DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

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„Bullying and its portrayal in Young Adult Literature – suggested activities for teaching *I swear* by Lane Davis in the Austrian upper secondary EFL classroom"

verfasst von / submitted by

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1. Introduction

[S]chool climate is like the air we breathe or the soil in which we plant a seed to grow. Both the air and the soil provide something that is essential to growth and to life. Learning cannot be achieved in the midst of a hostile, threatening environment.
(Preble and Gordon 5)

Too often newspapers report about the tragic deaths of youths who have taken their lives due to being relentlessly harassed by their peers. Bullying constitutes a global public health issue as it is a serious problem in schools all over the world, not restricted to specific countries or cultures. Hearing about violence in schools often elicits thoughts about physical fights, black-eyes and bruises, however, the form of violence that is the most prevalent and affects students the most is bullying (Bauman and Del Rio 219). While physical aggression can also be a part of bullying, the harm that is caused by bullying goes far beyond merely bodily injuries.

Despite the fact that bullying is not a new problem, research into the phenomenon is still in its beginnings. For a long time, acts of peer harassment were dismissed as an inevitable part of growing up and were not taken seriously, which only gradually changed after the public outcry that followed the suicides of three young boys in Norway in 1982 (Olweus, *Bullying* 1-2).

Schools should be safe places for students and provide them with optimal conditions for learning, which means that students should feel comfortable and respected and be able to devote all of their energy to studying and not worrying about being harassed. Sadly, the opposite is often the case. Bullying does not only have a negative effect on the perpetrator and the victim, but also on the bystanders, hence it can poison the whole school climate. Studies on the prevalence of bullying have obtained alarming results. In Austria, around one third of the students has bullied someone and about the same number has been the victim (Wallner 10), every fifth

student even experiences bullying at least a few times a month (OECD, *Results*; UNESCO; OECD, *Bullying*). Although anti-bullying strategies have been developed and put in place over the past years and first successes could be registered, the number of cases in schools is still high and more needs to be done.

The main aim of this diploma thesis is to explore how bullying prevention and intervention work can benefit from the use of Young Adult Literature, more specifically from the use of the YA-novel *I swear* by Lane Davis, in the Austrian EFL-classroom at upper secondary level. In order to establish if *I swear* is suited for educating students about peer harassment, a thorough analysis of the bullying situation in the book will be conducted and, in addition, activities for teaching *I swear* suggested.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the phenomenon of bullying in all its complexity. At the beginning, background information about research on bullying will be presented and a definition established. Then, the risk factors for youths to become involved in bullying in any constellation will be examined, before looking at the harmful effects it can have. Afterwards, prevention and intervention measures in the school-context will be discussed, with Finland's and Austria's anti-bullying strategies the object of closer scrutiny. Finally, practical advice for the fight against this type of peer harassment will be offered.

The second part of the thesis will discuss why Young Adult Literature should be used in the Austrian EFL classroom and why it is especially suited for teaching bullying as a topic. The YA-novel *I swear* by Lane Davis and the bullying situation in the book will be thoroughly analysed in order to establish whether teaching this specific work of literature can be of help to prevent or reduce peer harassment at school.

In the third and final part, a compilation of activities for teaching *I swear* will be presented. The suggested activities will be specifically designed to conquer bullying at classroom-level. The activities will not only present students with opportunities for social learning, but also aim at improving their knowledge about bullying. In addition, the exercises should be an incentive for students to reflect about bullying and come up with ideas to stop it or at least to help victims.

2. Bullying

2.1. Establishing a definition

The word 'bully (n.)' has been present in the English language since the 1530s. Until today, the question concerning its origin remains unanswered. It is assumed that the term has its roots in Dutch and German and derives from the Middle Dutch 'boel', meaning lover and the Middle High German 'buole', meaning brother. 'Buole' is in turn the source of the German 'Buhle', for which the equivalent English word would be lover. The ancestors of the term 'bully (n.)' already indicate something interesting – that the original meaning and the word's meaning in the present differ substantially. Indeed, further etymological investigation confirms the word's early positive denotative meaning. At first, as a term of endearment, it was applicable to both sexes and meant something close to 'sweetheart'. Later, only good men were called bullies and the term served as a common form of address for male friends, until its meaning slowly deteriorated from 'fine fellow' and 'blusterer' to 'harasser of the weak' in the course of the 17th century ("Bully", *Online Etymology Dictionary*; "Bully", *The Oxford English Dictionary*). In the present a person is considered a bully if they act habitually "cruel, insulting, or threatening to others who are weaker, smaller, or in some way vulnerable" ("Bully", *Merriam Webster*). It is speculated that the semantic change of the word 'bully (n.)' was influenced by the word 'bull (n.1)' that describes a male bovine animal ("Bull", Online Etymology Dictionary; "Bully", *Online Etymology Dictionary*). In the following, an excerpt from Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, written around 1600, and an excerpt from Emerson's essay "Prudence", written in 1841, will illustrate the shift in meaning from positive to negative.

> PISTOL The king's a bawcock, and a heart of gold,
>   A lad of life, an imp of fame,
>   Of parents good, of fist most valiant.
>   I kiss his dirty shoe, and from heartstring
>   I love the lovely **bully**. What is thy name? (*Henry V* 4.1. 100-104)

> But the sturdiest offender of your peace and of the neighbourhood, if you rip up his claims, is as thin and timid as any; and the peace of society is often kept, because, as children say, one is afraid, and the other dares not. Far off, men swell, **bully**, and threaten; bring them hand to hand, and they are a feeble folk. (Emerson)

On a side note, the adjective 'bully', which was first attested around 1680, preserves the "earlier, positive sense of the word" and still means "worthy, jolly [or] admirable" ("Bully", *Online Etymology Dictionary*).

However, the act of bullying is abominable. It is neither an admirable nor a jolly activity. Sadly, the act of bullying has existed for a long period of time. Numerous works of literature let one assume that bullying has been present in schools from the very start. In Austria, Hungary and the lands of the Bohemian crown, compulsory education for children was introduced as early as 1774 by empress Maria Theresia. England and France, on the other hand, were rather slow and it took them until the 1880s to make education compulsory (Politics.co.uk). Despite the fact that bullying is an extremely old phenomenon, society turned a blind eye to the pain and misery caused by it for a long period of time and commonly accepted the harassment as an inevitable part of growing up that children and adolescents could not escape. As a consequence, the first sincere attempts to study bullying systematically have only been made quite recently, in the 1970s.

The roots of research on bullying can be traced back to the Scandinavian countries. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Sweden's society became strongly interested in the problems caused by bullying, and Denmark and Norway followed quickly. Although

parents, teachers and the mass media in Norway were greatly concerned about bullying for several years, school authorities only became officially involved as it became known that three boys took their own lives, presumably as the result of being exposed to severe bullying for too long. A chain of reactions was triggered by these tragic events. In 1983 Norway's Ministry of Education launched a nationwide campaign against bullying in primary and secondary/junior high schools (grades 1-9) (Olweus, *Bullying* 1-2) and more researchers finally started to explore the causes for peer harassment and drew attention to the damaging effects it can have (Hillsberg and Spak 23). Unfortunately, the first attempts to study bullying were largely confined to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. It took until the late 1980s and early 1990s that bullying gained public and research attention in other countries, for example "Japan, England, The Netherlands, Canada, the USA, and Australia" (Olweus, *Bullying* 1).

The first term that was used to describe what is widely denoted as bullying today was 'mobbing'. It was introduced into the "public Swedish debate" at a very early stage by the school physician Heinemann, who defined 'mobbing' as violence carried out by a group against an individual, whereby the violence occurs and ceases suddenly (Arora 318). Heinemann "had borrowed the term 'mobbing' from the Swedish version of a book on aggression written by the well-known Austrian ethologist, Konrad Lorenz". In the study of animal behaviour, it is called mobbing when "a collective attack by a group of animals on an animal of another species, which is usually larger and a natural enemy of the group" happens. In his book on aggression, Lorenz uses the word to describe "the action of a school class or a group of soldiers ganging up against a deviating individual" (Olweus, *Understanding* 9). The word stem of mobbing is also frequently used in social psychology and everyday life in English speaking countries to refer to a "relatively large group of individuals – a crowd or mass of people – joined in a common activity or goal" (Olweus, *Understanding* 9). Usually a mob is characterised by being

loosely organised, formed by accident and existing only for a short period of time. There are different types of mobs, for instance "the aggressive mob (the lynch mob), the panic-stricken mob (the flight mob), [or] the acquisitive mob (the hoarding mob)" (Olweus, *Understanding* 9). Furthermore, it is said that members of a mob typically experience strong emotions, and therefore, the behaviour and reactions of its members are mostly irrational.

The connotations surrounding the words discussed above have been well established in the English language long before Heinemann first used them to describe the phenomenon of bullying. Therefore, the two terms elicit thoughts about the original meaning of the word mob and the ethological and social psychological concept of mobbing from English speakers, yet this is problematic for various reasons, of whom two will be discussed in more detail.

To start with, the term mobbing would imply that "school mobbing is a matter of collective aggression by a relatively homogeneous group", concealing the "relative contributions made by individual members". The fact that some pupils play a more active part in bullying would be hidden and teachers would have problems to identify situations where only a small group or a single student, and not a whole class, bullies another student. Furthermore, as the concept of mobbing describes the aggressive group as homogenous, the victim would be seen as the cause of the problem, as he is perceived as irritating by the majority (Olweus, *Understanding* 9-10). Second, bullying could be perceived as dependent on situationally determined circumstances and as a temporary problem. This impression is created since a mob turns against an individual very suddenly, without prior warning. Although there are isolated cases of peer harassment, bullying tends to be rather stable over a longer period of time.

For the reasons discussed above, a pioneer in the field and one of the leading authorities on research on bullying in the present, Dan Olweus, voiced his concerns about equating bullying and mobbing very early on and decided to rather speak of bullying or bully/victim problems when referring to the phenomenon under investigation (Olweus, *Understanding* 9-11). Today, the type of peer harassment this thesis focuses on is designated as bullying in the English language. However, in Scandinavia and a few other countries, such as Austria and Germany, bullying is still called mobbing, however, the connotation of the word mobbing has gradually changed, and native speakers think about the concept of bullying when they hear the word mobbing, although using the term mobbing to refer to bullying is to some extent inappropriate from a linguistic point of view (Olweus, *Understanding* 11).

As already briefly mentioned, Olweus initiated the first systemic research on bullying in the 1970s, the results of which were published in the form of a book titled *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* in Sweden in 1973 and in the US in 1978. It was also Olweus, who developed the bullying prevention program, also known as 'Olweus Bullying Prevention Program' that was used in Norway's nationwide campaign against bullying in 1983 after the tragic suicides of three teenagers (Violence Prevention Works). One of the key aims of the campaign was to gather data on the incidence of bullying in Norwegian schools with the help of a student questionnaire. At the beginning of his research, Olweus found it counterproductive to put forward a rigid definition of bullying, since there simply were not enough data on the subject available. However, a stringent definition was needed in the questionnaire to evaluate the bullying behaviour of students (Olweus, *Understanding* 11). When Olweus (*Aggression* 35) set out, he assumed that bullying was merely carried out by boys and, though loosely, defined a bully as "a boy who fairly often oppresses or harasses someone else; the target may be boys and girls, the harassment physical or mental". On a side

note, it needs to be mentioned that his consideration of the psychological consequences at this stage of research was remarkable. At the same time, his colleagues saw bullying as merely physical harassment. Only after Olweus published his thoughts on the mental aspect of bullying, other researchers included this form of peer victimisation in their concepts as well. Although the inclusion lead to an increased complexity of the phenomenon, it helped to paint a more accurate picture of it (Arora 318).

A few years later, in the course of the prevention programme, Olweus (*Understanding*, 11) specified that "[a] student is being bullied of victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students". This definition found wide acceptance in the field and most researchers used this exact formulation in their own research, or at least oriented themselves on it. For instance, a major research project on bullying, known as the Sheffield Project, was conducted in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s. The leading scientists Whitney and Smith (referred to in Arora 320) based their description on Olweus' and only slightly adapted it in order to make it more understandable for students, so that they could use it as a preface to their survey.

The description read:

> We say a young person is being bullied, or picked on, when another child or young person, or a group of young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a young person is hit, kicked or threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no-one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the young person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel. (Whitney and Smith qtd. in Arora 320)

However, not all scholars agreed with Olweus' view on bullying. Uncertainty prevailed about which elements should be considered the most essential to describe the phenomenon and therefore be included in its definition. In another prominent definition at that time, for instance it is stated that "[b]ullying is a behaviour which can be defined as the repeated attack – physical, psychological, social or verbal – by those in a position of power, which is formally or situationally defined, on those who are powerless to resist, with the intention of causing distress for their own gain or gratification" (Besag 4, qtd in Arora 319). In Besag's description there is a focus on power, motivation and intentionality, which cannot be found in Whitney and Smith's (Arora 319-320). The comparison of those two descriptions is only one example for the variations in the co-existing definitions of bullying in the past. Unquestionably, there were great overlaps between most definitions, but sometimes also discrepancies in essentials could be observed and that the emphasis on certain components varied.

Unfortunately, the lack of a uniform definition was a great impediment for making progress in the prevention of bullying in schools. Meta-analyses could not be conducted as a result of the varying definitions, and it was impossible to draw valid conclusions from the comparison of different studies. Apart from this problem, many early studies were preliminary in nature or conducted by undergraduate students that received little supervision from experienced researchers (Rigby, *What to do* 17). Not reaching consensus about a uniform definition to describe the phenomenon was certainly not ideal for researchers, however, it was highly problematic for the people that had to deal with bullying on an every-day basis. Parents were often unsure if the harassment their child experienced was by definition bullying and teachers were unable to identify cases or to intervene successfully (Gladden et al. 4). It is also alarming that the majority of schools needed until the 1990s to consider bullying as the harmful problem that it has always constituted, despite the ongoing research since the

1970s and the public's and scholar's growing interest in the matter (Rigby, *Interventions* x).

Thankfully, nowadays bullying is taken seriously by authorities, and the topic has also been very present in the media in recent years. Furthermore, a considerable number of films and works of literature have dealt with the issue. However, the general public still has difficulties to explain the concept of bullying correctly (Rigby, *Interventions* 14). As already mentioned above, Olweus' definition is accepted by the majority of researchers and up until today also the most widely used. Nevertheless, from time to time special criticism was voiced against declaring only repeated aggressive behaviour as bullying. The definition had proven problematic in regard to some particular cases where the victim had been attacked only once. Therefore, some researchers tried to draw attention to the fact that also single occurrences of aggressive behaviour that fulfil certain criteria should be considered bullying as well. Arora (319), for instance, states that also merely "one physical attack or threat to an individual who is powerless might make that person feel frightened, restricted or upset over a considerable length of time, both of the emotional trauma following such an attack but also due to the fear of renewed attacks". Therefore, the focus should rather be on the long-term effect that bullying has on the victim, and not on its repeated nature (Arora 319). One of the leading researchers on bullying, Rigby (*Interventions* 15), shares Arora's concern that seeing only "repeated aggressive behaviour" as bullying is dangerous, as it can lead to schools dismissing a student's need for help or support. It could also happen that schools would like to view certain incidents of harassment as bullying and punish the perpetrator but are not able to pursue single acts of aggression on the basis of Olweus' definition, although a victim may experience serious negative long-term consequences. For this reason, Rigby (*Interventions* 15-16) proposed that bullying "[only] typically involves repeated acts of aggression".

After a considerable amount of research had been conducted on bullying over the last 30 years, and its harmful effects proven, the leading national public health institute of the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), began to see bullying as an important health issue and realised that a uniform definition of the phenomenon was needed, since as already mentioned, the varying definitions used by researchers had implications on research and the implementation of anti-bullying strategies (Gladden et al. 4). Subsequently, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and additional feedback and assistance from external researchers, a uniform definition was presented in 2014 when the document "Bullying Surveillance Among Youths: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0" was published (Gladden et al. 2). The CDC (Gladden et al. 1) states the document's purpose is to function as a "tool to help organizations, researchers, evaluators, community groups, educators and public health officials define and gather systematic data on bullying to better inform research and prevention efforts" and aims to "improve the consistency and comparability of data collected on bullying", as "[t]he lack of a uniform definition hinders our ability to understand the true magnitude, scope, and impact of bullying and track trends over time".

The Health institute (Gladden et al.) oriented itself on Olweus' definition, but also addressed the critique it had to face regarding the term "repeatedly". Therefore, bullying is defined by the CDC (Gladden et al. 7) as

> any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social or educational harm.

The CDC's definition is the one that this thesis will use to describe bullying and, in order provide a better understanding, its key terms "youth" "unwanted", "aggressive behavio[u]r", "has occurred multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated", "power imbalance" and "harm" will be explained in the following.

Youth

Youth refers to school-aged individuals between the age of 5 and 18 years (Gladden et al. 8). In this paper, the terms youth, children and students will be used synonymously.

Unwanted

The targeted youth does not want the aggressive behaviour to continue. It has to be noted that two youths "making fun of each other in a playful manner" should not be considered bullying (Gladden et al. 8).

Aggressive behaviour

In the definition, aggressive behaviour means the threatened or actual intentional use of harmful behaviour against another youth. It does not have to be assessed whether the bully wanted to hurt the victim, intentionality can also be "captured by assessing the perpetrator's intent to use harmful behaviour against the targeted youth" (Gladden et al. 8). This approach to measure intentionality is used by both the CDC and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to measure different types of violence. As an illustration, spreading rumours about another youth or shoving someone should be regarded as intentional since the perpetrator's behaviour against a peer is harmful (Gladden et al. 8). Bullying is always an unjustified act of aggression. However, it needs to be taken into account that what youths perceive as justified is to some extent culturally determined and judgments can even differ within a given culture (Rigby, *Interventions* 15).

Has occurred multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated

This phrase expresses that a youth is exposed to several acts of aggression carried out "by a single youth or group of youths over a specified time period or there is a strong concern a single aggressive behaviour by a youth or group of youths has a high likelihood of being followed by more incidents of aggression" (Gladden et al. 8).

A power imbalance

The perpetrators try to use "observed or perceived personal or situational characteristics to exert control over the targeted youth's behaviour or limit the victim's ability to respond or stop their aggression" (Gladden et al. 8). In other words, the term power imbalance implies that bullies are more powerful than the victims in some way, for instance, they may be more verbally skilled, possess more physical strength or better social skills, have a higher social status or simply more supporters (Rigby, *Interventions* 15). Sometimes the power imbalance is obvious, for example when one youth is much smaller than the other, however, it can be less obvious as well, for example when the power imbalance is psychological. In these cases, observers of bullying acts often cannot understand why the people bullied do not defend themselves (Rigby, *What to do* 15). As a side-line, it needs to be said that it is important to keep in mind that the term power imbalance should "not be used to label certain children 'powerless' or 'powerful,' but instead to capture power differences that exist in a certain relationship at a specific time" and furthermore, that "the use of violence or threats of violence may create or enhance existing power imbalances" (Gladden et al. 8).

Harm

Harm means a variety of negative experiences or injuries, for instance

> a) physical cuts, bruises or pain, b) psychological consequences such as feelings of distress, depression or anxiety, c) social damage to reputation or relationship, and/or d) limits to educational opportunities through increased

absenteeism, dropping out of school, having difficulty concentrating in class, and poor academic performance. (Gladden et al. 8)

The section above provides detailed information on the definition of bullying and clarifies obscurities regarding important terms used in it. Next, the different modes and types of bullying will be discussed to provide more information on the phenomenon.

2.2. Modes and types of bullying

Peer harassment can occur in a variety of forms and each can cause the victim great distress. The CDC distinguish between two modes and three different types of bullying (Gladden et al. 7).

modes

In terms of modes, direct and indirect bullying are differentiated. Direct bullying takes place when aggressive behaviour occurs in the presence of the victim. Face-to-face interaction, such as pushing the target or insulting them verbally or through writing counts as bullying someone directly. On the contrary, indirect bullying does not happen in the presence of the victim, so that aggressive acts are not directly communicated to the target. Examples of this mode would be spreading harmful and/or untrue rumours about someone in person or electronically (Gladden et al. 7).

types

Regardless of whether bullying is carried out directly or indirectly, researchers distinguish between three different types: physical, verbal and relational bullying. Firstly, physical bullying occurs when someone uses their physical strength to cause harm to another person, for instance kicking, spitting, hitting or pushing someone count as bullying someone physically. Secondly, verbal bullying describes when harm is done through oral or written communication. Examples are threatening someone

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verbally or calling them names, taunting or making inappropriate sexual comments. The third type, relational bullying, is used to indicate that the perpetrator's behaviour aims to cause harm to the reputation and relationships of the victim (Gladden et al. 7). When direct relational bullying is carried out, efforts are made to isolate the target, for example, keeping them from interacting with other students, threatening to withdraw friendship or ignoring the victim. Indirect relational bullying means, for instance, spreading harmful or false rumours, posting electronically or printing without the target's knowledge pictures the target is ashamed of, or posting written insulting comments about the victim (Gladden et al. 7; Orpinas and Horne 20).

Research has shown that relational bullying causes even more emotional distress than physical bullying, it can lead to immediate or future social and psychological maladjustment, depression in adulthood (Bauman and Del Rio 220) or cause extreme damage to a youth's self-esteem (Orpinas and Horne 20). In general, relational bullying is not as easy to spot as physical or verbal bullying and teachers often have difficulties to identify incidents. However, it is not only crucial to raise more awareness for this type of peer harassment because teachers cannot detect it easily, but also because when confronted with cases, teachers tend to consider relational bullying as a rather harmless type of bullying and underestimate the negative consequences for the victims. This was shown in a project in which preservice teachers had to respond to six different cases of bullying. The preservice teachers' answers did not considerably differ from those of experienced teachers and showed that relational bullying was not seen as a very serious form of bullying. Furthermore, the participants did not have as much empathy for students exposed to relational bullying as for victims of other types of bullying, were less likely to intervene and if they decided to intervene, less severe consequences were mentioned (Bauman and Del Rio 219-225). This may be the case because the severity of physical and verbal bullying can be better assessed. Teachers

see if someone has a scratch on his arm or was beaten up brutally, in the same way that they can distinguish between a harmless swearword and a serious threat. The harm done by relational bullying, however, can only be inferred from subjective accounts of observers or the victim's behaviour. Hence, uncertainties regarding subjective judgements and appropriate actions can be experienced. When confronted with relational bullying, participants in the project often said that the action they would take depends on how upset the victim is. This is highly problematic as some victims internalise pain and therefore do not get the help they need (Bauman and Del Rio 226). Furthermore, when merely cases of physical and verbal bullying are addressed and intervention in cases of relational bullying neglected, those "more subtle forms of bullying are inadvertently promoted" (Bauman and Del Rio 220). As already mentioned above, schools need to be more aware of relational bullying and should not classify it as less severe than a broken arm or nose (Bauman and Del Rio 220).

cyberbullying

An issue of great relevance in our modern time, but not yet discussed is cyberbullying. While only 66% of youths in the UK had access to the internet at home in 2010, the figure was almost 80% in 2012. Access is even close to 100% in the present (Baldry et al. 37).

Most researchers see cyberbullying or electronic aggression as a subtype of indirect bullying, which

> can involve both verbal and relational aggression and is categorized by mode of victimization. Cyberbullying involves threats, harassment, and harmful actions via cell phones and on the internet. […] Bullying occurs on a continuum, of overt to covert [and whereas] relational aggression may be overt and covert; cyberbullying is unique in that it is predominately covert. (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Johnson 495)

To provide a second description: "Cyberbullying has been defined as the use of electronic communication technology as a means to deliberately threaten, harm, embarrass or socially exclude another [person]" (Ang 36). Although cyberbullying is characterised as a subtype of bullying most of the times, there is some dispute over whether it should be seen that way or be viewed as a "different type of aggression [with] unique characteristics and distinctive participant profiles" (Antoniadou and Kokkinos 363). In any case, the outcome of the debate has an influence on prevention and intervention practices. If cyberbullying is found to be related to bullying, the application of similar countermeasures is possible, whereas the classification of cyberbullying as a completely distinct phenomenon would require more research in this area (Antoniadou and Kokkinos 363). Findings hint in the direction that overall, electronic aggression is not completely distinct from school bullying, but a few differences can be observed (Antoniadou and Kokkinos 367), for instance that "a small group of cyber-bullying/victimization participants has no previous involvement in school bullying/victimization" or it can be observed that participants in both bullying and cyberbullying sometimes do not adopt the same role in the harassment process or even have multiple or opposing roles. The final and most dangerous difference is that bullying on the internet "happens with greater ease, low cost and high profit for the bully […], which may cause additional students to participate" (Antoniadou and Kokkinos 367).

To conclude this part, one can say that the type of bullying that is carried out changes with age. Younger children are more likely to engage in physical and direct bullying, whereas older ones rather bully verbally, relationally and indirectly. Cyberbullying behaviour increases with age and reaches its peak in adolescence (Cross et al. 109). Although teachers and parents mostly think about physical acts of aggression first when hearing about bullying, in general, verbal bullying is far more common among

students and on a number of occasions at least equally hurtful. As has been shown, indirect bullying can be the most hurtful mode at times, as for instance exclusion can make a student feel unwelcome, or when rumours are spread, the victim can never be sure of how many of their peers believe them and will treat them differently because of the allegations (Rigby, *Interventions* 16).

After dealing with the different modes and types of bullying in detail, the following section will shed light on a different subarea of the phenomenon. It will examine whether certain characteristics that individuals possess put them at a greater risk for becoming a bully or a target of this form of aggression and, moreover, if the contexts youths find themselves in play a role in the occurrence of bullying.

2.3. Examining the risk for becoming involved in bullying or victimisation

Bullying does not only have a serious negative impact on the physical and psychological health of perpetrators and victims, but also on that of witnesses and it can contaminate the whole school climate, as will be discussed at a later stage. In order to understand the nature of bullying better and develop effective prevention or intervention strategies, it is essential to examine if there are potential predictors that could indicate if children are at elevated risk for engaging in future bullying behaviour or becoming victims (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 126). It is necessary to bear in mind that a "risk factor can explain a relationship: its presence increases the likelihood of such behaviour […] taking place now or in the future; it increases the likelihood but its absence does not eliminate the risk" (Baldry et al. 38).

