

**VOLUME ONE:**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOMOPHOBIC  
BULLYING IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE  
PREVALENCE OF HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE IN A  
SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTING.**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Volume one comprises of two parts. Part one is a critical literature review which discusses the research into bullying in schools. There is a particular focus on the nature and prevalence of homophobic bullying and the use of homophobic language within the school environment and the impact of this on young people who are subjected to this type of abuse. Part two is an empirical paper based on the research project conducted by the author during her training on the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral programme. The research investigates the use of homophobic language within a single secondary school from the perspective of young people. The research is a two part study, where both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are utilised. The overall results highlight that young people who use remarks and language that are homophobic often perceive these remarks and language as banter amongst peers and are not always aware of the emotional distress this can cause to young people who are vulnerable to this form of bullying.

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## **INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER**

During the second and third years of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral course at the University of Birmingham, I have been employed by a large South Eastern Local Authority (LA) within their Educational Psychology Service. Volume one of the thesis, which is an assessed requirement of the course, consists of two papers that relate to research which was agreed by the Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist whose role it is to co-ordinate research topics in collaboration with the Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) working in the service.

The Educational Psychology Service's organisational structure reflects a matrix management system. This means that although centrally the Educational Psychology Service is managed by the Principal Educational Psychologist, the day to day management lies with both a Locality Manager and an Assistant Principal Psychologist, both of whom had highlighted the need for research into homophobic bullying within their locality. This was based on a previously highlighted need by a local secondary school, with particular incidents being raised regarding the emotional and social well being of young people and homophobic bullying. This led to an initial discussion with the Trainee Educational Psychologist regarding the possible research into the prevalence and use of homophobic language within the school environment.

The critical literature review focuses on current research into homophobic bullying, and the nature and prevalence of homophobic language within the education system. The review explored a number of research studies from the United Kingdom (UK) into homophobic

bullying, such as Thurlow (2001) and the Stonewall Organisation (Hunt and Jensen 2007 and Gausp 2009). The review also summarised the research into bullying; this was seen as an important aspect of the literature on homophobic bullying, as investigation of this social phenomenon would be incomplete without an understanding of the wider research into bullying within the UK education system.

The literature review identified a number of limitations within the existing research into the subject matter. Firstly, there is a dearth of studies dedicated to exploring the prevalence and impact of homophobic bullying from the perspective of children and young people. Secondly, there is an absence of any agreed operational and appropriate definitions of what constitutes bullying in general; most of the studies quote Olweus' (1993a) research conducted within the late 80s in Scandinavia. The limitations of the reliability of current investigations into homophobic bullying and homophobic language are also considered. Much of the research has been conducted by the Stonewall Organisation (a political pressure group), who advocate the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people. Limited research has been conducted into the views of children and young people who do identify as LGBT. Similarly there has been limited research into the views of children and young people who do not identify as LGBT.

This literature review led to the current investigation. The researcher chose to investigate the nature and prevalence of homophobic language within a secondary school, from the perspective of children and young people and, as the title suggests, the researcher employed methods congruent with a subjectivist view of the world. This means that the researcher aimed to explore the research topic from the views and experiences of the participants. The

research was conducted in two phases using a mixed methods approach. Phase One involved qualitative data collection (from focus groups) and Phase Two collected quantitative data (from a questionnaire survey). A mixed methods approach was considered by the researcher to be an appropriate methodology as it provided a framework to enable the researcher to assess the prevalence of homophobic language within a school from the viewpoint of the available research subjects.

Data analysis included the use of thematic analysis for the qualitative data and for some aspects of the questionnaire survey. The rest of the quantitative survey was analysed using descriptive statistics.

The two papers that are included in this volume have been written to journal specification and target the Journal of Pastoral Care in Education (JPCE). The JPCE states its focus is on tackling important contemporary issues within the curriculum, concerning the personal and social development of all pupils. The impact of homophobic bullying on the social and emotional well-being of a significant proportion of children and young people is under-researched, particularly from the perspective of children and young people.

The concluding chapter contains reflections regarding the limitation of the design of the study and further recommendations for the work of Educational Psychologists.

The appendices of this volume contain two public domain briefing papers. The first of these papers was written for the approval of the Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist (APEP) and for the Locality Manager. The second paper was designed as a summative report

to feed back the key findings to the professionals and school involved in this study and to the Local Authority Educational Psychology Service.

### References

Guasp, A. (2009) *The teachers report: homophobic bullying in Britain's schools*. London: Stonewall

Hunt, J. and Jensen, J. (2007) *The school report: the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools*. London: Stonewall

Olweus, D. (1993a) *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell

Thurlow, C. (2001) Naming the “outsider within”: homophobic pejoratives and the verbal abuse of lesbian, gay and bisexual high-school pupils. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 25–38

**Bullying within the education system with a focus on research into homophobic bullying  
and the prevalence of homophobic language in schools**

**Abstract**

This paper aims to review the research on homophobic bullying and the nature and prevalence of homophobic language within the education system. Within this extensively researched phenomenon there are many areas of foci identified in studies conducted in Europe, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and the United States (US). For the purposes of this review the author will discuss a number of areas of research in depth, as detailed below.

Firstly, to investigate homophobic bullying there is a need to understand what defines bullying behaviour in general terms. Definitions of bullying from the perspectives of researchers, teachers and children and young people will be discussed.

Secondly, research into bullying within the education system and the complex bully-victim dynamic will be summarised. The psychological impact on young people will be discussed alongside psychological theory that attempts to explain the complex interactions between the bully and the victim involved in bullying behaviour.

Thirdly, this review will explore the published research into homophobic bullying, the use of homophobic language within the school environment and how this impacts upon the well being of children who have or have not identified themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered (LGBT).

## **Search strategy**

Search engines used include Psych Info, Swetswise and ASSIA with key word searches of “bullying in schools”, “homophobic bullying”, “homophobic language”, and “homophobic language in school” dating from 2000 to 2010. For each search more than a hundred articles were retrieved. The search was further defined to look specifically at “homophobic bullying” and “homophobic language in schools” This search provided 145 articles which were then filtered for their relevance. Many articles from the American (USA) and European studies were excluded as the context would not have been relevant to a United Kingdom (UK) sample, whilst key articles linking to the subject were retained. After this process, twenty two articles remained. These key articles’ bibliographies were also a source of information as articles which were not obtained through the search engine were available by searching through the key article bibliographies.

## **Defining Bullying**

Any investigation into bullying in schools is complicated by the fact that there is no universally accepted operational definition, and terminology can be variable and imprecise (see examples from research such as Pikas, (1994) in Smith and Sharp, (1994); Smith, (1992) and Swain, 1998).

Even with the varied terminology there does appear to be widespread agreement between researchers (Besag, 1989; Smith and Thompson, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 1994) that bullying includes several key elements such as physical, verbal, psychological attacks and intimidation that are intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim. Other key elements include the abuse and provocation of the victim and repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged and sustained period of time (Smith, 2004).

Whilst identifying key themes emerging from the literature it became apparent that many research papers focusing on defining bullying quoted the definition used by Olweus (1993) based on his extensive research in Sweden and Norway in the 1980s and 1990s.

Olweus wrote:

“A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.”

(Olweus, 1993, p. 9)

Through the research review conducted by Berger (2007) three crucial elements were noted regarding bullying. These were: repetition, harm and unequal power. These characteristics of bullying are accepted by researchers in this field (Nansel and Overpeck, 2003 and Rigby, 2002b).

The research definition carefully excludes playful fighting, a one-time attack, or good natured teasing between friends, but includes indirect attacks, especially social or relational bullying. Not all aggression is bullying, but bullying is always aggression, defined as hurtful and hostile behaviour (Tremblay et al., 2005).

### Types of bullying

Researchers such as Benbenishty and Astor (2005) and Rigby (2002b) have highlighted that bullying is manifested in many ways, described in the research as physical, verbal, and relational.

- *Physical bullying* which includes hitting, kicking and beating and is described as the most recognized by adults and children (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, and Liefoogle, 2002).
- *Verbal bullying* comprises repeated derogatory remarks or name calling (Tapper and Boulton, 2005).
- *Relational bullying* (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995) disrupts the social relationships between victims and their peers. Another way to classify bullying is to distinguish *direct* and *indirect* attacks, which children call “to my face” (direct) or “behind my

back” (indirect). In a direct attack the victim sees the bully; in an indirect attack, the victim is hurt (by gossip, shunning, and so on) but does not know who to blame.

Indirect bullying makes attacks easy, detection hard, and self-defence difficult.

(Vaillancourt et al., 2009, p. 487).

Finally, cyber bullying is similar to other verbal and relation bullying, but with one crucial difference: the technology separates the bully and victim. Often the bully is unknown, which could lead to much more severe and persistent bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell 2004, p. 1310).

### Defining homophobic bullying

In comparison to bullying research, considerably less is known about homophobic bullying specifically and in particular the bullying of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people. Research in the late 1990s and 2000s has begun to highlight concerns about homophobic bullying within the education system. However, once again inconsistencies in operational definitions of homophobic bullying mean that the research is unclear about what constitutes homophobic bullying (Cowie and Rivers, 2007).

Having said this, researchers such as Rivers (2001) and Warwick, Aggleton and Douglas (2001) have summarised homophobic bullying as occurring, “when individuals are singled out for their actual or perceived sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, or bisexual)” p. 430. Rivers (2001) goes on to define this further by highlighting:

- **verbal abuse** including spreading rumours that someone is gay, suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are “gay” for example, “you’re such a gay boy!” or “those trainers are so gay!” ,  
and/or
- **physical abuse** including hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour (Rivers, 2001, p. 430).

This definition although used by researchers, is limited as it does not include social exclusion or emotional abuse. The Department for Children and Families (DCSF) (now the Department of Education) in guidance on homophobic bullying “Playing it Safe” (2001) defined homophobic bullying as occurring:

“when bullying is motivated by a prejudice against lesbian, gay or bisexual people.” (p.6)

This again can be viewed as too narrow a definition as it fails to incorporate perceived homophobic bullying through indirect forms such as social exclusion, as discussed in Olweus’s (1993) research on bullying.

A review of the literature in this area conducted by Warwick et al. (2006, p. 60) helped to conceptualise homophobic bullying as:

“An incident which is perceived to be homophobic and can take on different forms, it can be name calling, or verbal threats.”

This combined with the DCSF definition provides some useful information regarding some of the direct and indirect forms of bullying highlighted in the research.

Overall it can be argued that defining homophobic bullying is challenging. There appears to be a number of strands to homophobic bullying that are important to consider such as:

- social exclusion;
- perceived and actual prejudice;
- verbal threats;
- physical violence; and
- discrimination by individuals and by communities towards perceived or actual sexual orientation of a person (Rivers, 2001).

However, more research needs to be done into this area to identify an operational definition that is able to encapsulate the many elements of homophobic bullying further, such that it resonates with the sector of the population that these issues affect the most.

In summary it can be stated that defining bullying remains problematic within the literature. The difficulties in drawing out an operational definition can be related to many different factors. Firstly, researchers in this field appear often to quote research by Olweus (1993a) which was conducted over 15 years ago. As the issue of bullying affects children and young people, using definitions obtained from the literature some time ago may not have the same resonance with the current population. Therefore, research conducted previously may not give a true reflection of the current situation because the issues faced by young people today may have changed. This leads onto a second point which relates to the view that bullying is a

socially constructed phenomena, which means that definitions of bullying vary among different groups in society and are therefore, specific to gender, ethnicity, age, cultural experiences, to name a few. This complexity surrounding bullying definitions is reflected in the research reported by Berger (2007).

Berger (2007) gives an extensive summary of definitions used over the last decade including Olweus's (1993). Berger (2007) summarised Olweus definition (1993) and stated that although it was more universally accepted than other definitions it would never fully encapsulate variations across different social contexts. This means definitions of bullying will remain specific to the context or social group where the research was conducted. Berger (2007) reported some important implications for researchers using broad definitions such as Olweus (1993) on how bullying as a construct is assessed and then monitored and how effectively interventions are evaluated.

The challenges associated with defining bullying also have implications for generalising research findings. This means that any research discussed in this paper can be critiqued for its methodology, theoretical standpoint, sample size and the level of representation it has to the community from which the data is collected. For example, data collected from a secondary school in rural parts of Surrey can be representative of wider secondary school populations within this part of Surrey. However, due to challenges associated with defining bullying it would not be appropriate to make generalisations to school communities across the UK. Overall it can be stated that although bullying research can be critiqued for its analytical generalisations (see Yin, 2003) the findings can never fully become generalised to wider populations. Therefore, in this paper many of the discussions regarding generalisations of

bullying research are limited to discussing generalisations to wider samples which are representative of the sample used in the individual studies.

Thirdly, with different methods of social interaction on the increase – for example the use of text messaging, email and social networking sites – definitions which focus on incidents of physical and verbal abuse may no longer be as pertinent to the population as emotional or psychological abuse through technology such as cyber bullying.

## **Bullying in Schools**

Published research into bullying within the education system in the UK began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 90s. This included the Besag (1989) and Tattum and Lane (1989) studies which originated following the Elton Report (DES, 1989) on Discipline in Schools which although primarily focused on teacher-pupil relationships, did highlight that there was widespread bullying in schools.

Whitney and Smith's (1993) study followed on from the Elton Report (1989). With their sample of over 6000 pupils from 24 schools in Sheffield they found that an average of 27% of primary and 10% of secondary school pupils reported being bullied during a school term ("term" was defined as between September and December).

A follow-up study conducted by Sharp, Thompson and Arora (2000) in five schools (three primary and two secondary) with a total of 2871 participants, found that 49% of the students reported that they had been bullied in the year preceding the survey conducted by Whitney and Smith's (1993). More recently, research focusing upon the development of new technologies and their implications for bullying behaviour suggested that 6% of students reported receiving threatening email and text messages when they were at school (Rivers, 2003). These figures were also confirmed by the National Children's Homes (2002) study which suggested that mobile phones are the most commonly used medium for indirect forms of bullying.

In response to the findings of research such as that carried out by Whitney and Smith (1993) and Sharp et al. (2000), central government has made many substantive moves to help support school staff to tackle bullying through the development of anti-bullying initiatives such as the “No Blame Approach” and “*Don’t suffer in silence*”: *An anti-bullying pack for schools*, (DfES, 2000).

There is a large body of research which focuses on the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives in schools. For example, a large scale study conducted by Smith and Shu (2000), where 2308 pupils aged between 10-14 from 19 schools across England were surveyed, found that frequencies of being bullied and of bullying others were decreasing compared to earlier studies such as Whitney and Smith (1993), which they argue could be linked to the impact of the positive interventions by schools concerned with the issue of bullying. However, direct links to interventions are difficult to identify as researchers such as Reid et al. (2004) and Boulton et al. (2002) argue that simply raising awareness could be a reason why prevalence rates go down.

More recently Samara and Smith (2008) investigated how schools tackle bullying and the impact of whole school policies on bullying over the last decade. They focused on two key policies, “Don’t Suffer in Silence” (revised edition published in December 2000) and the “Safe to Learn” policy (2007) both from the DCSF. Samara and Smith (2008) wanted to see how schools had implemented the policies and how they had changed their practices. Out of 19,000 schools which had requested the “Don’t Suffer in Silence” intervention, 437 were contacted (it is not clear how or on what basis they were selected), 155 responded and 109 replies were analysed.

Questionnaires included both closed and open questions and responses suggested schools had responded to the policy suggestions. However, the response rate was low and not demonstrably representative of the 19,000 schools which had been sent the intervention. It could be argued that schools which were more concerned with this topic and more proactive in taking steps to reduce the prevalence and impact of bullying had responded to the survey, and that the results of this study might therefore not be representative of the wider school populations.

Overall there have been a number of key research studies within the UK that have focused on bullying within the education system. However, there are a number of limitations to these studies that are discussed below.

