to meet this new reality.

In Article III, the results reveal how hard it is becoming for children who experience bullying both at school and Online. While the articles in the dissertation targeting negative health outcomes at an aggregated level don't differ between different subtypes of bullying, previous research has shown that children subject to bullying, both at school and Online, suffer more severe consequences (Schneider et al., 2012). This is also the conclusion from the qualitative data in Article III. Results show that children describe how cyberbullying has made their situation worse, since the access to the Internet and cell phones at home, meant that the bullying came to violate even their personal, private spaces, making the bullying impossible to escape from. Situations where respondents woke to cell phones filled with hate-messages were described, and how this made them feel helpless because bullies were able to target nearly every aspect of their lives. According to Scheff (2000), the shame people feel when they are confronted with negative images of themselves causes them to withdraw, which may be expressed, as described above, as a fear of making new contacts and avoiding new peer groups, and through the different coping strategies used by the respondents,

avoiding some routes to and from school and hiding during breaks to escape their tormentor(s). Cyberbullying makes it impossible for children to escape these interactions. Instead, the interactions continue Online and in every place a schoolchild may visit. Since it becomes impossible to escape, the misrecognition of teasing, insults and threats, continuing outside the school environment, makes it even harder to avoid negative interactions with others.

Understanding this new reality will provide important insights into why bullying may have an increasing negative impact for some children and why such ‘developed’ patterns of harassment may be even hard for victims to break away from, particularly the small group referred to as ‘persistent’ or ‘continuing victims. These insights are vital if we are to develop strategies for helping the ‘hidden victims’. Destructive relationships with others and the constant rejection involved in these kinds of social relations creates a painful experience. Understanding how fear of rejection, through such interactions, may lead to victims of bullying coming ‘under the radar’ (Casidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012) and thereby hinder the effectiveness of intervention programs is an important result.

### **When the bullying ends, the pain continues**

Emotional, social, psychological, psychosomatic and problems at school have all been linked to bullying (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Research has also shown that resulting trauma may extend through adulthood (Ttofi et al., 2011). Thornberg’s (et al., 2013) results indicate that even when the bullying had ceased, a form of internalized victimization was still evident.

Bullying research constantly stress the importance of reducing bullying in order to prevent negatives consequences. Results from Articles I, II, III and IV describe these negative impacts for victims. In Article IV, cross-sectional data from over 3000 children reveals that children who are victims of bullying report significantly lower levels of well-being. This is not a new finding. It becomes important, therefore, to try relate this knowledge to patterns in bullying trajectories. These patterns include persistence of bullying, period of bullying before cessation, as in Articles I and II, and retrospective consequences, as in Article III. In Article II, the results are quite clear, even for victims whose bullying has ceased, their continuing levels of emotional and somatic distress are higher than for their peers. This is important

knowledge which gives indications into practical implications for adults at school. This notion will be discussed in next sections of this dissertation.

### **Offering help to children being bullied**

Many teachers are unaware that their pupils are being bullied (Mishna et al., 2005). Thus, the importance of children reporting such behavior has been stressed. One could argue and wonder why bullied children chose not to disclose their stories, not least because the adults in their schools have legally binding responsibilities for helping them. If appropriate measures, to aid victims and bring bullying to an end, are to be taken, then teachers and school authorities need to be aware of the problem. Attempts have been made to understand when and why children choose to talk to an adult and why they might be reluctant to work with teachers to stop bullying (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003). To understand why this process it is important to move beyond the restraints of correlational studies and try to incorporate children's views on and their possible arguments for making such decisions. In Article IV, some relevant arguments for such choices are presented. Children feel that their teachers might mistrust them, but also teachers perceived lack of empathy towards victims, play a crucial role in why and when children stop talking to adults at school.