Prior to discussing if there are risk factors for developing aggressive behaviour, it is necessary to discard commonly held ideas about bullies. The typical bully is mostly

portrayed as unusually aggressive, and while it is true that some are, many of them are not (Rigby *Interventions* 19-20). Bullies do not constitute a homogenous group (Reijntjes et al. 231), they do not all share the same personality traits that lead to exhibiting this type of behaviour and hence, there is no universal solution for identifying bullies or dealing with incidents, as it is often claimed in the media (Rigby *Interventions* 3-4, 20).

Nevertheless, analyses conducted on a wide range of past incidents of bullying have made it possible to identify the three most common types of bullies: the aggressive bully, the follower and the relational bully (Orpinas and Horne 17). Further, according to Rigby (*Interventions* 20) one should distinguish between bullies who respond, "at least initially, to a provocation, and those for whom there are no extenuating circumstances". Bullying is seen as a subtype of proactive aggression, which means that an unprovoked aggressive act towards the victim is carried out to achieve a goal, for instance the aggressor may want to dominate or intimidate another individual. On the contrary, provoked bullies rather use reactive aggression, since they perceive a supposedly threatening stimulus and respond to this stimulus with a defensive reaction that is accompanied by a form of anger (Griffin and Gross 380-381). Leaving aside that exerting bullying behaviour to resolve conflicts is never acceptable and that the majority of victims does not provoke their tormentors, it is still important to learn about the origin of a conflict, as one should not assume that every bully fits the usual stereotype (Rigby *Interventions* 20). As an example, Rigby (*Interventions* 20) names a case of bullying that occurred in a primary school in South Australia. Here, a group of students with Italian background were accused of harassing an Australian student, but in the end, it turned out that the Australian student had made racist comments about them first (Rigby, *Interventions* 20).

Returning to the three most common types of bullies, the 'aggressive bully' will be discussed first. These bullies are prone to use physical or verbal overt aggression in order to get what they want. On a number of occasions, they have made positive experiences with exhibiting this type of behaviour, which has led them to the belief that bullying is the easiest way to accomplish their goals. When hearing this, one would presumably think that aggressive bullies are rather unpopular and shunned by their peers, however this is not always the case. While it is true that some are socially unskilled and hence rejected by their peers for behaving this way, others have excellent social skills and can manipulate others without any problem. Those who are socially inept often experience great difficulties in their social relations, not only because they frequently perceive normal incidents, such as bumping into each other in the hallway, as hostile acts and respond with violence, but also because they see it as the other person's fault that they behaved violently towards them. To a considerable extent, they are unaware of the fact that other people feel negatively towards them (Orpinas and Horne 17-19). The label 'followers' or 'passive bullies' is given to the second most common type of aggressors. Although these youths do not commonly start the bullying, they join in and follow the aggressive bullies' behaviour. Needless to say, this encourages aggressive bullies and reinforces their negative demeanour. As opposed to aggressive bullies, relational bullies, who constitute the third most common type of bullies, do not confront their victims directly (Griffin and Gross 381). They tend to hurt their victims indirectly or through covert forms of aggression, be it spreading rumours or isolating them (Orpinas and Horne 19-20).

Of course, there is no universal solution for handling bullying. Being informed about the most common types of bullies makes it easier to spot incidents, but the crucial question to return to at this point is whether or not peer harassment can be prevented

from happening. Hence, in the following it will be investigated if there are variables that increase the likelihood of someone to engage in this negative behaviour.

2.3.1. Individual risk factors

2.3.1.1. Who are the bullies? Variables increasing the likelihood of bullying perpetration

socio-demographic variables

When thinking about bullying, most commonly people have in mind the picture of a boy hitting another one. Indeed, **gender** is a predictor of bullying behaviour in most studies, only a small number of studies show no significant relationship between bullying and sex. A meta-analysis conducted by Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez (128-129) of 85 articles with the focus on predictors of bullying and a quite recent publication date, namely between 2005-2014 found that boys are at a higher risk of engaging in bullying behaviour than girls. Only one of the reviewed studies concludes that girls bully more than boys, but only when it comes to indirect bullying. Those findings are congruent with other research about bullying predictors – that in general boys bully more than girls. Whereas male bullies rather use physical violence, girls are more likely to bully indirectly, they manipulate friendships or spread rumours (Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias 64). It has also been shown that the prevalence of "female bullies declined steadily with age, but the prevalence of male bullies remained roughly constant from the ages eight to 16" (Farrington referred to in Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias 64).

This raises the question about the relationship between **age** and bullying perpetration. Most studies examining the influence of age on bullying found a "curvilinear relationship between the two variables" (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 129). In a great number of studies, it could be seen that the probability of becoming a bully increases until the age of 14 and decreases subsequently, though a handful of studies

report an earlier decrease, starting around age 12 (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 129).

The last socio-demographic factor to be mentioned here is **race/ethnicity**. Belonging to an ethnic, racial or cultural minority increases the person's risk for developing aggressive behaviour. Studies in the USA and Canada "found a higher probability of being [a] bull[y] among African American or Hispanic students than in white students", in Israel, Arabs bullied more frequently than Jews, and in the UK, Caribbeans and Pakistanis engaged in more bullying behaviour than whites (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 129). However, sometimes belonging to a minority group can also be a protective factor, for instance, living in the USA and being from Asia or the Pacific Islands has been negatively correlated with bullying (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 129).

psychological variables

As already mentioned on page 19, one of the three most common types of bullies is called the aggressive bully. Indeed, **aggression** and a rather positive attitude towards the use of violence correlate positively with the development of bullying behaviour (Olweus, *Bullying* 34). Children that showed preschool aggressiveness were more likely "to be a bully […] and less likely to be uninvolved in bullying" in some way at a later age (Jansen et al. 3). Concerning the different types of aggression, only power-related proactive aggression and affiliation-related proactive aggression predict bullying, while reactive aggression does not function as a statistically relevant predictor. Incidents, in which aggression is used to increase one's own power in a certain group or to intimidate fellow students can be described as power-related aggression, aggressiveness in order to be accepted in a group or to earn friendship, fall under affiliation-related aggression (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130). In

conjunction with showing aggressive behaviour, bullies also more frequently "focus on angry thoughts", "are angry and revengeful", "chronically repeat aggressive behaviour" and moreover, tend to have contact with aggressive groups (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 96).

Furthermore, it has been found that, by tendency, bullies are high in **impulsivity** (Olweus, *Bullying* 34; Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130). In line with this, school professionals participating in a study on identifying bullies also described them as "quicker to anger and sooner to use force than others" (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 96).

It is commonly said that bullies lack **empathy**, otherwise they could not torment their victims in such a cruel way. However, before focusing on empathy, **emotional intelligence (EI)** will be discussed. "Emotional intelligence involves the capacity to carry out reasoning in regard to emotions, and the capacity of emotions to enhance reasoning. More specifically, EI is said to involve the ability to perceive and accurately express emotion, to use emotion to facilitate thought, to understand emotions, and to manage emotions for emotional growth" (Brackett et al. 1388-1389). In short, emotional intelligence is "a set of abilities for perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions" (García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 584). Studies on EI have shown that high EI serves as a protective factor for the development of aggressive behaviours, as EI correlates negatively with aggression. People with high EI "are more likely to be psychosocially adjusted", they have less conflicts in social relationships and function better in social settings. The findings of several studies on the relationship between aggressive behaviour and EI were consistent across different age groups and cultural contexts. In respect to bullying perpetration, it was shown that students with "greater difficulties in understanding others' emotions were more likely to

bully their classmates" and that low emotional understanding, and low emotional control and management lead to exhibiting more aggressive behaviour (García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 584-591). After gaining an insight into emotional intelligence, it can be seen why it needed to be discussed before asking about the significance of empathy for bullying –- children need to be able to recognise and understand others' emotions before being able to feel and show empathy. However, it is important to point out that the processes of understanding emotion and empathy are closely intertwined, which can also be seen when taking a closer look at the concept of empathy (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 78).

Empathy is a multi-dimensional construct and has a cognitive component, which "includes the ability to recognize and understand children's emotions", and an affective component, which "refers to the ability to share or experience others' emotions" (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd. 78). Empathy has been acknowledged as a significant individual characteristic in theories on the development of antisocial and criminal behaviour. It is believed that empathy encourages altruistic and prosocial behaviour and simultaneously inhibits or even prevents behaving in a way that causes harm to another person (Kemp et al. 6). Youths tend to show less aggressive or even delinquent behaviour if they are sensitive to the feelings of other people and take them into account (Kemp et al. 14). As a result, it can be said that people who are empathic are less likely to be bullies (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130). In recent years, it has often been discussed if bullies have deficits in one of the two dimensions of empathy, or even both. Although only little research has been conducted in this direction, it points towards the former. Bullies do not target their peers at random, they select those who they perceive as vulnerable and easy targets. It has been shown that perpetrators are well aware of their victims' feelings but bully them anyway. Therefore, they do not experience problems in the cognitive component of empathy (Ettekal,

Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd. 79; Griffin and Gross 384- 385). For instance, the findings of Caravita, Di Blasio, and Salmivalli's study on empathy and bullying (referred to in Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 79) suggest that "popular girls were using their emotion knowledge to select targets for bullying who would further their social standing or help them maintain their social status", since the researchers found a moderation effect of empathy and social status "such that cognitive (but not affective) empathy was positively related to bullying for popular girls – but not for unpopular girls". In another study, it was also shown that aggressive boys differed from non-aggressive boys only in affective empathy (Kemp et al. 7), and further research on the issue also suggests that the "lack of affective empathy contributes to antisocial behaviour", for instance Wied, Goudena, and Matthys (referred to in Kemp et al. 7) found that "clinically referred boys with externalizing behaviour disorders scored lower than age-matched normal control boys on […] affective empathy". To sum up, being low in affective empathy might constitute a risk factor for future involvement in bullying behaviour, whereas being high in the affective dimension of empathy serves as a protective factor (Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias 63,70).

People behave in different ways not only because of their capacity for empathy. Every day, a myriad of decisions is made and every single one of them is influenced by the **attitudes, morals and values** of the people who make them. So, people choose one way to achieve a goal from an indefinite number of possibilities and in some cases, people make the conscious decision to bully to get what they want, although bullying is commonly considered abominable behaviour. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that perpetrators do not share the common world view that bullying is morally reprehensible and that their deviant belief puts them at risk to engage in this negative behaviour. However, this explanation is too simplistic. Whereas it has been found that bullies view the use of violence more positively than people not involved in bullying

(Griffin and Gross 384) and that their "tolerant attitudes towards anti-social and aggressive behaviour […] as well as towards bullying […] are positively associated with being a bully" (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131), most bullies do not lack "adequate moral knowledge and reasoning skills" (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 80). Those children who bully are indeed able to recognize when other children intend to hurt them, but they do not judge the harmful intentionality of their own behaviour. Hence, they only access their moral knowledge when it is to their advantage. When they act aggressively, they disregard their behaviour as a moral issue and rather use personal or social conventional reasoning to evaluate their behaviour (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 80). The discrepancy between one's moral knowledge and their actions can be explained through Bandura's mechanisms of moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is the term for a set of social-cognitive mechanisms that are used in order to reduce the moral consequences of one's behaviour, for instance guilt or shame, and to rationalise selfish, aggressive behaviour. Immoral behaviour can be justified or rationalised through "cognitive restructuring"; "displacement or diffusion of responsibility"; "minimizing, ignoring or misconstruing negative consequences" or "dehumanising and blaming the victim" (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 80-81).

The following table is a summary of Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd's (80) description of the four processes and will provide a quick overview of them:

mechanism	description	examples
cognitive restructuring	a) moral justification of actions b) use of euphemistic labels c) advantageous comparisons – comparing one's actions to even worse deeds	a) I only protected myself b) It was just a joke c) I only hit him once, last week Jimmy beat him up really bad.
displacement or diffusion of responsibility	reducing personal responsibility by minimising one's role in the harmful behaviour	Everyone does it.
minimising, ignoring or misconstruing negative consequences	painting a different picture of the outcome of the behaviour	No one got hurt.
dehumanising, blaming the victim	the harmful behaviour is attributed to the victim, it is suggested that the victim deserved to be the target of this behaviour	He provoked me. She annoyed me.

Table 1 Mechanisms of moral disengagement

To finish this section, it needs to be mentioned very briefly that also sexist, competitive and homophobic attitudes increase the probability of showing bullying behaviour (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131). On the other hand, granting high importance to religion seems to function as a protective factor (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131).

The results of research on **social competence**, the next predictor that will be discussed, are mixed. In some studies, social skills were a negative predictor of maladjustment and being able to adjust well in social situations was negatively related to being a bully. Furthermore, evidence was found that social cognition and coping skills stand in negative relation to being a bully. Then again, other studies indicated that bullies have at least greater social competence than their victims and that they use their social competence to perpetuate their dominance over their victims (Álvarez-

García, García, and Núñez 130-131; Cook et al. 78). However, the findings in regard to **anti-social behaviour problems** are consistent. Youths showing anti-social behaviour are more often involved in bullying than those without behavioural problems. For instance, having run away from home, involvement in physical fights, cruelty towards animals or people, theft, and high consumption of alcohol or drugs have been associated with bullying perpetration (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130).

When looking at an individual's whole **personality** and how it might predict bullying, it is very helpful to use the five-factor model of personality (FFM) developed by Costa and McCrae for orientation. The FFM is an "empirical generalization about the covariation of personality traits" and, to a great extent covers what psychologists view as personality (McCrae and Costa 139). It divides our personality into five broad dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness and Conscientiousness. It has been found that bullies often show higher levels of Neuroticism and Extraversion and rather lower levels in Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, as they are focused on their own goals and do not take the feelings of their victims into consideration. The higher level of extraversion can be observed in the bullies' behaviour in social situations, as they initiate conflicts and dominate their victims (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias 63; Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130).

After learning that youths high in Neuroticism are more likely to be involved in bullying, it is interesting to take a closer look at **self-esteem**. Unfortunately, the results of research in this area are inconclusive and the relationship between the two constructs has proven complex. In general, two hypotheses concerning bullying behaviour and self-esteem have been formulated and evidence for both suppositions have been found. The first hypothesis suggests that individuals engaging in aggressive behaviour have low self-esteem, whereas the second hypothesis says that aggressive children

have high self-esteem and bully when their self-esteem is threatened or disputed (Tsaousis 194). In any case, it would be too simplistic to assume that either high self-esteem or low self-esteem alone cause this type of inappropriate behaviour. Unfortunately, only few studies on self-esteem and bullying exist, but some have pointed in the direction of self-perception variables functioning as a moderator between aggression and self-esteem. The relevance of one of these variables, locus of control (LOC) will be discussed in the following. Locus of control is considered a substantial element of our personality and, as already said above, influences the relation between one's aggressive behaviour and self-esteem (Wilderdom). The concept of LOC is from the field of psychology and refers to individuals' perceptions about the causes underlying major events in their lives (Wilderdom). It describes the "extent to which people believe they have power over events in their lives", hence, someone with an internal LOC thinks they can influence what is happening to them, whereas someone with an external LOC believes they cannot control anything that happens (Fournier). Having an internal LOC has proven beneficial in various respects, for instance, it is related to academic success and emotional well-being. In contrast, an external LOC often has negative consequences, for instance, it increases the risk for suffering from depression or showing aggressive behaviour. Research has further shown that high self-esteem has rather been associated with an internal LOC and low self-esteem with an external LOC. One explanation why individuals with low self-esteem and external locus of control engage in more aggressive behaviour could be that they try to regain control in their lives by using violence, hence, their behaviour can be seen as a coping mechanism. Another reason could be that hostility is used as a shield for their low self-worth. To tie up loose ends, an external LOC and low self-esteem appear to put individuals at risk for exhibiting aggressive behaviour, and both variables together

increase the risk even further, however, more research is needed to shed light on this complex issue (Wallace et al. 213-219).

Mental health seems to have an influence on the development of bullying behaviour, as there are a number of mental health problems that have been brought into relation with being a bully. In Cook's et al. (65,71,75) meta-analysis of 153 studies with the focus on bully status groups, externalising behaviour and other-related cognitions (negative attitudes and beliefs about peers) were found to be the strongest predictor of being a bully. In addition to externalising problems, Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez's (131, 134) review of 85 articles on risk factors for bullying showed that also internalising problems in relation to depressive symptoms are connected to it. Furthermore, negative feelings towards oneself, anxiety and depression have been found to increase the likelihood of becoming a bully (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131).

There is only one subject matter left that is briefly going to be mentioned here, before looking at the factors that put children at a higher risk for becoming victims. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss further individual risk factors or to examine the above-mentioned ones in more detail. The issue not yet discussed is a person's **prior relationship with bullying**. It is the case that having been a bully in the past increases the risk for showing this type of behaviour again in the future (Àlvarez-García, García, and Núñez 134).

2.3.1.2. Who are the victims? Variables increasing the likelihood of becoming the target of peer harassment

The last variable discussed in relationship with bullying perpetration, a child's **prior experience with bullying**, is also relevant in this section. If a child was the victim of peer harassment in the past, the risk of becoming a victim once again in the future increases (Kljakovic and Hunt 138). Sapouna et al. (225) even found that children who have been victimised at some point were six times more likely to be harassed at a later point in their life than children with no previous exposure to bullying. In general, victim status seems to be something that remains rather stable over time, which is extremely problematic (Griffin and Gross 386, 390).

However, why are some children more likely to become a victim of bullying in the first place? One risk factor may be the child's **temperament or character traits**. Most bullied children can be labelled as passive victims, which means they are rather anxious, quiet, distressed, withdrawn, cautious, sensitive, insecure and shy. All these qualities signal their tormenters that they will not retaliate if attacked, which therefore make them easy targets. (Olweus *Bullying* 54-57; Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288). The above-mentioned attributes belong to the character trait Neuroticism which shares a common underlying structure with negative affectivity. Hence, children that score high on Neuroticism or negative affectivity can be at an elevated risk for being victimised, as bullies pick up on their insecurities and "nervous temperament and appearance" (Hansen et al. 384).

Having outlined that a great number of victims possess the previously listed character traits which do not present them as very self-confident, it is only legitimate to ask if there exists a relationship between **self-esteem** and victimisation. Indeed, a strong negative correlation between these two constructs has been found (Griffin and Gross

386, Tsaousis 188, Fekkes et al. 82). Children with high self-esteem tend to be bullied less than children with low self-esteem, whereas the relationship between self-esteem and victimisation varies across age. Evidence points into the direction of the relationship being stronger in childhood and decreasing in adolescence (Tsaousis 195). As with other character traits, "individuals with feelings of low self-esteem attract negative attention from peers [as their behaviour implies] feelings of insignificance and cautiousness" and that they are not likely to stand up for themselves or fight back (Tsaousis 188). However, these findings need to be viewed with caution. Although a considerable number of studies found an either strong positive or negative connection to victimisation, more longitudinal studies are needed to support the causal relationship between the constructs (Tsaousis 188).

The next two risk factors that are going to be discussed are closely intertwined, **social competence** and **peer status**. In their meta-analysis of 153 studies on predictors of bully status group for school-aged children and adolescence, Cook et al. (71) found these two predictors to be the ones with the largest effect sizes in regard to victimisation. First, addressing **social competence**, the lack of adequate social skills, difficulties in solving social problems and social maladjustment can constitute serious problems for the children and earn them negative attention and lead to bullying (Cook 76, 78; Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288). It is believed that "weaknesses in interpersonal and social skills are particularly unique to victims" (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 99-100). Furthermore, victims often lack in the use of adaptive coping strategies, stay passive and apparently do not make "cognitive or behavioural efforts […] to manage or overcome stressful [bullying] situations" (Hansen et al. 385). However, staying passive does not mean that victims lack coping strategies per se. When we see coping in respect to bullying situations not as a trait, but rather as a process, the children's appraisal of the situation can be taken into account, which is

crucial since a child assessment of the situation influences their coping response. Most of the time, victims believe they cannot control their environment or the bullying situation, in other words they have an **external locus of control** (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 95; Hansen et al. 385). It is very likely that their belief of the insignificance of their actions stems from the power imbalance that exists between victim and tormentor. Therefore, they use avoidant coping or similar strategies like passive coping or non-engagement, which just seems like them not trying to dissolve the situation, whereas in fact they are trying to (Hansen et al. 385). As already mentioned, bullies select their targets carefully, which means that regarding **peer status**, children who find themselves rejected by classmates or in a low-power position in their class or peer group, are at a higher risk for being chosen as targets (Salmivalli 113; Cook et al. 71; Sapouna et al. 236). Since victims are often viewed as unpopular by the majority of the students (Sapouna et al. 236) they are often socially isolated or have only few friends who can offer them emotional support (Griffin and Gross 386). In regard to the quality of the **social support** students receive, research has obtained interesting findings, for instance that receiving uncompassionate or unsympathetic social support is worse than receiving no support at all. Parental social support can even help students to not internalise distress so much (Hansen et al. 385).

Not internalising distress is crucial since experiencing **mental health problems** also puts students at a higher risk for being bullied (Hansen et al. 385). Victims more often suffer from depression or anxiety, which fall under the category of internalising disorders, than non-victimised students. However, although internalising disorders are correlated with victimisation, it needs to be kept in mind that the precise impact of the bullying on the mental health (problems) of the victims can often not be established (Griffin and Gross 386,390; Kljakovic and Hunt 141; Alvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131).

The same applies for **somatic symptoms** that victims often complain about. Research showed that bullied children were "at [a] significantly higher risk for developing somatic complaints", but the lines between the somatic symptoms that existed before the bullying and the ones that are caused by it are often blurry. To put it in other words, children who have a history of depression, anxiety or other internalising disorders are at a higher risk of being bullied. Moreover, the conclusion was drawn that somatic symptoms are caused directly by bullying, but victims also experience other symptoms of psychological distress that precede and follow the harassment (Hansen et al. 385). Besides internalising problems and experiencing somatic symptoms, victims more often show **externalising behaviour**, blame themselves for their problems or in general, possess **negative self-related cognitions** than their non-victimised peers (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 95; Kljakovic and Hunt 138).

Apart from one's personality traits, **being different** than the majority of students for any reason can also incite bullying. First of all, physical differences like appearance (disability) and weight (obesity) can lead to being teased (Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288; Bullying.NoWay!). Moreover, one's sexual orientation can be the reason why they are harassed. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) students report being bullied more frequently (Alvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131; Monks et al. 148). Further reasons for becoming a target constitute **ethnicity, culture and religion**. In a large U.S. survey with approximately 15,000 participants, 8% of students reported to be bullied once a week or even more because of their religion or race. Further studies on this issue found even higher numbers. As an example, in "surveys in middle schools in New York and New Jersey, 40 to 45 percent of African American, Latino, and European American students and 60 to 65 percent of Asian American students reported that their peers had harassed or discriminated against them because of their race or ethnicity" (Way and Hughes 2007 in Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288). It should

be explicitly mentioned here that bullying someone because of their race has "profound educational, emotional, and physical consequences" and is a federal offense (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a in Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288). In addition to discussing many important risk factors and general characteristics of victims in detail, I want to share an excerpt from Olweus' guide (*Bullying* 54-56) to identifying possible bullying victims. In the guide the researcher draws attention to the signs teachers or parents should look out for at school or home, respectively:

At school

Children or young people who are being bullied may display one or (usually) several of the following signs:

Primary signs (directly and clearly related to victimisation)

- are (repeatedly) teased in a nasty way, called names (may also have a derogatory nickname), taunted, belittled, ridiculed, intimidated, degraded, threatened, given orders, dominated, subdued
- are made fun of and laughed at in a derisive and unfriendly way
- get picked on, pushed around, shoved, punched, hit, kicked (and are not able to defend themselves adequately)
- are involved in "quarrels" or "fights" in which they are fairly defenceless and from which they try to withdraw (or maybe crying)
- have their books, money, or other belongings taken, damaged or scattered around
- have bruises, injuries, cuts, scratches, or torn clothing that cannot be given a natural explanation (and have some of the general characteristics listed below)

Secondary signs (link to victimisation is often not that direct and strong)

- are (often) alone and excluded from the peer group during breaks and lunch time. Do not seem to have a single good friend in class.
- are chosen among the last in team games
- try to stay close to the teacher or other adults during breaks
- have difficulty speaking up in class and give an anxious or insecure impression
- appear distressed, unhappy, depressed, tearful
- show sudden or gradual deterioration of school work

At home

Primary signs (directly and clearly related to victimisation)

- come from school with torn or disordered clothing, with damaged books
- have bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches that cannot be given a natural explanation

Secondary signs (link to victimisation is often not that direct and strong)

- do not bring classmates or other peers home after school and seldom spend time in the homes or playgrounds of other classmates
- may not have a single good friend to share free time with (play, shopping, sports and musical events, chatting on the phone, etc.)
- are seldom invited for parties and may not be interested in arranging parties themselves (because they expect nobody wants to come)
- appear afraid or reluctant to go to school in the morning, have poor appetite, repeated headaches, or stomach pains (particularly in the morning)
- choose an "illogical" route for going to and from school
- have restless sleep with bad dreams, may cry in their sleep
- lose interest in school work and get lower grades
- appear unhappy, sad, depressed, or show unexpected mood shifts with irritability and sudden outbursts of temper
- request or steal extra money from family (to accommodate the bullies)

(Olweus, *Bullying* 54-56)

Naming factors that put children at risk for becoming victims of bullying or even painting a picture of a typical victim is often frowned upon and concerns in regard to this practice are often voiced. However, educationalists need to be able to identify the groups of children that find themselves at a higher risk, in order to spot incidents of bullying more easily. It is true that listing risk factors may be stigmatising, but otherwise more complex incidents of bullying that are difficult to spot may be overlooked (Hansen et al. 386). Moreover, it might be true that "once a bullying culture is operating, those who are somehow different…are likely to be singled out", however, the nature of bullying is random and indiscriminate, and this simply means "no one is immune" (Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288) and everyone can become a victim out of the blue. It can happen that none of the examined risk factors apply to a child and yet, they are harassed, although another child, who is at a higher risk for becoming a victim, never has to go through this cruel experience.