Surveys such as those conducted by Whitney and Smith (1993) use quantitative data collection measures. As with questionnaire based studies in this area of research, results from questionnaires alone are not sufficient to support reliable generalisations to wider populations. The questionnaire used in Whitney and Smith's study was adapted from Olweus's (1993a) instrument, which again is criticised for the limited legitimate generalisation of findings to different populations. However, it is important to document that analytical generalisations are possible, as reported by researchers such as Yin (2003) and Cohen and Manion (2007). Both argue that a previously developed theory can be used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of a case study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed. It is also noted that Whitney and Smith (1993) did not explain in their methodology how they adapted the questionnaire to fit their student population.

Furthermore, results from self-report questionnaires should be viewed with caution as there are issues related to the trustworthiness of results, particularly when a subject such as bullying is being discussed. Nevertheless, the results are interesting as they present the views of children and young people: an aspect of research which is still scarce.

More recently Swearer et al. (2010) discuss some of the methodological challenges related to bullying research. For example, they highlight the difficulties in making comparisons across studies and evaluations. They state that because bullying is assessed using different methods - for example rating scales, surveys, observations and interviews with different operational definitions- this affects the findings obtained.

How bullying is defined has an important implication for researching this construct. Vaillancourt et al. (2009) examined whether or not the provision of a certain definition yielded different prevalence rates in self-reported bullying surveys. More than 1,700 students (ages 8–18) were randomly assigned to either a definition or non definition condition and asked to report on their experiences with bullying as a victim or perpetrator. Provision of a standardised definition of bullying was found to be related to different prevalence rates, and students who were provided with a definition reported being bullied less and bullying others more than students who were not given a definition<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition used by Vaillancourt et al. (2009) was modified slightly to reflect Canadian dialect:

“A student is being bullied, or picked on, when another student, or group of students, say nasty or unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when people won’t talk to them, and things like that. These things may happen a lot and it is difficult for the student to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a student is teased a lot in a nasty way. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength have the odd (rare) argument or fight (Whitney & Smith, 1993, p. 7).”

Paradoxically intervention and prevention efforts that seek to raise awareness regarding bullying can initially increase student reports of bullying, contributing to changes in the reported rates of bullying in the short term (Smith et al., 2002).

## **Psychological theories and perspectives on bullying in general and homophobic bullying in particular**

Another area of research explores the impact of bullying for victims. According to Seals and Young (2003) and Beaty and Alexeyev (2008), victimisation by bullies has been commonly associated with low self esteem, feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression (O'Moore and Kirkham, 2001) for the victim.

There has also been some recent research which identifies the impact of homophobic bullying on young people perceived as or self identified as LGBT. Rivers (2004) reported that most LGBT adults who talked about their experiences of bullying at school had experienced homophobic bullying and as a result had contemplated suicide when they were at school.

Poteat and Espleage (2005) investigated the extent to which homophobic victimisation predicted multiple indicators of psychological and social distress among middle school students. They surveyed 95 male and 74 females aged between 13-14 years old and then 74 males and 69 females participated in a follow up survey a year later. Measures included a homophobic content agent target scale (Poteat and Espleage, 2005), anxiety and depression scale, a scale of school membership, personal distress and a 'withdrawn from school' membership scale.

Their results suggested that being the target of homophobic bullying had significant psychological and social consequences for students. For males being subjected to homophobic epithets significantly predicted higher levels of anxiety and depression, personal distress and a lower sense of school belonging.

Rivers and Noret (2008) measured well being and risk taking behaviours among young people. They randomly selected 36 males and 27 females from 14 schools: Group One included young people self identified as LBGT and the control group included young people who identified themselves as heterosexual. The results were similar for both groups regarding mental health indicators such as anxiety and depression. However, LGBT young people were more at risk of drinking alone, and had more concerns linked to their sexuality. These results suggested that although LGBT young people had concerns relating to their sexuality, both samples had similar concerns about being teenagers and emotional well-being concerns that are linked to this age group in general such as friendships and peer pressure.

The strengths of this study include the use of multiple measures of matching criteria and the use of several secondary schools within the sample which can be viewed as broadly representative of secondary schools. However, the study can be criticised for using a predominately Caucasian sample and is again limited in representation of minority groups. In addition, the use of self report scale measures means that caution should be taken when interpreting findings as there was no qualitative data to support the quantitative findings.

#### An ecological perspective on bullying behaviour

Barboza et al. (2009) discuss the broad range of individual and contextual factors that are involved in bullying behaviours among children and adolescents. Research has highlighted that bullying is linked to characteristics such as sexuality, religion, race or physical appearance (Smith, 2004). The ecological framework which focuses on the interplay between

these individual characteristics and multi-level contextual influences on development is particularly useful for understanding the complex dimensions of bullying and for developing sensitive and effective interventions. Swearer et al. (2010) suggested that the social-ecological theory of bullying offers a holistic view of bullying including theory, attitudes and behaviour change in children and adolescents.

The ecological perspective presents a conceptual framework to investigate the combined impact of social contexts and influences on behaviour, within systems directly affecting children and young people such as family systems, schools, peer groups, teacher-student relationships, parent-child relationships, neighbourhood and cultural expectations (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; Swearer et al., 2010).

The primary focus of the ecological perspective is to understand human development and the dynamic interaction between the bully and the victim (Baboza et al. 2009, p. 102).

The bullying behaviour relationship in this instance is defined by the interaction of the bully and the victim including the characteristics identified with each. At the core of the bullying behaviour are the individual characteristics of the bully and the victim which, in turn, relate to the social systems of which each is part.

The different systems which affect the bully-victim relationship are described in detail in Table 1 below:

<b>Social System</b>	<b>Description</b>
Microsystem	This includes the direct setting in which individuals develop: in this instance this would include the school and support for the child's behaviour in the classroom, larger school setting or parental involvement.
Mesosystem	This involves the interactions between two or more microsystems in influencing behaviours such as the school and the family, both of which can have a powerful impact on a child's development
Exosystem	This does not directly involve the key participants (bully/victim) but includes systems or protocols which can have a direct impact on them. In the case of school bullying, this could include school policies which can influence schools and shape the school environment.
Macrosystem	This consists of factors affecting the welfare of the individuals and systems in a less direct way. These include broader societal influences and attitudes towards certain types of behaviour linked to bullying, such as attitudes which normalise certain behaviours such as aggression among boys and social isolation among girls, with attitudes like "boys will be boys" and "girls will be girls".
Chronosystem	This includes the effects of time on certain bullying or victim behaviour. Children new to a school may become involved in bullying/victim type behaviours but over time these may decrease. Also societal attitudes may change over time.

(In Baboza et al., 2009, p. 103)

The ecological perspective on bullying is one way of explaining the complex behaviours and environmental influences that impact on prevalence, interventions and directly on both a bully and the victim. Another perspective is that developed from Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

### Social Learning Theory and Bullying

Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental influences. According to Bandura (1977) people learn through observing others, in particular their behaviour, attitudes and the consequences of their actions.

As with the ecological perspective on bullying, Social Learning Theory also discusses the fact that bullying occurs within social contexts and peer processes. O'Connell et al. (1999) examined the peer processes surrounding bullying from a social learning perspective of modelling and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). With links to social learning theory, O'Connell et al. (1999) stated that children are more likely to imitate and model when the model is a powerful figure, the model is rewarded rather than punished for the behaviour and the model shares similar characteristics with the child. In the case of bullying these conditions are often present. Peers who are present during a bullying episode have the opportunity to observe a power figure (the bully).

O'Connell et al. (1999) studied how peers provided reinforcement to the bully and support to the victim. They suggested that the school environment can often be a place where peers can

become bullies. For example peers may actively or passively reinforce the aggressive behaviours of bullies through their attention and engagement. In contrast, peers may also shape the behaviours of victims by either intervening in or ignoring the bullying behaviour.

O'Connell et al. (1999) found that older boys particularly, spent the most time joining in bullying incidents. The data also highlighted that boys and girls were more likely to engage in bullying behaviour within their social groups.

In summary the social learning processes of modelling and reinforcement may operate to shape bullying on the school playground. O'Connell et al's., (1999) study supported this theory of peers playing central roles in the processes that unfold during playground bullying episodes. Peer presence is positively related to the persistence of bullying episodes and peers are most likely to behave in ways that reinforce bullying behaviours.

Along with the social systems and the social learning process that are identified as factors in maintaining bullying behaviours there are also views and social constructs linked to, or that dominate social ideals, that can play a role in how and what young people view as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. There is a strong body of research that discusses the social and political contexts for why homophobic attitudes, epithets and bullying are present within institutes such as schools. Like gender, sexual identities are also socially constructed (Seidman, 2003), continuously contested (Flowers and Buston, 2001) and play a role in categories of social power (Foucault, 1984). Anderson (2008) states that homosexuality stigma is linked to cultural and gender stereotypes, particularly the idea that heterosexuality is hegemonic in Western culture.

Terms such as heterosexuality are used within the literature to describe the normative sexual behaviours that have been upheld within society and through religion (Foucault, 1984). The term heteronormativity denotes, “the myriad of ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic and ordinary phenomenon.” (Kitzinger 2005, p. 478) It also involves the celebration of socially constructed gendered behaviours that highlight the differences between men and women as well as the sanctioning of gender behaviours that disrupts the natural or dominant attitudes (Nielsen, Walden and Kunkel, 2000).

Considerable research links the operations of homophobia, heteronormativity and sexuality in the production and maintenance of gendered identities in western cultures (Plummer, 1999). McCormack and Anderson (2010) reported the importance of stating the complex multi-dimensional interaction of sexuality, gender and heterosexuality in the context of attitudes and culture of societies and in order to understand attitudes towards homophobia.

Research such as Epstein et al. (2001) and Pollack (1999) have found that boys and young men in particular who want to avoid homosexual stigma generally avoid acting or working in places which are viewed as culturally “feminine” particularly if they want to be viewed as masculine or heterosexual among their peers (Anderson, 2008). Epstein et al. (2001) also states that from a young age boys are under pressure to conform to a masculine or “macho” stereotype and therefore by definition there is pressure to adopt a heterosexual identity.

To maintain heterosexual boundaries and publicly defend their heterosexual identities young people often take part in homophobic discourse such as homophobic epithets (Kehily, 2002).

According to studies such as Epstein, 1997 and Plummer, 1999 this help boys distance themselves from anything perceived as feminine and/or gay.

Research on schools and adolescent peer cultures has documented the intersection of gender and sexuality. For example in schools, it is often the case that being called “gay”, a “fag” or a “dyke” is a reference not so much to young people who are romantically attracted to other young people who self identified as either LGBT but to young people who are acting in a non masculine or non feminine manner (Pascoe, 2007 and Plummer, 2001).

At an institutional level, schools produce their own sexual and gender oppression (Allen, 2007; Atkinson and DePalma, 2009 and Pascoe, 2007). In schools heterosexuality is often assumed and institutionally enforced through daily interactions amongst students and teachers (Wilkinson and Pearson, 2009) curriculum and policies which have been shown to favour heterosexuality, while at the same time dismissing all other sexual identities (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). Epstein et al. (2003) has shown that institutionally sanctioned cultures of homophobia severely diminish the social freedom and learning environment of sexual minorities and as a result LGBT students remain highly stigmatised in school systems. This heteronormativity can be explicit, including homophobic name-calling, or verbal or physical harassment of students who deviate from normative gendered forms of sexuality (Wilkinson and Pearson, 2009). It can also be subtle, perpetuated through pervasive heteronormative discourse and symbols of appropriate gender and sexual relations displayed in classrooms, peer groups and extracurricular activities.

Such displays of heterosexism are stigmatising for same-sex attracted youth and research has highlighted the negative effects on their well-being (D'Augelli, 2002) and because of the central role schools and peers play in the lives of developing adolescents, it is important to understand schools as normative contexts that shape adolescents' well-being. This insight can further our understanding of how schools reinforce or deconstruct strongly embedded heteronormative patterns that marginalise individuals who move from hegemonic forms of sexuality. One way in which schools reinforce heteronormative attitudes include the continued evidence from research which highlights the prevalence of homophobic language within the school environment and homophobic bullying of children and young people. In the next section this paper highlights the research into homophobic bullying and the prevalence of homophobic bullying within the education system.

## **Research into homophobic bullying within the education system**

Early studies in the UK involving children self identified as lesbian or gay found that 12% reported having been beaten at school and 21% reported being verbally abused (Trenchard and Warren, 1984). In a later survey of physical attacks against lesbians and gay men, for respondents under the age of 18, 90% reported that they had been subjected to homophobic verbal abuse and 40% had experienced violence (Mason and Palmer, Stonewall Trust, 1996).

These studies have documented the serious implications of bullying for these children and young people and, in the longer term, on their emotional well being and overall quality of life (Rivers, 2001 and Cowie and Rivers, 2007). However, these studies only targeted children self-identified as lesbian or gay, leaving a gap in the research for the children who were subjected to homophobic bullying but had not identified themselves as gay or lesbian. Therefore, the studies cited above have not provided a true picture of the issues facing the wider population of children and young people of this age.

Rivers' (1996, 2001) work highlighted ways in which young people identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual were bullied. These included many of them being called names that were sexual in nature or related specifically to sexual orientation. The most common names cited in this literature included "gay", "poof", "queer" and "queer boy." In contrast to the names for gay, bisexual, and transgendered men, names for lesbian or females perceived to be lesbian were fewer in number. Rivers concluded that name calling and being ridiculed in front of others were the most frequent forms of bullying experienced by participants.

Warwick et al. (2001) were commissioned to undertake an exploratory study to describe to what extent homophobic bullying was a concern for school staff, how staff responded to the needs of lesbian and gay pupils who were being bullied, and what factors hindered and might enable future work in this area.

The study was funded by the Stonewall organisation and the Terrence Higgins Trust, with both organisations heavily involved in research in this area and possible political agendas behind the research as both organisations work to advocate the rights of LGBT young people. The survey was distributed to school staff to address their perceptions of HIV and AIDS education, homophobic bullying, the effects of Section 28<sup>2</sup> of the Local Government Act (1988) and health and sex education.

They received 307 questionnaires and conducted a small number of telephone surveys. The findings from the overall survey indicated that 97% of teachers were aware of instances of general verbal or physical bullying, 83% were aware of incidents of homophobic verbal bullying and 26% were aware of incidents of homophobic physical bullying. Of these respondents 99% reported a policy addressing general bullying and only 6% of the sample made mention of a bullying policy relating to homophobic bullying. When asked what hindered them if they wished to target homophobic bullying, the most common answers included actual and anticipated parental disapproval, lack of experienced staff and unclear or non-existent policy on homophobic bullying.

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<sup>2</sup> \*Section 28 of the [Local Government Act 1988](#) was a controversial amendment to the [United Kingdom's Local Government Act 1986](#), enacted on 24 May 1988 and repealed on 21 June 2000 in Scotland, and on 18 November 2003 in the rest of the UK by section 122 of the [Local Government Act 2003](#). The amendment stated that a [local authority](#) "shall not intentionally promote [homosexuality](#) or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any [maintained school](#) of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

Warwick et al.'s (2001) work highlighted school environments as challenging places for lesbian and gay pupils, which can have a negative impact on their learning and emotional well being. Improving the situation may require staff and students being aware of this phenomenon and its impact and as a whole school ceasing to use homophobic language and terms, setting up support groups and providing information and advice (Rivers 2001, Walker, 2001 and Imich et al., 2001).

Rivers and Cowie (2007) conducted a study with 190 participants aged between 16-66 years who were self- identified as LGBT. Results suggested that experiences of victimisation at school were both long-term and systematic. Follow up data collected from a sub-sample of 119 participants indicated that over 50 per cent had contemplated self-harm or suicide at the time they were being harassed, and that 40 per cent had engaged in such behaviour at least once. As adults, participants were found to exhibit symptoms associated with a negative self image and low self esteem when contrasted with heterosexual and non victimised LGBT peers.

Although the above studies were positive because they documented the views of young people who identified themselves as LGBT. There are a number of limitations which are discussed in this paper.

Firstly Rivers' (2001) study was a small scale retrospective piece of research, from which it is therefore difficult to generalise to the contemporary populations. What the study does highlight is a commonality within the research stating that the main form of bullying for many

was verbal abuse, which has been highlighted as often difficult to detect due to its covert nature, as opposed to physical abuse which is overt in nature.