Results from Article IV show that children anticipate rejection in talking with their teachers. They are afraid of being rejected or blamed for their own victimization. In many cases this fear was realized, with teachers dismissing their stories and tending to blame them for being bullied. A theme in Article IV is the feeling of shame, both as a personal experience by the subject but also as direct shaming by the teacher toward the pupil. I argue that, if we wish to understand the consequences of bullying, and why bullied children keep their stories to themselves, these children's experiences need to be understood from the perspective of fear of not being recognized and the emotional turbulence of shame. Scheff (2000) maintains that shame is a part of every social interaction. Even if people are not experiencing such emotions all the time, they are constantly anticipating a risk of being shamed in their social interactions. Shame arises when social bonds with others are threatened which points to the intersubjective nature of the causes of shame. The notion of shame and how it regulates social interactions, gives an important insight into a schoolchild's decision to speak to a teacher. Some respondents in Article IV, chose to talk to their teachers early in their victimization, some waited until it was too difficult for them to manage by themselves. All of them could relate to the feelings of shame and fear of



being mistrusted. These feelings of shame emerge from a feeling that the self is unsatisfactory to others, a self that no-one takes seriously or is willing to recognize (Scheff 1997, 2000). Shame, in this sense, is related to both exclusion and denigration and may lead to reluctance to even express this shame. This is the shame of shame, better, therefore, to avoid any circumstances where a process of social bonding may lead to misrecognition (Honneth, 1995; Scheff, 2000). Results in Article IV show that bullied children feel both ashamed of themselves but also feel shamed in relation to others. They hesitate to talk to their teachers since it would involve admitting to someone else that they are not being welcome into their social group. By imagining how other people might react and how they might appear in the eyes of others, shame follows when people are confronted with what they perceive as negative images. By being subject to bullying, these children experience feelings of shame, but they still hesitate to talk to an adult since it would mean admitting that they are not good enough, which adds to such feelings. This leads to a negative spiral for the child, a spiral that becomes hard to break.

These results stress the importance for teachers to understand and reflect on how they deal with children who decide to talk to them. The results also point to how hard it might be for children to take the step of talking to adults. In Article IV, results show that teachers may add to these feelings of shame by placing some part of the blame on the victim. This victim-blaming is also likely to add to the spiral of negative feelings of shame, making victims even more unwilling to talk to teachers.

Different patterns emerged in Article II, when relationships to others were linked to different experiences of being bullied. While ceased victims showed significantly lower levels of social support from peers and less emotional and somatic problems compared to new and continuing victims, this was not replicated in relation to perceived support from teachers. Relationships with teachers stood out negatively, with ceased victims still experiencing the same low levels of perceived teacher support as those children who were still the victims of bullying. Therefore, studying factors that might enable more positive relationships with teachers is of extra importance for successful anti-bullying program implementation. In Article IV respondents expressed feelings of betrayal, of shame and of mistrust from their teachers. They knew that they could not handle the situation by themselves and they turned to a teacher for support. However, they felt rejected and felt that they were being treated as lesser being not worthy of a right to support. This legal dimension of Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition is closely linked

to societal ordinances, rules and regulations. Swedish school law states that every child has a right to a safe school environment. School children know this, since being told of these rights is one of the obligations on schools. Teachers and school staff are responsible for securing these rights. The experience of recognition within this dimension is connected to the feelings of self-respect. In the qualitative interviews, victims described feelings of uselessness and not being worthy of the respect of others. When they talked to the teachers in their schools and had their stories dismissed and when they were not provided with the support and interventions they were entitled to, all respondents described how they felt the value of their personhood being diminished because they somehow were not worthy of the same rights that other pupils were entitled to. All respondents, in different ways, struggled, with or without the support of their parents, to have their rights vindicated but were not heard by their schools.

### **The importance of how teachers deal with bullied children after cessation of bullying**

Consequences of bullying need to be considered in relation to how Swedish school law is formulated. This link is also important when it comes to role of schools in children's identity development. Staff in Swedish schools are obligated to intervene when degrading acts are detected, or even suspected (Skolverket, 2012). They are also obligated to work proactively in creating anti-bullying and anti-harassment strategies. A key goal of intervention strategies is to prevent new victims from ending up in a bullying spiral. Major evaluation studies have tried to figure out which programs and interventions best prevent, hinder and stop bullying. Notwithstanding the fact that Sweden, internationally, has one of the lowest levels of bullying prevalence, thousands of children, annually, are subject to bullying. Results presented in this dissertation indicate that bullying is still a severe problem for some children in Swedish schools. In Article IV, respondents repeatedly described how, once the bullying had ceased, they still experienced negative consequences of the victimization they had been put through and how they felt that teachers did not understand them or their pain. They described fear of making new contacts, fear of rejection and of struggling with negative self-identity. All this is important when trying to understand how best bullied children can be supported and how schools can best deal with bullying. One respondent spoke about how once her bullying had stopped, she still felt that teachers did not understand her situation. They had taken all the

