1 Introduction: new approaches to school bullying

Robin May Schott and Dorte Marie Søndergaard

As we write this Introduction, it is shortly after Stefani Germanotta – better known as Lady Gaga, one of contemporary pop music's icons – visited Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to launch her Born This Way Foundation (http://bornthiswayfoundation.org). At the appearance, she was interviewed by talk-show host and media personality Oprah Winfrey and spoke openly about the cruelty her peers demonstrated towards her as a teenager, including an episode where she was thrown into a dustbin. 'I was called really horrible, profane names very loudly in front of huge crowds of people, and my schoolwork suffered at one point. I didn't want to go to class. And I was a straight-A student, so there was a certain point in my high-school years where I just couldn't even focus on class because I was so embarrassed all the time. I was so ashamed of who I was'.[1] Lady Gaga said she planned to tour the United States on her 'Born Brave Bus' to 'talk about love, acceptance, kindness'; she told the audience that she doesn't have the answer for how to stop bullying, but students should do 'simple acts of kindness' to foster acceptance, tolerance and individuality.[2]

Lady Gaga's appearance at Harvard shows that the problem of bullying is one that touches a nerve in the public – amongst her pre-teen and teenaged fans as well as families, educators and researchers. It also highlighted the importance of research in this area. During the panel discussion at Harvard, she repeatedly said, 'We don't have the answer'.[3] But many researchers believe that they do have the answer – both about how to understand

[1] Nicholas D. Kristof, 'Born to Not Get Bullied', *The New York Times*, 29 February 2012; http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/opinion/kristof-born-to-not-get-bullied.html?_r=1; last accessed 5 March 2012.
[2] Denise Lavoie, Associated Press, 'Lady Gaga at Harvard, launches youth foundation', 29 February 2012; http://www.macon.com/2012/02/29/v-print/1925297/oprah-others-to-attend-lady-gaga.html; last accessed 5 March 2012.
[3] Emily Bazelon, 'Lady Gaga launches her Born This Way Foundation at Harvard'; Slate.com, 2 March 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/bulle/2012/03/lady_gaga_launches_her_born_this_way_foundation_at_harvard_.html; last accessed 5 March 2012.

bullying and what to do about it. In this anthology, we argue that answers to both questions are more complicated than even researchers often assume.

This book is intended to be an intervention into current research debates about bullying. Much of the published research is still dominated by the model of school bullying that was first developed by Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus; this model explains school bullying in terms of individual personality traits. In this model, the personality traits of bullies include being aggressive and impulsive, having a positive attitude towards violence, a need to dominate and little empathy with their victims; he also describes the personality traits of victims as passive, submissive, anxious, insecure and weak (Olweus 1993a: 32–4; see Schott, Chapter 2, page 21 for a critical discussion). Here, we refer to this approach as *paradigm one*. Despite the predominance of this approach, the past decade of research on bullying has seen contributions from social psychologists and sociologists who have begun to focus on bullying as a social dynamic. This anthology contributes to the shift away from *paradigm one* and towards this new focus on social dynamics; for the purpose of simplicity, we refer to this approach as *paradigm two*.

Emphasising that there needs to be more knowledge about bullying, as Lady Gaga did at the Harvard University event, obviously does not solve the problem of what kind of knowledge is needed. Is knowledge about bullying really a matter of learning about bullies and victims in terms that describe their pre-existing personality traits? Or is it instead a matter of having knowledge about children's social environments, as in recent social–ecological approaches (Espelage and Swearer 2004)? Perhaps the knowledge needs to be even more analytically sensitive to the constitutive processes of bullying practices that exist amongst children, and include not only their social environments but also the cultural, technological, psychological and material forces involved in the enactment of bullying. And the answer to the *ontological* question about what bullying is has implications for the *epistemological* question of what concepts are necessary to gain knowledge about it (Eriksson et al. 2002). If bullying practices were determined only by individual personality traits, then the relevant explanations would be based on these personality traits. For example, researchers who adopt *paradigm one* ask: what kind of family system or environment creates aggressive children? And what kind of power do individuals possess by virtue of their personality traits? But if bullying is understood as having been created by the dynamics of social relationships and as an effect of intra-activity[4] amongst a range of different forces and

[4] See the discussion of the term 'intra-action' – in contrast to the more usual 'interaction' – later in this chapter in reference to Karen Barad's work.

processes, then quite different concepts of power become necessary to understand the problem. Individual characteristics and preconditions should be understood as intra-acting with a range of other forces and processes, and not viewed as the only – or even the primary – cause of bullying. The nature of these epistemological commitments has implications for the type of methods that are used to acquire knowledge about bullying.