It is interesting to note that some victims are more **resilient** than others. Despite experiencing harassment, they function better than expected and show a positive development. These victims thrive, and it seems like the bullying does not affect them as much as other victims. Most researchers on resilience are in agreement that

resilience should not be viewed as a personality trait per se, but rather as something that develops over time through healthy and positive relationships with family members or peers (Sapouna and Wolke 997-998). In principle, there are three basic sources that can protect victims from the harmful effects of bullying: individual characteristics, family environment and community. In respect to individual characteristics, high self-esteem and autonomy are among the personality traits that are helpful. In terms of family environment, it is beneficial if the victim's relationship with their parents is warm and harmonious, that there is no conflict and the child is not neglected. Concerning community, victims have an advantage if their interactions with peers are "characterized by trust, support and absence of conflict", and their neighbourhood and school enjoy a good reputation (Sapouna and Wolke 998). In a longitudinal study, Sapouna and Wolke (997) observed 3136 adolescences in Scotland for one year and tried to "identify individual, family and peer factors that predict fewer than expected levels of depression and delinquency following experiences of bullying victimization". The results, leaving individual factors aside, showed that the context youths find themselves in played an essential part in how they dealt with victimisation. For instance, adolescents who were less depressed than other victims reported very little conflict with parents and furthermore, they were not victimised by siblings. Similar results were obtained for adolescents who showed only very minor levels of delinquency compared to other victims, they experienced no sibling victimisation and by and large did not have trouble with their parents (Sapouna and Wolke 1003).

As has just been established, a child's surrounding can make them more resilient to bullying or function as a buffer against its harmful effects. Unfortunately, one's surrounding can also constitute a risk factor. Individual factors alone are not enough to determine if someone is at a higher risk for being bullied. The likelihood of bullying incidents depends on "complex social situations that are not easily summarized in

terms of […] single variable(s) that hold […] across all contexts" (Hart, Hart, and Miethe 66). Therefore, the next section will do both, <u>provide information on</u> contexts that facilitate bullying perpetration and also address which contextual influences increase children's risk for becoming victims. The relevant risk factors will broadly be grouped into family, school and community variables.

2.3.2. Contextual risk factors

2.3.2.1. Family variables

Starting with the **socio-economic status** of a family, economic disadvantage can have negative consequences for children as it heightens the risk for becoming a bully or victim. Children made lower experiences with bullying if their house was owned by their family, had at least three bedrooms, they had their own room to sleep in and the family owned two or more cars – those were the findings of a survey in which 26,000 children from the age of 11 to 16 in South Wales participated (Lambert et al. 269, 276-277). However, most of the 85 research articles on risk factors for bullying and victimisation studied in a meta-analysis by Álvarez-García, García and Núñez (132) showed no relationship between the socio-economic status of the family and bullying. One explanation for these deviant findings could be that the socio-economic status of the family does not constitute a risk factor in itself but is a determinant of other aspects in the child's life that play a role. For instance, the school a child goes to or the neighbourhood it grows up in is often related to the family's financial well-being. More in this respect will be discussed later on when looking at school and community risk factors

In terms of **family structure**, also mixed results were obtained, although the findings point in the direction that a less traditional family structure, in which children are not

living with both of their biological parents, slightly increases the risk for showing bullying behaviour (Álvarez-García, García and Núñez 133).

When leaving the circumstances in which a family finds itself aside, and looking at the relationships between the members, it quickly becomes clear that how a child perceives their family environment has a lasting effect on their risk for becoming a bully or victim (Cook et al. 76). To begin with, it has long been known that the **attachment relationship** between the primary caregiver and a child is essential for the child's relationships later in life. For a child that has experienced secure attachment to its caregiver, it will be easier to develop positive and trust-based relationships with others. On the contrary, insecurely attached children often struggle to build up trust and are more distressed or fearful in unfamiliar situations. Hence, childhood attachment can serve as a risk or a protective factor for becoming involved in bullying situations (Hansen et al. 384).

It has briefly been mentioned at the end of subsection 2.3.1.2 that a loving home environment helps victims to be more resilient and can act as a buffer from internalising distress, however, a negative environment has serious repercussions for children. In the worst-case scenario, it is not only parental neglect that children suffer from. **Violence** is still a day-to-day reality for many children, even though it should be crystal clear that regardless of the circumstances, physical, verbal or emotional abuse of children is never acceptable. When children are disciplined physically, for example slapped for breaking a rule, or violence in general is used in the family, children are more likely to show bullying behaviour towards peers (Espelage and De La Rue 3,5; Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon 326, 331; Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133). Since children look up to their parents or other adults they feel close to, they often identify with them and, therefore, find their aggressive or violent behaviour acceptable,

especially when nobody steps in and objects to this type of behaviour. These observations are in line with the social learning theory of Albert Bandura, which suggests that humans learn from observing and analysing the behaviour of others. Applied to the familial setting, this means that children model or imitate other family members' behaviour and hence, are more likely to show aggressive and bullying behaviour if they witness it regularly (Espelage and De La Rue 5; Higuita-Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 68,78). On the contrary, the risk of becoming a bully is substantially reduced for youths who spend most of their time with adults who believe in nonviolent strategies to resolve conflicts (Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon 331).

It is the home environment as a whole that matters. Family plays a pivotal role in a child's life, the actions and values of family members shape a child's moral concepts, its identity and view of the world (Majcherova, Hajduová, and Andrejkovič 463). Unfortunately, many factors in the **family environment** can exert a negative influence and cause a person to treat others badly or even act aggressively, for instance conflict with parents, little or no warmth in the relationship between children and parents, low parental support or also indifference to their children's schoolwork, friends or activities constitute risk factors for becoming a bully (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133; Cook 76; Espelage and De La Rue 4-5; De Kemp et al. 6). An interesting finding that needs to be mentioned here is that the character trait empathy, which has been discussed in relation with individual risk factors (subsection 2.3.1.1), seems to be a moderator variable for parental support and antisocial behaviour. Research on this subject showed that ineffective parenting did not affect "callous and unemotional" children (Wootton et al. and Oxford, Cavell and Hughes referred to in Kemp et al. 6). Furthermore, in agreement with the insights just mentioned, empathy also functions as a moderator between perceived parental support and aggressive and delinquent behaviour. In a longitudinal study conducted by Van der Graaff et al. (368), youths who

described their parents as supportive at age 14, showed less aggression at age 15 than youths whose parents did not support them as well, but strikingly, only if the youths were high in empathy. Vice versa, adolescents low in empathy were not able benefit from their parents' support as much. As a matter of fact, they acted even more aggressively and were more delinquent at age 15, when they experienced their parents as supportive the previous year (Van der Graaff et al. 368).

To sum up, the section above has shown that a child's homelife can serve as a risk or protective factor for becoming a victim or bully. Children whose parents show interest in their school life or other activities are less prone to become involved in bullying situations. However, the familial setting is only one of the three contextual risk factors that is examined in this thesis. Children spend a considerable amount of time at their respective schools and therefore, the role those institutions play should not be underestimated. The school context's significance for students' involvement in bullying has received much attention over the last years. Interesting findings in this respect will be presented subsequently (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Linstorm 495).

2.3.2.2. School variables

First of all, some of the most persisting myths regarding the school's influence on bullying need to be cleared up. There is no evidence that the **size of the school**, the **class size** or the **setting of the school**, whether urban nor rural, are significant for the occurrence of bullying (Monks et al. 147). However, it was found that the **school climate** is of great importance. To start with, delinquent behaviours, for instance fighting, verbal threats, carrying weapons or stealing, serve as an indicator for bullying. If there are more acts of delinquency in a school, more cases of peer harassment are reported (Higuita-Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 78). A meta-analysis of 36 studies that investigated the link between violence and school climate conducted by Steffgen et al.

(307) also found a moderate negative relationship between students' perception of the climate in their school and violence. Leaving violence aside, a school's climate can also suffer from a high rate of students with behavioural problems, a high concentration of students who come from poor families, many suspensions, or high student mobility, which means that a great number of students transfer in or out of the school during the year. Furthermore, a high student-teacher ratio has a negative influence on the climate in schools, as it makes seem school as a rather impersonal space and teachers cannot address students' individual needs as much as they would maybe like to. In fact, the just mentioned circumstances can be grouped together under the term school-level indicators of disorder and are all positively related with the occurrence of bullying (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Johnson 494; 505; Hart, Hart, and Miethe 47; Espelage and De La Rue 7). The finding that those signs of school physical disorder are related to higher levels of bullying is consistent with social disorganisation theory. The theory sees the school as "an important social context in young people's lives [which shapes] their opportunities for social interaction and interpersonal relationships" and believes that "violent or disorderly features in the ambient societal context [signal] potential danger or threat [and] shape aggressive behaviour" (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 385). In addition, "[the] lack of positive behavioural expectations" also has a negative effect on children's' behaviour (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 385). As a matter of fact, students who go to the same school often "share similar experiences regarding the perceptions of their school and the appropriateness of using aggression in response to frustrations" (Espelage and De La Rue 7). This highlights the need for schools to reflect strong disapproval for bullying behaviour and to communicate this disapproval to students in a clear way. By taking this action, this type of behaviour is discouraged and moreover, a safe environment, in which victims feel more supported, is created (Espelage and De La Rue 8).

Of course, it would be for the best if anti-bullying norms could be found in the **school policy**, as there are less incidents against peers in schools with "established rules and accepted regulations against bullying, anti-bullying and pro-victim attitudes" (Azeredo et al. 73). Such straightforward rules are crucial in reducing incidents of bullying (Monks et al. 147). Schools that only punish students, without having a policy, are only weakly associated with a lower number of bullies and not related at all to the number of bullying incidents (Lambert et al. 276-277). How the students perceive the school professionals is also pivotal in the operating of a bullying culture. If students believe that the school leadership is poor and that there is little cooperation or consensus among the teachers, they are more likely to harass their peers (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 385), however, if they feel that teachers encourage mutual respect and make them feel safe, incidents of bullying are less likely to occur (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 132). It is, indeed, the teachers, who can contribute greatly to a positive school climate. Students spend most of their time at school in class and if the **climate in the classroom** is supportive and they feel comfortable, violence is a rare appearance (Hart, Hart, and Miethe 48). **Teachers' attitudes and beliefs** about peer harassment transfer onto their students, their "beliefs permeate the classroom atmosphere", so to say (Espelage and De La Rue 6). If teachers make it clear that they do not tolerate bullying, it also influences the behaviour of their students in a positive way. However, if bullying behaviour is ignored or dismissed by the teacher it makes it more likely that students repeat their hurtful actions (Espelage and De La Rue 3; Monks et al. 147). Students' opinion also matters, if most of the students in class have a pro-bullying attitude, or even reinforce the bullies, incidents will increase in frequency. On the contrary, the opposite effect is achieved by supporting or defending victims (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131; Salmivalli 115). The importance of **students' attitude** on bullying becomes even more obvious when looking at recently collected data from 7000

students from 378 classrooms in Finland. 13% of the variation of victimisation in classrooms could be explained by differences between the classrooms (Salmivalli 116) and 10% of the variance in bullying behaviour is also due to classroom effects (Salmivalli 116). Those figures indicate that something in the class context either reinforces or inhibits peer harassment. In addition, the atmosphere in the classroom does not only influence bullying perpetration per se, but also bystanders' reaction to it. 35% of the variation in bystanders' defending behaviour lies in the difference between classroom norms. In order to understand better why bullying occurs and to prevent incidents, it is crucial to examine these "rule[s], value[s] or standard[s] shared by the members [of the school class] that prescribe […] appropriate, expected, or desirable attitudes and conduct in matters relevant to the group" (Turner 3 quoted in Salmivalli 117). It needs to be addressed that the group norms at times do not reflect youths' private attitudes. Some children condemn bullying but believe that their peers accept it and hence do not speak out. This phenomenon is called pluralistic ignorance and can be regarded as very problematic (Salmivalli 117; Sandstorm, Makover, and Bartini 196-215). Salmivalli (117) describes the dilemma in the following way:

> When very few children in a school class publicly challenge the behaviour of bullies or openly communicate their private attitudes to others, children might infer that the others think that bullying is OK (see Juvonen & Galvan, 2008). Such a misperceived norm might have an impact on their public reactions to bullying further fostering the "false" norm in the classroom.

In the best-case scenario, classmates value each other and reject any form of peer harassment. It is commonly known that children's behaviour at school is influenced by their relationship with their teachers and the classroom atmosphere in general. Teachers can contribute to create a safe learning environment for students by showing good **classroom management** (Azeredo et al. 65): In cohesive, supportive and friendly school classes, bullying happens less often (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos

208; Greif Green et al. 134; Hart, Hart, and Miethe 48). How teachers handle their classes has both a direct and indirect influence on bullying perpetration. If teachers make it clear that they do not tolerate this behaviour and incidents will have serious consequences for perpetrators, it has a direct effect on the prevalence of bullying. Indirectly, classroom management affects the social norms of the class and furthermore, the relationships between the peers, which then in turn facilitate or inhibit bullying perpetration (Espelage and De La Rue 6). Nevertheless, it is not enough to have a clear anti-bullying policy and manage incidents well. Teachers also need to pay attention to the levels of social comparison and competition in their classes, as highly competitive behaviour and students comparing themselves to each other continuously provide optimal conditions for bullying to thrive (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos 213-214). Effective strategies for creating a positive classroom atmosphere are among others seating arrangements and grouping strategies. Through changing the seating plan regularly and assigning students to groups, peer affiliations are promoted. In classrooms in which teachers show great competence in these respects, "higher ratios of liking to disliking, higher densities of friendships and weaker status hierarchies" are found (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos 208). As has already been briefly mentioned above, the **quality of students' relationship with teachers** is also of significance for their behaviour at school. If students perceive their teachers to be unsupportive, describe their relationship to their teachers as bad, and complain about poor communication channels between students and teachers, the risk for bullying increases (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos 213) Azeredo et al. 65; Higuita-Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 68 and 78). On the contrary, "teachers' support and good personal treatment towards students is a protective factor against [students] becoming [bullies]" (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 132).

Turning from the social aspect of the school to the individual student, it can be said that students with **academic trouble** or a **dislike for school** are at a greater risk of developing bullying behaviour, whereas being satisfied with one's school and having a feeling of belonging to the school function as protective factors (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 131-132; Cook et al. 71, 76; Griffin and Gross 385). The number of students who **use mental health services** has also been found to be an indicator for the likelihood of bullying perpetration in school (Greif Green 144). The more students make use of the mental health services that are offered at school, the more incidents of bullying can be observed in a school. These results hint in the direction that "the extent to which students in school experience psychological distress may be associated with individual experiences of being bullied" and that attention should be paid to students' overall feeling of well-being at school (Greif Green et al. 146). What makes bullying in school so harmful, is that victims cannot escape their difficult situation easily and the other students, including the perpetrators, cannot leave it either. The classroom, in which most of the bulling incidents in school take place, distinguishes itself from various other social settings through one important aspect – its involuntary membership (Salmivalli 116). Unfortunately, the phenomenon of bullying is not confined to the school context, students are also exposed to it in other social settings. Hence, the variables that put someone at risk for becoming involved in bullying or victimisation in the larger community, will be analysed next.

2.3.2.3. Community variables

To start with, a student is more likely to show bullying behaviour if they have **friends** with antisocial behaviour problems, or friends that themselves are bullies or delinquents, as peer norms exert a great influence on the members of a friend group (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133; Espelage and De La Rue 3). Evidence for

the effect that peer group socialisation has on bullying was found by Espelage et al. (2003, referred to in Salmivalli 116), who identified peer groups in middle-school and observed that the cliques that showed bullying behaviour at the start of research, increased their behaviour over the course of the year. The behaviour and attitudes of group members matter as they exert a reciprocal influence on each other (Salmivalli 116). A further possible explanation for the observed problem could be that "'bullying together' might provide a sense of cohesion in groups that lack high-quality friendships and genuine cohesiveness" (Garandeau and Cillessen 2006 quoted in Salmivalli 116). The harassment of other peers makes members of a friend group believe that they have something in common and they bond through humiliating others, which is seen as entertainment (Salmivalli 116). On the opposite, having several friends from the LGBT community serves as a protective factor for becoming a bully, since youths who socialise in this community typically have less prejudice towards people who are viewed as somehow different by the majority, which correlates positively with bullying perpetration (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133).

However, also other factors in a child's close surrounding can have a negative impact on it. Living in an insecure **neighbourhood** or having neighbourhood safety concerns are related to showing bullying behaviour (Higuita-Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 68). This may be due to the fact that children often observe violence or aggression and, as already discussed in the context of the family risk factors, then view this behaviour as normal and copy it (Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon 331-332). Finally, youths' **relationship with mass media and the internet** needs to be addressed. Spending many hours in front of a TV has been linked to an increased likelihood to show bullying behaviour. In regard to video games, findings are yet inconclusive. While some studies report that playing M-rated video games is associated with bullying, other studies have

not found statistically relevant predictors. However, surfing on the internet, as well as the exchange of email or phone calls at night or showing risky behaviour on the internet pose a threat for becoming a bully. Risky behaviours would for instance be "sending or publishing personal information, hanging pictures, using a webcam to chat with strangers" (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133).

2.3.3. Risk factors for cyberbullying

Adolescents are prone to risky behaviour and are therefore at risk for becoming involved in cyberbullying. The anonymity provided by the internet can tempt them to make bad decisions (Ang 40). All of the previously discussed risk factors are also relevant for cyberbullying, as being involved in bullying can also lead to becoming a cyberbully or a victim of electronic aggression (Cross et al. 112). Therefore, attention will only be drawn to four risk factors that are especially relevant for cyberbullying.

First of all, the risk factor **age** is different for cyberbullying. It has been already mentioned that bullying behaviour declines in adolescence. Cyberbullying, in contrast, flourishes from age 13 to 17, most likely as a result of increased time spent online (Cross et al. 111; Baldry et al. 40). Second, harassing someone online can be done **anonymously** and with **relative ease.** It is also likely that perpetrators experience less empathy towards their targets and are not aware of the consequences their behaviour has on them, as they do not even have to face their targets in order to inflict harm on them (Cross et al. 112). Third, inadequate **parental control** over their children's use of technology is related to antisocial online behaviour. The problem here is that adults often have difficulties to keep track of their offspring's online activities. Parents simply have no overview over the existing platforms, they are not as present on social media channels as their children, or do not use social media at all, which leaves parents in the dark about the endless ways for their children to communicate with others

nowadays (Baldry et al. 48; Cross et al. 112). Last, real life incidents of bullying differ from online harassment situations in that the harm that is inflicted on a person and the person's reaction is **time-delayed**. This "delay between the act (e.g. creating a fake website) and the outcome (e.g. sharing secrets with the school) [can give the perpetrator a] heightened sense of expectation and anticipation for the time when the target realises what has been done" (Cross et al. 113). This alone may be thrilling for the bully and the victim's response is largely uninteresting to them (Cross et al. 113).

The knowledge about potential risk factors can help to identify students or social situations that are susceptible to bullying early, and hence be beneficial in the prevention and intervention of peer harassment. After having analysed the risk factors in detail, the subsequent section will focus on the impact this hostile phenomenon can have on children and adolescents.

2.4. Effects of bullying on youths

Over the last years, the negative effects of bullying have been well-documented and short-term as well as long-term consequences have been found to stem from being involved in bullying in any manner (Hart, Hart, and Miethe 144). Acts of peer harassment do not only affect victims who find themselves on the receiving end of violence, but also perpetrators and unfortunately, bullying's influence does not end here (Kljakovic and Hunt 134). Situations of abuse also inflict harm on uninvolved students, who merely witness the harassment (Salmivalli 112; stopbullying.gov). As a result, schools are no longer perceived as safe learning spaces and the whole school climate suffers (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 127; Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon 326).

2.4.1. Impact of bullying on perpetrators

To start with, committing acts of peer harassment often correlates with other **violent or criminal behaviour**. Even after taking other major childhood risk factors into account, bullying behaviour in childhood or adolescence is significantly linked to involvement in delinquent acts and aggressive behaviour in adulthood (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 127; Azeredo et al. 66; Ttofi et al. 415; García-Sancho, Salguero, and, Fernández-Berrocal 585). Bullies more often drop out of school, experience conduct problems and are more frequently sentenced for a criminal offence (Cook et al. 66; Griffin and Gross 380; Kljakovic and Hunt 134; Sapouna and Wolke 997). Olweus (*Bullying* 36) discovered that 60% of the bullies who harassed someone between grade 6 and 9 were convicted of a felony before the age of 24, whereas around 40% of those 60% were even convicted three times. Unfortunately, bullies keep up their violent behaviour as adults and behave abusive "toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children" (stopbullying.gov). Bullies abuse towards their children might explain why the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development has identified an "inter-generational continuity of school bullying" (Ttofi et al. 406). Findings showed that a parent who was a bully at age 14, was more likely, at age 32, to be the father of a child, that also exhibited bullying behaviour (Ttofi et al. 406).

Besides acting more aggressively, bullies more often turn to **substances** like alcohol or drugs than uninvolved peers and are at a greater risk to consume those substances in harmful amounts. The consummation of alcohol or drugs in adolescence often leads to abuse as adults. The negative consequences of this harmful behaviour should be clear, and it comes as no surprise that bullies report **poorer health** than peers (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 396). Harassing peers is also associated with **mental health problems**. It needs to be mentioned that bullies experience mental health problems to

a lesser extent than victims, however, depression, internalising problems and several other psychiatric problems are common (Cook et al. 66; García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585; Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 386). A further effect can be that bullies experience difficulties in maintaining close relationships with peers and often suffer from loneliness or poor social and emotional adjustment (Griffin & Gross 380). This seems to continue far into adulthood, as school bullies often report poor marital relations (García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585). However, not only social relationships constitute a problem for bullies, low-academic performance and absenteeism from school are also often reported (García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585; Griffin and Gross 380). All of the effects discussed above have serious repercussions for bullies as they continue to influence perpetrators lives even after their years at school, even academic performance, which youths often do not see as important at the time.

2.4.2. Impact of bullying on victims

In recent years, incidents of bullying have often been portrayed in the media, whereas reports are mostly in connection with stories of youths committing **suicide** because of the severe harassment they had to go through (stopbullying.gov). When thinking about suicide and bullying, it is mostly assumed that only victims are at a greater risk, although bullies also experience more problems in this area than uninvolved peers (Lubell and Vetter 168). Thankfully, the greater part of pupils does not have thoughts of suicide or show suicidal behaviour. However, bullying does put children and youths at increased risk of suicide or suicidal ideation (stoppbullying.gov). The latter poses a threat insofar as that thoughts about suicide do not only lead to suicide, they can also cause perpetration of violent attacks against other students, as could be learned from a number of recent tragic events all over the world (Lubell and Vetter 167). Data

collected about 37 school shootings showed that suicidal ideation or behaviour was exhibited by 78% of the shooters prior or during the attack. In more than half of the examined cases, shooters had not shown any prior violent behaviour (Lubell and Vetter 168). To put it in a nutshell, suicidal ideation can lead to violent behaviour, which can have irrevocable consequences in extreme cases.

An analysis of 15 school shooting cases in the US in the 1990s has shown that 12 shooters, indeed, had been bullied and that children might try to retaliate through such extreme measures (stopbullying.gov). In other cases, children turn against themselves. Also, thoughts about suicide often precede the act itself and bullying often is one of the reasons why children try to end their lives (Azeredo et al. 66; Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 93; Cook et al. 66; Sapouna and Wolke 997). It may be true that many interrelated factors, like home background, heartbreak or low academic performance can contribute to a youth's suicide, but in a great number of cases that were analysed, these factors varied widely, and many children did not experience problems at home, leaving without question that bullying was the constant that connected these tragic deaths (Rigby *What to do*, 56-57). It is often assumed that only adolescents try to kill themselves, a suicide attempt of an eight-year old girl living in Australia showed something different. When asked about why she wanted to end her life, she named frustration with her achievement in school, but also severe bullying and not being accepted by her peers as reasons for her attempt. She also had complained about being repeatedly harassed at school prior to the incident (Rigby *What to do*, 56-57).

In general, bullying is a trigger for many **mental health problems**, for instance depression, anxiety, emotional distress, psychotic symptoms or even psychosomatic symptoms, for instance changes in sleeping and eating patterns (Azeredo et al. 66; García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585; Griffin and Gross 380;

Hansen et al. 385; Higuita-Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 70; Kljakovic and Hunt 134; Monks et al. 148; Sapouna and Wolke 997; stopbullying.gov). Victimised students are often referred to psychiatric services, and depression is diagnosed in 70% of the referrals (Griffin and Gross 380). It is assumed that the link between internalising problems and becoming a target is bidirectional, since individuals with internalising problems are less likely to stand up to their tormenters and bullies use this to their advantage (Modin, Låftman and Östberg 385). Large-scale studies indeed have shown that the most common reaction to being bullied are anger and sadness, whereas anger was a more common response in boys (63%) and sadness in girls (61%) (*Rigby, What to do* 50). These findings are more problematic for girls. Feeling sad about bullying puts them at a psychological disadvantage, as anger constitutes a more adaptive response. Furthermore, girls are more likely to blame themselves for being harassed, especially when bullies exclude them from a friend group. This may be due to the social conditioning girls have been exposed to in the past, though thankfully there has been a change and girls are nowadays raised to be more assertive (Rigby, *What to do*, 52-53).

Self-esteem is also often diminished or destroyed completely through bullying. It is important for young students to have few conflicts with peers, to stand their ground and have the feeling of doing an overall good job at school. Conflicts or the failure to stand their ground affects them deeply. If there is a noticeable hierarchy in a school, the potential of feeling inferior or as being despised by everyone is great for victims of bullying. What adds to the problem is that young children have not yet had the time to develop interests and skills that are beneficial for their sense of competence. This is the reason why they depend so much on their self-esteem, their relationships with peers and especially on how they are treated by them (Rigby*, What to do* 50). It is often discussed if low self-esteem precedes or follows harassment. Findings are similar as

for internalising problems, the relation between bullying and self-esteem often seems to be bidirectional in that low self-esteem can precede and follow bullying (Rigby*, What to do* 50).

Victims of bullying often agree with these statements regarding self-esteem:

- I feel I don't have much to be proud of
- At times I think I am no good at all
- I wish I could have more respect for myself
- All in all, I am inclined to think I am a failure (Rigby*, What to do* 50)

Students not directly involved in bullying situations on the other hand agree more often with these statements:

- I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others
- I am able to do things as well as most people
- On the whole, I am satisfied with myself (Rigby*, What to do* 50)

Moreover, feelings of **loneliness, defencelessness, hopelessness, self-pitying and low levels of social satisfaction** are more often experienced by bullied children (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 93; Griffin and Gross 380; Kljakovic and Hunt 134, stopbullying.gov). It is not uncommon for victimised students to lose interest in activities or show social maladjustment (Griffin and Gross 380; stopbullying.gov). Without doubt, there is a negative effect on victims' social relationships. As with self-esteem, it is difficult to say if **having few or no friends** at all precedes bullying or is caused by it. However, it can be said that bullied youths often have only few friends, and that bullying can cause loss of friendships and a deepening of victims' feelings of isolation (Rigby*, What to do* 51-52; Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon 326). In addition, **social anxiety** sometimes is a result of severe bullying. Psychological scares often leave victims unable to commit to close, intimate relationships at a later stage in life (Rigby*, What to do* 58-61). In accordance with these findings, targets of aggression often perceive their quality of life as rather low, even years after escaping the harassment (Higuita-

Gutiérrez and Cardona-Arias 70). A serious impact on **general health** has also been reported (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 396). The stress resulting from bullying can manifest itself in headaches, stomach-aches and sleeping difficulties (García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585; Monks et al. 148). Recent studies in the field of neurobiology even suggest that experiencing abuse "can become biologically embedded in the physiology of [a] developing person, placing him/her at risk for poor health and earlier death" Vaillancourt and McDougall 1177). Changes in the DNA methylation have been associated with severe experiences of violence. Through this epigenetic process, individuals' future responses to problematic situations can differ from past ones (Vaillancourt and McDougall 1177).