measures stated in their school's anti-bullying plans, and had met their legal obligation. A meeting had been held with the bullies, the situation had been solved. That was the end of the matter. The bullying had stopped and the bullies had been sanctioned. However, a few weeks later some group-work was scheduled. The teacher decided the groups and placed the bullied child together with her tormenter. She spoke with her teacher and explained how she felt uncomfortable with her decision. The teacher showed no understanding, and told the respondent that she had to be able to work together with anyone, including the child, who one month earlier, had been her tormenter. This respondent felt completely let down by her teachers. They had simply not understood.

Results from Article IV make it clear that victimized children, even when bullying has stopped, may still feel unsafe at school and are likely to carry a feeling that they had been, and are being betrayed by their teachers. A literal interpretation of School Ordinances would be that schools cease to have a specific anti-bullying obligation to a bullied child once the bullying has ceased. However, results from Articles I, II and IV prove the importance of following up the circumstance and mental health of these children. In Article I and Article II, results show that children for whom the bullying has ceased, still report higher levels of emotional and somatic distress than those never subjected to bullying. Even though the bullying and the direct forms of degrading treatment had ended, bullied children still experience that they are not recognized for who they are, as shown in Article IV. The value dimension of Honneth's (1995) theory of relates to group solidarity and a shared system of norms within a group. This means being valued for you're the traits of your personality and who you are, feeling that you, particularity as a human being, are being valued. Results from Article II indicate that children still suffer emotional and somatic distress even after the bullying has stopped, and the long lasting negative consequences of bullying are apparent in Article IV. One could say that these children constitute a group in need of support but the school environment treated them as equal to the rest of their peer group, who had never experienced bullying, not recognizing their special needs and who they are. In Article IV, the results show that such treatment of these children made it more difficult for them to rebuild a sense of self-worth, since their individual feelings had not been recognized. In their, what might be termed 'recovery process', these needs were not being met by their teachers. The teachers show lack of awareness of the individual needs of these children and, in that sense, continue to misrecognize

them. Teachers can deal with these situations, for example, by putting victim and bully in the same class group, by failing to follow up ‘ceased victims’ or by misunderstanding or not recognizing victims’ fears, all in a way that adds to negative feeling for the bullied child. Aspects of the school context and ways in which school work is organized may, albeit unwittingly, hinder the recovery of bullied children. The organization of school practice as enabling and preserving bullying has been stressed in other studies. Wrethander Bliding (2007) has shown in her dissertation how the structure of school work could be used as a means for children to exclude each other, almost as a form of ijime. Various forms of formal and informal practices, offered by the school, such as choosing who to work with or demanding that children make presentations in front of each other, could be used to exclude pupils from the group, “I don’t want to work with him/her” or to denigrate other pupils in the peer group, for example, by applauding their presentation. In this way, the structure and organization of school work can enable and preserve bullying but also, as seen in the results presented here, may act to reduce children’s capacity to recover.

Value systems, relating to the third form of recognition, are evident in stories such as these, where children might be compelled to work together, or to stand up in front of the class, since they reveal a lack of understanding or lack of recognition for the pain these children might still be suffering from. A value system refers to recognition of an individual’s particular needs and of their autonomy as an individual (Honneth, 1995). One could interpret such actions, where bullied children’s needs are not met, as failure to recognize the status of bullied children as a group in need of extra care and support. It also shows how school pedagogies hinder the recovery of victims. Instead of treating them as if the bullying never took place (because it has ceased), showing flexibility and understanding for their individual needs could instead lead to a confirmation of the pupil’s dignity. If schools wish to offer these children support in their recovery, these results indicate that teachers have to acknowledge the importance of understanding children’s situations even after the bullying has stopped, and also, to some extent, provide flexible pedagogical solutions when organizing normal schoolwork.