Secondly, studies such as Rivers and Cowie (2007) were limited in their samples. They focused on 16-66 year old people (mean age of 29 years old) and therefore documented experiences before the removal of Section 28 and at a time of limited government policies and when homosexuality was positioned as a classified mental health disorder in the case of older adults. The sample was predominately Caucasian, and due to difficulties in consent from children identified as LGBT, the sample used mainly adults to talk retrospectively about their experiences of being bullied in school, suggesting that the contemporary voice of students experiencing bullying linked to sexual orientation is still limited.

#### How are schools addressing homophobic bullying?

Another area of research within this topic is the investigation of how schools are addressing issues relating to homophobic bullying and the inequalities faced by sexual minorities (Thurlow, 2001). In 1984 the London Gay Teenage Group published “Something to Tell You”, a report summarising the findings from a questionnaire survey of young people who identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, conducted by Trenchard and Warren (1984). They measured the frequency of homosexuality being mentioned in curriculum subjects, alongside incidents of homophobic bullying reported in school by participants who had identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This was one of the earliest studies analysing how schools tackled homophobic bullying. They found that only 174 out of a sample of 416 young people recollected any mention of homosexuality in their secondary

school curriculum subjects. Only 11 respondents reported any mention of homosexuality in personal, social and health education (PHSE) or sex education classes.

Trenchard and Warren's (1984) study, although significant in the respect of advocating the voice of young people who identified themselves as LGB, was limited to a self-report survey and the sample was limited to young people from Brighton (the area where the group was based). Moreover the work was undertaken prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum and the 1988 to 2003 Act (Section 28) of Parliament which made it illegal for schools to promote homosexual relationships "as a family". More recently Ellis and High (2004) conducted a study to see whether 17 years on from the Trenchard and Warren (1984) study, and with the removal of Section 28, they would find different results.

Ellis and High's (2004) questionnaire was distributed online and through the post to head teachers and Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) co-ordinators in secondary schools. They received 384 responses (less than the original number of 416 in the Trenchard and Warren, 1984 study). When comparing results with the original study, Ellis and High (2004) found a significant increase in reported discussions about homosexuality which they quantified in terms of the number of "mentions" homosexuality received during one PHSE lesson. They also found that the number of participants who regarded these discussions as helpful had also increased. However, participants who found these discussion unhelpful also increased when compared with the Trenchard and Warren (1984) study.

Criticisms of Ellis and High's (2004) study include a lack of elaboration on what is meant by "mentions" as this could have ranged from a "one off" conversation to a series of PHSE lessons.

Following on from the work of researchers such as Warwick et al. (2001), the government produced "Safe For All", a good practice guide for secondary schools to tackle homophobic bullying (Warwick and Douglas, 2001).

Before the "Safe For All" guidance, little had been written to guide teachers in schools about how best to tackle homophobic bullying. The Stonewall Trust carried out a series of case studies with secondary schools to identify best practice in this area. In each school they listened to the views of teachers, parents and pupils and others associated with the schools to try to determine exactly what works in tackling homophobic bullying.

Following on from Warwick et al. (2001), Adams et al. (2004) aimed to investigate the extent to which secondary schools addressed homophobic bullying through their formal anti-bullying policies and the Personal Social Health Education (PSHE) curriculum. They highlighted that school staff were still unsure about how to tackle these issues. Of the schools from which responses were returned, 13 in all, 10 school bullying policies referred to homophobia or homophobic bullying. Some stated that they referenced sexuality through the area of sex and relationship education within PSHE lessons. Overall teachers' responses across the sample indicated that issues surrounding homophobic bullying were dealt with through PSHE, life skills lessons, drama or as part of their anti-bullying policy.

The Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills (2004) produced guidance called “Stand up for us,” in an attempt to challenge homophobia in schools. It set out how schools who tackle homophobic bullying would help to meet the various government policy agendas such as Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004). Once again this document provided guidance on how to support children who experienced homophobic bullying. However a later review conducted by Warwick, Goodrich, Aggleton and Chase (2006) found that schools were still facing challenges, such as teachers not knowing how to challenge homophobic bullying.

Warwick et al.’s (2006) review looked to identify what is known about the extent and impact of homophobic bullying on pupils and how homophobia can best be challenged within the classroom and as part of whole school approaches. This was conducted to support the DfES interest in how best to address homophobia and make school environments more open and inclusive of sexual diversity.

The review conducted between March and August 2006 drew on published articles and reports as well as a series of interviews with 28 key informants (no information about the key informants is provided) with expertise in the area. The data from the literature review were analysed thematically.

Warwick et al.’s (2006) review found that estimating the extent and impact of homophobic incidents in schools poses a challenge due to the difficulty associated with estimating the numbers of same-sex attracted young people in school and variations in how homophobia and

bullying are perceived and measured. These findings reflect the findings of many of the research papers presented in this literature review.

More recently the Stonewall organisation, an organisation/pressure group which works to support LGBT young people and adults in the UK, has been linked to research in this area (Hunt and Jensen, 2007) They conducted a large scale survey to find out the experiences of LGBT students in schools. They surveyed young people from the UK who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) or who think they might be, about their experiences at school. The postal survey received 1145 responses from young people at secondary school. Their findings concluded that:

- 65% of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils experienced direct bullying.
- 60% of young gay people heard the phrases “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” in school.
- 80% heard such comments often or frequently.
- 97% of pupils heard other insulting homophobic remarks, such as “poof”, “dyke”, “rug-muncher”, “queer” and “bender” often or frequently.
- 23% of young gay people had been told that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school.
- In schools that had said homophobic bullying was wrong, gay young people are 60% more likely not to have been bullied.
- 35% of gay pupils did not feel safe or accepted at school.

In this study homophobic language was donated in the questionnaire by the researchers so it was not necessarily a true reflection of what the young people thought homophobic language

included. Also the use of “frequently” and “often” were not clearly defined. For example, these terms could have been interpreted as weekly or monthly, which could have impacted on the reported prevalence rate.

They also stated that 65% of children experienced direct bullying but again this is not clearly defined. Also the survey excluded children who experienced homophobic bullying who did not fall into their categories of LGBT or think they might be.

Furthermore, it is of course questionable whether Stonewall are impartial researchers. As a political organisation, with political aims and messages, the objectivity of their research methodology and published findings requires cautious appraisal.

The Stonewall group followed their School Report with a Teachers Report (Guasp, 2009). This surveyed 2043 teaching and non-teaching staff from primary and secondary schools. Half were from secondary and half from primary schools, with 80% of teachers in the overall sample. The survey does not clarify how the sample was recruited. The participants were asked about their experiences of homophobic bullying of pupils in their schools. Their findings concluded:

- Nine in ten secondary school teachers say children and young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, currently experience homophobic bullying, name calling or harassment in their schools.

- Secondary school teachers stated that homophobic bullying is the second most frequent form of bullying (happening ‘very often’ or ‘often’) after bullying because of weight and three times more prevalent than bullying targeting religion or ethnicity.
- 95 per cent of secondary school teachers report hearing the phrases ‘you’re so gay’ or ‘that’s so gay’ in their schools.
- Eight in ten secondary school teachers report hearing other insulting homophobic remarks such as ‘poof’, ‘dyke’, ‘queer’ and ‘faggot’.
- Nine in ten teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools have never received any specific training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.
- Half of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say the vast majority of incidents go unreported.

These results suggest that even with the publication of “good practice guides” and support for tackling homophobic bullying such as “Safe for all” and “Stand up for us” (DfES and DCSF publications 2001 and 2007) there still appears to be uncertainty amongst staff in schools about how best to tackle the issue.

The weaknesses of the Stonewall Organisation’s work include the limited qualitative focus, particularly in gaining a understanding of the views and perceptions of young people about what they define as homophobic bullying and, following on from this, what they themselves describe as homophobic language. Although the Stonewall researchers document the experiences of young people identified as LGBT they do not attempt to discuss homophobic bullying within the wider school populations. In order for schools to tackle homophobic

language and bullying, staff would need a level of confidence in responding to the remarks they are hearing and about what does constitute bullying per se. This would mean that expected responses are informed by clear policy guidance within the school. However, if children are not aware of what constitutes homophobic language, such consistency then would be difficult to achieve. Tackling bullying and in particular homophobic bullying would require adherence to a carefully supported whole school approach.

Another weakness is the fact that the way in which the self-report questionnaires had been validated and analysed was not reflected in the report's methodology. Results should be treated with caution as much of the language linked to the homophobic experiences is open to interpretation. It is also unclear how many schools were included in the study. The number, type and demographic make-up of the schools was also not identified, all of which would clearly impact on the generalisability of the survey. However as discussed earlier in the paper, analytical generalisations, where one study is replicated to support the findings of another can help strengthen a particular theory or research findings.

In summary it is noted that there are a number of methodological strengths to the research into homophobic bullying within the education systems. For example Adams et al.'s (2004) study included the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The qualitative aspect of the survey allowed respondents the opportunity to provide in-depth information about how homophobic bullying was addressed. Also, both Stonewall reports highlighted what has consistently been reported in the literature over the past 20 years. This is that homophobic bullying is prevalent in both primary and secondary school systems. Also commonalities are

found with the type of bullying experienced by all children. These include the particular language associated with homophobia, or perceived homophobia.

Difficulties associated with definitions, perception of teachers and pupils and children who perceive themselves or are perceived as lesbian or gay is very complex and sufficiently diverse to render generalisation difficult. Researchers such as Walker (2001) and Swearer et al. (2010) state that how bullying/homophobic bullying is defined has a clear implication for how it is assessed, so impacting on the results obtained from surveys and interviews.

Furthermore, congruent with the previous research, the School Report (Hunt and Jensen, 2007) and the Teacher Report can also be critiqued for its methodology. It is not clear from the report how the results were analysed and as the sample was recruited through YouGov (a political organisation) it can be argued that the sample is unlikely to be representative of the wider school population. Researcher bias may have impacted on the results as the Stonewall organisation and YouGov are both political groups employed to advocate the views of children and young people, particularly vulnerable groups such as LGBT young people.

## **Research into homophobic language**

Another focus of research within the area of homophobic bullying is the use of homophobic language. This comprises terms of abuse that are often used towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people, or those who would not label themselves in this way but are still subjected to this form of abuse. However, homophobic language is also often used to refer to something or someone as inferior and not necessarily linked to sexuality (Kosciw and Diaz, 2004).

For example, phrases such as ‘you’re such a lezzer!’ or ‘those trainers are gay!’ may be used to insult someone or something, but without intentionally connoting actual or perceived sexual orientation. This language is often dismissed as ‘harmless banter’ and not thought to be particularly hurtful, especially where the intent is not to comment on someone’s actual or perceived sexual orientation (Phoenix et al., 2006).

However, regardless of the lack of deliberate intent, these terms liken being gay to something that’s bad, wrong or inferior. Homophobic terms tend to be used without thinking and are often ignored by teachers and school staff because either they feel it is difficult to know how to respond or they believe the language is used without any homophobic intent (Thurlow, 2001; Rivers, 2001; 2004)

As noted above, research into homophobic bullying by Rivers (2001) Warwick et al. (2006) and the Stonewall reports (Hunt and Jensen, 2006 and Guasp, 2009) have highlighted that homophobic language is prevalent and that teachers find it difficult to know how to respond (Thurlow, 2001). Rivers (1991, 2001 and 2004) and Warwick et al. (2006) have found that

name calling is the most common of a range of abusive practices reported by lesbian women and gay men and according to the Stonewall reports (2006 and 2009) this is common for young people who identify themselves as LGBT. However, there is still a gap in the research regarding general school populations. What do other children think? An exploration of the views and perceptions of young people in schools is still an area that needs further investigation. Also raised in the literature is the view that not all homophobic name-calling is intentionally directed toward young gay and lesbian pupils. For example, researchers have consistently found that terms such as “gay” and “poof” are often used to refer to anything deemed un-masculine, non-normative or “un-cool” (Thurlow, 2001 ; Warwick et al., 2001).

In spite of being such a common everyday occurrence there are surprisingly few instances in the literature, particularly in the UK, where researchers deal explicitly with homophobic language (Sutton, 1995 and Thurlow, 2001).

Thurlow (2001) conducted a study which focused on name calling. She surveyed 377 pupils aged 14-15 from five mainstream secondary schools with almost equal numbers of girls and boys participating in the study. The sample was predominately Welsh (with 4 out of the 5 schools being Welsh schools).

Open questions were posed in the anonymous survey, “what words do people at school use for slagging someone off, write down as many as you can think of”. This survey was not particularly focused on homophobic language, but this was an element of the data that were collected. Children were then asked to rate which term was the worst (defined as the most offensive). Eight categories were identified based on assigning each word to a category. 6000

individual pejoratives were described; homophobic insults comprised 10% of these and were not regarded as very offensive.

Thurlow's (2001) findings are relevant, as not only do they highlight the forms of abusive language heard by children and young people. They also clarify the perceptions of young people at the time, which was that such terminology was not considered really offensive. These findings are very similar to the findings obtained by the Stonewall surveys about homophobic language. A criticism of Thurlow's (2001) study is that the study did not solely focus on homophobic language but also racist and sexist pejoratives.

A school climate survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight education network (GLSEN) in the USA by Kosciw and Diaz (2006) looked closely into the experiences of gay, bisexual and lesbian pupils in school. Kosciw and Diaz's (2006) school climate survey aimed to identify the types of homophobic language and verbal abuse children experienced directly or indirectly in their school environment. This large scale survey covered 48 states, and 887 LGBT students completed the questionnaire.

The results highlighted that more than 90% of LGBT students heard homophobic remarks in their school such as "that's so gay", "fag" or "dyke" used in a derogatory manner or the use of the word "gay" to mean something meaningless or valueless, just as words such as "dumb" and "stupid" might be used. The majority of the youth reported feeling distressed to some degree when hearing remarks such as "gay" or "queer". The sample did not include LGBT who had not identified themselves as such.

The limitations of Kosciw and Diaz's (2004) work includes the use of self report scales; again, as with previous research into this field, methodological concerns relating to self report surveys suggest that results should be interpreted with caution. From a qualitative viewpoint semi-structured interviews may have supported the triangulation of the data to strengthen the reliability of the results. Also as the sample was from the USA, generalisations cannot be made to UK school populations.

It is also unclear what definition was used to identify the term homophobic bullying and the paper does not clarify how the questionnaire was developed, whether the researchers developed an instrument based on their own knowledge of the field or whether participants were recruited to support the development of the questionnaire. The sample was comprised solely of children who had identified themselves as LGBT, therefore limiting the extent to which results may legitimately be generalised beyond this particular population.

Phoenix et al. (2006) conducted a study using Kosciw and Diaz's (2006) school climate survey and assessed the prevalence of homophobic language in North Carolina Secondary schools. They surveyed six high schools in North Carolina to assess the level of homophobic language in the schools. Schools selected were actively involved in the Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) group. Questionnaires were completed anonymously by participants who ranged from 13-18 in ages, with 904 male and female students being surveyed.

When asked how often the expressions "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" were heard in school, 69% stated these expressions were heard frequently or often. Other homophobic remarks were "faggot", "dyke" or "queer" which were heard frequently or often. Furthermore,

72.6% stated that they heard others use homophobic remarks frequently or often. Only 26.4% of youth reported that teachers or other staff members intervened frequently or often. Young people also reported hallways and cafeterias as the most common places for hearing homophobic remarks. Phoenix et al. (2006) also found that schools which did not include sexual orientation in their non-harassment policies reported a higher level of homophobic remarks in the questionnaire.

Findings from this study suggest a number of implications. Firstly students reported the frequent use of phrases such as “you’re so gay” and other homophobic terms, which create an environment that not only distressed the LGBT youth but also made them feel unsafe.

Secondly the findings suggest limited school staff intervention to address homophobic language. However this was reported by students and a teacher survey could reveal a different perception. Phoenix et al. (2006) suggest that low frequency of interruption can indirectly promote harassment and discrimination, perpetuating an environment that can be both emotionally and physically harmful to LGBT students.