In relation to students' **academic performance**, findings show different results. Bullying can make it hard for students to concentrate in class and lead to academic failure and a desire to skip school (Rigby, *What to do* 54; Sapouna and Wolke 997; García-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernández-Berrocal 585). On the other hand, the avoidance of social situations and after-school activities may lead students to focus on a more introverted lifestyle which maybe reading constitutes a great part of. Hence, some victims excel in school. Unfortunately, this outstanding performance in school "occurs at the expense of adequate emotional and social development (Rigby *What to do*, 54).

One harmful consequence of harassment is **substance abuse**. Youths that are victimised are at an elevated risk to use substances like drugs or alcohol more often than youths not exposed to peer harassment (Valdebenito, Ttofi, and Eisner 142). It was shown that being a victim of bulling at one point was associated with marijuana use later in adolescence. Especially victims with poor self-regulatory processes or coping skills may think they benefit from using certain substances to deal with painful

memories, feelings or cognitions related to their victimisation. Cannabis might be used to feel relaxed or to reduce negative feelings, for instance personal inadequacy or powerlessness. However, the use of drugs as a coping strategy only brings temporary relief and is harmful in the long-term, as the need for substance use increases over time and can cause dependence. Moreover, drugs only suppress negative feelings and, as soon as their influence wears off, the painful memories resurface. It is also a possibility that substance use can lead to victimisation, since the cognitive impairment that happens when drugs are consumed and the "possible exposure to deviant peers or dangerous settings" the use of drugs is often related to, put victims at risk (Maniglio 257).

2.4.3. Impact of bullying on bully-victims

The last group that is directly involved in bullying are bully-victims. Those youths find themselves on both ends of the continuum, they are perpetrators themselves, as well as harassed by others. Most of the times, they are the target of peer aggression first, and then take their frustration out on other students since they feel that retaliation against their own aggressors is futile and will cause them even more problems (Sapouna et al. 227). It can be said that this subgroup of youths tends to be worst off (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 386), as they experience the harmful effects of both, being a bully and a victim. Chronic bully-victims are much more likely than mere bullies or victims to behave continuously violent and hostile towards their peers, carry weapons or get incarcerated for delinquent behaviours. However, they are also at a greater risk of inflicting harm on themselves than any other group involved in bullying (Cook et al. 66; Sapouna et al. 227).

2.4.4. Impact of bullying on bystanders

Bullying not only affects victims and aggressors, it also has an influence on those who are involuntarily exposed to these acts of aggression. The majority of students does not like to witness peer harassment (Wolk 1). The occurrence of bullying in a school can decrease other students' well-being, lead to elevated levels of stress and the fear of becoming the next target (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 386-387). Higher levels of tobacco, alcohol and drug use, as well as slightly increased levels of mental health problems including anxiety and depression, have been found in students who are often exposed to bullying situations (stopbullying.gov). In addition, research has shown that stressors, including bullying, in the school-environment can cause psychosomatic problems (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 386-387). It is interesting that students' physiological and psychological reactions to bullying exposure are comparable to those that occur in life threatening experiences, such as for instance natural catastrophes (Werth et al. 295). Some bystanders that witness episodes have, of course, been victims themselves at one point. Those witnesses "experience higher social maladjustment than non-victimised bystanders" (Werth et al. 295). Whether or not students have made previous experiences with bullying, seeing someone being harassed almost always puts them into an uncomfortable psychological state, since most of the time, they do not intervene although they know that what is happening is wrong. They feel uneasy because their actions do not resemble their internal code of morality and ethics. This state is referred to as cognitive dissonance (Wolk 1).

2.4.5. Impact of cyberbullying

The effects of cyberbullying on victims are as harmful as the ones of other bullying situations, if not even worse. Cyberbullying can lead to constant distress and worrying as it can happen anytime, and it is not related to certain settings or times. Almost 100% of youths have access to the internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This means that victims do not only feel uneasy at school, as cyberbullying incidents can also happen afterwards, at a time when they at least expect it (BullyingUK; stopbullying.gov). Furthermore, bullies have the power to post insulting material publicly, meaning that anyone can access the content anytime and that sometimes victims are not even aware of what rumours are spread about them online. Even if they notice, once posted content often proves difficult to be taken down or the material spreads so quickly over the internet that it is futile to delete the original post. This can have an extremely devastating effect on the targets of aggression (stopbullying.gov). In cases of extreme school bullying, the very last hope for students was to switch schools. With cyberbullying, the nightmare is still not over, changing one's environment does not bring relief. Students also have to fear that their negative online reputation may have an impact on their future (stopbullying. gov; Kyriacou).

To conclude, cyberbullying has an especially far-reaching impact on victims' lives. However, all acts of peer harassment can poison the whole school atmosphere and cause "health problems that go beyond the directly exposed students" (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 398).

2.5. Theories on bullying prevention and intervention

Since the start of the implementation of anti-bullying policies in schools their effectiveness has often been the object of close scrutiny. Practices that could have been observed in the past, such as giving bullies detention or a speech about their inappropriate behaviour have proven as futile (Rigby, *Interventions* 14). The simplicity of the question: "What helps to prevent bullying" is deceiving, as bullying is a highly complex phenomenon which requires intervention strategies that take into account the unique context that it occurs in. Approaches need to be adapted to the school's overall goal for the implementation of such a project, the school context and most importantly, its students and staff (Bullying.NoWay!). Thankfully, some intervention programmes have succeeded in finding a way to reduce the prevalence of bullying. A meta-analytic review, conducted by Ttofi and Farrington (27) showed that in the 44 examined anti-bullying programmes, on average a reduction of 20-23% in bullying and 17-20% in victimisation could be achieved. Furthermore, it was found that effective anti-bullying strategies share certain key elements and components that are essential to their success and that the higher the programmes are in their intensity and the longer the anti-bullying policy is in place, the greater the desired outcome is (Espelage and De La Rue 8; Ttofi and Farrington. 27-28). For the fight against bullying this means that, if "schools are willing and able to put time and effort into a thoughtful, comprehensive anti-bullying program, peer victimisation can definitely be reduced" (Rigby, *What to do* 125).

Intervention strategies that have proven the most successful in the reduction of bullying are termed 'whole school approaches'.

> 'Whole school approaches' are "cohesive, collective and collaborative action[s] in and by a school community that [have] been strategically constructed with school leadership to reduce bullying and respond to it appropriate" (anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk).There is evidence that a 'whole school approach'

(Cambridge Education, 2005) where the whole school community, including the pupils, teachers, support staff; parents and board of governors, are involved in confronting the issue of bullying is the most effective approach to tackling bullying in school. (Anti-Bullying Alliance)

Besides dealing with actual cases of bullying, whole-school approaches also focus on the prevention of violence by encouraging pro-social behaviour and promoting desirable values and positive relationships between peers (Rigby, *Interventions* 5).

2.5.1. Steps in the process of designing an intervention programme

2.5.1.1. Problem Recognition

Before an anti-bullying policy is introduced, it is crucial that the whole school community, including staff, parents and students, recognise that bullying is indeed a problem at school. Moreover, the community must admit that it has serious harmful consequences and believe that the implementation of a new anti-bullying policy will lead to a substantial reduction of the problem (Rigby, *What to do* 129).

Then, the first step in designing an effective countermeasure against bullying is to get a comprehensive picture of the situation at school. School audits assist schools to find the right strategies by conducting surveys on students' experiences and thoughts in relation to peer harassment. They further,

> plan out where to target resources and time, monitor the effect of the school's strategies over time, measure the effectiveness of prevention and responses, raise the school community's awareness about bullying, provide a benchmark for measuring progress, identify what you want to achieve in your school, involve all stakeholders in discussion about the need for change, select the most appropriate program [and] involve the school community in developing a clear plan for preventing and responding to bullying. (Bullying.NoWay!)

In the process of designing an intervention strategy, the whole school community including students, parents and staff need to be educated about bullying. Discussions on the topic should be held and involve all three groups. With the help of these

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discussions a school policy that all groups support, can be developed. If there already is an existing policy, in most of the times it is better to build on it than to start from scratch (Rigby, *What to do* 142).

2.5.1.2. School policy

There are certain key elements that should be encompassed by an effective anti-bullying policy. First of all, the school's position regarding harassment needs to be stated. It must be clear that bullying is not tolerated in any case. It is important that not only bullying among peers is condemned, but also teachers bullying teachers; teachers bullying students or vice versa (Rigby, *What to do* 144). Second, a concise definition of bullying should be presented. The trick to a good anti-bullying policy is to place peer harassment within the larger frame of the school philosophy and show how it violates its values and morals and furthermore, destroys the positive environment beneficial to academic achievement and personal growth the school aims to created (Rigby, *What to do* 145, 151). Third, the rights of children should be stated, as the policy aims at protecting the ones who are the most vulnerable and creating a safe space for them. By incorporating children's rights, the school clearly shows that it is on the students' side and tries to protect them from harm (Rigby, *What to do* 145-146). Fourth, the responsibilities of witnesses of bullying episodes need to be addressed. The policy should state that students are expected to intervene in and report cases. However, putting this responsibility on students can have consequences for them as well as it may make themselves a target. Therefore, the school needs to educate students' moral judgement and make it easy for them to report bullying. For instance, students who want to come forward about cases of peer harassment need to know which authorities they can speak to and that their anonymity is protected if they wish (Rigby, *What to do* 146). Fifth, students need to know which actions a school will take against bullying,

and sixth, the policy should include an assurance to review the document after a certain period of time and to revise and update it if necessary (Rigby, *What to do* 147).

As already briefly mentioned in the paragraph above, there must be clarity in regard to the handling of bullying reports. One option would be that all reports land on the principal or deputy principal's desk in order to ensure that cases of peer harassment are taken very seriously (Rigby, *What to do* 197). However, it is also possible to give teachers or counsellors some decision-making power to separate the less serious from the serious cases. In that case, guidelines for handling bullying are needed to assist teachers in their decisions (Rigby, *What to do* 198).

An excellent anti-bullying policy that incorporates the above-mentioned elements has been developed by the Xavier College (Rigby*, What to do* 149-151):

A policy against bullying

Xavier College does not tolerate bullying in any form. All members of the College Community are committed to ensuring a safe and caring environment which promotes personal growth and positive self-esteem for all.

1 What is bullying?

Bullying is an act of aggression causing embarrassment, pain or discomfort to another:

- it can take a number of forms: physical, verbal, gesture, extortion and exclusion
- it is an abuse of power
- it can be planned and organised or it may be unintentional
- individuals or groups may be involved

2 Some examples of bullying include:

- any form of physical violence such as hitting, pushing or spitting on others
- interfering with another's property by stealing, hiding, damaging or destroying it
- using offensive names, teasing or spreading rumours about others or their families
- using put-downs, belittling others' abilities and achievements
- writing offensive notes or graffiti about others
- making degrading comments about another's culture, religious or social background
- hurtfully excluding others from a group
- making suggestive comments or other forms of sexual abuse
- ridiculing another's appearance

- forcing others to act against their will

3 If we are bullied:

- we may feel frightened, unsafe, embarrassed, angry or unfairly treated our work, sleep and ability to concentrate may suffer
- our relationships with our family and friends may deteriorate
- we may feel confused and not know what to do about the problem

4 What do we do to prevent bullying at Xavier College?

As a School Community we will not allow cases of bullying to go unreported but will speak up, even at risk to ourselves.

(a) This requires Staff to:

(i) be role models in word and action at all times

(ii) be observant of signs of distress or suspected incidents of bullying

(iii) make efforts to remove occasions for bullying by active patrolling during supervision duty

(iv) arrive at class on time and move promptly between lessons

(v) take steps to help victims and remove sources of distress without placing the victim at further risk

(vi) report suspected incidents to the appropriate staff member such as Homeroom/Class teacher, Year Co-ordinator, Deputy Headmaster, Pastoral Care Staff, Chaplain who will follow the designated procedures

(b) This requires Students to:

(i) Refuse to be involved in any bullying situation. If you are present when bullying occurs:

(a) if appropriate, take some form of preventative action;

(b) report the incident or suspected incident and help

break down the code of secrecy. If students who are being bullied have the courage to speak out, they may help to reduce pain for themselves and other potential victims.

(c) The College recommends that parents:

- watch for signs of distress in their son, e.g. unwillingness to attend school, a pattern of headaches, missing equipment, requests for extra money, damaged clothes or bruising; take an active interest in your son's social life and acquaintances;
- advise your son to tell a staff member about the incident. If possible, allow him to report and deal with the problem himself. He can gain much respect through taking the initiative and dealing with the problem without parental involvement.
- inform the College if bullying is suspected;
- keep a written record (who, what, when, where, why, how);
- do not encourage your son to retaliate;
- communicate to your son that parental involvement, if necessary, will be appropriate for the situation;

- be willing to attend interviews at the College if your son is involved in any bullying incident;
- be willing to inform the College of any cases of suspected bullying even if your own son is not directly affected; When staff, students and parents work together we create a more Christian environment at Xavier College. (Rigby, *What to do* 149-151)

2.5.1.3. Approaches to handling cases of bullying

The question that remains is how incidents of bullying should be handled. One of the world's leading researchers, Ken Rigby, has identified "three broad approaches to treating the bully", which will be briefly sketched out (Rigby, *What to do* 207).

The moralistic approach

This approach tries to apply moral pressure on the bully. Unfortunately, this method of intervention often does not change the bully's behaviour in the future for the better, as the practice that is used here does not try to understand the bully and their motives for their behaviour and hence, there is no real engagement. The only change that can be frequently observed here is that the perpetrator tries to bully more subtly and pays more attention to not getting caught (Rigby, *What to do* 207-208). Rigby uses to the following example to explain how bullying is handled with the use of the moralistic approach:

> A student has been found to have bullied someone. The student is asked to see the counsellor who describes the values underlying the School Policy as it pertains to bullying. The importance of showing respect and tolerance for others is emphasised. The student is then required to write an essay explaining that what he/she has done is contrary to the school's explicit values and requirements. It is explained that the essay is then to be given to the Deputy Principal who will decide whether it is acceptable. The student is also instructed to write an apology to the person who was bullied. Finally, the student's parents are invited to come to the school and the situation and the moral position explained to them. (Rigby, *What to do* 207-208)

The legalistic approach

This approach does not appeal to the morals of the school. Its foundation is a set of rules or sanctions that all students should know by heart. The penalties the bully has to face can differ from chores or detention, to expulsion from school, dependent on the severity of the bullying. However, the penalties must always be consistent with the school's Behaviour Management Policy. In extreme cases, formal charges may be pressed. There are various benefits in using this method to deal with bullying. The administration of bullying cases does not take up much time, no counselling is required, and students quickly learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Besides, students get the impression that justice can be achieved by choosing the penalty in relation to the seriousness of the harassment. Furthermore, staff can collaborate with students in order to find rules that govern the use of the sanctions, which makes the rules more relatable to them. However, there are also a few drawbacks surrounding the legalistic approach. In order to achieve justice, accurate information about the bullying needs to be obtained, which can be extremely time-consuming and frustrating in some cases. Besides, the punishment often does not have a lasting impact and severe bullies may become defiant or take it out on the peers who informed teachers about the bullying. Lastly, penalties do not lead to a "genuine reconciliation between the bully and the victim" and the "effectiveness of the approach depends very much on the students' perceptions of the efficiency of the surveillance of their behaviour and the risk involved in bullying someone" (Rigby, *What to do* 208-209).

The humanistic approach

Here, the focus lies on understanding the bullies and their reasons for their behaviour and trying to have a genuine communication with them. Bullies are treated as individuals, and listened to, so that maybe change can be brought about in their

thinking and behaviour. Among the strengths of this approach are the "readiness to encounter the bully as a person to whom respect is due, irrespective of what the bully has done"; the possibility for the bully to work with a counsellor and the prospect for a lasting resolution of the problem, which stems from the bully's inner motivation to change (Rigby, *What to do* 210). Arguments against handling bullying this way would be the difficulty and uncertainty about whether change can be achieved, especially when the counselling is done by a school authority and the bully unwilling to participate; the disapproval of other members of the school community who may think that the humanistic approach is too easy on the bully; and that some bullies are extremely low in empathy, and exhibit extremely manipulative behaviour, and hence will simply not respond to counselling in the desired way (Rigby, *What to do* 210).

As already pointed out several times, there is no simple solution to handle bullying, and it is clear by now that in order to tackle the problem successfully, a combination of the three approaches is needed. Schools should neither abandon their sanctions nor values, but whenever possible, the emphasis should lie on trying to understand the bullies and working with them, since this is the most promising way to bring about change (Rigby, *What to do* 211-213).

2.5.1.4. Design of prevention and intervention programmes

When it finally comes to the design of the intervention programme specifically, it is helpful to have a look at existing programmes that have been considered successful (Ttofi and Farrington 44). One of the most successful anti-bullying programmes is Finland's present national anti-bullying strategy 'KiVa', which is an acronym for Kiusaamista Vastaan, meaning "against bullying".

KiVa – Finland's national anti-bullying strategy

A pioneer in the field of bullying research, Finland realised at a very early point that legislative changes and schools' zero tolerance policies against bullying were not enough to counter the problem effectively. It became clear that clear guidelines on bullying intervention and concrete tools for prevention were needed. In 2006, the University of Turku was commissioned to develop an anti-bullying programme which, if successful, could be implemented nation-wide in Finnish comprehensive schools from grades 1-9, hence for children between seven and fifteen years of age (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 41-42). The anti-bullying strategy that was developed can be described as a "whole school programme" which is based on the finding that bullying almost always takes place in front of peers and that the behaviour of those bystanders has an influence on acts of peer harassment. The programme's aim is to "put an end to ongoing bullying, prevent the emergence of new bully-victim relationships, and minimize the negative consequences of victimization", while its main focus lies on "influencing the peer bystanders, who are neither bullies nor victims, to make them show that they are against bullying and to make them support the victim rather than encourage the bully" (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 44). In comparison to other anti-bullying strategies, the data collected by KiVa are unique, as more than merely information about bullying and victimisation is obtained.

> Besides bullying and victimization, the data contain information about children's and adolescents' family structure, possible immigrant status, school and class atmosphere, school motivation and well-being, learning outcomes, peer acceptance and rejection, friendships, peer networks, self-esteem and generalized perception of peers, and social-emotional problems such as social anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Self-reports, peer reports, and dyadic questions are used. Besides student questionnaires, teacher reports regarding their attitudes, self-efficacy, and efforts to tackle bullying, as well as information regarding their students (for example, about learning difficulties and special educational needs), have been collected. (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 49)

To the benefit of bullying research, KiVa further provides "detailed data on the implementation of the KiVa program, enabling [researchers] to study how the implementation varies across schools, which teacher- and school-related factors explain this variation, and how differences in implementation are reflected in program effects" (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 49)

The first phase of the implementation of KiVa in Finnish schools was from 2006 to 2009 and the first evaluation of the anti-bullying strategy yielded promising results. 234 schools, with a total of 28,000 students, were assigned to intervention and control groups and took part in a longitudinal study, which came to the conclusion that both, bullying and victimisation, in primary school levels 1-6 were reduced to a significant extent after 9 months of the implementation of the KiVa programme. The highest effect sizes were found in grades 3 and 4, since after those 9 months, students of control groups were 1.58 and 1.83 times more likely to be a victim of bullying and 2.08 and 1.30 more likely to be a bully, respectively. For grades 7-9 the results were more mixed, and the reduction seemed to be connected to gender, however, the probability to be involved in bullying was still 1.3 times higher for students from control groups than for students who participated in the KiVa programme (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 48-50).

Unexpectedly, the positive effects of KiVa have gone beyond the mere reduction of bullying and victimisation incidents. When compared to control schools, KiVa schools have reported an increase in students' academic motivation, academic performance, empathy and self-efficacy to defend victimised peers and a decrease in negative peer perceptions and internalising problems (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 50). As KiVa uses preventive and interceptive measures against bullying, it can be used in a wide variety of schools, for cases of severe and long-lasting harassment, but also novel incidents, however, the main objective is prevention (Salmivalli and Poskiparta 48, Nebenführ

128). Since the nation-wide implementation of KiVa in Finland in 2009, several other countries, among them Sweden, Belgium, Italy and Great Britain, have followed and implemented KiVa in their schools (Nebenführ 108-109; KiVa).

Weiße Feder – Austria's national strategy against violence

Austria chose to develop their own national strategy for violence prevention in the public-school system after the obtainment of alarming results about bullying in Austrian schools in several recent HSBC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children) and OECD studies (Nebenführ 45). A 2003 review of measures against bullying in schools showed that schools tried to act against bullying, but also that most of their work was not grounded on a scientific basis and strategies differed greatly between schools, due to the absence of sufficient means for the collection and assessment of data and the lack of a network for information exchange between schools (Paljakka 80). Other countries, like Finland, had already implemented national anti-bullying strategies when in 2007, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture finally reacted and commissioned researchers of the Viennese Faculty of Psychology to develop a national strategy against violence in Austrian schools. However, in the development process of Austria's strategy "Together against violence" ("Weiße Feder – Gemeinsam für Fairness und gegen Gewalt"), Spiel and Strohmeier benefited from previously implemented anti-bullying strategies like KiVa and the exchange with international colleagues (Paljakka 80; Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 177-178).

Austria's strategy to prevent bullying in schools is incorporated in its national strategy against violence, which has three main focal points: extremism, (sexual) assault against women and girls, and bullying. It was a conscious decision to address also other forms of violence, nevertheless, the fight against bullying is the strategy's priority, which becomes obvious when looking at the amount of information that is presented

about bullying in comparison to the other two focal areas (Paljakka 81). The three goals of the 'Weiße Feder' are "increased awareness and knowledge about violence: I know, we know", "[i]ncreased social competence skills and strategies to cope with violence: I can, we can", and "[i]ncreased responsibility and civil engagement: I do, we do" (Spiel, Wagner, and Strohmeier 178). The creation of six activity domains followed the formulation of the goals and all measures that the strategy deemed essential to fight bullying were assigned to one of the categories. The superordinate domains of the projects and goals in the fight against bullying are the following:

1. Policy and advocacy
2. Prevention and intervention
3. Knowledge transfer and education
4. Information and public relations
5. Networking and cooperation
6. Evaluation and research

Examples for preventative and interventive strategies would be the 'Faustlos programme' and the 'Viennese Social Competence Training' (ViSC) programme, whereas the first has been developed for younger children who are in elementary school, or even still in kindergarten. If teachers decide they want to use the 'Faustlos' programme with their students, they have to complete 'Faustlos' training and can order the material in form of a toolkit. The ViSC can be described as a "school development project to prevent violence and foster social competencies in secondary schools". As other successful whole-school approaches, the activities "are geared up to operate on three levels: the school as a whole, the classroom and the individual level" (Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 181). The basis of the programme is a "cascaded train-the-trainer-model", which allows to "implement the ViSC program sustainably in the school system" (Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 181). To provide more clarity, it works in the way that scientists train ViSC coaches, who then train teachers, who finally work with students. As a matter of course, teacher-training lecturers and psychologists were the

first to be chosen to be trained to be ViSC coaches (Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 181).

Besides the specification of projects and goals, the programme also the agents that would be responsible for the realisation of the various measures (Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 178). An example of an improvement in the evaluation and research area was the development of online self-assessment instruments for classes and schools. The programme developed was named AVEO and stands for Austrian Violence Evaluation Online Tool. It provides school staff with the opportunity to gather information about the violence rates in their respective schools and classrooms and assess the situation, whereas it further allows to evaluate how effective the implemented interventions against violence are. Another great benefit is the obtainment of information about violence from the perspective of students (Spiel, Wagner and Strohmeier 183).

The guidance document for bullying prevention in the school context ("Mobbingprävention im Lebensraum Schule"), commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture, was revised and updated in 2018. All schools can access the guidance document and other material of the Austrian violence prevention strategy, however, the participation in prevention and intervention programmes of the strategy is not compulsory for schools, unlike in several other countries. (Elke Prochazka). However, Austria's national strategy against bullying shows some successes so far, as the number of repeat bullies at the ages eleven, 13 and 15, has decreased by 4,5 percent from 2002 until 2014, as the HBSC study from 2013/14 has shown (Schulpsychologische Bildungsberatung). However, the same study further reveals that the number of students involved in bullying in some way or other is still extremely high. Around one third of Austrian students states that they have

been involved in bullying someone, and about the same number have been a victim (Wallner 10). In comparison to other OECD countries in the aforementioned study, Austria had the fifth highest number of bullies among thirteen-year students and the fourth highest number of thirteen-year old victims. (Schulpsychologische Bildungsberatung). The PISA survey published in 2017 and launched by the OECD in 2015 obtained similar alarming results. 540,000 15-year-old students from 72 countries participated and on average, one in five students had experienced bullying at least a few times a month. The collected data shows that Austria lies slightly above the OECD average with 19,1 percent of students experiencing bullying that often, whereas in Finland only 16,9 percent 15-year olds are exposed to this amount of bullying (OECD, *Results*; UNESCO; OECD, *Bullying*; Mobbing an Schulen) It is without question that more needs to be done in order to reduce these numbers further.

After introducing the Austrian national strategy against violence and taking a look at the bullying situation in Austria, it is high time to discuss intervention strategies or methods that can be used in schools. Of course, it would go beyond the scope of this diploma thesis to discuss every detail of an intervention strategy or a complete whole-school approach. Therefore, only a selection of intervention measures will be examined in the following. Most of which will hopefully be practical advice that teachers or other readers interested in teaching lessons about bullying with the help of literature find helpful.