In conclusion, the importance of including follow-up strategies for those who have been subjected to bullying has been stressed. The main focus of research and anti-bullying strategies has been to make bullying stop. This is, and should be, the main focus of school-based interventions. It is also what Swedish law demands. However, when trying to understand the negative consequences of bullying and how they can be reduced or eliminated,

which is the aim of this dissertation, results from the four articles show the importance of not forgetting about the continuing needs of victims once the bullying have stopped or been brought to a halt through successful intervention. Even though the harassment and degrading treatment may have come to an end, children might still feel misrecognized because of how they had been met and how their needs had been handled by their teachers. A formal interest in and understanding of the situation for bullied children is an important element of the recovery process. By not seeing the individual and recognizing their needs, victims of bullying are still being misrecognized and still face problem in developing or recovering their self-esteem.

### **How support from teachers relates to bullied children's experiences**

Articles III and IV present the concept of social support and interactions between pupils and teachers as crucial factors in understanding how school-children react to being bullied. To understand how and why teachers might serve as an important supports for children, it is vital to have children's perspectives when trying to identify the processes that determine positive teacher-pupil relationships. In both the empirical results and theoretical speculations in this dissertation, social interactions have proved crucial for an individual's development. In bullying research, the main focus has been on the peer- to-peer interaction or the different roles children can take in their peer group. Results from the articles presented here underline the importance of the interplay between anti-bullying strategies, recovery from bullying and the part played by teacher-pupil interactions.

### **Teachers as positive forces**

Positive teacher relationships might help bullied children to cope with their feelings, but a negative interaction might prevent any positive development of self. In this section the positive side of social support from teachers toward bullied children will be discussed. Results from Article IV indicate that social support can be a positive force in reducing and eliminating bullying for schoolchildren who are victims. However, this statistical correlation is weak, i.e. children who are bullied and who report higher levels of social support from teachers show only a small reduction in the negative effects of bullying. This small reduction may be due to the complexities of social support from teachers where well-intention actions may have opposite effects. What is it in relationships with their teachers that children experience as positive?

Results from Article III describe how positive relationships with teachers could transform a bullying situation and help victim's deal with their bullying in a positive way.

Then came a substitute teacher. He was vital for me to be able to cope with the last year in school. He saw me – listened to my story – restored my trust in adults.

Respondent 3, attended a program, specially designed for pupils with problem backgrounds at first year in upper secondary school (7<sup>th</sup> Grade). She spoke about her teachers in a very positive way, explaining how their support was the main reason for her getting herself to school every day. The respondent explained how one teacher noticed her, took her experiences seriously, as she explained;

They said, take care of yourself and we will help you with the rest. They keep track. They know and they see the need of every pupil. The teachers in compulsory school didn't do that.

Respondent 1 described how, after he had changed schools, he got new teachers who seemed to understand his situation, who supported him and who, simply by asking him how he felt, showed him respect and made him feel important. This struggle for recognition is an ongoing, continual process (Honneth, 1995). Even though these victims of bullying had experienced various forms of non-, or misrecognition, at all three levels, new relationships offered social interactions where they were being recognized and their particular needs were being acknowledged. In both citations above, flexible 'meetings', where teachers recognized and gave value to particular needs, left the interviewees with an enhanced sense of value, in Honneth's (1995) terms, a sense of feeling that did possess skills and capacities, valued within a common normative system, in this case, the school context. Since recognition develops through interaction with others, new relationships offer a possibility for bullied children to change how they view themselves. However, as described by these respondents, in order to do so, teachers much recognize their need for support even after the experience of being bullying has ceased. This need may last over a long period. How long this period might be is an urgent area for future bullying research.