Furthermore, verbal harassment left unchecked can lead to physical harassment such as pushing, hitting and shoving (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The school climate may be perceived as hostile and unsafe for LGBT students and may cause negative effects on the educational progress of LGBT students.

The limitations of this study include that within the survey “frequently” and “often” are not clearly defined (this could mean weekly, monthly) and nor is homophobic language clearly

defined. Only a few words such as “faggot”, “dyke” and “queer” are offered in the survey and this limits the analysis of the findings to these phrases. It is also not clear from the methodology how these phrases were decided upon. For example, were they derived from participants or from previous research in this area? It is also important to highlight the researchers’ own background. Like the Stonewall organisation, Phoenix et al. (2006) conducted their research in collaboration with a political organisation which supports the rights of sexual minorities in the U.S. Their impartiality can therefore be questioned, which could have impacted on their data collection, interpretation and overall conclusions. Also the schools which participated in the survey were involved with the GSA (a political organisation). Therefore, the sample may not be well placed to offer a representative indication of homophobic language in schools that are not involved in the GSA. A comparison school sample may have identified whether the findings of this research were more widely applicable. Finally Phoenix et al. (2006) used the Kosciw and Diaz’s (2006) school climate survey and the limitations regarding this instrument which have been summarised above would also apply to the Phoenix et al. (2006) study.

## **Conclusion**

From reviewing the research on the subject of homophobic bullying, it is clear that further studies are required to provide a better understanding of the impact of homophobia in student interactions. This is still a relatively new area of research and, therefore, unsurprisingly there are numerous shortcomings to the existing studies available for review.

The first and foremost obstacle in tackling the subject is one of definition. There is some consensus in researchers' understanding of which types of behaviours constitute bullying. However, overall, it appears that due to the socially constructed nature of bullying, without discussions and reviews locally about "what bullying is" it may be problematic to ensure clarity and consensus within a specific local context. This has implications on how incidents of bullying are reported, measured and how school based interventions are then developed. Without a definition that relates to the community in which the research is focused, the results will not provide a true reflection of the issues relating to bullying affecting the community/participants. This is also relevant to ascertaining what constitutes homophobic bullying due to the dissonance between the definitions chosen by researchers and the definitions their research subjects would accept as correct. Whilst some researchers, such as Rivers (2001) and Warwick et al. (2006), have chosen a broad definition that includes the same elements such as verbal and emotional abuse, further work is required in order to encapsulate the many elements of homophobic bullying which resonate with the sector of the population that these issues affect the most.

Within the available research there are also some inconsistencies in studies reporting the impact of homophobic bullying on young people. Rivers (2004), in reviewing the experiences of LGBT adults, concludes that negative experiences in school led a high proportion of victims to contemplate suicide. Poteat and Espleage (2005) supported these findings, as they concluded that being the target of homophobic bullying led to higher than average incidences of anxiety and depression. However, Rivers and Noret's (2008) more recent investigation concluded that the concerns of LGBT students were essentially in line with the concerns of non-LGBT of the same age group i.e. friendships and peer pressure, therefore highlighting the need for further research in area.

UK research into homophobic bullying appears to be dominated by the Stonewall organisation. Although their research is highly regarded and very relevant, it cannot be ignored that their research may be biased. Much of Stonewall's research is self-report surveys which can be criticised on different levels. Are people filling in the surveys honestly? This cannot be known for certain. Children who do not identify themselves as LGBT are not included in Stonewall's work and this leaves a gap in the research as non-LGBT young people and those who choose not to label themselves as LGBT are unrepresented.

An emerging theme from the research that is documented by authors such as Rivers (2001), Warwick et al. (2001) and Thurlow (2001) is the level of verbal abuse suffered by children in schools. Particularly relevant is the use of homophobic language around the hostile school environment that is engendered as a result. As previously stated this is still a relatively new area of research and much of the research is defined and reported using language donated from the researchers' point of view, which may not correlate with the research subjects'

understanding. Also, what is missing is more research into how this language impacts on children who are affected by it. Although we know that the phrase “that’s so gay” is used frequently in schools, what has not been ascertained is whether it is perceived as homophobic and whether young people recognise the use of such phrases as bullying and homophobic bullying.

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**EMPIRICAL PAPER: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF HOMOPHOBIC  
LANGUAGE WITHIN A SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTING**

**ABSTRACT**

This section includes the research conducted by the Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in collaboration with a South Eastern Educational Psychology Service during Year 2 and 3 employments as part of the Doctorate in Applied Child and Educational Psychology training course. This paper is an exploration into the views of young people regarding homophobic bullying and their views on the nature and prevalence of the use of homophobic language within a secondary school.

The research employed a mixed methods design which allowed the researcher to collect data in two stages. Phase One included two focus groups of 14-15 year old pupils in a local secondary school convened to gather information regarding young people's opinions of what constitutes homophobic bullying and how prevalent they believed homophobic language to be within the school environment.

This information was then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) and the themes derived were used to inform the design of a questionnaire. This process led on to Phase Two of the study which involved distribution of a questionnaire to Year 10 pupils within the same secondary school as the focus group data collection. This questionnaire assessed the prevalence of homophobic language within the school environment.

## **Introduction**

Any investigation into bullying in the school context is complicated by the fact that there is no universally accepted operational definition of bullying, and terminology can be variable and imprecise. However, even with the varied terminology there does appear to be widespread agreement between researchers (Besag, 1989; Smith and Thompson, 1991; Smith and Sharp, 2004 and Berger, 2007) that Olweus's (1993) definition of bullying is still relevant. Olweus (1993) summarised bullying or victimisation in the context of the school in the following way:

“A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students”.

(Olweus, 1993, p. 9)

Although Olweus's (1993a) definition conceptualises the overall term “bullying” there are other elements of bullying behaviour that also require clarification. These include:

- Physical bullying - which includes hitting, kicking and beating and is described as the most recognised by adults and children (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, and Liefogle, 2002)
- Verbal bullying - the use of repeated derogatory remarks or names (Tapper & Boulton, 2005).
- Relational bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) - that disrupts the social relationships between victims and their peers.

- Indirect attacks -“the victim is hurt (by gossip, shunning, and so on) but does not know whom to blame. Indirect bullying makes attacks easy, detection hard, and self-defence difficult” (Vaillancourt et al., 2009, p. 487).

Homophobic bullying is defined by The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2001) – now known as The Department for Education – as occurring:

“When bullying is motivated by a prejudice against lesbian, gay or bisexual people.”

(DfES, 2001, p. 6)

Rivers (2001) further described different forms of homophobic bullying as:

- Verbal abuse including spreading rumours that someone is gay, suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are “gay” for example, “you’re such a gay boy!” or “those trainers are so gay!”  
and/or
- Physical abuse including hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour (Rivers 2001, p. 430).

Overall with both bullying and homophobic bullying definitions are varied and particularly with definitions of bullying researchers often quote the work of Olweus (1993a) which was conducted more than 15 years ago. However, it is also argued that bullying is socially constructed which means that how bullying is defined within a local context has important

implications for researching this construct (Vaillancourt et al., 2009). Young people's perception of what constitutes bullying behaviour varies across different cultures, ages and genders. Therefore, careful consideration should be taken when discussing research findings, the level of generalisations that can be made and when planning school based interventions.

The research into bullying within the education system has focused on a number of key areas, including studies relating to prevalence rates, (Whitney and Smith, 1993; Sharp et al., 2000 and Smith and Shu, 2000) the characteristics of bullies and victims (Smith, 2004; Barboza et al., 2009) and cultural and peer group attitudes (Espleage et al., 2003; Ojala and Nesdale, 2004) and gender or sexuality stereotypes which often marginalise particular groups within society (Epstein et al., 2001).

Early studies into homophobic bullying within the school context, such as Trenchard and Warren (1984) have reported the negative experiences of self identified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth (LGBT). Rivers' (1996, 2001) work highlighted ways in which young people identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual were bullied. Findings from studies such as that by Thurlow (2001), the Stonewall organisation (2006 and 2009), Cowie and Rivers (2007) and Warwick et al. (2006) on bullying prevalence rates, the victimisation of LGBT young people within the school environment and the use of homophobic pejoratives and language, have all highlighted a high prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools and the widespread use of homophobic language. Researchers such as Mandel and Shakeshaft (2000), Epstein et al. (2001), Phoenix et al. (2003) and Poteat (2008) have documented the social context of homophobic bullying and peer group attitudes which are often associated with the use of homophobic epithets and language in bullying incidents.

Studies such as those stated above have highlighted the serious implications of bullying for children and young people who have been or have identified themselves as LGBT , in the longer term, on their emotional well being and overall quality of life (Rivers, 2001 and Cowie and Rivers, 2007) Studies such as D’Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger (2002) have documented the psychological and social consequences resulting from being the target of homophobic epithets and other forms of homophobic behaviour.

Studies which have discussed the use of homophobic language within the school environment, such as Kosciw and Diaz (2006), have found that more than 90% of LGBT students heard homophobic remarks in their school such as, “that’s so gay”, “fag” or “dyke” used in a derogatory manner or the use of the word “gay” to mean something meaningless or valueless, just as words such as “dumb” and “stupid” might be used. The majority of the youth reported feeling distressed to some degree when hearing remarks such as “gay” or “queer”. Phoenix et al. (2006) also conducted a similar study and found that 69% of the young people they surveyed stated these expressions were heard frequently or often. However, both the Phoenix et al. (2006) and Kosciw and Diaz (2006) studies were conducted in the US.

Within the United Kingdom (UK) the Stonewall Organisation conducted two postal surveys between 2006 and 2008. The School Report, 2006 (Hunt and Jensen, 2006) suggested that homophobic language is prevalent within the school environment. They identified that 97% of their sample (1145 participants) heard insulting homophobic remarks often or frequently within the school environment and only 23% of their sample had been told that homophobic bullying was wrong in their school.

A follow up survey targeted professionals working in schools. The Teacher Report (2009) surveyed 2043 teaching and non-teaching staff from primary and secondary schools and found that nine in ten secondary school teachers say children and young people regardless of their sexual orientation experience homophobic bullying, name calling or harassment at school. Secondary school teachers reported that homophobic bullying was the second most frequent form of bullying (happening “very often” and “often” after bullying because of weight and overall 95% of the sample reported hearing phrases such as “you’re so gay” or “that’s so gay” in their schools.

Findings from this study suggest a number of implications. Firstly, students reported the frequent use of phrases such as “you’re so gay” and other homophobic terms, which created an environment that not only distressed LGBT youth but also made them feel unsafe. Secondly, the limited school staff intervention to address homophobic language. However, this was reported by students and a teacher survey could reveal a different perception. Finally, verbal harassment left unchecked can lead to physical harassment such as pushing, hitting and shoving (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The school climate may be perceived as hostile and unsafe for LGBT students and may cause negative effects on the educational progress of LGBT students.

The limitations of studies such as those conducted by the Stonewall Organisation include the limited qualitative focus, particularly in gaining an understanding of the views of young people about what they define as homophobic bullying and, following on from this, what they themselves describe as homophobic language. Although the Stonewall researchers document

the experiences of young people identified as LGBT they do not attempt to discuss homophobic bullying from the wider school populations. Results should be treated with caution as much of the research relies on self-report questionnaires.

Limitations of current research into the social phenomenon of bullying and particularly homophobic bullying include firstly, the socially constructed nature of bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2009). Researchers such as Walker (2001) and Swearer et al. (2010) state that how bullying/homophobic bullying is defined has a clear implication for how it is assessed, so impacting on the results obtained from surveys and interviews.

Secondly, studies such as those conducted by the Stonewall Organisation, whose focus and bias may be driven by political agendas and assessing prevalence rates from the perspective of young people who are self identified as LGBT has limited their results .Particularly in regards to young people still exposed to homophobic bullying for other reasons and from the wider societal population. Due to the limitations described above the researcher set out to explore what young people in school perceive as homophobic bullying and their views on the use of homophobic language.

## Research questions

The research questions were as follows:

- 1) At present what are young people's definitions of homophobic bullying?
- 2) What language do they think is homophobic bullying?
- 3) Are homophobic language, phrases and pejoratives prevalent in the school environment, and are they perceived as homophobic bullying?

The research questions were highlighted as a result of gaps in current research in this area and through collaboration with the commissioner of the research (discussed in the introductory chapter). The three research questions required an approach which was qualitative and quantitative in design and implementation as the questions being explored could be approach through both methods of data collection.

## **Methodology**

Within the field of research design there are a number of terms that describe the concepts of methodology. For the purpose of this paper the author refers to the definition provided by Cohen and Manion (2007):

“If methods refer to the techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering, the aim of methodology then is to describe approaches to, kinds and paradigms of research”, (Kaplan, 1973 in Cohen and Manion, 2007, p. 47).

For the purpose of this research the author has adopted a mixed methods approach as the overall research methodology. The research questions that are being explored in this study are both identifying young people’s perceptions of homophobic bullying, the language they associate with this type of bullying and the prevalence of homophobic language in a single secondary school. The author did not feel that an entirely qualitative or quantitative approach would best address the research questions being explored.

### **Mixed methodology research**

The mixed methodology approach is less well known than the quantitative and qualitative traditions, and has emerged as an alternative to both the other methods by advocating the use of methodological tools which are required to answer the research questions under study (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Mixed methods have been defined as:

“A type of research design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis”.

( Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003a, p. 711)

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) the basic premise or rationale of mixed methodology is that the combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches provide a more in-depth understanding of research problems than either approach alone. For example, understanding the context of participants' lives and the voice of participants is often limited in quantitative research. This is something which qualitative researchers work towards in their research but are criticised for their interpretation and difficulties in generalisations to wider populations due to limited sample sizes.

### Research design

There are four major types of mixed methods designs:

- The Triangulation design
- The Explanatory design
- The Embedded design
- The Exploratory design

The exploratory design which consists of a two phase approach and is described by writers as the Exploratory Sequential Design (Creswell et al., 2003) was used in this study as the approach to data collection and analysis. This design starts with the elicitation of qualitative data to explore a phenomenon and then builds to a second quantitative phase. There are two common variants within this research design which include the Instrument Development Model and the Taxonomy Development Model. Both models seek to use the initial qualitative phase to either collate data to design a quantitative instrument (instrument development model) and the use of a qualitative phase to identify themes or to develop a theory which can then be tested using quantitative methods in phase two (the taxonomy development model) (Creswell, 2003). As the study was exploring the prevalence of homophobic language in a secondary school, the data collection tool of a questionnaire was viewed as more appropriate. Therefore, the Instrument Development Model was used for the design as this linked appropriately with the overall research questions.

Strengths to this research design include the phase one and two process which makes the results easier to report and to implement, for example allowing the researcher to reflect on the qualitative findings during phase one and on the quantitative findings during phase two rather than trying to analyse two sets of data simultaneously (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003).

Challenges to this model include the time to implement both phase one and phase two, and the actual selection of participants for phase one and phase two of the study. Researchers such as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggest that the researcher needs to decide which data to use from the qualitative phase to build the quantitative measures. The instrument development approach could possibly lead to

researcher bias in deciding which information is going to be used in the instrument/questionnaire. Using an analysis method such as thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) where the prominent themes are used to develop an instrument/questionnaire could resolve this challenge.

Although the mixed methods (MM) approach was decided on based on how best the research aims/question could be answered, the author is also aware of the common challenges associated with this methodology.

Firstly, the timing of both qualitative and quantitative methods is potentially problematic. This includes the order in which each data set is used, sequential or concurrent. Secondly the weighting issue which means to what extent there is greater emphasis on one method or another (qualitative or quantitative). As each research question in this study was explored one after another, a sequential approach was chosen.

Morse (1991) suggested that the theoretical drive or worldview can determine the weighting of a mixed methods study. As two of the three research questions were more exploratory in nature the qualitative approach was emphasised during the study.

Finally, the extent to which the data are mixed is also important to clarify. Options include merging data sets – where the two sets of data are explicitly integrated – embedding data at the design level – where one set of data is embedded into the design of the other method – or connecting from data analysis to data collection – where analysis of one type of data leads to

the data collection and results of another. In this research the data were connected as the first data set led on to the development of the second.