2.5.2. Practical advice for the fight against bullying

It has been shown that bullying cannot simply be treated as a problem of individuals, it concerns the whole school culture and climate, and all relationships in the institution. Hence, measures need to be implemented on the individual, class and school levels. The thorough study of successful anti-bullying strategies has helped to identify certain

elements at all three levels that are key to the reduction of bullying. A selection of these essential elements will be presented subsequently (Wallner 45-46, 48-49).

2.5.2.1. Measures against bullying on the individual level

Ideally, conflicts between students can be resolved before they turn into severe cases. In order to prevent bullying from happening or to stop it in its onset, it is crucial to be aware of tensions between students and to have knowledge about the individual and contextual factors that put children at a higher risk for becoming either a bully or victim. However, teachers should not draw premature conclusions, as the absence of one or several risk factors does not eliminate the risk for a student becoming caught up in bullying somehow, whereas the presence of risk factors does not mean a student is determined to become either bully or victim (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 126).

Prevention on the individual level further includes the creation of a warm, emotional atmosphere between teachers and students, who show an honest interest in each other and communicate in a respectful way. The establishment of good teacher-student relationships is also of importance here. Bullied children often do not like school, but a close, low-conflict relationship with their teachers can make the situation better. When children are bullied and dislike their teachers, their academic troubles are greater than the ones of the children who experience bullying but have a good relationship with their teachers (Vaillancourt and McDougall 1178). It has been proven that teachers are role models, their' beliefs and behaviour influence students (Wallner 48), hence it is crucial that teachers do not ignore incidents of bullying as this would set a negative example. Anti-bullying training for teachers is important, as it has been found that teachers who received such training ignored incidents significantly less than teachers who did not (Sairannen and Pfeffer 339).

If the bullying is already in progress, talks with all concerned parties, bullies, victims and parents, are necessary. One possibility would be to talk to the bully first and then have a talk with all concerned. If the talk is successful and the bully tries to make things better with the victim, the power or control the perpetrator had is taken away, at least to some extent. Hopefully, the talk also empowers the victim and gives them confidence. Of course, decisions about further actions, as for instance about the consequences for the bully and the protection of the victim, need to be made. In any case, importance should be given to disciplining bullies in a constructive way, making them understand that bullying behaviour is inacceptable, and assisting victims deal with their traumatic experiences (Olweus, *Bullying* 97-101; Ehiorobo; Sairannen and Pfeffer 339). Before the decision-making, it is crucial to learn about the perpetrator's situation and if it is a possibility that they are merely displacing their own pain on others. It could be that they are exposed to violence at home or have to face other difficulties and also need special help and assistance (Ehiorobo). Sometimes the bully needs to learn to deal with conflicts in non-aggressive ways or to acquire new skills in order to stop their harmful behaviour, especially if they lack social skills. Possibly, bullying is the only way or option a student knows to assert themselves (Rigby, *What to do* 215; Sairannen & Pfeffer 339). In other cases, bullies behave the way they do out of boredom. They do not have a "real and enduring interest or occupation within school or outside", they are not "engaged in any pursuit that claims and sustains their vital interest" (Rigby, *What to do* 216). Here, teachers can support bullies to find activities they like to engage in. If a teacher assumes that a disinterest for other people's feelings or "a non-acceptance of responsibility for [cruel] actions" lies beneath the bullying behaviour, it can be tried to help perpetrators to become more concerned or to take responsibility for their actions by using the 'Method of Shared Concern' or the 'No

Blame Approach' when working with them[1]. In reflective interviews, bullies are placed in the shoes of the victim and have to try to answer questions about how the bullying might have made the victim feel. Above all, it is always crucial to make the victim feel seen and heard and to encourage victims to always report actions of bullying. (Ehiorobo).

2.5.2.2.   Measures against bullying on the classroom level

As bullying is a systemic problem based on group dynamics, it also takes prevention and intervention measures that target the problem at the classroom level (Wallner 58). Indeed, the majority of students claims that certain aspects of the work done in classrooms helps to stop bullying (Rigby and Johnson 68). Especially lessons on problem solving in general, on solving arguments peacefully, and on safe online behaviour have been considered helpful (Rigby and Johnson 68). Providing students with the opportunity to improve their social and emotional competency is seen as a further preventative factor (Wallner 50) as well as giving students a time and space to talk about bullying and other issues relevant to it (Olweus, *Bullying* 88). It becomes clear that teachers have a great responsibility in the success of anti-bullying programmes as they are in charge of planning the lessons on these sensitive issues. But apart from those few classes on bullying, it is always a teacher's lesson structure that sets the framework within which the relationships of students unfold (Wallner 50).

The question then is which characteristics lessons in general should have in order to contribute to a low bullying culture at school. As a starting point, students should feel respected in the classroom and they do so if they believe that teachers put effort into their lessons, try to prepare engaging tasks and carefully planned activities. Furthermore, they believe they are valued if they are given a choice, meaning it is

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[1] For more information on these two methods consult Rigby, *What to do* 216-220.

beneficial if teachers sometimes prepare a variety of tasks and let students choose (Preble and Gordon 16-23; Wallner 50). Valuing students for their input (Preble and Gordon 16-23) and respectful teaching practices make teachers appear caring, and thus students will more often confide in them (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos 208).

Another possibility to create a friendly and cohesive classroom atmosphere is to rely on network-related teaching practices. This practice, in which teachers choose the seating arrangement in the class and group students strategically in order to enhance peer affiliations, has been positively related to higher ratios of students liking than disliking each other, a greater number of friendships, and a weaker status hierarchy in classrooms (Di Stasio, Savage, and Burgos 208). Besides network related teaching practices, the implementation of cooperative learning can be of advantage to increase students' willingness to help or support each other, develop fewer prejudices and engage with each other in a more positive way (Olweus, *Bullying* 89). When cooperative learning is used, students are assigned to small groups and have to work on a common task. At the end of the group work, only the performance of the group as a whole is evaluated. The task itself is designed in a way that a "mutual positive dependence" is created between the group members, all members need to be familiar with every part of the assignment, as the teacher can ask any member of the group to answer questions or present their results (Olweus, *Bullying* 89-90). The cooperative method ties in perfectly with the belief that instilling a sense of responsibility in students serves as a protective factor for bullying (Wallner 49).

Regardless of lesson designs or teaching methods, students need to be aware of what is expected from them, therefore a clear set of classroom rules and good classroom management are essential (Preble and Gordon 26; Espelage and De La Rue 8, Olweus, *Bullying* 81-82, Rigby and Johnson 69; Wallner 63). Ideally, the whole class

creates classroom rules and sanctions together, so that they are perceived as transparent and fair (Wallner 49,63; Olweus, *Bullying* 86-87). Posting the set of rules in a visible place in class can be of additional help (Fekkes et al 88). A culture of cooperation, which is created by following certain rules, is an important foundation for a low bullying culture and is strengthened by the implementation of democratic structures like a class council or the election of class representatives (Wallner 49).

As students spend most of their time in school in their respective classrooms or with their peers, the way they interact with each other on a daily basis is of great importance. One essential aspect in relation to student behaviour on the classroom- or peer level has yet not been discussed – the relevance of bystanders' reactions to bullying situations in regard to prevention and intervention measures. Bullying, of course, does not merely involve a bully and a victim, but also peers who witness those episodes of harassment. In approximately 85 percent of bullying incidents, peers are present (Rigby, *What to do* 267), but almost 70% of students are merely witnesses, and since this group is extremely large, it needs to be examined more closely how bystanders' behaviour influences these situations, positively or negatively (Olweus, *Understanding* 18; Werth et al. 295; Salmivalli 114) Unfortunately, most of these witnesses do not help the victim, which is devastating, since it has been shown that students are highly successful when they choose to intervene. In 50% of the cases, the bullying stops if another student steps in (Rigby, What to do 267).

In general, four participant roles aside from bullies and victims have been described: assistants, reinforcers, outsiders and defenders. Assistants have been found to join ringleader bullies, whereas defenders take the victims' side, comfort and support them. Outsiders tend to withdraw from the situation, while reinforcers provide bullies with positive feedback, intentionally or unintentionally. The problematic is that even the

subtlest verbal or non-verbal clue can be a reward for a bully, a smile from a bystander is often enough to reinforce his behaviour (Salmivalli 114). Obviously, this smile can also be extremely hurtful for the victim and discourage them even more from fighting back (Salmivalli 118). In general, it has been found that the frequency of bullying increases, the more peers reinforce the bully. Conversely, the frequency decreases, if bullies experience that victims are frequently defended and supported (Salmivalli 114). It has been previously discussed that social anxiety and peer rejection constitute two risk factors for becoming a victim of bullying, while having social anxiety or being rejected by peers does not necessarily mean that one has to experience harassment. However, the likelihood of becoming a victim for an anxious or rejected child increases in classrooms which are high in reinforcing the bullies (Salmivalli 114). Victims' adjustment to bullying seems to be affected by witnesses' behaviour as well, since victims who have at least one other student defending them show less anxiety, less depression and higher self-esteem.

Unfortunately, as already mentioned, bystanders do not often defend victims. In fact, a Finnish study found that only around 17 percent of bystanders could be described as defenders of victims, whereas around 29 percent reinforced bullies in some way (Salmivalli 118). Another study with focus on the frequency, effectiveness and nature of peer intervention, observed students identified as bullies and victims during recess over a three-year period and found that in 88% of bullying incidents, peers were present. Shockingly intervention only happened in 19% of the cases. One further naturalistic study needs to be mentioned here. It aimed at identifying the behavioural reactions of bystanders to bullying episodes and analysed 53 videotapes of incidents at a playground. The analysis showed that bullies were actively reinforced by onlookers in 21% and passively reinforced by peers standing and watching in 54% of the cases. The results concerning bystander intervention were similar to other studies, onlookers

intervened only 25% of the time (Sandstrom, Makover and Bartini 197). These findings show that witnesses of bullying incidents should be given a central role in intervention programmes.

After looking at these figures, the question arises why children do not intervene more often, despite knowing that bullying someone is wrong. Students' most frequent answer to that question is simple – they are afraid that getting in the way of the bully means they will lose their status in the group and might become a target themselves. However, if peers stopped reinforcing bullies or giving them a high status, bullies would not feel rewarded for their behaviour and eventually, the number of incidents would decline. Hence, bystanders are an important group for bullying prevention as the group is extremely large and their behaviour is easier to change than the one of bullies (Salmivalli 115-117).

Unfortunately, it is not as easy as it may sound. Bystanders' behaviour is also influenced by their own personal experiences. Research has shown that merely witnessing episodes of bullying can cause great pain to previous victims, as they can feel the target's distress, which makes them relive their own experience. Furthermore, previously bullied students more often have troubles interacting with others, as a result of being exposed to bullying episodes than non-victimised students (Werth et al. 295-297). The exposure to incidents of bullying can result in emotional maladjustment for both, previous victims and nonvictims, who frequently report "negative emotional responses such as feeling sick, bad, sad and difficulty learning" (Werth et al. 303).

Besides being afraid or triggered by incidents, there may be another explanation for witnesses staying passive. After a young woman in New York in 1964 was brutally murdered with none of the people witnessing the incident coming to her help, extensive research on bystander behaviour has been conducted and the term "bystander effect"

was coined. This describes the inhibiting effects the presence of other people can have on helping individuals in need. Sometimes observers do not help because they are not sure if there is an emergency at all, which is known as the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance, whereas at other times they simply wait for other witnesses to act, which is described as diffusion of responsibility. Hence, the bystander intervention model identified five sequential steps that a person needs to go through in order to act.

The bystander intervention model

First, the event must be noticed, which means that one's attention needs to be drawn to the problem. Second, the noticed event must be interpreted as an emergency requiring action. Some experiments have shown that serious decision-making errors occur when people look at others for guidance in the interpretation of events. For instance, one study revealed that 75 percent of participants who found themselves in a room that filled with smoke, reported the smoke when they were alone in the room, whereas only 10 percent of the participants told someone about the smoke when there were other people present who seemed not to be bothered. Thankfully, the more dangerous situations seem to be, the less likely the bystander effect seems to become. The problem in regard to bullying is that students often do not interpret bullying behaviour as harmful or they have a different concept of it in their mind and do not realise that this is what is happening to their peers. The third step to take action is to feel responsible for helping, but diffusion of responsibility is often the problem here. After taking on responsibility, knowledge about possible intervention strategies and certain skills are required in order to act appropriately. If bystanders have adequate knowledge and skills, the implementation of intervention decisions follows, if individuals perceive themselves as self-efficient and the advantages for helping the person in need outweigh the costs for the individual (e.g. putting oneself in danger) (Nickerson et al. 392-393). As could be clearly seen, it is not enough to provide

students with information about bullying and they will step up if they notice incidents. Students need help and guidance to manage all five sequences that have been presented above. Above all, it is necessary to teach them safe strategies to intervene in bullying cases to secure their own safety (Nickerson et al. 397).

Victims' responses to bullying

Another factor that influences bystander intervention, which should not be underestimated, is victims' responses to bullying. If bystanders perceive victims to be angry or aggressive, they are more likely to believe that victims are to blame themselves for getting bullied. On the contrary, the most empathic response from bystanders is elicited by sad and passive victims, which in turn may signal the bully that their victim is an easy target and more attacks will follow in the future. Appearing confident during a bullying incident has the opposite effect, it signals the bully that their victim is not intimidated, but it also makes attacks seem less distressing or serious to bystanders. In cases of harassment, victims are advised to react according to the severity of the attack. At first, victims should ignore bullies or respond in a calm and confident tone. Calm and non-provocative comments can be uttered to diffuse the situation and confuse the perpetrator (Sokol, Bussey, and Rapee. 375-376, 386-388). However, if the bully is persistent or the incidents are of great severity, victims need to report their tormentors. How a bullying situation can be diffused by the victim putting on a friendly act, will be illustrated subsequently:

> Three 12-year-olds are heading to a soccer field for gym class. Two athletic-looking boys are walking behind—and snickering at—the third, a somewhat chubby classmate. 'So you're going to try to play soccer', one of the two says sarcastically to the third, his voice dripping with contempt. The chubby boy closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. Then he turns to the other two and replies, in a calm matter-of-fact voice, 'Yeah, I'm going to try—but I'm not very good at it.' After a pause, he adds, 'But I'm great at art. Show me something and I can draw it real good…' Then pointing to his antagonist, he says, 'Now you, you're great at soccer—really fantastic! I'd like to be as good some day, I'm just not.

> Maybe I can get better if I keep trying.' At that, the first boy, his disdain now totally disarmed, says in a friendly tone, 'Well, you're not really that bad. Maybe I can show you a few things about how to play'. (Rigby, *What to do* 266)

Needless to say, bullying incidents are not always as easily diffused as in this illustration. Nevertheless, students can be assisted to develop certain skills that can be helpful in such situations, for instance, they can be taught how to act more assertively (Rigby, *What to do* 266). Besides teaching victims how to respond to bullying, bystanders should be sensitised to assess the severity of the situation by the means of the deeds of the perpetrator and not by the responses of the victims.

In general, schools have to make bullying intervention easy and safe for bystanders; witnesses need to know what they can do to stop episodes and who they can turn to if they want to ask for help or report incidents (Nickerson et al. 392 Salmivalli 118). Moreover, students' social, conflict mediation and coping skills need to be strengthened, so that they feel competent to defend victims (Pronk et al. 671). In conclusion, it can be said that there are three main reasons for focusing on bystanders in bullying prevention and intervention: 1) incidents mostly happen when other peers are watching, 2) the group of bystanders is extremely large, which means that they outnumber bullies and 3) bystanders' intervention is mostly successful (Pronk et al. 670).

What to avoid

Before turning to strategies against peer harassment on the school level, attention needs to be drawn to some things that need to be avoided when targeting bullying at the classroom level. It is of great importance that teachers do not give a big speech in which they blame students, as this will "immediately antagonise the bullies and their supporters and produce a highly charged atmosphere in which victims are cowed and

thoughtful discussion impossible" (Rigby, *What to do* 157). Moreover, when teachers want to talk to students about bullying, they should never start with telling their pupils about a recent incident and naming the children involved, since students are likely to take sides, which will cause even more conflict. Lastly, it is crucial to choose the right timing for raising the topic in class – "if the class is very unsettled or being silly", there will most likely be no constructive outcome (Rigby, *What to do* 158).

Research has also shown that sometimes a difference between teachers and students' opinions on the effectiveness of what helps to prevent bullying exists. While staff named promoting respect and inclusiveness to be crucial in the fight against bullying, students emphasised student discussions (Rigby and Johnson 68). Needless to say, students' beliefs should also find room in regard to this matter and they should feel included in decision making processes, as the right of co-determination and perceived fairness constitute central pillars of bullying prevention work (Wallner 50).

2.5.2.3. Measures against bullying on the school level

In order for measures against bullying on the individual and class level to be feasible and successful, prevention needs to be seen as a task of school development. The school as an institution has the responsibility to ensure that students are able to focus on their education and not find themselves in a surrounding which is poisoned by fear or violence (Wallner 70-71,74). This goal can only be obtained if the task of school development which encompasses curriculum, profession and organisation development is taken seriously (Wallner 70).

Schools need to recognise the importance of "emphasising awareness of emotions, caring and concern for others, positive relationships, making responsible decisions, resolving conflict constructively and valuing the thoughts and feelings for students"

(Downes & Cefai 34 quoted in Wallner 45). This quote gives a concise overview over important preventative measures at school level. Tying in with decision making, important steps or actions should not be taken without consulting or at least informing students first. Rules and other agreements are more readily accepted when all parties feel included in the decision-making process (Wallner 70, 73).

Besides, increased surveillance of students' recess areas has a positive impact on students' behaviour. In fact, some studies have shown that as much as 80 percent of students and parents are in favour of this anti-bullying strategy. It is also beneficial because intervention can take place quickly (Rigby & Johnson 69; Olweus, *Bullying* 71; Wallner 73). In the course of the KiVa programme, teachers would also wear special vests to make them more visible. As with classroom rules and management, the importance of teachers actively setting the framework in which the relationships of students unfold, can be seen (Wallner 73).

It is an absolute necessity that schools work closely with parents. Parents need to be aware of the anti-bullying policy that is in place in a school and must be instructed to report if they notice any transgression. Information about the policy can be passed on through leaflets, newsletters or meetings. Sometimes even educational sessions on peer harassment are held (Fekkes et al. 90; Rigby and Johnson 69). It is plausible that students do not want their parents to get involved as they fear that it will make the whole situation worse. In these cases, it is beneficial to have a contact telephone, which makes it possible for parents or also students to call anonymously and discuss issues in regard to bullying with a professional (Olweus, *Bullying* 74).

Furthermore, to keep an eye on the whole bullying situation in school it is of advantage if a group of teachers agrees to meet on a regular basis to exchange information about observed incidents (Olweus, *Bullying* 77). Teachers should keep their knowledge

about bullying up-to-date and learn about how they can handle incidents (Fekkes et al. 90).

Mental health services should be available to all students, not only for the reason that they may help to "identify students with emotional and behavioural problems early", but also because students may need support as they experience a lot of pressure to achieve excellent academic performances (Greif Green et al. 144-146).

Two specific suggestions which can make a difference for bullied students have been brought forward by students. It was suggested to provide a safe space for students that they can withdraw to. In this space, talking is not allowed and a teacher present makes sure the rule is followed. Moreover, students wished for 'bully' letterboxes to be installed, so that they could report bullies anonymously (Hitradio Ö3).

To return to the issue of school development, it is of absolute necessity that the following eight protective activities are part of a school's development plan, if it wants to be effective in preventing bullying. Sugai, Horner and Algozzine (2) argues that it needs (1) "a school-wide curriculum that emphasises targeted social skills instruction", (2) "positive school and classroom social cultures where teaching and learning is emphasized", (3) "challenging and engaging instructional practices that effectively maximize academic success for all students", (4) "continuous, positive and active supervision and monitoring of student behaviour and learning", (5) "regular, frequent and positive acknowledgements and reinforcement for students displays of academic and social behaviour success", (6) "active involvement of all students and family, faculty and community members", (7) "multi-year and multi-component approaches to implementation", and (8) "adults who model the same positive behaviours and values expected of students".

This is, of course, by far not all that can be done against bullying on the school level. Here are some of the options schools have in the fight against cyberbullying.

2.5.2.4. Prevention and intervention measures against cyberbullying

Firstly, schools can include the use of cyber technology in their school policy, stating whether or not smart phones are allowed on school premises. Secondly, it needs to be ensured that staff have an up-to-date knowledge about the phenomenon. Thirdly, students should be taught about the dangers of using new technologies and who they can turn to if they experience cyber abuse. Lastly, teachers should try to make connections between incidents of cyberbullying and bullying at school, since perpetrators often engage in both types of bullying and cooperate with parents since cyberbullying can happen at any time and not only during the school day (Rigby, *What to do* 274-275)[2].

It has been mentioned at the beginning that whole-school approaches are the most effective strategy to diminish bullying. Everyone involved in the school community must work together (Fekkes et al. 81,89). Effective and lasting prevention work needs special programmes that focus on bullying, but also the inclusion of possibilities for social and emotional learning in the curriculum (Wallner 45-46). This is the reason why this thesis has presented in its first part the most important information about all aspects of bullying in the school context.

The second part will investigate how the topic the topic of bullying can be discussed critically with the help of Young Adult Literature in the Austrian EFL classroom and how opportunities for social and emotional learning can be provided in the process.

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[2] Didactic material for the prevention of cyberbullying in Austrian schools has been designed by SOS Kinderdorf and can be found under the title "Wir sind Klasse – Handlungsmöglichkeiten gegen (Cyber-) Mobbing" (SOS Kinderdorf).

3. Young Adult Literature and its relevance for the English classroom

3.1. Defining Young Adult Literature

Young Adult Literature (YAL) has found reluctant acceptance in the scholastic community and there is still disagreement about the terminology which should be used to describe the genre. However, the term YAL seems to have asserted itself to refer to those works marketed to and centred around young adults (Hayn & Nolen 7-8; Thaler 104). As the term 'Young Adult' already hints at, the age span of YAL's audience is rather big, ranging from twelve to eighteen years. The age ranges the works are targeted at are not unessential to the terminology problem and also make it impossible to choose one short and concise definition for all YA-works (Thaler 104; Glaus 408). The fact that YAL comprises works for adolescents from twelve to eighteen years of age, is also relevant for teachers. It means that they need to have a certain knowledge about the depth and breadth of the genre in order to know which books to pick, as students at different age levels vary greatly in their "reading abilities, levels of maturity, interests and aptitudes" (Elliott-Johns 41). Since there is no definition of the genre of YAL, it is useful to look at the characteristics that all, or at least most YA-works share. First, the protagonist is an adolescent, who has to deal with certain subject matters that are relevant to the lives of young adults. The choices the main character makes, to a great extent influence the direction in which the story develops and how the events unfold. In contrast to children's books, the content of YA-novels is often "edgy", meaning that the fictional characters encounter difficult situations like violence or bullying (Thaler 104). A great advantage of YA-novels is that they do not have as many pages as classics and the language is often simple enough to be understood by intermediate learners. This also makes reading more enjoyable for rather weak students (Thaler 104; Glaus 408).

The last characteristic already hints at the fact that in comparison to English classics, YAL might be more enjoyable to read for students in the Austrian EFL classroom, as their level of proficiency in English might not be high enough to enjoy reading more demanding texts.

The relevance of YAL for the English Language classroom in general is also nicely described by Salvner (qtd. in Hayn & Nolen, 7):

> Because [works of young adult literature] are about adolescents and for adolescents, they put students at the center of the learning experiences we devise. Because they illustrate for young readers what literature can be, moving them and revealing to them how literature builds knowledge and perspective, they use our time effectively.

In the process of defining YAL, it has already been revealed that YAL can be used for teaching in the English classroom. Unfortunately, as the study of the genre is relatively new in comparison to others, little research on the transactional occurrences that happen between teachers and students, students and students or readers and text has been conducted. Hence, some educators still question YAL's "validity in the curriculum, in classrooms, and in teacher education" (Hayn and Nolen 8) and are in dispute over whether "the fictional portrayal of teens confronted with difficult situations (crime, violence, sexuality, drugs etc.) encourages destructive and immoral behaviour, or instead helps readers deal with real-life challenges" (Thaler 104). However, there are many arguments in favour of using YAL in the English classroom.

3.2. YAL's relevance for the English classroom

Exposing students to the finest works of English literature, also referred to as English classics, can be a valuable experience for them. Nevertheless, limiting the reading list in class to English classics can send a rather unfavourable message to students,

namely that other types of books, as for instance the books they read in their spare time, are less valuable. Classics are often hard to read for students as they often cannot relate to the experiences of the characters as their lives are too different from the ones portrayed in the books – and the difficult language constitutes another complicating factor. Students generally enjoy working with material different from their textbooks, but it can be said that especially in EFL classrooms, reluctant readers will more likely enjoy easier reads like YA-novels (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 55,56,58-59).

As the classics' themes and issues "mirror the concerns of the society" of the time in which they were written, YA-novels deal with issues that the present society encounters, and students are likely to be familiar with (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 55). However, as students are often not aware of the complexity of a certain problem, reading about it can help them to dive deeper into the matter and to reflect upon their newly gained insights (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 55).

Adolescence is a difficult time for students, in which a huge emotional and social development takes place. This comes with a lot of insecurities and as teenagers take on the task of formulating or reformulating their identity, they often feel overwhelmed. Providing students with literature that addresses these issues can help them during this time (Bushman 1; Hughes and Laffier 4). Adolescents need characters they can identify with and a plot that they can relate to. In short, they want to see themselves in the characters (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 56; Bird and Giles 40). When being told the story from an adolescent point of view, students are able to draw or see connections that they often cannot make in the real world (Bushman 9). The characters in YA-novels are often highly independent and take on great responsibility, which may seem unrealistic to adults, but very realistic to students that age. These independent

characters "offer hpe [sic] to the young reader – hope that things can change, improve and succeed. They give hope to be able to cope with all that seems wrong with being a young adult" (Bushman 9).

A further reason that speaks for the use of YAL in class, is that students are more likely to engage in more reading, if they find the works of literature that are presented to them interesting (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 53; Bushman 9). Adolescents like to read about things they experience themselves and about which they talk with their friends (Bird and Giles 40). If it is possible for students to dive into the world of the characters, teachers will experience lively discussions in class and collect well-thought-through writing tasks (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 53). A nice side effect of students reading is, of course, that it has a positive effect on their language skills. Reading YAL should not only be seen as pleasure for students, it can be used to prepare students to meet standards and to design relevant curricula, while at the same time engaging them in interesting discussions about life in the twenty-first century (Gibbons, Dail, and Stallworth 53).