### **Teachers as bystanders?**

The importance of a whole school program to detect and tackle bullying has been stressed (Bradshaw & Waasdorp 2009; Holt & Espelage, 2012a;

Skolverket, 2011a; Unnever & Cornell, 2003). Meta-analyses of anti-bullying programs show that most programs focus on changing the school climate, giving information and knowledge about bullying to students and how it effect the parties involved as well as how peers can function as effective defenders in situations of bullying (Holt & Espelage, 2012b). I would argue that one black box in this research has been not to focus on the teachers' roles in bullying and how teachers' actions in a bullying situations are one important part in how bullied children interpret and understand their situation. When talking about a whole school program and the importance of including the silent mass of bystanders, results from Article III and IV indicate that more focus ought to be directed at teachers' roles within the school, both in order to reduce negative outcomes for victims but also to reduce general bullying behavior in schools. However, results in this dissertation show that the situation of teachers is complicated. On the one hand, teachers are important actors when understanding bullying as a group process and in administering effective anti-bullying interventions. On the other hand, teachers themselves may become unwitting participants in bullying, serving, through omission, as reinforces, and by neglect, perhaps allowing a continuation and strengthening of bullies' misbehaviors.

Although a majority of children within schools disprove of bullying behaviors, they may behave in ways that make a bullying situation continue (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Even by not engaging, choosing to remain silence or turning away may be interpreted, by bullies, as a form of approval for such behaviors. I would contend that this proposition also holds true for some teachers. All of the respondents in the qualitative material had experienced bullying in front of a teacher. For some of them, the teachers had just passively watched the bullying taking place, whereas for the others, teachers had chosen to turn their backs and walk away, thereby, in the eyes of the bullies, indirectly approving the bullying and, maybe, even reinforcing it. This behavior also had direct negative effects on children's views of themselves. Respondents described how these reactions from teachers made them question themselves and their value as a person, prompting one respondent, as she expressed in her interview, to the thought at that very moment; "it's no wonder the teachers walked, considering how pathetic I am".

By taking a whole school approach to bullying intervention all actors can be made to feel responsible for the school environment (Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004). While positive outcomes of utilizing the silence mass of peers in schools have been stressed, I would argue that there has to be a shift away from discussions about pupils' participatory roles in bullying prevention to

place more focus on teachers responsibilities and actions. The interview respondents all stated that their respective schools had anti-bullying-plans in place and that their teachers had informed their classes that bullying behavior was not accepted. However, simply declaring a school's anti-bullying norms and strategies is not sufficient. Norms and strategies have to be strongly and repeatedly activated and implemented, especially by teachers. Teachers can be seen as the most important instigators and supporters of normative goals within the schools, since they are the most important figures of authority within the school context (Veenstra et al., 2014). Pupils' perceptions of efforts and strategies to decrease bullying have also been linked to a reduction of peer-reported bullying over time. On the other hand, lack of consequences from teachers may act, instead, to reinforce bullying behaviors, as has been shown in the results presented here. One respondent expressed how the bullying even intensified after the teacher had been informed. The bullies knew that the teachers had been told, but since no sanctions were forthcoming, the respondent described how the bullies took this as a green light to continue and even intensify the bullying. For him, the reaction, or rather, the lack of reaction from the teacher could be seen as a teacher allowing the bullying to continue. This is just one example of where a teacher's lack of assertiveness regarding school norms, policies and sanction simply put more fuel on the bullying fire. If teachers, as authority figures and those responsible for implementing sanctions, indirectly approve, or fail to disapprove bullying, not impose sanctions or passively standby as bullying is taking place, it is hard to argue for and base any element of an anti-bullying interventions on expecting that children should intervene. There were also examples of situations where teachers were seen, by my interviewees, as taking on a role of reinforcer in the bullying process. In one situation, Respondent 1 experienced how the teacher encouraged other students in the class to ignore him. Another respondent explained how a teacher, loudly and clearly explained, after the respondent had purposely been hit in the head with a football by one of her tormentors, that she shouldn't have gotten in the way. Both these situations indicate how teachers may act as reinforcers of the process of bullying.