Most of the research that begins with *paradigm one*'s understanding of bullying is based on quantitative data, and it endeavours to identify causes, predict occurrences and develop evidence-based intervention programmes. Both researchers and practitioners measure data that can be individualised, and they are often blind to other constituting and enacting forces. However, the chapters in this book describe alternative methods that are based on both qualitative and quantitative studies; the ambition here is to uncover the complex processes by which bullying is enacted as well as its complex effects. Our analyses investigate the different and often shifting positionings – i.e. how individuals assume various positions – within group interactions. And in focusing on a wide range of relationships that are relevant to bullying, we challenge both the dyad of perpetrator–victim and the triad of perpetrator–victim–bystander. Instead, group relations and dynamics become the focus.

In this Introduction, we first outline the need for a transition from *paradigm one* to *paradigm two* in the research on school bullying; next, we provide a brief overview of the theoretical concepts that are the background and inspiration for applying theories of power and intra-action to the arena of school bullying; and finally, we offer the reader – who may be either a researcher, student, parent, educator or practitioner – a road-map for navigating through this anthology.

Background of *paradigm one*

Focusing on the social dynamics within the knowledge about bullying has many dimensions. It includes acknowledging that the concept of bullying itself has a social history, as pointed out by Swedish sociologist Ola Agavall (2008). This shift in the research highlights the role of the social in the ontology, epistemology and methods that have developed in relation to research on bullying – in contrast to the primarily individualised approach of *paradigm one*. And this new focus has implications for practical interventions, as Dorte Marie Søndergaard discusses (see Chapter 15, page 389).

Research into school bullying is a relatively recent field of inquiry (see Schott, Chapter 2, page 21). To understand the development of this field,

it is enlightening to examine its origins and trace the genealogy of its central concepts, particularly how they developed over time. Agevall wrote an eye-opening report on the social history of the concept of bullying (Agevall 2008), which we draw upon in the following pages. Peter-Paul Heinemann originally introduced the term 'mobbing'[5] in Sweden in 1969. Heinemann was a physician and also the adoptive father of a black boy who was excluded and harassed at school. Heinemann first introduced this term in a small Swedish journal after being inspired by Konrad Lorenz's work on the mob behaviour of animals. And he explicitly linked the word to the system of apartheid, writing, 'I am the father of a seven-year-old Negro boy. . . During his lifetime, I have been convinced that the mechanisms of apartheid are alive and well in our country. I share this experience with all parents whose children strongly deviate from their peers'.[6] In this way, Heinemann borrowed a term from ethology (the science of animal behaviour) and connected it with everyday, human examples of harassment and exclusion. Using Lorenz's language helped to naturalise the phenomenon of bullying and situate it as a subset of aggression, thereby giving it scientific legitimacy (ibid.: 13–14). For Heinemann, 'mobbing' was equivalent to an all-against-one situation and later, in contributions by laypersons, it became synonymous with group violence.

As both adoptions of foreign-born children and migration in Sweden reached new peaks in the 1960s, the issue of racism began to emerge. Heinemann's description of racism was taken up by Swedish local and national media, and in this process, 'mobbing' became linked to perceptions of the leading social problems of the day, including the belief that large schools have adverse effects on youths and that alienation is inherent in metropolitan life.[7] The term 'mobbing' entered the public domain with discussions between an array of participants – from non-governmental organisations, journalists, the media, politicians responsible for migration issues and education professionals; thus, the term has multiple authors. In the process, the concept of 'mobbing' became entwined with several other recognised social problems, which allowed it to gain credibility in what

[5] The word 'mobbing' (in Swedish, 'mobbning') was used in these early Swedish debates and was borrowed by other languages. In discussing the early development of the concept in this Introduction, we acknowledge its early usage by enclosing 'mobbing' in quotation marks. But 'bullying' has now become the standard term in English; thus, we use that word later in the Introduction and throughout the anthology.

[6] *Dagens Nyheter*, 13 November 1969; cited in Agevall 2008.