As could be seen above, YAL should not be missing in the English classroom for various reasons. Reading a book about complex real-life issues and problems that students often experience or at least have heard of, is a great starting point to teach tolerance and social justice (Rybakova, Piotrowski, and Harper 37). Stories can have a powerful impact on young people, which is of great advantage when trying to open a discussion about a subject bullying.

3.3. Reasons for using YAL to talk about bullying in the English classroom

Before having a look at the benefits of teaching lessons on bullying, it is important to address that bullying is a sensitive issue and opening a discussion about it in class can be difficult for some students and trigger negative feelings. However, peer harassment is a part of students' daily life and many popular teen series and books deal with the issue. The most watched tale about bullying might be the Netflix-series *Th1rteen R3asons Why* (2017), which is based on the book by Jay Asher (2007). The Austrian society for suicide prevention (ÖGS) recommends not to use *Th1rteen R3asons Why* to open a dialogue about bullying in class and advises teachers to not address the series or book in class, if they do not have the impression that students have already been exposed to it. However, with today's streaming culture and almost every student having access to at least one streaming service, it can be assumed that the great majority of the class will have seen the material. The problem the Austrian society for suicide prevention sees in *Th1rteen R3ason Why* is that while several reasons for the suicide of the main protagonist, Hannah Baker, are named, no adequate ways how she could have been helped are portrayed. This may paint the wrong picture for youths who are struggling themselves, making them believe that there is no other way out. Teachers generally need to be careful when they decide to talk about bullying in class, regardless of the material they choose to work with. If teachers notice students that seem to withdraw from the conversation or struggle with the topic, or even know of students that have experienced bullying, it can be helpful to talk to them in private. Should there still be reason for concern after the conversation, educators should not hesitate to inform an expert, for example the school psychologist (Banzer, Niederkrotenthaler, and Sansone 1-3). It must be highlighted that suicide is the third leading cause for teenage death, even though most youths survive suicide attempts,

which means the number of teenagers attempting suicide is shockingly high. Still, suicide or suicide prevention is often seen as a taboo topic. However, it can help students enormously to be allowed to discuss this sensitive issue in the safe environment of the class (Rybakova, Piotrowski, and Harper 42; Pytash 470). Having shed a light on the reverse side of the coin, the focus can now shift to how students can benefit from being exposed to YAL that deals with bullying in the context of the English classroom.

In the process of examining risk factors, as well as prevention and intervention measures, it could already be seen that teachers have a considerable influence on the bullying culture in their classrooms. Choosing a YA-novel about bullying and giving students tasks that encourage them to reflect critically on the issue sends a powerful message about the teacher's attitude towards the problem. Furthermore, teachers can make their stance clear in discussions (Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 385). One problem that is often encountered when trying to eliminate bullying is that students are often afraid to tell adults, indeed only 30% of students turn to their teachers for help. Addressing the issue in class can make a difference, as students feel more comfortable to confide in teachers who they know to care about the issue and have the knowledge and skills to help them (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 83; Rigby *Interventions* xvi; Modin, Låftman, and Östberg 385). However, reading a YA-novel about bullying in class can also strengthen victims in other ways. When the whole class works together on finding solutions for bullying situations, victims learn about their classmates' true opinions about the matter. Furthermore, while picking apart characters choices and actions, students learn about different ways to deal with bullying, which can help them in real-life incidents (Rigby, *Interventions* 117-118).

It is important to note that by using YAL, a natural and unforced dialogue about bullying can be opened. Nevertheless, bullying should not be made the subject of discussion on a regular basis, students may tire of it, which is counterproductive in the fight against it (Rigby, *What to do* 165).

However, when talking about fictional characters and their problems and not specific cases of bullying at students' actual schools, open-minded discussions are possible, and students will feel free to speak their mind. As already mentioned, listening to the opinions and views of other students can help youths to gain more knowledge about the topic, but it can also lead to an improvement of their moral reasoning skills, which in turn has a positive influence on their thoughts and behaviour in general (Rigby, *What to do* 167-168). Bullying prevention recommends that schools expose their students to "cultural products that evoke sympathy for a wide range of people", with the goal to change students' values "through improving the sensitivity of children to others". This is exactly what is done by selecting a compelling read about bullying and teaching it in class (Rigby, *What to do* 168). Curricula that take into account the social and emotional education of students play a crucial part in preventing violence in schools (Downes and Cefai)

Reading about it as an assignment in class presents students with the opportunity to discuss the issue in a safe environment. To reflect on characters' choices and actions and bullying incidents in general is not only beneficial in the fight against peer harassment as it may help victims to cope with their own experiences. It may open bystanders' eyes to injustices they have not noticed before (Bird and Giles 40) and teach them safe strategies to intervene (Salmivalli 118).

It is often difficult for adolescents to have the courage to stand up against tormenters. However, discussing and reflecting critically about fictional situations teaches students

cause-and-effect thinking. They learn about the positive or negative effects their actions or non-actions as bystanders have. Conscience development is promoted and, hopefully, students realise that every single person in a classroom has the responsibility to keep others safe (Chisholm and Trent 80; Metzger and Adams 62-63). YAL can help students to become transformative agents simply by confronting them with stories about real-life issues and giving them the opportunity to look at complex situations from different perspectives (Chisholm & Trent 75). Reading about bullying provides students with the opportunity to develop a more critical perspective on the subject and allows them to make connections between the text and the situation at their own school (Chisholm and Trent 75-76) and get a better overall understanding about what is happening (Rybakova, Piotrowski, and Harper 42).

A good story has more power than telling students how to behave, students are able to take a story to a higher level and turn it into something meaningful (Hillsberg and Spak 28). Diving into the world of the characters allows students to experience how hurtful a mean comment can be or how rumours can destroy a person's life even if they never have been exposed to bullying themselves (Pytash, Morgan and Batchelor 15). Students can see that bullying has an influence on all aspects of a person's life. Jay Asher describes this 'snowball effect' in *Th1rteen R3asons Why*:

> "You don't know what goes on in anyone's life but your own. And when you mess with one part of a person's life, you're not messing with just that part. Unfortunately, you can't be that precise and selective. When you mess with one part of a person's life, you're messing with their entire life. Everything…affects everything" (Asher 201-202)

As already mentioned, *Th1rteen R3asons Why* is a compelling read, and also the Netflix-series based on the book is very popular among teenagers. However, this thesis has decided against using *Th1rteen R3asons Why* as the YA-novel to teach lessons

about bullying in class for two main reasons. First, students may find it difficult to focus solely on the book as they most likely have been exposed to the series and there are slight differences between the book and the series adaptation. Second, Netflix has released three seasons of *Th1rteen R3asons Why* to this day, where only the first one is based on the events in Jay Asher's book. Students who have seen the second and third seasons may interpret the book differently, because they are influenced by the characters' choices and actions in these seasons. The YA-novel that has been chosen to introduce students to the topic of bullying in the context of the English classroom is *I swear* by Lane Davis. The following subsection will dive into the world of *I swear* and analyse the bullying situation that is described in the book.

3.4. The portrayal of bullying in the YA-novel *I swear* by Lane Davis

3.4.1. List of main characters

Leslie Gatlin

Leslie is a kind and empathetic teenage girl with chin-length blond hair. She has lived in a different house every year for as long as she can think, since her father is a contractor and her mother a real estate agent, who both earn money through remodelling houses and reselling them quickly for profit. Leslie goes to Westport High school in Seattle and is on the school's volleyball team. However, she has lost all her friends over the last three years, due to being relentlessly bullied by Macie Merrick and her friends. The bullying, which started in freshman year, has only become worse over time, so that in her senior year, Leslie feels that the only option she has to escape the harassment is to take her own life. She starts the engine of her parents' car in the closed garage, sits in the car and dies of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Macie Merrick

Macie, Jillian's friend since kindergarten, has great social skills. However, she is two-faced and only uses her skills for her best interest, sometimes being adorably charming, at other times extremely ruthless. She has had a crush on Jake, Jillian's twin brother, for a long time and cannot come to terms with the fact that Jake does not return her feelings. She thinks Leslie is the one to blame for that and starts to bully her relentlessly, although Leslie is a friend of Jillian's too. Macie's father is a politician and Macie, who has a brilliant sense for fashion and media relations, takes right after him, always trying to please him. Macie also holds a special place in her father's heart, as she is the only daughter among his five children.

Brad Wyst

Brad is a tall and strong, but rather quiet schoolmate of Leslie and the others. He is the captain of the football team and has been Jake's best friend since kindergarten. He started to date Macie in freshman year. He knows that he is only Macie's second choice, since Macie always wanted Jake as her boyfriend, even if Jake was never interested in Macie. Although Brad is officially dating Macie, he has been seeing Jillian, Jake's twin sister, in secret, for almost the same time span. The Wyst's are wealthy, and Brad lives in a luxurious house alone with his father. His brother is older than him and at college and, sadly, Brad's mother died a few years ago, which has left his father devastated and burying himself in his work. Although his father technically lives at home with Brad, he is gone most of the time, even on weekends.

Jake Walker

Jake is a tall, good-looking and very nice teenage boy around Leslie's age. Leslie and Jake are best friends and their families went on holiday together the summer before the start of freshman year. Jake's twin sister, Jillian, is also a friend of Leslie's, and on

that holiday they even got matching necklaces, which they were very proud of. Jake and Leslie spend a lot of time together, also having weekly guitar sessions. Jake has feelings for Leslie and kissed her once at the beach in their summer holiday, but Leslie tries to keep Jake in the friendzone, which he does not understand because he does not know all about the bullying.

Jillian Walker

Jillian has hazel eyes and wavy chestnut hair and is Jake's twin sister. She and Macie have been best friends forever, but Jillian has noticed a change for the worse in Macie's behaviour from the day on Macie decided that she wants to pursue a career in politics, like her father. Jillian has also been friends with Leslie but starts to ignore her when Macie starts to bully Leslie and eventually, even joins the bullying.

Beth Patterson

Beth is a pale girl with a blond pixie cut and freckles on her nose. Beth and Leslie meet the summer before freshman year at a cookout of Leslie's uncle, Guy Stevens, who is the coach of the girl's athletics team at Westport High. Coach Stevens has noticed the tiny gymnast Beth at a competition and found that she was talented. So, he invited Beth and her family to his cookout, to convince Beth's father that it would be best for Beth's career in gymnastics to transfer to his school, as Westport High is known to have the best public-school athletics department in the area. Beth and Leslie get along immediately and become friends. Beth even falls in love with Leslie and, one day, tries to kiss her. As Leslie tries to stop her, Beth realises that she does not reciprocate her feelings and feels devastated. Although Leslie is very sweet about the incident and promises not to tell anyone, Beth hurt, afraid and paranoid that Leslie might tell someone, sides with Macie and turns her back on Leslie.

Katherine Fraisure

Katherine's family has only moved to Seattle before the start of her junior year. Katherine's father is a litigator and as she wants to become a lawyer as well, she spends a lot of time in his office. Her other passion are beauty pageants. Katherine has won Miss Georgia Teen and wants to become Miss Teen USA. In order to do that she still needs to win Miss Washington Teen. In the week before the start of junior year, Katherine meets Macie at the registration for new students. Macie approaches her and tries to convince her to run with her for student council president. At first Katherine wants nothing to do with Macie, as Macie makes it clear that she only wants Katherine as her vice president because she thinks that her black skin colour will help them win the vote. However, as Macie promises her recommendation letters for top universities from her father and inside information and contacts inside the beauty pageant system, Katherine agrees. She never asks about why Leslie is being bullied and simply joins the bully group.

Krista Abernathy

Krista is a very skinny girl who wears cat's eye glasses, smokes a lot and usually behaves in a mean way. She joins Macie's bully group the first day of school in freshman year. Her father died while Krista was having dinner with him, due to an overdose of painkillers causing a stroke.

Josh Phillips

Josh is a tall and athletic teenager who is on the school's swim team. He is very successful and even has the fastest time for the two hundred butterfly in the state. He has sold drugs to Macie's brother, which Macie finds out and uses against him.

3.4.2. Plot summary

In her senior year, Leslie ends her life because she believes that it is the only option to escape the relentless bullying that she is exposed to. By the time she makes her decision final and gets in her mother's car, she has been bullied by Macie and her group of friends for over three years. Since her parents, to some extent, know about the bullying, they file a suit for wrongful death. As the investigation into Leslie's death proceeds, not only the whole story about the bullying, but also the bullies' reasons for having harassed Leslie are brought to light and the girls, who at first claim that they have nothing to do with the incident, soon realise that they have played a bigger part in Leslie's death than they have wanted to believe.

Before the start of freshman year, Leslie was a happy teenager who had just spent a lovely summer holiday with her friends Jake and Jillian and their families in Cape Cod. She had just come back from vacation, when her uncle invited her to a dinner party, where she met Beth, a girl her age who would also go to school at Westport High in the fall. Beth and Leslie bonded immediately and became friends. Everything seemed to be going well for Leslie, until the day of Brad's pool party before school start. Beth tried to kiss Leslie, but Leslie stopped her. Although Leslie's reaction was very kind and she promised not to tell anyone, Beth was deeply hurt, felt ashamed and went home. However, they had made plans with Jake to go said pool party at night, so they went there together, the tension between them almost tangible in the air. Despite the awkwardness between Beth and her, Leslie was having a good time. At some later stage of the evening, Jillian and Macie arrived. Much to Macie's disappointment, she realised that Leslie received a lot of attention from the boys, including Jake, who she had a crush on. From the time she was introduced to Leslie, she behaved very rude towards her. In the course of the evening, Beth learned that Macie was very popular

and tried to befriend her as she wanted to make sure that Leslie would not tell a girl that influential about the incident in Leslie's garage. A few days later in the school cafeteria, Leslie sat with Jake when Macie, Jillian and Beth arrived. Macie's behaviour towards Leslie again was very hostile. When Jake had left and the opportunity presented itself, Macie dictated the other two girls to get up and leave, making very clear that she did not want Leslie to join them. Beth and Jillian, both for their own reasons, obeyed Macie and left Leslie sitting there, alone and hurt that her two friends would treat her like that. After socially isolating Leslie, Macie sat down at a different cafeteria table and chatted up two girls. During this conversation, she started to spread the first rumours about Leslie. One of the two girls at the table, Krista, immediately joined Macie in bullying Leslie, and at Macie's request, wrote "whore" on Leslie's locker in an unobserved moment the following day. From that moment on, the intensity of the bullying Leslie had to endure only increased. Macie made sure that she attacked Leslie verbally every time she saw her, and that Leslie could also not forget about the bullying at home, as she and her group of friends, Beth, Krista and Jillian sent her threatening and hurtful texts frequently. In their junior year, Katherine, a girl who had recently moved to Seattle and was new to the school, joined Macie's bully group. Macie learned that Katherine liked to compete in beauty pageants and informed her that Leslie's mum was very influential in the pageant system and instructed her to become friends with Leslie in order to take advantage of her mum. When Katherine did not need Leslie's mum anymore, she set her a trap and made sure the whole school knew about her wrongdoing, which was extremely embarrassing for Leslie. Little by little, Leslie's classmates stopped talking to her and even started to avoid her, until she had only Jake left to talk to. However, Leslie's situation with Jake also became difficult, as they both had feelings for each other, but Leslie did not dare to act on them because she was afraid that Macie would only terrorise her even more. Jake could not understand

why Leslie kept pushing him away, so, in the end, they also stopped talking and Leslie felt like she was completely alone, and the hurting would never stop.

Leslie's hurting ends in suicide and her parents try to make the bullies pay for causing their daughter so much pain. This much has been stated before the events that lead to her death are narrated. However, it has not been said if the lawsuit is successful. In the course of their depositions, Katherine, Beth and Jillian finally admit to themselves what they have done and own up to their mistakes. They fully confess and are ready to testify against Macie, the mastermind behind all of the bullying. Nevertheless, Leslie's parents decide against pursuing the criminal case. As Jake does not understand their decision and is hurt about the fact that they do not fight for justice, he confronts Mr. Gatlin. In the course of their conversation, it becomes clear that Mr. Gatlin, in a way like his daughter, has lost all hope that they would win the case against the Merrick family, as Mr. Merrick, as a very influential state senator with many friends in high places, finds himself in a more powerful position than Leslie's parents. As a matter of fact, Mr. Merrick's previous actions let assume that he would use his powers against Leslie's father, if he chose to put Macie on trial. Mr. Gatlin is in a precarious financial situation, having tried to get a huge development project approved for three years, without luck. In exchange for dropping the charges against Macie, Mr. Merrick arranges that Mr. Gatlin receives the approval for his delayed project hours after withdrawing the criminal lawsuit. Afraid to jeopardise his own future, Mr Gatlin chooses to accept the senator's offer and succumbs.

3.4.3. Analysis of the bullying situation

On the basis of the information provided about bullying in the first part of the thesis, the situation in *I swear* will now be analysed.

3.4.3.1. Modes and types of bullying

In *I swear* a variety of different modes and types of bullying can be found.

Modes and types of bullying	Incidents in *I swear*
direct, physical bullying	deprivation of liberty throwing objects
direct verbal bullying	verbal insults inappropriate gestures and actions written insults
indirect, verbal bullying	mean and inappropriate sexual comments
direct, relational bullying	social isolation public humiliation fake friendships
indirect, relational bullying	rumour spreading social isolation publicly writing derogatory comments setting up Leslie's mother

Table 2 Modes and types of bullying in I swear

Incidents of direct, physical bullying

▪ **deprivation of liberty and throwing objects**

Josh lured Leslie into a park one night and then locked her in it by locking the gates, preventing her from leaving. It was part of Macie's big plan to humiliate Leslie in front of the whole bully group. Macie had instructed Josh to set up a fake profile and ask Leslie out on a date. When Leslie arrived to meet her date, every one of the bully group was at the park and laughed at her. Eggs were thrown at Leslie. A combination of different types of bullying can be seen here. Locking Leslie in the park and throwing eggs at her count as direct, physical bullying. Chanting "kill yourself" is direct, verbal bullying, and messaging Leslie with a fake profile in order to humiliating her in front of

others is direct relational bullying. The text excerpt that describes the physical bullying can be found right below.

Text excerpt (The speaker is Josh):

> As soon as Leslie had waited for about thirty minutes, I walked up and introduced myself as Craig Hutchins, then I closed the gates on her and trapped her in the park with a bike lock". […] "Yes," confirmed Josh. "Once I'd locked the gates, everybody who had come with us switched on their headlights and started whooping and throwing eggs at her, and Macie led everyone in a chant as well." "What did Macie have you chant?" asked Kellan. "'Kill yourself,'" said Josh. "It had sort of become her mantra with Leslie. She'd cough it in the hallway every time Leslie passed her." (Davis 182)

Incidents of direct, verbal bullying

- **verbal insults**

Macie did not leave out any opportunity to insult Leslie verbally. Every time Leslie passed Macie in the hallway, or in class, Macie would whisper hurtful comments to her or say them out loud for everybody to hear.

Text excerpts:

> "The words [Leslie]'d heard so often rang in her ears. *You are pathetic and worthless. You should just kill yourself*". (Davis 6)

> Macie laughed so hard she almost spit out a mouthful of water. She was choking and coughing and pounding her chest as Leslie walked by, and just as she passed, Macie coughed the words, "Kill yourself." Leslie wheeled on us. "What?" Her eyes were smoldering. "Easy, Thunder Tits," said Macie. "Don't you need to go scrub your locker or something?" (Davis 134)

Macie also bullied other students verbally, although not as relentlessly as Leslie. The first excerpt below shows how Macie reacted to Kelly's merely looking at her. The second excerpt is from a conversation between Katherine and Macie, after Katherine had turned on Macie.

Text excerpts:

> "I think the Gay-Straight Alliance meetings are in the bathrooms upstairs [Kelly],"
> Macie said coldly. "Maybe you could quit staring and get the hell out of here?"
> (Davis 170).

> "Where do you think you're going, bitch?" Katherine stopped but didn't turn
> around. "What did you call me, Macie?" "Monday morning, you're over," spat
> Macie. (Davis 217)

As already mentioned in relation with direct, physical bullying, Leslie was also bullied

verbally in the park, when she was supposed to meet up with her date.

Text excerpt:

> "Once I'd locked the gates, everybody who had come with us switched on their
> headlights and started whooping and throwing eggs at her, and Macie led
> everyone in a chant as well." "What did Macie have you chant?" asked Kellan.
> "'Kill yourself,'" said Josh. (Davis 182)

- **inappropriate gestures and actions**

After Katherine, Jillian and Beth turned on Macie, Krista tried to make them feel uneasy

at school.

Text excerpt (The speaker is Beth):

> When we got back to school and slid into third period, Macie didn't bat an eye.
> She wasn't really speaking to any of us anymore anyway. Krista was a different
> story. She kept turning around and staring, making faces, narrowing her eyes,
> passing notes to Macie, laughing. (Davis 262)

- **written insults**

Macie and the bully group also sent Leslie hurtful text messages, mostly via Facebook.

Although the bullies created a fake Facebook account and further changed the Google

voice number from which texts were sent after every message, Leslie knew that it was

always the same people harassing her, even if she could not prove it. Even the name

that was chosen for the Facebook profile was an insult and suggested Leslie should

kill herself as, when read out loud, Di Young sounds like "die young". The severity of

the cyberbullying Leslie had been exposed to, becomes clear when reading these excerpts.

Text excerpts:

> Of all the emails and all the Facebook messages and all the texts and phone calls [Leslie]'d received since she'd stepped into Macie Merrick's crosshairs, this one was the worst. (Davis 1)

> Macie was finishing the Facebook message to Leslie. […] The words on the screen were typed into a Facebook message. It read: TOP 10 THINGS TO REMEMBER IN YOUR SUICIDE NOTE. (Davis 8-9)

> These are printouts of hundreds of messages subpoenaed from a Facebook profile with the name of Di Young. These messages were sent from several IP addresses traced to three different residences. One of them is Miss Patterson's. (Davis 106)

Macie also sent Leslie a message from Jake's email account, in fact it was the message that led to Leslie's decision to kill herself.

Text excerpts:

> "Miss Walker, did you send this email from Jacob's account?" Jillian stared at the table and shook her head. "You gave her my computer, didn't you?" [Jake] knew the answer even before Jillian looked at [him] and said, "Yes." (Davis 245)

> In front of [Jake] was a printout of an email. It had been sent from [his] email account. Leslie, I'm tired of you turning me down. You don't deserve somebody like me. You are pathetic and worthless. Maybe Macie is right. You should just kill yourself. Done trying, Jake (Davis 244).

Incidents of indirect, verbal bullying

- **mean and inappropriate sexual comments**

After Krista had written "whore" on Leslie's locker, Macie said distasteful things to her friends when Leslie entered the classroom.

> "Nice work [Krista]," said Macie. "Oh, and don't look now, but here comes Thunder Boobs." "Didn't have to look," said Beth. "Felt the ground shaking." (Davis 134)

Incidents of direct, relational bullying

▪ **social isolation**

When Leslie was with other students, Macie tried to isolate her and keep her from talking to others, or ignored her completely. The first two excerpts are taken from a conversation in the school's cafeteria. All of the students were hanging out in a group, whereas at the end, Leslie is left alone at a table because when Macie, Beth and Jillian stand up to leave, Macie makes it clear that Leslie is not welcome and should not come with them. The third excerpt describes how Leslie tried to apologise to Katherine for her mother's behaviour at a pageant, but Macie would not even let Leslie talk to Katherine.

> "Where have you been all my life?" Macie asked Jake, ignoring Leslie completely (Davis 128).

> "Well, good luck," Leslie said. "If you need any help, I'll be over at Jake and Jillian's this weekend. I'd be happy to pitch in making posters or whatever you need." [Jillian] opened [her] mouth to say thanks, but before [she] could, Macie jumped in. "Coming, Beth?" Her question was a command. Beth sprang forward […], and as she did, [Jillian] saw Leslie's face fall. [She] knew [Leslie] was hurt. Macie had claimed [Jillian], and now she was taking Beth. (Davis 130)

> "What did Leslie do [Katherine]?" Kellan asked quietly. "She actually tried to apologize to me," I said. "She came up to me in the hall the next morning and said, 'Congratulations, Katherine.' Before I could turn around from my locker, Macie was flappin' her mouth." "What did Macie say?" I swallowed hard and glanced up at Lauren Wolinsky. She was looking directly into my eyes, and when I met her gaze, she nodded at me, just once. "I don't remember all of it," I said. "But I remember how it ended. She just looked at Leslie and said, 'Kill yourself.'" (Davis 224)

▪ **public humiliation**

Macie blackmailed Josh into setting up a fake Facebook profile and messaging Leslie to meet up with him. Only after weeks of persistent messaging, Leslie agreed to meet up, only to find the whole bully group waiting for her and publicly insulting her. Leslie was locked in a park at night, eggs were thrown at her (direct, physical bullying), but

the whole incident, setting her up to be ridiculed in front of everyone at the park, can

be viewed as direct, relational bullying.

Text excerpts:

> "Macie Merrick asked you to send falsified Facebook messages to Leslie Gatlin?" asked Kellan. "Yes," said Josh. […] "How long did you send Miss Gatlin messages from the account of Craig Hutchins? […] "A month? Maybe six weeks, I think." "And did she agree to meet this imaginary Craig Hutchins for a date?" Kellan asked. "Yes, finally," said Josh. "Did anyone else know about this date?" asked Kellan. "Sure." Josh smiled. "The whole gang was in on it". […] "Did you meet Miss Gatlin alone?" asked Kellan. "No. Of course not," said Josh. "Macie invited everyone. People brought popcorn and beers and blankets. She wanted everybody there to witness this one. (Davis 180-182)

- **fake friendships**

Macie suggested that Katherine should pretend to be Leslie's friend in order to get

insider information about the beauty pageants from Leslie's mother.

Text excerpt:

> "Macie turned back to [Katherine] with a grin so full of mischief […]. 'There's a girl in our class whose mom just so happens to be a former beauty queen herself. […] And goodness, Katherine, her daughter could certainly use a friend.' 'What's this girl's name?' [Katherine] asked. 'Leslie Gatlin'". (Davis 72-73)

Incidents of indirect, relational bullying

- **rumour spreading**

On the first day of freshman year, Macie started the first rumour about Leslie in the

school's cafeteria, subsequently more followed.