An appropriate response to bullying, on one hand is simple, bullying should be stopped. On the other hand, as this dissertation has shown, finding appropriate responses to bullying is complex and risk-filled. Teachers reluctant to deal with bullying might have many explanations and several factors could explain why and when teachers chose to react, or not to react to bullying. Lack of knowledge on how to react appropriately as well as



teachers' views on what constitutes bullying have been shown to be related to their willingness to intervene (Mishna, 2004). It has also been shown that teachers are more likely to intervene when physical bullying occurs (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). However, as the Swedish school law is formulated, it is not up to teachers to judge if a situation should lead to actions or sanctions, or not. The school law is very clear. If someone reports to a teacher any experiences of bullying or degrading treatment, teachers are obliged, immediately, to react, to investigate the situation and to take appropriate measures. It is not up to individual teachers to judge the seriousness of the degrading treatment before taking action (Skolverket, 20125). Besides risking making the bullying worse, by not reacting, victims are likely to feel that they are not recognized as legal subjects, with the same right as other pupils to a secure and safe school environment, leading to even more negative feelings for those children who are the victims of bullying (Honneth, 1995).

To conclude, teachers may have a negative influence on bullied children's personal identity projects and on the actual prevalence of bullying within schools. In the same way as a teacher might serve as a negative force in bullying, he or she, also has the possibility of being a positive factor in the lives of bullied children whose identity projects are ongoing and whose struggle for recognition is lifelong (e.g. Honneth, 1995; Mead, 1976/1995, Scheff, 2000). It should however be noted that these conclusions do not place all the responsibility and blame on single teachers actions. This would put this dissertation in a theoretical understanding of the teacher's role that are more consistent with how bullying is view in the first order paradigm. As argued, bullying is a social phenomenon and teachers are also, as pupils, effected by different structures and social processes within the school environment. Rather, I argue for the importance of understanding such social processes and interactions which might help to explain how teachers may support bullied and former bullied pupils.

## **Strength and limitations**

While it is hoped that this dissertation will add some new and hopefully significant knowledge to the field of bullying research, it has, like all research, some limitations. The overall study has striven to understand the implications of the duration and different trajectories of bullying, the consequences of bullying, when it is taking place and after it has ceased, and how bullied children can best be supported by applying new theoretical approaches. This task is not complete. Still more knowledge needed. The new knowledge that is presented here must be seen as a work in progress.

Firstly, there are some limitations to the quantitative material. While the longitudinal study offers new insights into Swedish school children's experiences, the period of measurement, at one year follow-up, is at the lower limit. To gain deeper knowledge of bullying profiles and patterns of bullying victimization over time, the measure period would need to be extended. Article III indicated that changing schools is one explanation, beyond any intervention strategies, of why bullying might cease. Future longitudinal research should delve deeper into what happens when children changes schools or classes or move between school grades. Since earlier indications of a low prevalence of bullying in Swedish schools was replicated in this study, the low rates of bullying did not allow for differentiation between different forms of bullying victimization. It may, or may not be the case that some types of bullying, emotional, relational or physical are more stable than others and develop in different trajectories. Research designs allowing for differentiated bullying behavior should be included in future studies.

The quantitative data also allowed for measurement of some health outcomes and of kinds of support offered to victims. However, these indexes were built on few items. More psychometrically powerful measures should be used to capture a wider range of the psychosomatic consequences of bullying. Social supports are also difficult to measure and should include more nuanced indexes of feelings of being cared for as well as practical indicators of any help given by relevant actors. It could be the case that bullied children actually receive considerable help but still feels less valued or cared for. Using measurements that capture a wider range of actions related to bullying would be of great value in future research.

Secondly, this dissertation confined to studying bullied children as victim. Previous research has also studied the roles of bullies and participants in bullying referred to as bully/victims. Including actors in the future studies of longitudinal trajectories and consequences is likely to produce further important results. Some research has indicated that children who are both subject to and perpetrators of bullying may have more severe outcomes of bullying than both victims and bullies. If planning support strategies, these children are of major interest. They may be most negative affected, and therefore, be most in need of support.