[7] Subsequent research into school bullying has shown no definitive connection between school size or population density with regard to either the frequency or intensity of bullying occurrences.

Agevall refers to as a process of 'issue-symbiosis' (ibid.: 26). Through this process of conceptual contagion, 'mobbing' absorbed other current issues, such as debates about the role of discipline and democracy in schools. Furthermore, different organisations – e.g. parent organisations or associations representing the disabled or immigrants – emphasised those parts of the concept that were relevant to their members, feeding these examples back into public debates in the media, literature, theatre and so on (ibid.: 19–26).[8]

Meanwhile, the publication in 1973 of Dan Olweus's book, *Hackkycklingar och översittare: forskning om skolmobbning* (*Whipping Boys and Bullying: Research on School Bullying*) constituted a watershed moment in the meaning of the term 'bullying'. Olweus had conducted the most ambitious, large-scale quantitative study of the phenomenon to date. His doctoral dissertation about the psychology of aggression was published in 1969, and it was an attempt to 'predict overt aggression in an interpersonal situation on the basis of aggressive responses to a specially constructed projective test' (Olweus 1969). When the problem of 'mobbing' gained traction amongst the public in Sweden and emerged in the debates, he was already equipped with a psychological theory and method to study aggression.

His model of the mechanisms that inform aggressive behaviour relied heavily on the notion of stable personality traits – i.e. habitual aggressive and aggressive inhibitory tendencies. In his view, these tendencies function as dispositions to respond to certain stimulus situations with relatively consistent reactions. If 'mobbing' was an issue of aggression, he could easily take the trait approach to aggression used in his previous research and transfer it to this new field. In this way, he extracted the view of aggression from Lorenz's study of animal behaviour and reformulated it into a model of individual aggression based on personality traits (Agevall 2008: 28–30, 34). As social scientists often do when confronted with an unknown entity, Olweus proceeded to apply the knowledge he already had about his field and transplant it to a new area via methods, theories and concrete procedures (ibid.: 48).

A consequence of Olweus's theoretical framework for the concept of psychological aggression, however, is that the idea of 'mobbing' as *group* violence – as Heinemann had originally conceived it – almost disappears from view. Olweus acknowledges that all-against-one situations do occur, but he views these as a tiny fraction of 'mobbing' behaviour; instead, he focuses primarily on single-perpetrator 'mobbing' (ibid.: 36–7). Anatol

[8] Agevall refers to this phenomenon as 'institutional bootstrapping' (2008: 23).

Pikas objected to this focus on the single perpetrator in formulating his own definition of 'mobbing', which in other respects echoes Olweus. For Pikas, 'mobbing' 'refers to repeated negative activities (physical and mental assaults and/or exclusions from the group) directed against a single individual by two or more interacting individuals' (Pikas 1975). Olweus later formulated another definition of 'mobbing', which has become the standard in the literature and research on bullying: 'mobbing' is when 'one or more individuals are subjected to negative actions, on several occasions and over an extended period of time, by one or more individuals' (Olweus 1986 cited in Agevall 2008: 34).

This short exegesis of the conceptual genealogy of 'mobbing' – or what is now definitively referred to as 'bullying' in English – explains why the field has usually been dominated by researchers from certain traditions within psychology and education who have focused in particular on the individual as an entity, as opposed to social psychologists, researchers in education focusing on social dynamics or sociologists for whom aggression tends to be poorly suited as a theoretical category (ibid.: 28). There are many more parts to the story about how the concept of bullying has developed and been applied, including its use in relation to adults and work-life (see Leymann 1986[9]) – which we do not explore in this anthology – and the interaction between scientific studies and the law. But we include this discussion about the concept of bullying in relation to the sociology of knowledge to highlight that the individualised approach to bullying in *paradigm one* is situated within the social dynamics of knowledge production.