> "The first [rumour] we have record of was in regards to Leslie having had breast implants". (Davis 103)

> The girl with the red hair sitting next to Krista piped up. "Oh, that's too bad. I was hoping you could introduce us. That girl with the blond hair is so pretty." Macie cocked her chin and raised her eyebrows. "Well, isn't that sweet. And your name is . . . ?" "Kelly," she said, extending her hand. Macie shook it. "Well, ladies, anyone can be that pretty." "What do you mean?" Krista laughed. "I'll never look like that. That doesn't just happen overnight." "It most certainly does," said Macie. Blank stares—all around. "Oh, puh-leease," Macie scoffed. Then, in a conspiratorial whisper, she added, "Do you really think that puberty is that

gracious to anyone? Those tits are a hundred percent silicone". "Really?" Kelly's eyes were wide like lightbulbs. "Whose mom would let them do that?" "You're kidding, right?" said Macie with a stifled laugh. "Have you seen her mom's rack? Linda Gatlin, real estate agent. Google her on the way to fifth period. Same doctor did the surgery. And from what I hear, Leslie paid for those in person." "Wow. Impressive," said Krista. "Where did she get the money?" "Who said anything about money?" Macie asked, a gleam in her eyes. "Apparently, the doctor got a great deal on a house and had a special buy-one-get-one-free deal for a mother/daughter combo". (Davis 131-132)

[After hearing the rumour about the breast implants, the girl] across the table from [Macie] let out an "Ew!" while the other slowly slid her phone out of her purse and started sending a text. (Davis 132)

- **social isolation**

At the start of freshman year, Macie started to despise Leslie and wanted others to see Leslie the way she saw her. She started to badmouth Leslie and kept other students away from her.

Text excerpts:

"Let's review," said Macie. "You, me, Jake, Bradley: freshman class royalty. New girls: Beth—gymnast, undecided cool factor. Leslie—slut who wants Jake". (Davis 127)

"They won't be [friends] for long," said Macie. "I swear, by the time I'm through with her, [Jake] won't know she exists. (Davis 126-127)

"I was just getting worried about where I was going to sit." "Well, stay away from that Leslie girl," said Macie. "That's my advice to you [Beth]. Pretty much any other table will do". (Davis 128)

- **publicly writing derogatory comments**

Macie proposed that a nasty comment should be written on Leslie's locker to humiliate her in front of everyone. Krista, eager to become Macie's friend volunteers and vandalises Leslie's locker.

Text excerpts:

Macie reached into her bag and pulled out a Sharpie. "I think we should let Leslie know what we think of sluts. Maybe on her locker, say, first thing in the morning?" Krista looked at the Sharpie in Macie's outstretched hand, then

looked up over her glasses with a grin. "Atta girl," said Macie. "You've got potential". (Davis 132-133)

The next morning, the word "WHORE" showed up in big, bold black letters scrawled across Leslie's locker, and Leslie didn't show up for first period. (Davis 133-134)

- **setting Leslie's mother up**

As Katherine had gotten all the information she needed from Mrs. Gatlin and did not need Leslie anymore, she set Linda Gatlin up in order to hurt Leslie.

> Turns out Mrs. Gatlin was a board member for the Miss Washington Teen USA Pageant circuit. She knew every judge, coach, talent consultant, makeup artist, and hair stylist that mattered. She knew who would judge what when. She knew how to make sure her daughter's best friend met them before the regional competitions. Turns out she knew every bartender at the events too, and the night I won Miss Seattle Teen my junior year, she was supposed to welcome the audience with a word about the pageant organization before she introduced the host. Instead, she was backstage in my dressing room with a bottle of Veuve and the hunky bartender I'd tipped to take it to her. "So you purposefully set her up?" Kellan asked. "Why? What happened?" "I ran to get the stage manager and told him what was going on in my dressing room," I said. "He got the chairman of the board. They both found her in there together." Kellan was silent for a moment. "Due respect, Katherine, but . . . who cares?" […] "So a board member for a pageant gets tanked and makes out with a bartender in a contestant's dressing room. So what? Big deal. Who cares?" I looked down at my hands, folded on the table in front of me. "Leslie," I said quietly. "Leslie cared." "Yeah, but who would know about this?" Kellan was driving at something. "Everyone," I said. "Macie was backstage with me that night. She snapped a picture of Mrs. Gatlin and the bartender in my dressing room when the board chairman opened the door. By the time I got to school the next morning, she'd posted it all over Facebook. She uploaded the picture of Mrs. Gatlin hunkered down on this boy, with the words, 'Now we know where Leslie learned to be a whore.'" (Davis 222-224)

It has been shown above that many different modes and types of bullying can be found in the book, and that most of the negative actions are directed towards Leslie. Clearly, having to make such painful experiences, affected Leslie's whole life.

3.4.3.2. Reasons, motives and risk factors for bullying

So far only the actions of the bullies have been discussed, but not their reasons / motives for behaving that way. Therefore, the following will analyse why the girls chose to harass Leslie and whether certain personality traits or contextual influences put them at an increased risk for behaving in such a hostile manner.

For the analysis of the characters' risk factors and motives for bullying, it is beneficial that the story is told from multiple perspectives. Reading not only about the acts of bullying, but also about the other characters, helps to better understand the behaviour of various members of the friend group and their reasons for going along with the cruelty against Leslie.

Macie

When looking at Macie's personality and her family environment, it can be seen that she is at higher risk for being a bully than her peers. First of all, Macie displays signs of aggression, which is positively linked to bullying (Olweus, Bullying 34). When Macie and her friends sat together and talked about what they should do about the lawsuit against them, she shocked her friends when she smashed Jillian's snow globe against the wall in a fit of anger. Macie even justified her behaviour and believed that she had not behaved inappropriately.

> "Shut up!" roared Macie, and I glanced back at her just in time to see the Vegas snow globe leave her hand and sail across the couches before it slammed into the door to the media room and shattered in a spray of water and plastic shards. Katherine and Krista jumped about four feet off the couches, Brad leaped to his feet, and Josh pressed himself up against the wall next to the window Macie was standing in front of. Finally, there was silence in the room. Beth didn't even dare to sniff. "Good." Macie smiled. "Now that I have your attention, I'm going to give you all the strategy you need." (Davis 96)

It is very likely that she has made positive experiences with this type of behaviour and bullying in general in the past, which is also a risk factor (Orpinas and Horne 17-19). Furthermore, the snow globe incident shows that Macie is rather high in impulsivity, another risk factor for bullying, as she used force in a situation that most people would want to solve peacefully, for instance by just asking everyone to please stop talking (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130; Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 96).

Since bullying is a subtype of proactive aggression, the hostile behaviour of the bully is mostly not provoked, but rather carried out to achieve a goal (Griffin and Gross 380-381). Macie's acts of bullying against Leslie were unprovoked. Leslie had always behaved amicably towards Macie, she even offered to help her with her student council campaign, after Macie had been rude to her at the pool party (Davis 130). Macie only started to bully Leslie to make sure that Leslie did not become more popular than her, and in the hope that Jake would stop liking Leslie. It was a thorn in her side that Jake, who she had a crush on, was in love with Leslie, instead of her. Bullying someone in order to increase one's power in the peer group falls under power-related aggression (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130). At the day of the pool party, Macie felt threatened by Leslie who received all the attention of the boys that Macie normally got. Brad described it the following way: "'[…] I was thinking about that first day I met Leslie and Beth. […] He laughed. "Macie didn't know what hit her" (Davis 119). Macie bullied Leslie verbally every time she saw her and sent her messages almost every single day. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that Macie more frequently than her peers focuses on angry thoughts and chronically repeats aggressive behaviour (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 96).

Most likely, Macie is high in cognitive empathy, but rather low in affective empathy, which is common for bullies. She makes clear that she wants to be Jake's girlfriend,

but does not take Jake's feelings into account at all. She simply does not acknowledge that his feelings are different to hers and that he does not want to be with her. Throughout the book, it seems like she cannot put herself in the position of others and also does not see how much pain she causes Jake.

As has already been pointed out, one of the reasons Macie bullied Leslie was to secure her social status. There is evidence that popular girls, like Macie, carefully select their targets (Caravita, Di Blasio, and Salmivalli referred to in Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Lad, and Ladd 79). Macie is also socially skilled. She decided to bully Leslie because she saw her as a threat, however, she behaved differently towards Katherine when she met her. Even though she made sure Katherine knew how powerful she is, she tried hard to make her an ally and, instead of denigrating her, she promised her college recommendation letters from her father, amongst other favours. The speaker in the following text excerpt is Josh:

> The thing I've always liked about Katherine is that she doesn't appear to give a shit what anyone thinks of her. Two years ago when she moved here, I think that's why Macie dumped Jillian as a running mate and went with Katherine— not just because she needed votes, which is what she told Jills. I think it was because Macie recognized a quiet strength in Katherine that she knew she wanted on her side. If she didn't make Katherine a friend, she'd become a challenger. (Davis 83)

Bullies also tend to be high in extraversion and low in agreeableness (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias 63; Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130). This is true for Macie, she is student body president and enjoys speaking in front of crowds and to the media. However, her extraversion also shows in that she frequently initiates conflicts. The fact that Macie's level of agreeableness is low is obvious; she is only focused on herself and her feelings and would stop at nothing to get what she wants.

Macie's personality and behaviour have surely been influenced by the adult role-models in her life. Her father also shares the philosophy that 'the end justifies the means'. As rumours of his son taking drugs became public, he did not really care about him and his problems. Instead of being there and taking care of him, he only focused on saving his political campaign and sent his son away to somewhere in Nevada, so that he could not cause any more trouble (Davis 35). Furthermore, Macie has observed very early on that her father crushes everyone who tries to get in the way of his political career and that such behaviour is acceptable. Thus Macie also behaves that way. She only seems to be interested in moral reasoning when it is to her advantage. Although Macie seems to be able to recognise the harmful intentionality of other people's behaviour, she does not access her moral knowledge when she behaves in a hostile manner (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, and Ladd 80).

Macie's reasons for bullying Leslie have already been mentioned above. Leslie did not provoke Macie; Macie merely started to bully Leslie because she was afraid that Leslie might become more popular than her and because she was angry because Jake liked Leslie and not her.

> "Macie, you are my best friend's girlfriend," [Jake] said slowly. "So I'm going to be kind about this. You hated Leslie because I liked her. She knew it and everybody else here did too. Since ninth grade, you've been an outright bitch to her, and now she's dead. I'm going to find out how you were involved in this. When I do, you are going down, and I'm taking your daddy down with you." (Davis 61)

Before looking at the other characters of interest's reasons for bullying Leslie and analysing whether certain factors in their lives have made it more likely for them to behave that way, it needs to be mentioned that Macie can be described as an aggressive and relational bully since she often used verbal aggression to hurt Leslie, but also so often did not confront her directly The other girls, Beth, Jillian, Krista and

Katherine, are passive bullies, meaning that they did not initiate the bullying, but copied Macie's behaviour (Griffin and Gross 381).Needless to say, the fact that most of the other teenagers in Macie's surrounding did not try to stop her, but joined in, only reinforced her behaviour. The question why that was the case will be addressed subsequently.

Krista

Krista shows affiliated-related aggression on the day she meets Macie for the first time. When Macie suggests that Leslie's locker should be vandalised, she volunteers. An explanation for her behaviour could be that she believes Macie will accept her as a friend, if she bullies Leslie. Research has found a positive link between affiliation-related aggression to bullying (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 130).

Krista also seems to be low in empathy, which can be inferred from her mean comments in sensitive circumstances, for instance:

> "Ugh. When is [Jake] going to stop moping around?" asked Krista. "He's so much cuter when he smiles." I didn't say anything. I just turned up the music. Krista has no filter. She says everything she thinks, and she thinks some awful things. (Davis 79)

> For a moment, no one moved or spoke. Then Krista tossed back the last sip of Diet Coke in her can and sat forward with a bright smile. "Hi. I'm Krista Abernathy and you're watching Teen Suicide Week with Jake Walker on Lifetime. Television for Boring Women." (Davis 62)

As Krista did not even know Leslie at the time Macie started bullying her, Krista's only reason for bullying Leslie is to get Macie to like her. In general, Krista is happy to take Macie's orders and believes that Macie has the power to dictate everyone in the friend group how to behave. This becomes clear when Krista talks to Beth: "Where has [Katherine] been all week?" Krista asked. "She hasn't been at a single one of the student council meetings. You'd think Macie would whip her into line" (Davis 78).

However, it should also be taken into account that Krista's father died rather recently, and she maybe is acting out because of the pain she feels (Davis 66).

Katherine

At the very beginning of Katherine's introduction, the reader learns that her skin colour is black, and that Macie tries to take an advantage of Katherine's heritage.

> "Hi," she said, extending her hand. "I'm Krista." "Katherine," I said, taking her hand and using my "evening gown portion of our competition" smile. "It's a pleasure." Before I realized what was happening, she pulled me in close and whispered, "Thank God you're black. I was hoping we'd get some decent color this year." "Excuse me?" I asked, smile frozen in place. "I'm on the Welcome Committee for the student council," she said. "C'mon. Wait'll Macie gets a load of you." (Davis 66).

Research indeed has shown that belonging to an ethnic, racial or cultural minority can increase a person's risk for developing aggressive behaviour (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 129). But unlike Macie or Krista, Katherine seems not to have deficits in affective empathy. She is clearly affected by Leslie's death and admits that she hurt her and did things that added to Leslie's misery (Davis 221). However, at the beginning, Katherine is only focused on herself and how she can benefit from her friendship with Macie and does not consider Leslie's feelings. When she meets Macie for the first time, Katherine soon realises how popular and influential Macie is, but also that she has to be very careful around her and should not step on her toes. The prospect of benefitting from Macie's friendship is the reason why she joins the bully group.

> "Katherine." [...] "Do I have to spell this out for you? We're the cool kids. You're the new girl. This is your invite." [...] I've been class president since ninth grade. Jillian always runs as my VP, but this year, we can run for student council [and I want you to run with me]." "Why?" I asked. "Because if I'm going to win, I need the minority vote," she said. [...]. "And they'll vote for juniors like you and me because . . ." "Because you've got the right heritage," Macie said. [...]. That was it. I was done here. I stood up. "Macie, I may be from the South, but I did not just bump off the turnip truck yesterday. Don't know who you think you're talkin' to, but I am not about to be—" "The most popular girl in school on the first day?" [...] "Your call, Katherine," she said. "I'm not a racist. I just know how this works.

> […] I know all about campaigning and I know even more about winning." I stood there, unsure what my next move was. […]. "I want a recommendation from your father to Columbia, Harvard, and Stanford whether we win or lose," I said. […] "Done." "And I won't be makin' any big speeches or stayin' after school till all hours to make posters for the prom or whatever fool thing your student council wants done next." "Understood," Macie said. […] "One more thing," I said. "Who do you know in the pageant system around here?" "I think we can help you with that, too," Macie said slowly, and shot a look at Krista. (Davis 68, 70-72).

At some point in the book, the reader realises that there is a difference between Katherine's morals and the way she behaves towards Leslie. This discrepancy between can be explained through the mechanism of moral disengagement, which brings Katherine to ignore the negative consequences of her behaviour (Ettekal, Kochenderfer-Ladd and Ladd 80).

Beth

Beth's main motive for becoming friends with Macie and turning on Leslie was plain fear; the fear of Leslie exposing her lesbianism and the effect it would have on her career in sports and her reputation in school (Davis 107). Not much more information that could be linked to Beth being at elevated risk to become a bully can be found in the book. It was simply her hurt over Leslie's rejection and the fear she experienced that drove her to behave in such a cruel way.

Jillian

Jillian has been friends with Macie a lot longer than the other girls. At first, she tried to convince Macie to leave Leslie alone, but stopped when she realised her words fell on deaf ears. Furthermore, Macie threatened to replace her as class vice president and played with her fear that her high school experience could become hard too, if she made the wrong decision. Since Jillian believed that high school would be more terrible without Macie on her side, she went along with the bullying (Davis 160).

"Macie! What are you doing?" […] Macie stopped and burned holes through me with her eyes. "I'm winning," she said softly. "It's what I do." "But . . . Leslie didn't have a boob job—" "How do you know?" said Beth. […] I saw a slow smile spread across Macie's face […]. "Beth's exactly right, Jillian. Look around you. None of these students knows anything about us. Our whole class is a blank slate. The story gets written this week. The future of high school is set in the next four days. Get on board, or tell me now, and I'll find a new class vice president. Krista seems pretty resourceful, and Beth here is beginning to impress me." (Davis 133)

Jillian knew that being friends with Macie also had its downsides, but she claimed that Macie could be extremely sweet too and give her the feeling that she is most unique and special person in the world, which is one of the reasons she tried hard to stay friends with her (Davis 169).

Reasons and risk factors for the whole group

It has already been mentioned that Krista thinks that it is normal to follow Macie's orders. When looking at the various events in the book, it becomes clear that also Macie's other friends, for some reason, accept that Macie is in charge. It is most likely that the main reason why Macie's friends do not stand up to her and avoid to pick a fight, is that they all, not only Jillian, are afraid that Macie will drop them as friends and start to bully them too (Davis 145). Moreover, Macie's friends also put up with her behaviour because being friends with Macie has advantages (Davis 135). For instance, Macie promised to take Jillian on a trip to Paris (Davis 252).

Being friends with Macie increased the risk to engage in bullying for everyone in her close surrounding, not only for Jillian. Research has clearly shown that finding oneself in a friend group that has a positive attitude towards bullying, and also shows this type of behaviour, puts a person at risk. Peer group norms have a great influence on the individuals and groups who bully only increase their behaviour over time (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133; Espelage and De La Rue 3; Salmivalli 116).

As Leslie was exposed to a lot of cyberbullying, it can be assumed that the teenagers spent a lot of time online, which is also a risk factor for becoming a bully. The anonymity provided by the internet often lowers teenagers' inhibition threshold for cyberbullying. They think that bullying via the internet will not have consequences for them as they have the possibility to do it anonymously (Ang, 40; (Álvarez-García, García, and Núñez 133). Macie and her group of friends also set up a fake account to torment Leslie and made it a group activity to send hurtful messages to her (Davis 106).

The adult role models in the teenagers' lives also have an influence on their behaviour. Macie's father, Mr. Merrick, and Katherine's aunt Liza are two opposing characters in the book. Aunt Liza tells Katherine to do what is right and come clean about the bullying, Macie's father does everything to cover up the deeds of his daughter (Davis 145). Mr. Merrick is a bully himself and tries to get what he wants at all costs (Davis 271).

> "But, Li'l K, when you go into that room and you sit there with those lawyers, you got to tell the truth. Even if you afraid. Fear is what got you into this mess—fear of what other people think, fear you ain't beautiful enough as you is, fear that if you stand up, you'll be all alone"[, said Aunt Liza.] (Davis 145)

> Mr. Merrick just wanted it kept off the Action News at eleven. (Davis 93)

Reasons and risk factors for becoming a victim of bullying

Leslie

Leslie cannot be described as the "typical victim". She was socially skilled and, at the beginning, often tried to diffuse bullying situations (Carney, Hazler, and Higgins 99-100; Sokol, Bussey, and Rapee. 375-376, 386-388). She was not overweight or in any other way physically different from her peers, which could have increased her risk for becoming a victim. On the contrary, her male peers thought she was good looking (Davis 117, 119-120). The fact that Leslie became the victim of severe bullying shows

that it can happen to anyone and that no one is immune (Kaiser and Rasminsky 285-288). The reasons why Macie chose to harass her have already been discussed. When talking about Leslie's suicide, Macie repeatedly tries to put the blame on Leslie's parents. It is true that a complicated relationship with one's caregivers can increase the risk for being bullied, but Leslie's relationship with her parents is not described as completely lacking in warmth or empathy. At least, Leslie trusted her parents enough to tell them about some of the bullying she was experiencing.

3.4.3.3. Effects and consequences of bullying

Of course, the bullying that was going on had the most effects on and consequences for the victim, Leslie. At the very beginning of the book, it becomes clear that the severe bullying Leslie had to endure made her lose all hope that her situation would ever change, which led to her taking her life (Davis 6). As the story unfolds, the reader learns that the bullies have taken everything from Leslie, as the harassment had affected all aspects of her life. Research has shown that bullying can cause victims to commit suicide, which is true for Leslie. Suicidal thoughts, as Leslie experienced them, are also more common for harassed teenagers (stopbullying.gov, Davis 4).

A letter that Leslie wrote to Beth shows that Leslie felt "worthless" and cried every day because of the way Macie and the others treated her (Davis 152). Feeling sad is a common reaction of girls to bullying, as well other mental health problems (Rigby, What to do 50; Azeredo et al. 66). In regard to mental health problems, Leslie experienced anxiety and great emotional distress. Macie made sure that Leslie could not feel safe anywhere or at any time. She even told Josh to set up a fake profile and keep messaging her until she said yes to a date, only to humiliate her in front of everyone (Davis 200). Being harassed repeatedly also affected Leslie's self-esteem (Rigby, *What to do* 50). When she reflects about everything in the car, she looks at herself and

she remarks that "[p]erhaps once, she'd been pretty. Now she was unremarkable, sort of exactly what you'd expect" (Davis 6).

Furthermore, Leslie had lost all her friends, and most of her peers even avoided her because they were afraid of Macie. The bullying had also destroyed Leslie's relationship with Jake. He was the only friend Leslie had left, but even Jake had not really talked to Leslie for months before her death. The reasons they were on non-speaking terms was that Jake wanted Leslie to be his girlfriend, but that Leslie turned him down although she liked him too because she was so afraid of Macie, who had a crush on Jake, and what she would do (Davis 202).

However, the bullying not only had negative effects on Leslie, but also on bystanders and other students at school. For instance, two girls from Leslie's volleyball team talk about their fear of becoming the next victim of Macie and are clearly shocked and deeply affected by Leslie's death (Davis 23). Another example is the change in Jake's behaviour. When he hears about Josh locking Leslie in the park, he acts violently towards Josh and almost gets suspended (Davis 201). In general, after the bullying had cost Leslie her life, Jack behaves aggressively more often, even towards his own sister (Davis 158).

Extensive research into the negative effects of bullying has shown that peer harassment has serious repercussions for perpetrators as well. As with victims, each bully is affected differently. Behaving hostile towards Leslie has never been easy for Beth, since she was secretly in love with her. It can be assumed that Beth felt uneasy because her feelings for Leslie were extremely different from the way she behaved towards her (Wolk 1). Although she bullied Leslie, she still went to every one of her volleyball games and watched her play (Davis 204). When Beth learns that she will never be able to see Leslie again, she is devastated and cannot stop crying (Davis 13,

17) Later on, in the proceedings of the lawsuit, she feels sick and fears that her secret will be exposed. Furthermore, she is afraid of the consequences the bullying might have. "A wave of nausea swept over [Beth] and [she] ran into the bathroom just in time. [She] wanted to cry, but there were no tears, just fear. [She] was sweating and freezing at the same time" (Davis 148).

Although Macie does not admit it, it can be observed from her behaviour that she knows what she has done and fears the consequences (Davis 85). As if it were not enough that she bullied Leslie relentlessly, she does not learn from her mistakes and continues her cruel behaviour towards her peers (Davis 64). In the end, Macie's behaviour ruins her friendship with Jillian, Beth and Katherine. Jillian, friend since kindergarten, realises that she does not recognise Macie anymore and observes that bullying has changed her. Hence, not only Leslie lost friends because of the bullying, also the mastermind behind it did (Davis 218).

The crimes of the bully group have remained unpunished for a long time, but in the end, the bullies indeed have to face serious consequences for harassing Leslie. The bullying is taken seriously, and the perpetrators have to go through depositions and face criminal charges. Eventually, Leslie's parents decide to drop the lawsuit, but if they had pursued it, the bullies might have had to pay "hundreds of thousands of dollars" for their misdemeanour, if they had settled and the sum could have gone up if the case had been taken to court (Davis 108-109). It is not mentioned how Macie's relationship with her father is affected by all of this. Mr. Merrick bribes Mr. Gatlin to protect his daughter, but when looking at how he treated his son, it could easily be that he will not be the most understanding person and forgive Macie easily (Davis 268). Furthermore, Macie had already been accepted by Brown University, but when the university got wind of Macie's involvement in Leslie's death, they revoked her

acceptance (Davis 277). Katherine decision to do the right thing and come clean about her part in harassing Leslie, cost her her shot at becoming Miss Teen USA. For Jillian, the most serious consequence is a strain on her relationship with her brother Jake. The two of them have been inseparable before all of this started, but now Jake is not even speaking to her and it is not foreseeable that this will change in the future (275). Beth, as has already been mentioned, lost the person she had loved (Davis 190), and although it is not known how Krista is affected by the bullying and Leslie's death, it can be assumed that there are repercussions for her as well.

3.4.3.4. Prevention and intervention measures found in the book

The book does not give much information about Westport High's prevention and intervention strategies against bullying. Only in the immediate aftermath of Leslie's death, a reporter asks Macie Merrick about the school's measures against bullying and she speaks briefly about them. She even boasts that one of the student council's major initiatives this school year "has been to institute a campus-wide bully-free zone" (Davis 41). It is ironic that it is Macie who talks about how the school and herself as student body president try to make the school a safe space, although she has been the mastermind behind all the bullying that has eventually led to Leslie's losing all hope to escape her miserable situation and committing suicide. The reader does not need to get specifics about Westport High's anti-bullying policy. When reading about how long Leslie was bullied and how severe the incidents were, it becomes obvious that the policy in place could not have been very effective, as it had clearly failed to protect Leslie.

3.4.3.5. Reasons for using *I swear* to discuss bullying in class

The YA-novel *I swear* is suited for teaching bullying in the Austrian English classroom on upper secondary level for various reasons. First of all, the language used in the book is appropriate for learners with a language level of B1+/B2, according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). At B2 level, students can read many literary texts in a modern standard language in their original version, even though they may not understand every single word (ESP 15+ 35). As the Austrian secondary school system allows students to choose from a great variety of school types, it is difficult to say in which form *I swear* should be taught. However, in an AHS, for instance, the book could be taught in a 7th or 8th grade, in a HLW from the 3rd grade upwards, learners by then should have reached the level B2 (Horak et al. 20). It needs to me mentioned that literary texts are most commonly used in grammar schools (AHS), as vocational schools rather focus on preparing their students with the language skills they need for their future work place. Therefore, the proposed activities for teaching for *I swear* in the next section will be designed for a 7th form AHS. I have decided to design the lessons for students in a 7th form, since students in an 8th form are in their final year and will leave the school soon. Hence, it is of greater benefit for preventing bullying to discuss the issue at an earlier point. When teachers design questions for the oral English Matura, they can also compose questions about bullying, as it fits into the subject areas "Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke", "Medien", "Kommunikation", "Erwachsenwerden und Identitätsfindung" and "Regeln, Vorschriften, Gesetze (Jugendkriminalität, persönliche Freiheit…)" (BMBF 13).