In summary, sequential mixed methods methodology was chosen over an entirely qualitative or quantitative approach because this was viewed as the most appropriate method to answer the research questions.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher followed the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee guidelines during the research (please see Appendix 10 for the study's ethics form). The sensitive nature of the topic being investigated meant a number of ethical considerations were important to discuss. Firstly, as the participants in the study were young people, parental consent was important to obtain (see Appendix 2 for parental consent letter).

For phase one of the data collection process (two focus groups) the researcher ensured that informed consent was given by the participants in a number of ways. The children who took part in the focus groups firstly required parental consent before they were selected (see Appendix 2 for a parental consent form); secondly they were briefed by the researcher about the nature of the focus group and thirdly they were provided with a briefing statement emphasising the topic of discussion, right of withdrawal at any time, that the focus groups was to be tape recorded and that follow up for anyone who found the focus group evoked an emotional response would be provided (please see Appendix 3 for focus group briefing). At any of the stages of the data collection, participants were free to leave or discontinue their involvement. This was explicitly stated to the participants when the focus groups met.

For the second phase of the research (questionnaire) consent form was sent to parents about the study (see appendix 4) informing them that a questionnaire would be available for their child to complete. A briefing statement was provided to the participants stating clearly that if they wished to proceed to the questionnaire they could do so. This briefing was also read out

by the researcher on the morning of the questionnaire distribution. The questionnaire was anonymous so this supported the ethical requirements for confidentiality. Participants were briefed orally about their right to opt out by the researcher before the completion of the questionnaire and were signposted to a key member of staff for any further questions or concerns (for details of how and where the questionnaire was distributed please see Appendix 11).

#### Sampling of Focus Group and Questionnaire participants.

The researcher set out to select a sample which would reflect the wider population of secondary schools in the UK. Due to location and limited flexibility within the scope of this small scale study, the researcher aimed to find a sample within her local area. There were nine secondary schools within the locality, four were grammar schools of which two were single sex schools, a faith school and a special school. All of these schools were rejected as the researcher aimed to gain a diverse sample, (one which would reflect demographics such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background) which would have been difficult to obtain in a single sex grammar school or a faith school. The three remaining schools were contacted as they were all public mixed secondary schools. However, one school declined to take part in the study as it had recently gone into special measures after an OFSTED inspection and in another school the leadership team did not feel able to support the study at the time of the planned data collection. They stated that later in the year would have suited their school calendar. This was not feasible for the researcher.

This process left the researcher with one potential mixed maintained secondary school and as such the sample was from one secondary school. The participating school was a large comprehensive secondary school located within an urban area of the town with a high proportion of new arrivals from Eastern Europe. Although the area is ethnically diverse and has a prominent Sikh community, this school itself is not as ethnically mixed as other secondary schools in the area. This is reflected in the overall sample, with a predominately Caucasian sample, obtained in both phases of the data collection.

Gaining access to a sample of participants within the secondary school was the next step. This was completed through initial discussions with key senior staff members which included the Pastoral Department Head and the schools Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), both of whom were chosen because of their links with the Educational Psychology Service. The TEP provided information about the research in the form of a briefing letter (Appendix 1) which was forwarded to the staff members mentioned above who then presented the research proposal to the Head teacher. Once the Head teacher had agreed to the small scale study the researcher was able to discuss the selection of participants with the Pastoral Department Head and the SENCO for the school.

Participants were selected from National Curriculum Key Stage 4. Children from Key Stage 3 were excluded by the researcher as research suggests that different development ages can affect the level of understanding children have regarding a particular topic (Leufodo-et al., 2003). Therefore, the researcher felt that older participants would generate a discussion with a deeper understanding regarding the topic being explored.

The researcher selected participants using a purposive sample and wanted to gain a sample which reflected both genders and children from different ethnic backgrounds. However, this sampling process is not without its criticisms; for example a random selection does not guarantee the researcher an equal number of males and females or a representative sample of young people from a different ethnic background.

Clark and Creswell (2003) discuss issues regarding sampling in mixed methods research. For the exploratory sequential design it is suggested that a different sample should be used in phase two than that used in phase one. As the purpose of the quantitative phase is to generalise the findings to a population, a larger sample would be required for the result to be seen as valid. Therefore, it was decided that a small sample would be used in the focus group and a larger sample would be sought for the questionnaire process.

## **Phase one procedure**

There are two phases to the study which explore the research questions. As phase one is completed before phase two, the procedure and analysis of phase one is presented before phase two. Phase one of the research explored the following research questions:

- 1) At present what are young people's definitions of homophobic bullying?
- 2) What language do they think is homophobic?

Both these questions were addressed through the process of qualitative data collection using focus groups. The researcher felt that focus groups would be the most appropriate method of data collection as it would provide rich data regarding young people's views, perceptions, and constructs about homophobic bullying and homophobic language. Due to the nature of the topic the researcher felt that a discussion may yield a variety of responses and young people may feel more comfortable discussing issues when they are supported by their peer group rather than participating in individual semi-structured interviews.

Criticisms of the use of focus groups as a method of data collection include the limitations of being in a group situation. For example, when discussing a particular topic within a group situation, certain group dynamics can impact on the results obtained. These include the role of dominant group members and more reserved group members who may feel less relaxed in sharing their views within a group. Therefore, results from focus groups should be taken with some caution as some participants may not, for one reason or another, share their personal

views and could proceed to agreeing with the popular view of the group. Semi-structured interviews can eliminate the group dynamic factors associated with focus group data collection (Forsyth, 2006).

Researchers such as Cohen and Manion (2007) state that focus groups are useful for developing themes about a topic through empowering participants to speak out and in their own words. The researcher felt focus groups would best fit the questions being addressed, as identifying key themes would help to generate a collective definition and common language used/heard directly from the participants within the particular school context.

Factors to consider in constructing the focus groups included, firstly, the number of focus groups to be conducted. The researcher set out to conduct two focus groups in an attempt to minimise any behaviour that could be unique to one particular group. A second issue to consider was that of group size. Cohen and Manion (2007) noted that a group size of between four and twelve is seen as appropriate. Too small a group could lead to intra-group dynamics and exert a disproportionate effect and too large a group could become unmanageable and fragmentary. For the purpose of this research, the groups' size was seven participants in one group and eight in the other.

The researcher developed a prompt sheet (see Appendix 5) with the key open ended questions, which helped the researcher, the facilitator of the groups, to keep the focus on the topic related to the research questions. The researcher used her experience and background in counselling to help the participants feel safe, supported and listened to during the focus group.

This was done through the use of the three key Rogerian counselling principles (Mearnes and Thorpe, 2007) of unconditional positive regard, paraphrasing and active listening.

Two focus groups were conducted. The first group consisted of eight participants with 4 females and 4 males. Group two consisted of five males and two females. All children participating in the focus groups were aged between 14 and 15 years. The sample was white British/White other. As this was a random sample, the researcher did not select the sample to represent particular demographics.

The focus groups were recorded and were 45 minutes in duration. The recordings were then transcribed and analysed (see appendix 6 for an example of a transcribed focus group). The data was saved on a USB pen drive and stored in a locked cabinet within the researcher's office. Only the researcher had access to this cabinet. The researcher aimed to shred and delete any files consisting of transcribed focus group discussions once the research was completed.

### Pilot

The focus group questions (for prompt sheet see Appendix 5) were piloted initially at the secondary school with a group of six students. The aim of the pilot was to assess whether the focus group questions were appropriate in facilitating a discussion regarding bullying and homophobic bullying. Based on the positive discussions in the pilot focus group the researcher kept the same questions/prompts for the actual focus groups (see Appendix 5).

### Phase one data analysis

The focus group interviews were transcribed by the researcher. This was viewed by the researcher as the appropriate course of action as this would ensure that the content remained accurate to the expressed views of the young people in the study. As discussed earlier, in qualitative research methodology the researcher becoming involved in all stages of the data collection and analysis allows for the researcher to gain a rich picture of the data (Robson, 2003). A co-researcher was not used throughout all phases of the research, but the commissioner of the research was involved during the analysis phase.

Each transcribed focus group transcript was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). The reason thematic analysis was chosen as the method of qualitative data analysis is its flexible approach. As stated in Braun and Clark (2006) other qualitative analysis processes link directly to a theoretical framework or epistemological viewpoint such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA, e.g. Smith and Osborn, 2003) and grounded theory (Glaser, 1992).

An important aspect of thematic analysis is how the data set is analysed as a whole. Within thematic analysis there are two options, a deductive or inductive approach. For the purpose of this research a deductive approach was used, where the data was coded to answer specific research questions. Braun and Clark (2006) argue that this method can provide a less rich description of the data than inductive analysis (where the theory is generated from the

identified themes, similar to a grounded theory approach). However, for the purpose of this research the deductive approach to coding the data was deemed appropriate as this was in line with the overall research aims that were being explored.

Once an overall approach is identified the next step is to consider at what level the themes should be identified. Boyatzis (1998) suggests that themes can be identified at the semantic or explicit level and a thematic analysis generally focuses exclusively or primarily on one level (Braun and Clark, 2006). In this study the researcher sought to analyse the themes using a semantic approach. This was done because the research aims were to identify what young people defined as homophobic bullying and what homophobic language they thought was used in their school. Therefore the analysis needed to remain as close to their words as possible otherwise the data would no longer represent their views accurately but would be distorted by the researcher's interpretation of their views. However, it must be acknowledged that any analysis of raw data would be subjected to the researcher's interpretation to some extent.

The researcher followed the six phase thematic analysis set out by Braun and Clark (2006) p. 87, which is summarised in Table 1

**Table 2: Stages of Thematic Analysis**

<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>
Stage 1	This stage includes the researcher familiarising herself with the transcribed data, noting down initial ideas.
Stage 2	This includes the researcher generating initial codes, as codes identify features of the data either at the semantic or latent level. Coded data at this stage differ from units of analysis (emerging themes) which are often broader than the initial coded data.
Stage 3	This requires the researcher to begin to draw out initial themes.
Stage 4	<p>This stage includes the refinement of themes. Some might be collapsed into equivalent or super ordinate themes while others might be discarded as themes. This process is completed in two levels.</p> <p>Level 1: The review of collated extracts for each theme, which requires the researcher to assess whether there is a coherent pattern, and if some of the Stage 3 themes do not fit, the researcher may need to review a theme or create a new one.</p> <p>Level 2: This includes looking at themes within the context of the whole data set to consider validity of individual themes in relation to the data set.</p>
Stage 5	This stage involves defining and naming themes further, refining and identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspects of the data each theme captures. This stage is not just paraphrasing the data extracts but identifying what is of interest and why. This could include abstraction of sub-themes or telling a story behind a theme. The researcher should ensure the theme fits into the broader story of data in relation to the specific research questions.
Stage 6	This stage involves the presentation of a report where the themes are fully worked

	out and written. The report should include data extracts and provide sufficient evidence behind the themes i.e. enough data extracts to demonstrate the remit of the theme. The researcher should embed an analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story about the data and makes an argument in relation to the research questions.
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(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83-93)

### Validity in mixed methods research

Validity in mixed methods research is defined as the ability of the researcher to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions from all of the data in the study. This definition reinforces “inference quality” – the accuracy with which researchers draw inductive and deductive conclusions from a study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003a).

Validity in mixed methods research will depend on which mixed method design is used. For the purpose of this study sequential data analysis was the process followed. This means that the analysis of the first database would inform the design of the data collection instrument used in the second phase of the study, and the database derived from this (Creswell, 2003).

Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches raises additional challenges to validity which need to be addressed. For example, choosing weak qualitative findings to develop a

quantitative instrument (questionnaire) would affect the validity of the overall results. This will be addressed through using the major themes as the basis for the quantitative follow up.

In qualitative research there is a focus on validity to determine whether the account provided by the researcher can be seen as accurate, credible and trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In qualitative analysis, reliability relates to how the researcher arrives at the themes that are identified. Reliability of the data can be strengthened by sharing the coded themes with a second researcher. Within this study the researcher aimed to strengthen the reliability of the qualitative analysis by discussing the coded themes with a co-researcher (the commissioner of the research). Although this was positive in strengthening the reliability of the results it can also be argued that the commissioner of the research may have brought some measure of bias towards the analysis which may have impacted on his interpretation of the results.

## **Phase one results and analysis**

The researcher had three specific open-ended discussion questions which were developed through consultation with the research commissioner and based on previous research in this field (Kosciw and Diaz, 2006 and Phoenix et al., 2006). The three questions put to the children were linked to the following two research questions:

- 1) At present what are young people's definitions of homophobic bullying?
- 2) What language do they think is homophobic?

The three questions put to the children in both focus groups are stated below:

- 1) What do you think bullying is?
- 2) What do you think homophobic bullying is?
- 3) What language do you think is associated with homophobic bullying?

Discussion of the first question was considered important prior to a discussion about homophobic bullying, as the researcher wanted to understand the young people's perceptions and general understanding of bullying. As highlighted earlier in the paper by Swearer et al. (2010) a lack of robust definitions from the perspective of children and young people makes any enquiry into this social phenomenon difficult. Therefore, in this particular study, the researcher thought that to abstract a current definition from the children involved in the research would help ensure the formulation of a working definition relevant to the young people in the sample.

The results were analysed using thematic analysis following the six key steps summarised in Table 2.

### Thematic analysis

This section gives a summary of the thematic analysis of the focus group data. Both focus groups were transcribed (step 1, see Appendix 7), coded (step 2, see Appendix 8) and organised into initial emerging themes (step 3, see Appendix 9). The summary of the analysis below includes responses from both focus groups which were analysed together to ensure themes were based on overall comments made by participants. The analysis begins at stage four (refining themes) and follows on to stages five and six. The emerging themes are presented under the questions asked by the researcher at the focus groups.

Table 3: Stage four: Thematic analysis

Focus group question	Initial themes (stage four of thematic analysis)
<p>What do you think bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bullying can be direct or indirect, which can be being hit or beaten or punched or can be verbal abuse, mocking and teasing</li> <li>➤ Bullying can be physical, emotional or verbal abuse</li> <li>➤ “One off” or persistent when there is a power imbalance involved can be viewed as bullying</li> <li>➤ “One off” incidents are not as serious as long term persistent acts, unless the person experiencing the bullying is a vulnerable young person</li> <li>➤ Cyber bullying</li> <li>➤ It can also be social isolation</li> <li>➤ Intention to hurt someone means it is bullying</li> <li>➤ Verbal bullying is harder to detect than physical</li> <li>➤ Girls engage in more verbal abuse (bitching) which can last a long time, whereas boys may engage in jokes which escalate into gang violence</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Actions by schools to prevent bullying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sanctions such as isolation room do not stop bullying.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Teachers being involved do not stop bullying</li><li>➤ Conflict resolution could be a method to combat bullying</li><li>➤ Punishments should fit the severity of the situation</li></ul> <p>Subtheme: Actions by young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Being confident and having a hard exterior can prevent bullying happening to you</li><li>➤ Standing up for yourself can prevent you from being bullied</li></ul> <p>Subtheme: Victim Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Being different such as: your appearance, your background, your race, gender or sexual orientation which means you do not fit in with others</li><li>➤ Vulnerable children and young people are at more risk of being bullied</li></ul> <p>Subtheme: Bully Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ People bully others because they are jealous of them</li></ul>
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Table 4: Stage five: Defining and renaming key themes

<b>Focus group question</b>	<b>Refining the initial themes (stage five of thematic analysis)</b>
<p>What do you think bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social isolation of someone who is perceived as vulnerable</li> <li>➤ Physical abuse and acts of aggression</li> <li>➤ Emotional abuse</li> <li>➤ Verbal abuse and harassment which can be persistent and harder to detect</li> <li>➤ Has to be persistent but one off incidents where there is a power imbalance are bullying</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Actions by young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be confident and stand up to bullying</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Actions by the school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interventions are not always effective</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Characteristics of the bully and the victim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Children and young who are different from their peers either because of their appearance, race, background or sexuality are bullied</li> <li>➤ Vulnerable young people are at risk of being bullied</li> <li>➤ Peer envy can be a reason for bullying others</li> </ul>

Table 5: Stage six: Reporting the main themes derived from the two focus groups.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Qualitative description</u>	<u>Number of comments</u>
Verbal abuse and harassment which can be persistent and harder to detect	“teasing someone”, “verbal abuse”, “picking on someone by calling them names”, “ girls making bitchy comments to each other” and “verbal bullying”	18
Physical abuse or acts of aggression	“beating someone up”, “physical abuse”, being pushed around”, “being punched or hit”.	8
Social isolation of someone who is perceived as vulnerable	“people are always on their own”, “they are alone because no one wants to hang out with them”, someone who is alone at school”, “an isolated person”.	8
Emotional abuse	“Emotional abuse”, “mental abuse”, “non-verbal, like between the lines”, “spreading rumours”.	5
Has to be persistent, but one off incidents where there is a power imbalance is bullying.	“more than a one off incident”, “can be persistent”, “constant”, “bullying can be one off incidents”, “for some people one off comments can be perceived as bullying, and the power imbalance plays a part in this”.	5
Cyber bullying	“being horrible to someone on MSN”, “cyber bullying” “being nasty to someone through Facebook”.	3

In Table 5 above the main themes that children in both focus groups identified were linked to verbal harassment which was identified as the type of bullying behaviour hard to detect and relatively persistent. Overall 18 comments were made referring to this form of bullying. One participant referred to this type of bullying as it “happens all the time”.