Thirdly, the theoretical basis for the dissertation was described in terms of widely different levels of social interactions and various factors that contribute to and influence bullying behavior from an individual to societal levels. Thus, the data on which the results are based only capture a small

part of all the relationships, social interactions and other factors that contribute to emergence of bullying behavior. Teacher support has played an important part in the research. Results have shown how teachers' actions have a great bearing on the circumstances of bullied children. Thus, involving teachers' experiences would also be of great importance. Organizational constraints, issues in the curriculum, perceptions of general support for teachers who work directly with bullying interventions would all be factors of relevance in understanding teachers' roles. It might also be the case, that teachers have done more than schoolchild respondents themselves are aware of. Including data from teachers would mean an addition level of understanding. Interviews with and questionnaires for teacher could offer additional perspectives. To fully understand the complicated arena for bullying that schools provide, additional ethnographic studies would also be of interest. This would give firsthand information about what goes on in the arena. Comprehensive case studies, covering events in much greater detail, would yield important information for intervention planning.

Besides these limitations, this dissertation also has its strengths. Arguments have been made for combining types of data as a future extension of bullying research (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). This study has followed that advice, using quantitative and qualitative data separately and in combination, and not being limited to either stochastic parameters or qualitative interview analysis. The mixing of quantitative and qualitative data made it possible to capture patterns of bullying over time, to understand how these patterns relate to different health outcomes at an aggregate level, and to use qualitative interviews and open-ended questions to give a voice to the numerical aggregations. Bullied children were given a retrospective voice that gives the reader some insight into how bullied children perceived themselves. Talking about bullying, understanding it, cannot be done without raising and capturing the voices of those involved.

I have focused primarily on the relationships these children had with their teachers, how they experienced support or lack of it, and how this might help explain the long term negative impact of bullying. This perspective has been lacking in bullying research. Even though it has been argued that teachers are of vital importance in bullying prevention, few studies have been conducted to understand how teachers may or may not contribute to various outcomes. This dissertation has made a contribution to this area of research by incorporating quantitative and qualitative data and focusing on the experiences of children who have been the victims of bullying. By including qualitative interviews with bullied children, this study addresses the

lack of literature examining the negative consequences of bullying. The views of former victims, on how they have been treated by primary adults in their lives, such as teachers, has deepened an understanding of bullying.

This dissertation also makes a contribution to an area that can be seen as underdeveloped in the field of bullying research, namely, the application of theory to understanding the negative consequences of bullying and to factors that might ameliorate negative outcomes. If schoolchildren are to be offered support, we need to understand children's perceptions and experiences of support. This cannot be achieved without a relevant discussion on theorizing bullying.

### **Practical Implications and final remarks**

This dissertation has discussed three different, but closely related issues, that together offer new insight into understanding the consequences for victims of bullying.

Firstly, results reveal the negative impact that bullying can have on children's views and understanding of themselves, in both the short- and long-term, and how varying experiences of bullying victimization relate to different health outcomes. From these results, it becomes evident that the period after bullying has ceased, is of crucial importance from the perspective of the victim. Even Swedish school ordinances state that action must be taken when children experience negative acts at school, little direction is given about what should be done once the bullying ends. Results from this study show that more attention needs to be given to the period after bullying ceases. Schools should direct more attention and support towards children who have been victims of bullying even after their bullying ends. Results also indicate that bullying has negative carry-over effects, making it hard for children to regain their trust in adults and to change negative perceptions of self.

Secondly, the dissertation has resulted in an important theoretical understanding of why and under what conditions negative reactions may be intensified or reduced. By interpreting these reactions from a theoretical perspective, new knowledge has resulted for improving intervention strategies by stressing the importance of recognition and feelings of shame that bullied children experience. Key conclusions from this study point to the importance of support from teachers and particular stress is laid on understanding the factors that constitute an experience of positive relationships

with teachers. Feeling cared for, feeling valued and an experience that teachers are treating them fairly has emerged as the most important salutogenic theme for children who experience bullying. This is important knowledge for teachers working with children in school.

Thirdly, results provide an important insight in how bullied children can best be supported. The results mean we have to take the actions of teachers and their support, or lack of support, into consideration when explaining and understanding the consequences of bullying. Teachers' interactions with bullied children, as well as their reactions in bullying situations, can have both positive as well as negative influences of children's capacity to bounce back from bullying.

Finally, bullying is complex. I hope that this dissertation will offer one piece of the larger puzzle that is the human phenomenon of bullying. Hopefully, many pieces of the puzzle will follow.

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