Second, since *I swear* is about bullying, it allows teachers to introduce the problem to students and open a natural conversation about the issue. Bullying constitutes a problem in Austrian schools and the YA-novel by Lane Davis, published in 2012,

provides students with up-to date knowledge about the phenomenon, and even illuminates it from different perspectives, not only the perspective of the victim. The analysis of the bullying situation in the book has further shown that the information that is given about the problem is in accordance with the latest research into the phenomenon.

Third, the characters in the book are portrayed in a realistic way, and being told about the events in the book from different perspectives gives valuable insights into the complexity of bullying situations, the power dynamics in the bully group and the different characters' reasons for targeting Leslie. It furthermore shows that not all members of the bully group are equally comfortable with the harassment. As an example, when the group sit together and Macie composes a Facebook message to Leslie, Jillian does not seem to be as enthusiastic as the other girls about sending the message. Krista and Beth "dissolve into laughter on the floor", while Jillian only wants to get the message sent before Jake gets home (Davis 10).

Fourth, the book paints an accurate picture of the behaviour of bystanders. It can be seen that a lot of students are afraid of becoming a victim. No one tries to help Leslie or steps up to stop Macie, not even Jake, Leslie's best friend. He only confronts Macie about her hostile behaviour when it is too late. The passivity of bystanders is the biggest problem in the fight against bullying. Reading about peer harassment and engaging in tasks designed around the book can help students to develop social skills that can be in assistance in real life bullying incidences. Teachers could instruct students to reflect about the bystanders' behaviour in the book and help them to come up with ideas how the characters could have behaved differently. Teaching *I swear* is in accordance with the curriculum for Austrian grammar schools (Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes) which states:

> Im Sinne des exemplarischen Lernens sind möglichst zeit- und lebensnahe Themen zu wählen, durch deren Bearbeitung Einsichten, Kenntnisse, Fähigkeiten, Fertigkeiten und Methoden gewonnen werden, die eigenständig auf andere strukturverwandte Probleme und Aufgaben übertragen werden können. Die Materialien und Medien, die im Unterricht eingesetzt werden, haben möglichst aktuell und anschaulich zu sein, um die Schülerinnen und Schüler zu aktiver Mitarbeit anzuregen.

Besides, to raise students' interest for the target language, it is vital to not only work with the students' textbooks, but to introduce them to authentic language resources and a great variety of materials (Akbari and Razavi 105).

Fifth, the book shows that bullying has serious negative consequences, as it can lead to a person committing suicide. However, it is also made clear that bullies are not omnipotent. In fact, if other youths decide not to listen to bullies and stop being afraid of them, these are powerless. Bullies are only as powerful as their surroundings allow them to be. This is illustrated in this text excerpt (the speaker is Josh):

> Kevin and Brandon, two of our defensive linemen, were with a couple of cheerleaders in the other booth, and the four of them started an all-out spitball war with Brad, who was getting pegged with little wads of napkins they were shooting out of straws. I watched as Beth and Krista joined in to help him out, and before I knew it, everyone was laughing and joking around, and Macie was yelling for all of them to stop it, so they all turned on her and pelted her until she slid down under the table with her hands over her head. (Davis 82)

Lastly, the book sends a powerful message about choice – namely that the choices that we make on an everyday basis matter. One can decide to behave differently at any time. Sometimes, stepping up and doing the right thing can be very hard and make one feel uncomfortable, but it will become better, or as Jillian puts it:

> It's a strange thing when you spend so much time and energy fearing the worst will happen. Turns out that when it finally occurs, it's pretty much as bad as you thought it would be. In fact, some parts are worse. Then an amazing thing happens. You see clearly for the first time what made the terrible thing so frightening in the first place: You didn't think you'd survive. But you do. (Davis 274)

Jillian also realises something very important, namely that

> every click of a mouse, every tap of a button on a cell phone […], every thought, every word, every action, [is] a choice. Some big, some small, some better than others […] [You have] no power over what [people have chosen to do] in the past, or what [other people will choose to do] in the future. [You cannot] make better choices for either of them, or change the choices [you have] made before. [You can] only move forward by making sure the choice [you make] in this instant [is] the best one [you can] possibly make. (Davis 278-279).

It is crucial for students to see that many of the novel's characters, in the end, make better choices. To name only one example, Brad breaks up with Macie, although this means that he does not get the internship with her father and has to take a summer class to make up for his grade at school. He decides on the hard way instead of going along with Macie's cruelty any longer (Davis 276-277).

4. Suggested activities for teaching *I swear*

In order to prevent bullying on the classroom level, it is not only important to teach students about the problem, but also to provide them with opportunities for social learning, which means that teachers should let students work in groups, do role play exercises or reflective tasks. This allows students to hear the opinion and perspectives of others and requires them to look at situations from different angles. Hopefully, it also teaches students skills to assert themselves in a non-aggressive way (Wallner 61). Furthermore, talking or writing about bullying situations that students have read about in a book can help them to explore their own feelings in regard to this matter (Everts Danielson and LaBonty 33) and "learn about their own possible solutions to dealing with bullying problems" (Everts Danielson and LaBonty 36). The following exercises are specifically designed to help prevent bullying in classrooms.

- **Introducing *I swear***

Aim of activity: The activity aims to introduce students to the YA-novel *I swear* and make them realise at the very beginning that bullying can have serious consequences.

Skills/ language system: Listening, Reading, Speaking

Description of activity: The teacher writes the title of the book *I swear* on the blackboard and then reads the first few sentences of the book to the students. Next, students are assigned to groups and get a print out of the text that has been read and questions they need to answer. They should discuss what they think the book is about, what Leslie is about to do and what may have happened previously. Then, there will be a class discussion and groups will compare and discuss their answers to the questions. Afterwards, the book will be read in class together up to page 7. By then,

the students know that Leslie has been bullied. However, it is still not clear if Leslie survives her suicide attempt. The teacher asks students what they think will happen, if, for example, Leslie's parents will find her. After hearing students' opinion about how they think the story will turn out, the teacher provides students with information about the severe effects bullying can have on victims, but also on bystanders and perpetrators.

Material for the activity "Introducing *I swear*":

Worksheet:

PROLOGUE

Leslie Gatlin couldn't believe the words she was reading on the screen. Of all the emails and all the Facebook messages and all the texts and phone calls she'd received since she'd stepped into Macie Merrick's crosshairs, this one was the worst. As the sobs came one more time, she slowly closed the lid of her silver laptop and laid her head down on top of it. *You finally did it. You finally lost the last friend you'll ever have.* It was almost a relief. No one would miss her now when she left (Davis 1).

Discuss the following questions in your group:

Where is Leslie when she reads the message?

Is she alone or with someone?

Who is Macie Merrick and why is she sending Leslie messages?

What may have happened before that day that Leslie is so devastated?

What do you think does the message say?

What does Leslie plan to do? Where does she want to go?

- **Tick Tock Boom**

Aim of activity: Students can test their knowledge about bullying in a fun group activity and see how much their peers know about it. However, most importantly they hear about their peers' ideas to fight/ reduce bullying and possible solutions for bullying situations.

Skills/ language system: Speaking, Listening

Description of activity: Students are divided into groups of four and sit down in a circle. Each group gets a bomb replica, which, when activated, starts ticking and no one knows when it will make an explosion sound. Each round of the game, a different student draws a card which states what the students have to do. The student who draws the card reads the instructions out loud. After reading the instructions, the bomb is activated and passed on to the person on their left. When the person to their left is able provide a valid answer, the bomb can be passed on. The student who holds the bomb when it "explodes" loses the round. The student who has lost the most rounds has to write up the group's best ideas (with the help of the group) and hand the sheet of paper in. The teacher then summarises the ideas of the different groups and provides the students with a well-structured summary.

Material for the activity "Tick Tock Boom": Teachers need some sort of alarm clock, egg timer, time bomb, which makes a sound when the time is up and activity cards. For instance, a bomb replica can be taken from the game "Tick Tack Bumm".

Activity cards for "Tick Tock Boom"

Name reasons why someone might become a bully!	What effects can bullying have on victims?	Why is bullying someone in school not okay?
What consequences can bullying have for the bully?	How can bystanders help to decrease bullying?	You receive hurtful text messages every day. You think you know who sends them, but the number is untraceable. What do you do?
What can you do when your friend is bullied?	What can teachers do about bullying?	What can you do when you hear a rumour about someone?
Name different modes and types of bullying OR examples for bullying (e.g. spreading rumours)	Name reasons why other students (bystanders) might not help victims	What do you do when you are bullied? How do you behave towards the bully?

▪ **Role play**

Aim of activity: Students reflect on the feelings of the victim and possible solutions for helping the victim.

Skills/ language system: Speaking, Listening

Description of activity: Students work together in groups. Half of the groups are assigned the role of Leslie, whereas the students of the other groups have to slip into the role of Leslie's volleyball coach. In their groups, students talk about what they think the characters should say in the conversation and write a quick list with bullet points. Then the dialogues are acted out.

Material for the activity "Role play": Teachers hand out sheets of paper with instructions.

<u>Instructions for students:</u>

A) Imagine you are Leslie. You are late for your volleyball practice and your face is red from crying. Your coach asks you what is going on. Talk about what has been happening to you. What has Macie done? How long has it been going on? What are the effects of the bullying? How do you feel? Ask for help.

B) You are Leslie's volleyball coach. You have noticed a change in Leslie's behaviour over the last few months. One day, when she is late to practice, you see her alone in the changing room and decide to ask her. Tell her what you can do to help her or to improve her situation.

- **Diary entry**

Aim of activity: Instead of focusing on the perspective of the victim, this time the students should reflect on the bullies' feelings. They should think about Macie's feelings and the reasons why she started to bully Leslie.

Skills/ language system: writing

Description of activity: Students are asked to write a diary entry from Macie's perspective after she has met Leslie for the first time.

Material for the activity "Diary entry": Students are provided with the writing prompt below.

<p style="text-align:center">Writing prompt:</p>

You come home from Brad's pool party and after putting on your pyjamas you slip into your bed. You close your eyes and try to sleep, but somehow you can't stop thinking about Leslie and how much the others seemed to like her. Finally, you get up, sit down at your desk and pull out your diary. After looking at yourself in the mirror for a few minutes, you start to write…

- **Connecting text and real world**

Aim of activity: Students use outside sources to make connections between the text and the real world. In order to get a more in-depth understanding of the issue, students are instructed to find more information about bullying, or anything in connection with it that they think is interesting.

Skills/ Language system: Reading

Description of activity: Students should search for all kinds of material related to bullying that they find interesting (e.g. newspaper articles, blog entries, pictures…) and bring it to class. The teacher will put up an empty poster on the wall and students can pin everything they have found on it. Every now and then, the teacher will ask the students about the material they have collected and its relation to *I swear*.

Material for the activity "Connecting text and real world": Teachers merely need a poster and tape.

- **Character portraits (activity adapted from Motamedi et al. 29-31)**

Aim of activity: The activity ensures that students have an overview of the different characters in the book *I swear* and their part in the bullying.

Skills/ Language system: Reading, writing

Description of activity: While reading, students add new information they come across to the cards that their teacher has provided them with.

Material for the activity "Character portraits": Teachers merely need to adapt the size of the cards and print them.

<u>Cards</u>**:**

Leslie	Macie	Jake
observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:
observed feelings:	observed feelings:	observed feelings:
Jillian	**Beth**	**Katherine**
observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:
observed feelings:	observed feelings:	observed feelings:
Krista	**Josh**	**Brad**
observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:	observed actions/ inactions:
observed feelings:	observed feelings:	observed feelings:

- **Reflective writing**

Aim of activity: As students reflect about the characters' behaviour in the course of the story, it helps them to understand what was wrong with the characters' actions. In general, this activity gives students the opportunity to see that every choice that is made matters and that changes can be made so that no one is hurt as badly as, for example, Leslie.

Description of activity: Students decide on a character of the book and write about what the character has learned from the events in the book.

Material for the activity "Reflective writing": Teachers use the following writing prompt.

<u>Writing prompt:</u>

Choose a character (Beth, Jillian, Katherine or Jake) and write a short text in which you explain what the character has learned from Leslie's death.

What has the character learned from Leslie's death? What does he/she regret?

Do you think the character will make better choices in the future?

How will the character behave differently? In which situations especially? Give one or two examples.

- **Retelling the story (activity adapted from Pardede 22)**

Aim of activity: Students practice the use of connectors and discourse markers and establish the chronological order of events in the book.

Skills/ language system: Speaking, listening

Description of activity: The teacher tells students to form groups of three or four. The students are then instructed to "retell the story as a chain activity" (Pardede 22). If one student is stuck, or they think they have already said enough, it is the next student's turn. The students take turns until the whole story is finished. The teacher also advises the group to help each other.

Material for the activity "Retelling the story": No specific material is needed.

- **Iceberg model (adapted from SOS Kinderdorf 11-12)**

Aim of activity: Students get to know the iceberg model, on the basis of which it is illustrated that many invisible factors play a big role in communication. Furthermore, students reflect about the characters' reasons for behaving the way they did towards Leslie.

Skills/ language system: Speaking

Description of activity: The teacher draws an iceberg on the blackboard. Most of the iceberg is under the water surface. Then the teacher asks the students the following questions: 1) Can you describe what an iceberg looks like? What is the most dangerous thing about an iceberg? What could an iceberg have to do with communication? After hearing the students' ideas, the teacher explains the iceberg model further and writes the words "gestures", "intonation" and "words" above the water surface and "feelings", "needs", "expectations", "hopes", "wishes", and "a person's history" below the surface. When the students have got a picture of the characters, the iceberg model can be applied to them and their actions. This activity can be done as preparation for the writing exercises in which students have to reflect on the characters choices and reasons for bullying Leslie.

Material for the activity "Iceberg model": Teachers only need a blackboard and chalk.

- **Vocabulary work**

Aim of activity: The activity's aim is to help students acquire new vocabulary and improve or refresh their knowledge of difficult vocabulary words.

Skills/ language system: Reading, vocabulary

Description of activity: As looking up vocabulary can destroy the fun of reading and make the students lose interest, it will be done as a group activity (Pardede 20). *I swear* is told from the perspectives of Jillian, Beth, Katherine and Jake, therefore the class is divided into four groups. A character is assigned to each group, which then has to look up the vocabulary in the chapters that are told from the view of their character. All groups need to look up the vocabulary from the prologue. Besides giving the German translation of the word, the students also need to write down the sentence in which the word is used in the book. When they are done, the group members compare the words they have written down and eliminate double entries. After that, the students hand in their work and the teacher compiles an alphabetically sorted vocabulary list for the whole book. Besides, the teacher creates activities which help the students to acquire the new vocabulary. For instance, students are asked to match words to their definitions or find synonyms or antonyms. Students need to write down the sentences the words appear in and work on definitions, synonyms and antonyms as it is easier for them to memorise words in chunks (ESP 15+ 17). After working on the words' meanings, students are asked to complete sentences with the words from the exercises above. This allows them to "practice using the words they already understand the meanings of" (Pardede 21).

Material for the activity "Vocabulary work": Teachers can only compile the vocabulary list and activities after students have handed in their lists.

▪ **A different conversation**

Aim of activity: One of the major themes in the book is choice. Students should realise that every choice they make is important and in Leslie's case, could have saved her life. Furthermore, the activity fosters students' creative writing and reflective skills.

Language skills: Writing

Description of activity: The teacher provides the students with four different writing prompts. Each prompt describes an encounter of one of the four narrators with Leslie. The students should think about how the narrators' choices in this specific situation have affected Leslie and reflect on how they would have liked them to behave. Then they should write a dialogue between the characters' and Leslie in which the characters choose to behave differently.

Material for the activity "A different conversation":

Beth

The week before Leslie died, she showed up at Beth's birthday party, although she was not invited. Beth had an argument with Leslie in the driveway and begged her to leave. After she went back inside the house, Leslie started to cry and dropped on her knees. When she got up, she threw a letter in Beth's mailbox. It read (Davis 152):

> Dear Beth –
>
> I've never told anyone that you tried to kiss me. I don't know why you hate me so much. Ever since that day in my garage, you won't even look me in the eye. I told you then, and I'll say it again now: I don't care if you're gay. I didn't ever want to hurt you. I just wanted you to be my friend.
>
> Can we try to be friends again? Can you try to get Macie and the other girls to stop being so mean to me? I don't know how much more of this I can take. I'm tired of crying every day. I'm tired of feeling worthless.
>
> I want you to have this necklace. It reminds me of those two weeks before freshman year when I thought you were going to be my best friend. Maybe it will remind you of those good times too.
>
> Love, Leslie

As you know, Beth never saw the letter until after Leslie's death. Imagine Beth sees that Leslie puts something in her mailbox, goes back, reads the letter and runs after her immediately. Write a dialogue between Beth and Leslie.

Reflective questions:

- How do you think Beth felt when Leslie showed up at her house?
- Why did Beth want Leslie to leave?
- When Beth runs after Leslie, what does she say to her?
- Does Beth tell Leslie the reasons why she has been so mean to her?
- Does Beth tell Leslie about the effects the bullying has had on herself?
- What can Beth suggest to stop the bullying?
- Does Beth promise Leslie to behave differently in the future?

Jillian

The night Leslie decided to take her life, she received a message from Jake, Jillian's brother, which said that she was pathetic and worthless and should consider killing herself. However, Leslie believed that Jake sent the message, although Macie did. It is Jillian's fault that Macie could access Jake's email address. Macie had promised Jillian to take her to Paris and Jillian had been looking forward to it, even had started to shop for the trip. However, when they were at Jillian's place that night, Macie told the other girls about it and Jillian feared that Macie would take one of her other friends. Macie kind of made it seem like the girls had to compete to get to go to Paris with her. When Jillian was alone with Macie in Jake's room, she confronted Macie with that, but Macie merely asked why she should take Jillian. When Jillian saw that Jake was still logged in in his email account, she gave the laptop to Macie and saw this act as her ticket to Paris (Davis 250-252).

As you know, this message caused Leslie an extreme amount of pain and you know what else happened that evening. In her heart Jillian knew that it was wrong to give Macie access to Jake's email. Imagine Jillian had decided differently and decided to stand up against Macie instead of handing over the laptop. Write a dialogue between Jillian and Macie.

Reflective questions:

- What does Jillian want to tell Macie? What should she have told her a long time ago?
- What is Jillian's opinion about the bullying?
- Does Jillian say why she went along with the bullying?
- Does Jillian tell Macie what she believes are Macie's reasons for bullying Leslie?
- What does Jillian say about stopping the bullying?
- Does Jillian say she is going to talk to Leslie too?
- Does Jillian threaten Macie to tell someone (Jake, parents, school,…)?

Katherine

Katherine pretended to be Leslie's friend in order to get inside information about the beauty pageant system. Furthermore, she wanted the help of Leslie's mother, who had been a beauty queen herself. At one pageant, she tricked Leslie's mother, and Macie sent the pictures to the whole school to embarrass Leslie (Davis 223).

As you know, Katherine liked Leslie and did not find it hard to be her friend. Imagine Katherine had chosen differently at the pageant and she would have talked to Leslie instead of sending the bartender to Leslie's mother.

Reflective questions:

- Does Katherine tell Leslie about the plan with the bartender? Does she apologise for considering it?
- Does Katherine tell Leslie why she joined Macie's friend group? Does Katherine tell her about her first meeting with Macie?
- Does Katherine tell Leslie that she actually likes her, and Leslie should not believe what Macie says about her?
- Does Katherine tell Leslie why she thinks Macie bullies her?
- Does Katherine promise to help Leslie?

Jake

The last time Jake and Leslie had a longer conversation was in his car in front of her workplace. After that evening Jake stopped talking to Leslie because he was hurt that Leslie did not want to be his girlfriend. During their talk, Leslie told him about the bullying, but Jake did not see in how much pain Leslie really was. He was rather focused on his own wish to be Leslie's boyfriend (Davis 197-203).

Imagine the conversation went differently and Jake really considered Leslie's feelings and not only his own.

Reflective questions:

- What did Jake not understand in the original situation? What could he have done instead of pressuring Leslie?
- Should he have given up so easily to convince Leslie to report the bullying?
- What else could have Jake suggested to do about the bullying?
- Does Jake tell Leslie about how he feels about her pushing him away?
- What does Jake say about their friendship and what will happen if Leslie does not want to be his girlfriend?

5. Conclusion

For too long the problem of bullying in schools has been widely ignored and its negative effects on all parties concerned underestimated. Fortunately, there has been a change over the past years and peer harassment is now taken seriously. Anti-bullying strategies have been developed and put in place in a great number of schools around the world. However, the measures taken have yet not achieved the desired results and bullying still affects too many young children and teenagers.

It is true that many factors besides the ones inherent to educational institutions play a part in the occurrence of peer harassment. However, at school, teachers have an enormous influence on the operating bullying culture. Students spend most of their time in their respective classrooms, which is why teachers' attitudes about bullying and their classroom management matter. Ultimately, teachers serve as role models and the atmosphere in their classrooms sets the framework within which the relationships of the students unfold.

This thesis' goal was to find out if teaching Young Adult Literature on the topic of bullying, and especially the YA-novel *I swear* by Lane Davis in the context of the Austrian upper secondary EFL classroom, can contribute to combat the problem. The endeavour has been successful as it has been established that YAL and *I swear* are suited to educate students about bullying and can help to prevent or reduce incidents at school.

First of all, many reasons speak in favour of opening a discussion about bullying in class by using YAL. It allows teachers to start a natural conversation about the issue and take a clear stance against bullying. Furthermore, students learn about the nature of peer harassment and its harmful effects, while in addition the discussion of fictional bullying incidents can help students to deal with real life encounters.

Of course, teachers have to select the work of literature they wish to use carefully (Hughes and Laffier 4). *I swear* has been found to be particularly suited for teaching bullying in the Austrian upper secondary EFL classroom. The language in the book is appropriate for learners with a language level of B1/B2, the bullying also happens in a school context and the students can identify with the characters in the book as they are about the same age.

In order to find out if *I swear* is suited for teaching bullying, I have conducted a thorough analysis of the bullying situation in the book based on the first part of this thesis. The analysis has allowed me to come to the conclusion that *I swear* is a good pick for teachers to discuss the matter in class. The information about bullying presented in the book is up-to-date and in accordance with research into the phenomenon. Furthermore, the book portrays it in all its complexity and makes it very clear that the choices people make on an every-day basis matter.

The activities I have suggested for teaching *I swear* can help to prevent or reduce bullying as they provide students with opportunities for social learning and encourage them to reflect on the issue.

In light of these findings, I am positive that using Young Adult Literature to discuss bullying in class can contribute to making schools safer and that more educationalists will recognise the importance of YAL for bullying prevention and intervention strategies.

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7. List of tables

8. Appendix

8.1. Abstract (English)

Bullying constitutes a serious problem in schools all over the world and not only has severe negative effects on victims, but also on perpetrators and witnesses of incidents. If a bullying culture is operating, the school climate suffers, and schools are no longer perceived as safe learning environments. Despite the ministry of education's efforts to reduce bullying through the implementation of a national strategy against violence, the prevalence of bullying in Austrian schools is still high. One in five students has to endure bullying at least several times a month. In view of these findings, this thesis aims to make a contribution to help create a world without bullying by examining how peer harassment can be prevented, or at least reduced on the classroom level by the use of Young Adult Literature about bullying in the Austrian upper secondary EFL classroom. In order to demonstrate that Young Adult Literature can be of benefit in the fight against bullying, a thorough analysis of the YA-novel *I swear* by Lane Davis is conducted. The findings of said analysis are throughout positive and have led to the conclusion that *I swear* due to portraying bullying in all its complexity and providing up-to-date knowledge about the phenomenon is of great value for bullying prevention and intervention work in the English classroom. The activities designed around *I swear* further present specific ideas about how teachers can use the novel to help students gain knowledge about bullying, reflect on its harmful nature and learn about ways to handle incidents or how to assist victims.

8.2. Zusammenfassung (German)

Bullying in Schulen ist ein ernstzunehmendes Problem, das zu vielen Kindern auf dieser Welt großes Leid zufügt. Von den Mitschülern schikaniert zu werden hindert Opfer nicht nur daran sich auf ihre schulische Ausbildung zu konzentrieren, sondern kann auch negative Langzeitfolgen haben. Da Bullying nicht nur Auswirkungen auf die Opfer, sondern auch auf Täter und Beobachter von Übergriffen hat, vergiftet es das Schulklima und führt dazu, dass Schulen nicht mehr als sichere Lernumgebungen wahrgenommen werden. Trotz der Bemühungen die Übergriffe in österreichischen Schulen zu reduzieren, ist die Zahl der Fälle immer noch erschreckend hoch – jedes fünfte Kind macht die Erfahrung Opfer von Bullying zu werden. Diese Diplomarbeit versucht einen Beitrag zur Bekämpfung von Bullying zu leisten, indem sie untersucht wie die Verwendung von Jugendliteratur im Englischoberstufenunterricht in österreichischen Schulen dazu beitragen kann Bullying im Klassenkontext zu verhindern oder zu reduzieren. Um dies zu tun wurde der Jugendroman *I swear* von Lane Davis analysiert. Die gewonnenen Erkenntnisse aus der Analyse zeigen, dass *I swear* geeignet ist um Bullying zu unterrichten und die Schüler und Schülerinnen dazu zu bringen die Thematik kritisch zu reflektieren. Für die Verwendung des Buches sprechen unter anderem die gut dargestellte Komplexität des Phänomens und, dass die gelieferten Informationen im Buch mit dem aktuellen Wissenstand der Forschung übereinstimmen. Die für Schüler und Schülerinnen zusammengestellten Übungen zum Buch ergänzen die vorhergehende Analyse und liefern praktische Vorschläge wie Wissen über Bullying vermittelt werden kann und Schüler und Schülerinnen zum Reflektieren angeregt werden. Darüber hinaus erlauben die Übungen Schülern und Schülerinnen Ideen zu entwickeln um Opfern zu helfen und Erkenntnisse über Handlungsmöglichkeiten in Bullyingsituationen zu gewinnen.