The second most common forms of bullying identified were physical acts of bullying and social isolation, again identified through eight comments. Young people referred to social isolation in reference to a young person who is “vulnerable”, which respondents framed as someone who is alone and isolated when at school.

What was considered to constitute a bullying incident varied between the participants. Some of the young people thought behaviour had to be persistent for it to be bullying, whereas others agreed but stated that there is an exception again linked to the power imbalance between bully and victim (see Olweus, 1993a, Berger, 2007 and Valliancourt et al., 2009).

Subthemes were also identified through the thematic analysis and although they were not linked to the overall research questions the researcher considered these important in line with the overall view that they represented the views of the young people in the study.

Table 6: Subthemes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Qualitative Description</u>	<u>Number of comments</u>
Why does bullying occur?	<p>“being different”, being different from the crowd”,                      “people are nasty to you because of your appearance”,                      “picked on because you’re fat”, “you talk funny”, or                      “you have an accent” “you have a different background”</p> <p>“It’s vulnerable young people who are more at risk of bullying”, “young people who are assertive are less likely to be bullied”.</p>	14
How should bullying be addressed?	<p>“Sanctions such as isolation room do not have an effect on bullying,” “telling a teacher can escalate the situation”, “getting teachers involved does not always resolve the issue in the long term aspects”.</p> <p>“You have to be strong and stand up to bullies,” “if people don’t stand up to bullies they are more likely to be a victim of bullying,” “standing up for yourself can prevent bullying happening to you”,</p>	13

The young people had felt it important to comment on the reasons why they believed young people became victims of bullying which linked to the following characteristics: background, sexuality and general appearance. Young people also felt that current interventions within school were not necessarily effective in tackling the issue. Also mentioned eight times was the

idea that looking confident and standing up to bullies is a way of reducing the power that bullies otherwise have.

Focus group question two: what do you think homophobic bullying is?

For an account of stages 1, 2 and 3 please refer to the Appendices 7, 8 and 9.

Table 7: Stage four of thematic analysis

Focus group question	Initial themes (stage four of thematic analysis)
<p>What do you think homophobic bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Intentionally hurting someone because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation</li> <li>➤ Being abusive to someone who expresses themselves and does not fit into the gender stereotypes</li> <li>➤ Is linked to individual characteristics e.g. girls who are viewed to be more masculine than their peers can be called a lesbian in a derogatory way</li> <li>➤ A guy who is perceived as feminine by his peers could be called gay in a derogatory way</li> <li>➤ Spreading rumours about another pupil's sexuality</li> <li>➤ Homophobic bullying involves aggressive verbal abuse and homophobic remarks</li> <li>➤ Young people who say openly that they are either gay or lesbian, those being called gay is not bullying</li> <li>➤ Using the word gay amongst friends in a joke is not bullying, even if the friend is self identified as gay</li> <li>➤ Words such as gay are very common and can be derogatory if they are used in a negative context and where there is a power imbalance</li> <li>➤ Intimidation through gestures and homophobic remarks are homophobic bullying</li> </ul> <p>Subthemes: Who is subjected to this form of bullying</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There is more homophobic bullying and homophobic remarks directed at males</li> </ul>
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Table 8: Stage five: Defining and renaming key themes

<b>Focus group question</b>	<b>Refining the initial themes (Stage five of thematic analysis)</b>
What do you think homophobic bullying is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Homophobic bullying involves aggressive verbal abuse, intimidation homophobic gestures and remarks</li> <li>➤ Intentionally hurting someone because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation</li> <li>➤ Spreading rumours and socially isolating someone because of their perceived or actual sexuality</li> <li>➤ As a male being abused because you don't fit into the masculine stereotype</li> <li>➤ As a female being abused because you do not fit into the feminine stereotype</li> </ul>

Table 9: Stage six Reporting the main themes derived from the two focus groups

The main themes presented in Table 9 integrate the themes derived from stages four and five of the thematic analysis.

Table 9:

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Qualitative description</u>	<u>Number of Comments</u>
As a male, being abused because you do not fit into the masculine stereotype	“A guy who wears something that is more feminine”, a “guy who is in touch with their feminine side”, “if you don’t have a deep voice”, “if your voice is too squeaky”	8
Intentionally hurting someone because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation	“if you really wanted to annoy them you would say it often”, “there are loads of words but only a few that would really offend you, like swear words” “when you talk stuff at them, just verbally abusing them, that type of stuff is bullying”	6
Homophobic bullying involves aggressive verbal abuse, intimidation, homophobic gestures and phrases.	“Being teased for liking men”, “also if a woman’s gay”, “being harassed if you’re gay or lesbian”	5
Spreading rumours and socially isolating someone because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation	“Also you’ve got homophobic rumours going on around school that’s bullying”. “I can remember about one person it going around about them being gay, it went on for ages that was	4

	bullying”.  “Stuff went around about a girl being a lesbian and that, so that’s like bullying”, “like even now some people are like get away from me and erggghh, stuff like she’s looking at you when you’re getting changed and she’s blatantly not it’s so childish”	
As a female being abused because you do not fit into the feminine stereotype	“If a girl is butch and has really short hair”, “if a woman is manly”, a girl who is masculine”, “or a girl who likes football”	4

Table 9 summarises the key themes discussed by young people in both focus groups. They described homophobic bullying in relation to being verbally abused about one’s sexual orientation. They also defined homophobic bullying as being bullied for a person’s perceived (by others) sexual orientation because of an individual’s personal choice in dress and overall appearance. Young people also viewed homophobic bullying as abusive to a young person who does not fit the typical gender stereotype, “what is perceived by others as masculine and feminine”. Social isolation through spreading rumours was also seen as an act of homophobic bullying. This definition suggests that young people who have characteristics that do not fall within the broad gender stereotype can be subjected to homophobic bullying.

Focus group question three: what are the words/language you hear used in school that are homophobic?

For an account of stages 1, 2 and 3 please refer to the Appendices 7, 8 and 9.

Table 10: Stage four of thematic analysis

<b>Focus group question</b>	<b>Initial themes (stage four of thematic analysis)</b>
<p>What are the words/language you hear used in school that is homophobic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Batty boy</li> <li>➤ Queer</li> <li>➤ Bender</li> <li>➤ Poof</li> <li>➤ Using hand gestures and saying poof</li> <li>➤ Using media gay or lesbian stereotypes such as “Bruno” or “Christian from Eastenders” to bully others</li> <li>➤ Pussy</li> <li>➤ Tomboy</li> <li>➤ Les</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Is this language homophobic bullying?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Phrases such as “you’re so gay” and “that’s so gay” are not homophobic bullying. This is because they are used in everyday contexts and are viewed as non-offensive and are normalised by society.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ But phrases such as “you’re so gay” can be offensive if the individual exposed to them has experienced this form of bullying, is vulnerable or it is directed to someone who is alone</li> <li>➤ Phrases such as you’re so gay coupled with aggressive language is homophobic bullying, but as a joke among friends is not</li> <li>➤ More persistent use of these phrases is homophobic bullying when it is constant</li> <li>➤ Words have different meanings to different age groups. Some words might be offensive to younger children or vice versa</li> <li>➤ Homophobic language is not necessarily viewed as homophobic bullying</li> </ul>
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Table 11: Stage five: defining and renaming key themes

<b>Focus group question</b>	<b>Refining the initial themes (stage five of thematic analysis)</b>
<p>What are the words/language you hear used in school that are homophobic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Homophobic pejoratives</li> <li>➤ Homophobic pejoratives with aggressive language such as swearing</li> <li>➤ Gay or lesbian media references</li> <li>➤ Words describing someone’s sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation because of their appearance or characteristics.</li> </ul>

Table 12: Stage six: reporting the main themes derived from the two focus groups

Table 12 provides a summary of the emerging themes from stage 4 and 5 of the thematic analysis for the question: “What language do you think is associated with homophobic bullying?”

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Qualitative description</u>	<u>Number of Comments</u>
Homophobic pejoratives	<i>“Poof”, “Batty boy” “queer” , “Bender”, “Rug Muncher”, “Pussy boy”, “Fag”, “Faggot”, “Queer ****”, “Queer balls”, “**** taker”, “Pussy hole”, “***** gay boy”,</i>	<b>33</b>
Words describing someone’s sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation because of their appearance or characteristics	<i>“you’re so gay”, “that is so gay, what you’re doing”, “stop acting gay”, “Les”, “lesbo”, “gay boy” , “homo”, “dyke”, “tomboy”.</i>	<b>6</b>
Homophobic pejoratives with aggressive language such as swearing	<i>“***** gay”, “gay *****”, ***** batty boy,”</i>	<b>6</b>
Gay or lesbian media references	<i>“You’re Hannah Montana”, “Daffyd Thomas from Little Britain”, “you’re like Christian from Eastenders”, “Bruno”.</i>	<b>6</b>

Table 12 highlights the number of comments that were made by participants linked to types of language viewed as homophobic. Interestingly many of the participants found language such as “you’re so gay” as general comments and not necessarily homophobic pejoratives. This is why the overall number of participants who agreed that these comments were homophobic was six. Homophobic pejoratives were quoted 33 times by participants, suggesting these comments were viewed as homophobic by the majority of participants overall. Even though homophobic pejoratives with aggressive language were cited as homophobic, only six comments were stated overall by all participants. Finally, gay and lesbian media references were also noted as using homophobic language by some participants.

## **Phase two: results and analysis.**

At this phase of the study the researcher aimed to gather quantitative and some further qualitative data to address the final research question below:

- 3) Are homophobic language, phrases and pejoratives prevalent in the school environment, and are they perceived as homophobic bullying?

After the information from the focus groups was analysed and the themes arising were identified, the researcher then used this information to design a questionnaire. This questionnaire addressed the third research aim and was based on previous questionnaire based research assessing the prevalence of homophobic language in secondary schools designed by Phoenix et al., 2006. As this questionnaire was based on a United States sample, the researcher adapted it for use in the UK. This was conducted through identifying the views of young people through the focus groups and collating the emerging themes from the qualitative analysis. The reasons for this included that gathering the views of the young people in the sample and by incorporating their words into the questionnaire would ensure the survey was more relevant to the sample in this study. This decision sought to address the limitations of previous research on bullying and homophobic bullying. For example, the link between varied definitions and perceptions of what constitutes homophobic bullying behaviour and their impact on prevalence rates (Swearer et al., 2010) risks making it difficult to address the issues at a whole school level.

The questionnaire design included closed questions with a Likert scale to assess the prevalence of homophobic language e.g. How often do you hear phrases such as “you’re so gay” at school? (very frequently = more than once a day, frequently = more than once a week sometimes = less than once a week and rarely = less than once a month) and dichotomous with yes or no (e.g. do you think the above phrases are homophobic bullying, yes or no). This question was added as a result of previous research findings by Rivers (2001) and Reid et al. (2004) who suggested that young people’s perceptions of what is a bullying incident impacts on rates of reporting.

A qualitative element was also added to the questionnaire. This was to ensure that all children participating in the survey had an opportunity to give their views on what they perceived as bullying and homophobic bullying. This was in line with the overall research aim of gaining the views of young people regarding bullying, and more specifically homophobic bullying.

The questionnaire was piloted (for pilot study details see Appendix 12) and was adapted on advice from key stakeholders. The key stakeholders included the research commissioner and the researcher supervisor both Educational Psychologists working within the area in which the research was conducted. The feedback from the key stakeholders included suggestions on making the questionnaire clearer using more sub-headings, simpler language and general layout adjustments. This was completed to ensure the questionnaire would be accessible to the participants. The final questionnaire was distributed to the participating school to be completed by children aged between 14-16 years old (see Appendix 11 for questionnaire). The age of participants was decided upon based on the mean age of the focus group

participants of 15 years 160 questionnaires were distributed and in total 127 were returned and analysed.

The main themes from the qualitative analysis of phase one of this study were incorporated into the questionnaire, in the form of the following questions:

- What do young people view as bullying?
- What do young people view as homophobic bullying?
- What words/phrases/pejoratives are associated with homophobic bullying?
- How prevalent is the use of words/phrases/pejoratives within the secondary school environment?
- Are the above perceived as a form of homophobic bullying?

#### Validity of the questionnaire

In quantitative research there are two contexts in which to think about validity and reliability. The first pertains to scores from past uses of the instruments and whether the scores are valid and reliable. The second relates to an assessment of the validity and reliability of the data collected in the current study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2003).

The questionnaire's content validity was strengthened by comparing the results of the pilot study and scores obtained from other similar questionnaires, such as Kosciw (2004). Content

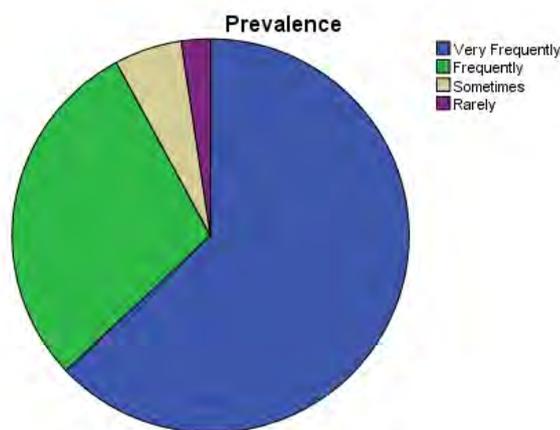
reliability was assessed through identifying the most commonly reported words/phrases/pejoratives to use in the questionnaire questions (for further information regarding the questionnaire pilot see Appendix 12).

### Quantitative results of the questionnaire survey

The qualitative section of the questionnaire was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) and followed the same principles and procedures highlighted in phase one of the study. The quantitative section of the questionnaire included four key questions. All four questions had a second element to them which included a yes or no response regarding the question, “are these phrases homophobic bullying?”

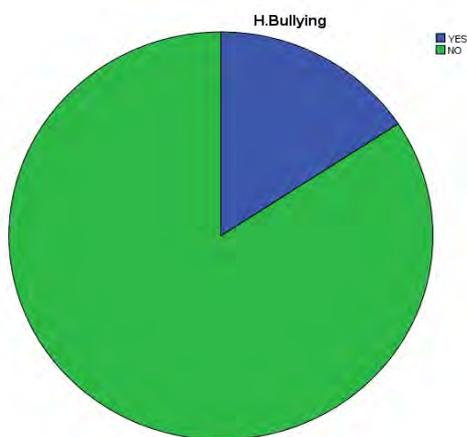
The analysis is presented using descriptive statistics with the use of pie charts under each question which is linked to the overall research aim/question.

Figure 1: Question 1.1 How often are phrases like “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” heard in your school?