It is also crucial to emphasise that debates about the ontology, epistemology and methods used to study bullying are far from mere academic exercises – they have explicit and potentially disturbing consequences for schools' intervention programmes. This is evident from the report published in 2009 by David P. Farrington and Maria M. Ttofi for Campbell Systematic Reviews, entitled 'School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization'.[10] In the report's concluding discussion about policy implications, the authors call for 'a system of accrediting effective anti-bullying programs'. They also note that such an accrediting system should 'ensure that programs contain elements that have been proved to be effective in high-quality evaluations' (Farrington and Ttofi 2009: 70). In arguing for a standardised national, and even international accreditation

[9] Heinz Leymann has numerous publications on the topic of workplace bullying, including Leymann and Zapf (1996).
[10] We refer to this report as the Campbell Collaboration.

approach, one must have a very robust level of knowledge about how to understand school bullying; specifically, the extent to which it is measurable and, if so, the means as well as the interventions that are considered 'appropriate' on the basis of this knowledge. But as Søndergaard argues here (see page 389) and in a commentary to the Campbell Collaboration co-authored with Inge Henningsen and Helle Rabøl Hansen (2010), this entire approach calls for discussion. Although the Campbell Collaboration reviewed 622 articles and reports that address anti-bullying programmes, they excluded 578 of the programmes for not meeting all four criteria in their research design: (1) randomised experiments; (2) experimental-control comparisons with before-and-after measures of bullying; (3) other experimental-control comparisons; and (4) quasi-experimental age-cohort designs. In other words, only 44 studies met the Campbell Collaboration's meta-analytic standards, which raises a question about the knowledge that may be *lost* when studies are limited to evidenced-based concepts of measurement. Such an evidenced-based approach may be appropriate for measuring a phenomenon that remains the same across different contexts or groups – as bullying is assumed to be in *paradigm one* – and this is the oldest and most established approach in the field.[11] But an evidenced-based approach may be poorly suited to understanding social complexities and complicated interactions, which *paradigm two* researchers argue are central in bullying dynamics. Instead, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches – such as the method Donna Cross and Amy Barnes present in their assessment of intervention programmes – seems more productive. Amongst the 578 programmes that were not included in the Campbell report, valuable knowledge about potential intervention strategies may have been lost – knowledge that might be better suited to engage with the theoretical and conceptual framework that *paradigm two* develops in relation to the complexities and shifting nature of bullying. Thus, as Søndergaard argues (see page 389), with the predominance of evidence-based approaches, we must also ask: what knowledge is prevented from being generated?

[11] All of the references named in the Campbell Collaboration are researchers working with the individualised approach of *paradigm one*, and they view bullying as an encounter between a strong child and a weak child. The report's section on definition, however, mentions researchers like Roland and Salmivalli, who recognise bullying as a phenomenon that also involves social dynamics. See Henningsen, Hansen and Søndergaard (2010): 'Hvad måler Campbell Collaboration? En kritisk kommentar til rapporten ('What does the Campbell Collaboration measure? A critical commentary of the report): *School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization*'; www.exbus.dk; last accessed 5 March 2012.

The social turn in *paradigm two*

Despite the continued dominance of *paradigm one*, several researchers as well as practitioners at non-governmental organisations over the past decade have begun to view bullying as a socially and culturally complex phenomenon, warning that an individualised approach can contribute to the exclusion of individual children within their local school contexts. A growing number of scholars are focusing on bullying as a group phenomenon that is generated within social environments where children interact with each other, such as the school class. Some studies describe the relation between the individualised perspective on bullying and social perspectives on bullying as first- and second-order perspectives (Slee and Mohyla 2007), where second-order perspectives recognise that bullying involves a multitude of participants and cannot merely be understood in terms of the perpetrator–victim dyad or the perpetrator–victim–bystander triad. For example, researchers have pointed out that there are several participant positions (e.g. Salmivalli et al. 2004); that some children are both bullies and victims (Cook et al. 2010); and that the construct *bullying* must be contextualised in a situation (Beran 2006). Others have utilised a socio-ecological lens, which includes a focus on family, home environment, school climate, community factors, peer status and peer influence (Espelage and Swearer 2004). Much of this literature emphasises the need for whole-school and multi-contextual approaches. But there remains a tendency to concentrate on specific problems associated with individual children and to emphasise the development of empathy and social skills rather than focusing on patterns of interaction between children. Furthermore, as noted in one recent report, the more intense bullying is perceived to be, the more individualistic the intervention tends to become (Kousholt and Fisker, unpublished manuscript).