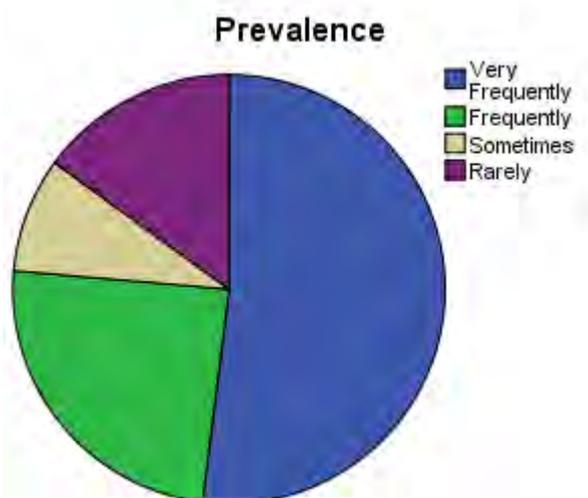
80 respondents (63 %) reported hearing the above phrases very frequently (more than once a day) and 37 (29%) respondents reported that they heard these remarks frequently (more than once a week). This highlighted that young people in the survey viewed these phrases as being highly prevalent within the school environment.

Figure 2: Question 1.2 Are the above phrases homophobic bullying?



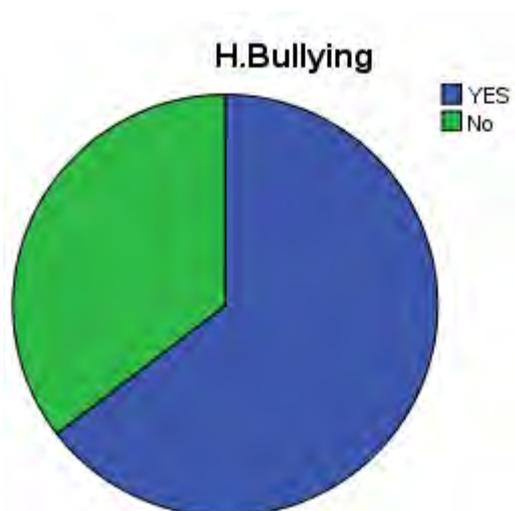
119 (94%) of the 127 respondents perceived the above phrases as not being homophobic bullying.

Figure 3: Question 2.1 How often have you heard phrases like “poof”, “queer”, “batty boy” and “bender” in and around school?



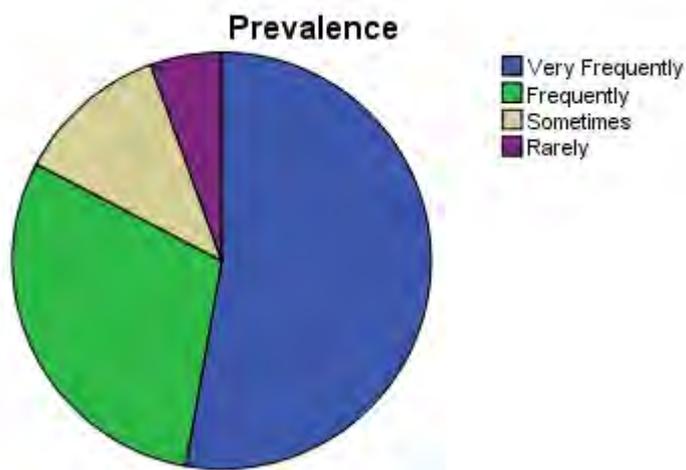
66 (52%) respondents reported that they heard these words or phrases very frequently (more than once a day) and 31 (24%) respondents stated that they heard these phrases frequently (more than once a week). This suggested that in total 76 per cent of the survey stated that these phrases were highly prevalent within the school environment.

Figure 4: Question 2.2 Are the above phrases homophobic bullying?



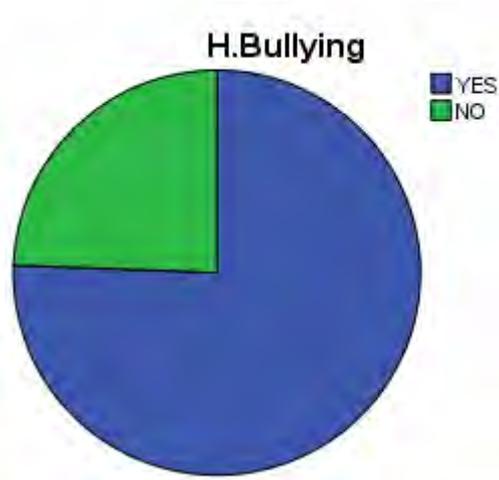
82 (65%) respondents reported that these phrases were homophobic bullying, 45 (35%) respondents answered “no” and did not view these phrases as homophobic bullying.

Figure 5: Question 3.1 How often have you heard swear words used with homophobic language for example “You’re \*\*\*\*\* gay” in and around school?



Out of the 127 respondents 67 (53%) reported hearing such language very frequently (more than once a day) and 38 (30%) respondents reported hearing such language frequently (more than once a week).

Figure 6: Question 3.2 Is the above language is homophobic bullying?



96 (76%) respondents perceived this language as homophobic bullying, while 31 (24%) respondents did not perceive this language as homophobic bullying.

Figure 7: Question 4.1 How often are TV/movie characters such as “Daffyd Thomas” (character from Little Britain) or “Bruno” mentioned when students are talking about other students in school?



Out of 127 pupils 62 (49%) respondents reported hearing such remarks rarely (less than once a month) and 31 (24%) respondents stated that they heard such remarks sometimes (less than once a week).

Figure 8 Question 4.2 Are the above remarks homophobic bullying?



81 (64%) respondents stated that these remarks were not homophobic bullying, yet 46 (36%) respondents did think these remarks were homophobic bullying.

## Qualitative results and analysis of the questionnaire

As the questionnaire included a qualitative element, these results were analysed using thematic analysis, all 127 responses to both qualitative questions were collated and sorted into emerging themes (using stages 1 2 and 3 of the thematic analysis by Braun and Clark, 2006) which can be viewed in Appendices 7, 8 and 9. Once again the results are presented under each question.

### What do you think bullying is?

Table 13 below represents stage four of the thematic analysis: refining emerging themes: the comments were collated and are displayed below.

Table 13: Stage four of thematic analysis

<b>Questionnaire question</b>	<b>Initial themes (stage four of thematic analysis)</b>
What do you think bullying is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Bullying someone who is socially isolated</li><li>➤ Bullying someone is repeated and persistent</li><li>➤ Physical and verbal abuse</li><li>➤ Individual and group attacks</li><li>➤ Emotional abuse</li><li>➤ Abusing someone who has low self-esteem and is perceived as</li></ul>

	<p>vulnerable</p> <p>Subtheme: Characteristics of the bully and the victim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Is often related to jealousy</li> <li>➤ For financial gain or personal enjoyment</li> <li>➤ Bullying happens because the bully wants to be popular</li> <li>➤ Because the bully is a victim of abuse</li> <li>➤ Bullying someone for their difference i.e. appearance, background or race</li> </ul>
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Table 14: Stage five: defining and renaming key themes

<b>Questionnaire question</b>	<b>Refining the initial themes (stage five of thematic analysis)</b>
<p>What do you think bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Repeated and persistent attacks on an individual</li> <li>➤ Abusing someone who is marginalised, socially isolated and perceived as vulnerable</li> <li>➤ Physical, emotional and verbal abuse of an individual by another individual or a group of people</li> </ul> <p>Subtheme: Characteristics of the bully and the victim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bullying someone because of peer pressure, being jealous or for financial gain</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bullies are often victims of abuse</li> <li>➤ Being bullied for being different (race, appearance, other characteristics)</li> </ul>
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Stage six: reporting the main themes

Tables 15 and 16 below present summaries of responses to the question: what do you think bullying is?

Table 15: Reporting the main themes derived from questionnaire analysis

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Qualitative description</b>	<b>No of Comments</b>
Physical, emotional and verbal abuse of an individual by another individual or a group of people	“A person or a group of people pick on someone”, “being mean”, “calling them names”, “pushing them”, “turning others against you”, “being tormented by someone”, “Person/group of people repeatedly bully someone”, “being a bitch to someone”, “making someone cry”, making someone’s life hell”, “hurting someone by calling them names or physically hurting them”, “be horrible to someone”, “being nasty”, “out of order”, “putting someone down”, “take the piss out of	70

	someone”, “make someone upset”.	
Abusing someone who is marginalised, socially isolated or perceived as vulnerable	“Act of singling out alone person abusing them physically/emotionally”, “hurting because they are disabled or different race”, “harassing a person who is a loner”, “bullying them because they have no friends”, “targeting them because weak”.	43
Repeated and persistent attacks on a individual	“Repeatedly hurting someone by name calling or physical abuse”, “Being tormented by someone constantly”, “repeatedly making someone’s life hell”, “hurting someone in ways that affect them for a long time”, “happens on daily basis”	14

Table 15 summarises the participants’ views on bullying. Many of the young people (55% of the sample) stated that bullying was when someone was being physically, emotionally and verbally abused by an individual or a group of people. Only 11 % of the participants talked about repeated or persistent attacks on an individual and 34% of the sample discussed social isolation as a form of bullying. These results were broadly consistent with the results obtained from the focus groups (refer to table 4 page 87).

Table 16: Subtheme, why do you think children and young people are bullied?

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Qualitative description</b>	<b>No of Comments</b>
Bullying someone because of peer pressure or for financial gain	“Someone trying to be tough in front of friends”, “picking on someone because of jealousy”, “telling people to give them money and hurting them for fun”.	33
Being bullied for being different (race, appearance, colour, other characteristics)	“Picking on someone because different to you”, “hurting someone because they are different”, “because they do not fit in”.	6
Bullies are often victims of abuse	“bully might not know what he/she is doing”, “bullying because used to get bullied”.	6

Table 16 includes comments and emerging themes regarding factors linked to why children and young people get bullied. Although this was not asked in the survey, participants felt it important to elaborate in their definitions of bullying.

What do you think homophobic bullying is?

For this question all 127 comments were collated and sorted into emerging themes using thematic analysis. For stage 1, 2 and 3 of the analysis please see the Appendices 7, 8 and 9.

Table 17: Stage four of thematic analysis

<b>Questionnaire question</b>	<b>Initial themes (stage four of thematic analysis)</b>
<p>What do you think homophobic bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Not sure</li> <li>➤ Being verbally, physically and emotionally abused for being different</li> <li>➤ Physically, emotionally and verbally abusing someone for their actual or perceived sexual orientation</li> <li>➤ Judging or being prejudiced to a person for same sex attraction</li> <li>➤ Being physically, verbally and emotionally abusive to children and young people who do not fit into their gender stereotype</li> <li>➤ Spreading rumours about a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation</li> </ul>

Table 18: Stage five: defining and renaming key themes

Questionnaire question	Refining the initial themes (stage five of thematic analysis)
<p>What do you think homophobic bullying is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ not sure</li> <li>➤ Being verbally, physically and emotionally abused for your actual or perceived sexual orientation</li> <li>➤ Being physically, verbally and emotionally abused for not fitting the gender stereotypes or for just being different from the norm</li> <li>➤ Socially isolating, being prejudice and judging a person because of their sexual orientation</li> </ul>

Table 19: Reporting the main themes derived from the questionnaire analysis

What do you think homophobic bullying is?

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Qualitative description</b>	<b>No. of Comments</b>
Being verbally, physically and emotionally abused for your sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation	“Picked on because likes different sex”, “picked on because homosexual”, “mentally/physically attacking gay people”, “called names because your gay”, “mocked by kids who think you like the same sex”, “ beat up for being gay”, “simply terrorised for their sexuality”, “bullying because not straight”, “beating you up because people think your gay”, “bullying someone because act gay”, “picking on people who seem gay/lesbian”, “people may spread rumours about other people’s sexuality”, “ mentally/physically attacking gay people”	61
Being physically, verbally and emotionally abused for not fitting the gender stereotype or for just being different.	“Singling out because they are different”, “calling them names because they act in a way which doesn’t fit the stereotype”, “picking on someone because of their gender” “may not even be gay/lesbian e.g. a girl could be called lesbian for just being affectionate towards a female friend or boy for acting slightly feminine”, “verbally or physically hurt because they are different”, “calling them names because they act in way which doesn’t fit their stereotypes”.	37
Not sure	“I don’t know”, “Not Sure”, “I don’t know”	30

	“I don’t know”, “Not Sure”.	
Socially isolating, being prejudice and judging a person because of their sexual orientation	“Judging because of sexuality”, “society prejudice against gay/lesbian people who don’t fit in”, “judged for actions not personality” “ because society sees gay/lesbian people as they don’t fit in”, “bullied for what they believe in”, “judged by actions not personality”	18

In Table 19 the key themes regarding young people’s constructs of homophobic bullying included 48% of the sample stating that they thought homophobic bullying included being verbally, physically and emotionally abusive to someone because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. 19% of the sample perceived homophobic bullying as being physically, verbally and emotionally abused for being different or if you do not fit your gender stereotype. A small percentage (10%) linked homophobic bullying to wider societal attitudes and prejudices. Finally 23% of the sample were not sure what homophobic bullying meant.

The results for both phase one and phase two of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions in the discussion section below.

## Discussion

In phase one of the study the researcher focused on research questions 1 and 2:

- 1) What are young people's definitions of homophobic bullying?
- 2) What language do they think is homophobic?

The results of the focus groups were presented as key emerging themes and the data were also used to inform the design of a questionnaire through which the views and experiences of a wider sample of young people at Key Stage 4 within a mainstream secondary school were further explored. The results are discussed under the following headings:

### Question 1: What do young people think bullying is:

Participants conceptualised bullying as: verbal abuse and harassment which can be persistent and hard to detect, physical abuse or acts of aggression, social isolation of someone who is perceived as vulnerable, emotional abuse, cyber bullying and they went on to quantify their responses noting that such behaviour "has to be persistent, but one off incidents where there is a power imbalance is bullying".

These views were similar to many research definitions identified in the literature review. For example, Benbenishty and Astor (2005), Nishina (2004) in Saunders and Phye (2004) and Rigby (2002b) have described bullying as physical, verbal, and relational. Relational bullying was described in the present study as social isolation of a vulnerable young person, where there is a power imbalance between the victim and bully.

This suggests that overall the participants in the study had an understanding of the different forms of bullying and the interactions between bully and victims which can influence the dynamics and impact on any given incident.

Also, indirect and direct bullying are identified in a number of definitions by researchers such as Rigby, (2002b) and Benbenishty and Astor (2005), based on Olweus' (1993a) definition. This was not identified within the focus groups. Participants reported verbal and physical abuse and reported that the latter is easier to detect due to its more overt nature. Although the language of "direct" and "indirect" bullying was not used by the young people in the survey, their descriptions could be viewed as similar to the definitions provided Olweus (1993a). Though similar, it does highlight some variation between research definitions and the views of the young people in this study.

Other findings that were not linked to the research questions were commented on by a number of participants and emerged as a theme in the data corpus included firstly, that young people in the survey did not view certain school interventions as effective. For example, some conflicts between pupils which had been long term and persistent may not have been resolved by students telling teachers and speaking out about the bullying. A number of participants recalled peer group conflicts that would not/ were not resolved by placing young people in an "isolation room": a common institutional sanction used to address unacceptable behaviour.

Furthermore, young people identified many different factors that can be linked to bullying including individual characteristics of victims and perpetrators, differences in resilience and

social and peer group interactions. For example, young people identified factors such as low self esteem and confidence and the characteristics of the victim and the bully (young people who may have been victims of bullying themselves) could make a young person more vulnerable to being bullied and becoming a bully. These comments are similar to those identified in research findings such as Barboza et al., (2009) which discuss how individual characteristics but also wider environmental factors can be a reason for why bullying occurs. Finally many of the focus group participants stated that helping to support individual characteristics such as being more confident and standing up for yourself could be a way to tackle bullying, something which would be a useful discussion for the school in looking at what interventions are effective in tackling bullying in their school.