The language of first- and second-order perspectives might allow us to draw the conclusion that researchers should combine the two paradigms by adding social interactions and dynamics to the individualised approach. In a discussion about epistemology, Barbara Thayer-Bacon raises this problematic in reference to the children's version of a tale from India called 'The blind men and the elephant': 'There were six men from Industan/to learning much inclined/who went to see the elephant/though each of them was blind/so that by observation/each might satisfy his mind' (Quigley 1959 cited in Thayer-Bacon 1996). Depending on which part of the animal they touched, the blind men variously described it as a rope, tree, fan, snake, wall or spear. Thayer-Bacon uses this imagery to argue that different perspectives can contribute to an interactive, cooperative and

more comprehensive definition of knowledge.[12] But this suggestion about the partiality of epistemological perspectives does *not* imply an add-on approach. Rather, as evidenced by the chapters in this anthology, analysing the social dimensions of bullying calls for theories and methods that challenge the first-order approach of *paradigm one* (see Schott, page 21).

For example, whilst *paradigm one* invokes the concept of power to refer to powerful individuals, some contemporary researchers – including several authors in this volume – draw upon the work of Michel Foucault to develop a quite different understanding of power within the context of bullying. Foucault argued that power is not a static category but is 'exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations' (Foucault 1978: 270). This approach implies that power differences in bullying situations are themselves 'the effects of social relations' (Horton 2011: 270). Researchers inspired by Foucault's theories tend to ask how individuals are positioned in relation to the dominant social and moral orders; for example, in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexuality or other 'social vectors of inequality' (Whitehead 2002 cited in Horton 2011: 270; see also Ellwood and Davies, page 81 and Meyer, page 209). Bullying, they argue, may be an attempt by some children to act as 'over-zealous guardians of the normative moral order' (Bansel et al. 2009; Davies 2011).

New theories in context

School Bullying: New Theories in Context brings together the work of scholars who utilise ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches that move beyond *paradigm one*, contributing to the shift in research on school bullying that we call *paradigm two*. Several of the authors have participated in a five-year research project based in Denmark called 'Exploring Bullying in Schools' (eXbus) and others have been collaborative partners. Many are based in the Nordic countries, and others are from Australia and the United States; their collective experiences with conducting empirical research in these countries highlights both the similarities and differences amongst national school systems. Most importantly, the authors 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.

[12] See also Thornberg (2011) for more about this elephant image.

Instead of approaching bullying as a phenomenon that can be explained and defined in terms of one factor (e.g. aggression), the authors in this anthology focus on a range of different forces that are central in bullying: teachers (Hansen), school principals and parents (Hein), classroom culture with its particular experiences and histories (Hansen, Henningsen and Kofoed) and the virtual experiences of children – both in terms of their electronically mediated communications and the media products with and through which they play and interact (Kofoed; Søndergaard). Other chapters focus on social factors in relation to gender, sexuality, race and class (Meyer) and the role of normativity in understanding bullying more generally (Ellwood and Davies; Laustsen). These chapters by no means exhaust the range of intra-acting forces at work within school bullying, and further investigation would be welcome in order to address, amongst other subjects, the economic and political structures of school systems. In the chapters produced through the eXbus project (Hansen; Hein; Hansen, Henningsen and Kofoed; Kofoed; Mathiassen; Schott; Søndergaard; Viala), the authors have addressed this analytical ambition through a conceptualisation of multiple intra-acting forces and an analysis of different and often shifting positions within group interactions. Thus, the group relations found within bullying dynamics move into focus.

With the subtitle 'New Theories in Context', we are calling attention to the importance of the theoretical approaches that are either implicit or explicit in current research on bullying. And we seek to open up the field of school bullying – which has been heavily dominated by researchers from certain theoretical traditions within psychology that focus on the individual as a demarcated entity – to theoretical approaches developed and applied within the humanities (e.g. history, literature and philosophy) and the social sciences (e.g. anthropology, law, psychology/social psychology and sociology). Foucault's work, for example, has been making a substantial impact on these disciplines for more than three decades, but bringing his theoretical perspectives into research on school bullying is a new endeavour. By challenging and expanding the theoretical resources for research on bullying, we are contributing to our ambition of opening up the field of research to a dialogue among many different disciplines in order to enhance knowledge about bullying.

The analytical goal of this anthology is inspired by a range of thinkers who analyse complex processes of subjective and social becoming, including several who are loosely labelled 'poststructuralist', such as Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler. Both Foucault's and Butler's analyses of the processes of becoming with regard to the subject and the social provide an important basis for many of the perspectives brought forward in this volume. The social,