#### Question 2: What do young people think homophobic bullying is?

Young people who participated in the focus groups were asked to discuss their views on homophobic bullying. The results highlighted that young people viewed homophobic bullying as “verbal abuse, “physical abuse”, “emotional abuse” or “social isolation” of someone who is perceived by their peers to be gay or lesbian or not to conform to the broadly accepted gender stereotype. Many young people discussed “social isolation” in depth and described this to mean actions such as spreading rumours about an individual’s sexuality, which they interpreted as homophobic bullying.

Young people also viewed epithets linked to gender stereotypes as homophobic bullying. For example, young people reported that girls who were teased for being masculine and boys who were mocked for being feminine were examples of homophobic bullying. The focus groups

added that homophobic labels such as “tomboy” or “gay” were used to undermine and bully vulnerable pupils in the school. They described the term “vulnerable” as referring to young people who were “loners” or “socially isolated by their peers” (Smith, 2004). Young people also conceptualised homophobic bullying as occurring where someone was bullied for their perceived sexual orientation even if they are heterosexual.

When comparing these results with research highlighted within the literature review such as Rivers (2001) and Warwick, Aggleton and Douglas (2001, page 430) homophobic bullying is viewed as occurring “when individuals are singled out for their actual or perceived sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, or bisexual).” Rivers (2001) goes on to define this further:

**Verbal abuse**, including spreading rumours that someone is gay, suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are “gay” for example, “you’re such a gay boy!” or “those trainers are so gay!”

**Physical abuse** including hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour.

This suggests some similarities with the focus group results, although young people in this research described social isolation and spreading rumours as homophobic bullying whereas the definition provided by Rivers (2001) discusses social isolation within the category of verbal abuse.

The current study highlighted that the definition for bullying embraced by students was multidimensional, much more in-depth and this conceptualisation corresponds with research findings such as Valliancourt et al, (2009).

Many of the young people in this study did not view phrases such as “you’re so gay” as bullying behaviour in the conceptualisation of homophobic bullying. This suggests that in the use of language such as “you’re so gay”, the word “gay” was not viewed as a homophobic term from focus group participants. Many young people stated that they used this language to describe objects and people implicitly rather than intentionally.

#### What language do you think is homophobic bullying?

Participants discussed their views on what homophobic words/phrases/pejoratives are commonly heard in their school. This elicited many responses and the common phrases and pejoratives included:

- Words and phrases such as “you’re so gay,” “that’s so gay” (although it was acknowledged that their use would not necessarily or even predominately signal bullying behaviour).
- Pejoratives such as “batty boy”, “poof” and “queer”.
- Aggressive language and pejoratives such as “\*\*\*\*\* gay, gay \*\*\*\*\*
- Media references to describe a person’s sexual orientation such as “you’re Daffyd Thomas, from little Britain”.

The most commonly noted language by participants were phrases such as “you’re so gay”, although as noted above many of the young people in the focus groups did not view these phrases as homophobic bullying. Poteat and Rivers (2010) and Poteat (2008) have suggested that homophobic phrases or epithets are often associated with wider peer group interactions. Therefore, this could explain why young people did not view these phrases as offensive as among peers their usage may be common, and therefore, normalised (Poteat, 2008).

Many more pejoratives for males than females were denoted in the focus groups. For example, “lezza” and “tomboy” were the two epithets for females, whereas many more pejoratives for males were highlighted, with “poof”, “queer” and “bender” as just a few examples. Research regarding homophobic epithets for males and females suggests that although girls do experience bullying, males who have particular (feminine) characteristics will be more vulnerable to homophobic name calling and pejoratives (Phoenix et al., 2003; Mandel and Shakeshaft, 2000).

How prevalent is the use of homophobic language, phrases and pejoratives in the school environment, and are they perceived as homophobic bullying?

The participants perceived phrases such as “you’re so gay” as being commonly expressed within the school environment and most young people did not view this as homophobic bullying. Poteat (2008) investigated how wider group contexts can account for the use of homophobic epithets. Their prevalence suggests that peer group influences can be associated with an individual’s attitude towards homophobic language/epithets and their likeliness of using them (Poteat and Rivers, 2010).

During adolescence individual's peer groups become increasingly important and provide a primary source of social interaction and support (Berndt, 2004) and although this can have a positive impact on social development it can also create unhealthy norms and behaviour, such as anti-social behaviour and bullying and in this instance the use of implicitly homophobic phrases such as "you're so gay".

Research on bullying and peer group influences has documented the significance of the group context in accounting for individual's bullying attitudes and behaviours (Espleage et al., 2003; Ojala and Nesdale, 2004). These findings indicate that bullying generally occurs within larger group contexts with multiple individuals involved.

More severe pejoratives which are aggressive in their content were also reported to be prevalent in this study and were viewed by most young people as homophobic bullying. According to research by Poteat and Rivers (2010) using such pejoratives is linked to underlying aggression from the individual or groups of young people who engage in this type of bullying behaviour, suggesting it is not specific to just homophobic bullying and homophobic pejoratives, but it is used more generally in peer group aggression.

Research by the Stonewall Organisation, Kosciw and Diaz (2004) and Phoenix et al. (2006) suggests that homophobic comments and phrases are very prevalent and as a result LGBT young people can feel unhappy and unsafe in their school environment.

Overall, in conclusion when asked about their understanding of what constituted bullying, the views of the participants correlated closely to the definitions used by researchers identified within the literature review. Bullying was generally understood to be behaviour involving persistent and repeated harassment or abuse, which can be either direct, such as physical attacks, and/or indirect attacks like verbal abuse, relational and cyber bullying.

An interesting side-note is that the participants reported that school pupils do not believe anti-bullying interventions by schools are effective. The participants also discussed causes of bullying and identified low self-esteem and lack of confidence as playing a part for both victims and their bullies, which correlates with the findings of researchers such as Barboza (2009).

On the subject of homophobic bullying, from the participants' responses it appears that in homophobic bullying interactions, more pejoratives exist for male victims than female victims, which correlates with the findings of several other researchers (Epstein et al., 2001). Several different sources of research have suggested that homophobic language is very much prevalent in schools. However, the participants in the Focus Groups appear to disagree with the definition of homophobic language that is used by researchers such as the Stonewall Organisation.

Participants defined homophobic bullying as any form of bullying that targeted victims who are or are perceived to be LGBT or not conforming to accepted gender stereotypes. The young people suggested that this particular form of bullying was often linked to indirect

attacks. For example, through relational disruption such as spreading rumours and promoting social isolation of the victim.

Furthermore, Rivers (2001) and others regarded the use of any negative phrases that included the word "gay" as homophobic. However, participants in the research did not agree and reported that they did not consider every usage of phrases like "you're so gay" or "[an object] is so gay" as homophobic, and the use of such phrases was not always linked to bullying as such phrases had often become normalised amongst their peers. However, the same phrases or pejorative terms for LGBT young people when used aggressively, especially when coupled with offensive adjectives or swear words, is considered homophobic bullying according to the Focus Group participants. This was also evident from the questionnaire analysis as most participants agreed that the use of "you're so gay" and "that's so gay" was prevalent within the school environment but did not view this language as homophobic bullying.

#### Psychological theories and research findings

Key psychological theories, such as The Ecological Perspective, present a conceptual framework for investigating the combined impact of different social systems on individuals. Systems such as family, schools, peer groups, teacher-student relationships, parent-child relationships, neighbourhood and cultural expectations can directly affect children and young people and their behaviour (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; Swearer et al., 2010). The results of the current study have reported homophobic language, in particular homophobic phrases and epithets, as highly prevalent within the school environment. The phrase "you're so gay" is reported as the most commonly noted phrase within the school environment.

When discussing these results using The Ecological Perspective it is important to note that the individuals involved in this research are influenced by the systems by which they are directly affected. For example, the school system as a whole would inevitably impact upon the young people's views, and thereby their responses to the questions asked in this study. Within this research the school system's views of bullying or homophobic bullying were not sought. However, in future research this could be investigated further. For example, by understanding the school's views on homophobic bullying, homophobic language and by analysing their existing bullying policy a greater insight into the system that affects the views and behaviours of the young people would be possible.

The Social Learning Theory discusses how individuals learn and model behaviours from their environment. According to Bandura (1977), people learn through observing others, in particular their behaviour, attitudes and the consequences of their actions. This is again another theoretical position that is relevant in discussing the current research findings, as many of the students reported that they did not view the phrase "you're so gay" as homophobic bullying. According to the focus groups and questionnaire respondents such phrases were reported commonly around the school environment which meant they were used openly and frequently by many pupils. With this in mind, it can be argued that the prevalence of such language within the school environment is a result of young people learning from their peers and their environment.

These results also correspond with previous research such as O'Connell et al., (1999) who stated that children are more likely to imitate and model when the model is a powerful figure and the model is rewarded rather than punished for the behaviour. They suggested that the

school environment can often be a place where peers can engage in bullying behaviour. For example, peers may actively or passively reinforce the aggressive behaviours of bullies through their attention and engagement. Although this aspect of peer group influences was not directly researched within this paper, it can be noted that influences of more dominant peers mostly likely had some impact on the results obtained.

Both the above perspectives have important implications for school based interventions. Firstly, The Ecological Perspective implies that school based interventions require a wider approach to understanding and intervening against homophobic bullying and the use of homophobic language within the school environment. The Social Learning Theory suggests that interventions to target peer group influences on individuals is important to change existent school culture and norms. In conclusion, it can be stated that both school environments and peer group influences should be targeted to intervene against bullying. Finally, it is important to note that this is just one aspect of the systems that affect an individual's life. Other systems such as family and community also affect children and young people on a daily basis but were not investigated in this study.

## **CONCLUDING CHAPTER**

### Limitations

Using focus groups in research has many advantages: for example Kitzinger (1994) argues that the interaction between participants is the crucial feature of focus groups as this supports formulation of their view of the world, and makes accessible to the researcher the language they use and their values and beliefs about a situation. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences.

There are also a number of limitations which can be highlighted. Firstly, although focus groups can be positive in empowering participants through a group process they can also have the opposite effect, especially for young people who are shy and not used to talking openly about their views. Often, how trust and respect develops among focus group participants can affect how well the discussions develop (Kitzinger, 1995). The second focus group in this research was demonstrably affected by these processes. The researcher noted that one participant did not talk about their views but instead used agreeing comments and facial expressions, therefore this participant's views may not have been fully explored through this process.

Also, of significance is the role of the moderator in the focus groups. Although it can be positive in ensuring the discussions in the focus groups are in line with the aims of the research it can also have the opposite effect. By leading the discussions using the key

questions, the researcher is likely to impact on the extent to which participants are able to share their thoughts, beliefs and feelings about this topic. This was a possibility within the research, as it is an inherent limitation of using focus groups. In her opinion, the researcher in the current study did not prevent any participant from sharing their views even if they were not relevant to the research questions; rather discussion was redirected following any digression from the key discussion points.

The questionnaire design had a number of limitations which impacted on the overall study. For example, the use of closed questions limited participants' answers to four possible options (and in the case of 'yes'/'no' responses too). Open ended questions would have been more time consuming to analyse and due to the time constraints, four such questions were used. Although the researcher piloted the survey and tailored it to the age of the young people, there may have still been some pupils who did not understand the questions being asked. This could have been a reason why 30 percent of pupils answered "don't know" to the question "what do you think homophobic bullying is?" as there may have been a reluctance to invest in providing a written response, based on either insecure literacy skills or a lack of knowledge or understanding in the topic itself.

Analyses of both phase one and two of the research were not without their limitations. With the thematic analysis, the transcribed data were linked to the research questions and because of this some data were lost. These data were not identified as a theme and, therefore, were not incorporated into the overall thematic analysis. Also the quantitative analysis was predominantly descriptive which meant that interaction between variables was not subjected to scrutiny.

### Limitations of sample size

Although this research study was exploratory and did not aim to make generalisations it can still be argued that the small sample size (a year group in one secondary school) limits the possible impact of the research findings overall. Extending the study to a larger sample and/or a number of settings may have provided much more information about the extent of homophobic bullying and homophobic language within secondary schools, the level of consistency between schools and factors contributing to any observed differences. However, using a single school enabled the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data about these issues.

The limitations inherent in the use of a random sample were also noted during the research process, as the sample was predominately White-British and there were many more males than females participating in the focus groups. A more representative sample; where proportionate representation of males, females and young people from different ethnic backgrounds, could have provided results more reflective of the general school population.

## **Recommendations**

Overall, the findings of this research and the critical review of the literature into bullying continue to identify and reinforce the notion of bullying as socially constructed phenomena. The implications and recommendations for future research into this area would suggest that without prior discussions and clear definitions, which resonate with the local population, any research conducted within a school context would be limited. A true reflection of the prevalence rates would be difficult to obtain without setting out such definitions and any results would therefore impact upon future interventions and their overall effectiveness. Therefore, it would be recommended that research into bullying within the school environment should identify a definition which has been sought from a representative population of their research subjects to ensure any results and future recommendations are an accurate reflection of the local population that is being researched.

Furthermore the results suggest that homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives are highly prevalent within the school environment and young people's perceptions of this are varied. Many young people in the survey did not view phrases such as "you're so gay" as constituting homophobic bullying.

When this information is analysed in relation to recent research by the Stonewall Organisation (2008) and Kosciw (2004) who state that young people who have identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) feel unsafe and vulnerable at school because of the language and pejoratives to which they are exposed; evidence suggests that this area of bullying would need to be addressed at the whole school level. By addressing the views and

perceptions of young people regarding homophobic language and its impact on young people, schools could take a positive step in supporting the emotional well being of young people who are self identified as LGBT, or who may be LGBT but do not identify themselves as such, and children who are vulnerable to homophobic bullying because of their individual characteristics.

It is also important to discuss how Educational Psychologists can support schools and children and young people regarding homophobic bullying and the use of homophobic language. Comely (1993) made proposals about how educational psychologists could assist lesbian and gay teenagers at school. She advised that professionals should be aware of the issues surrounding this area from day one of their careers, and felt that lesbian and gay issues should be part of the equal opportunities components and that teaching materials in schools should address and reflect lesbian and gay lifestyles.

For EPs working with schools the implications for practice suggest a need for raising awareness of the use of homophobic language and the impact this can have on children and young people. This can be conducted through whole school approaches. For example, through in service training (INSET) targeted at whole school approaches to discussing and tackling homophobic bullying and supporting teaching and non-teaching staff in schools to become aware of the nature and use of homophobic language/epithets and its links with homophobic bullying. This awareness can then empower them in becoming more confident in tackling incidents they observe or hear around the school environment.

Also the use of PHSE lessons to support children and young people's understanding of homophobic bullying is an important further recommendation. Making clear what homophobic bullying is, including language such as "you're so gay", may help young people's understanding of homophobic bullying behaviours. Raising awareness of the impact of homophobic language on vulnerable young people's emotional well-being would further help to tackle the issue at a whole school level.

The use could be strengthened through addressing homophobic bullying in school bullying policies and making links to the use of homophobic language more clearly. As suggested by Kosciw and Diaz (2006) making clearer which phrases/epithets and language are homophobic can support staff members in school to feel more confident to intervene when they hear such verbal abuse around the school environment.

Finally further research into the use of homophobic language and the impact of this within the school environment is essential to strengthen the overall evidence base and methodological reliability of the studies in to this social phenomenon.

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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

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Appendix 7 – step one in thematic analysis

Appendix 8- Step two in thematic analysis

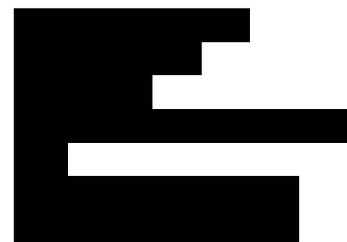
Appendix 9- step three in thematic analysis

Appendix 10- Ethics form

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Appendix 12 – Pilot study

## Appendix 1



Ask for: Psychology Service  
Your ref:

Our ref: KPsS/ZA  
Date: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Dear Headteacher

I am currently a year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist based in the [REDACTED] cluster. Within the Doctorate course requirements, there is a research component. This requires me to undertake a research project, which is the reason for my letter. I am writing to you to ask for your support in recruiting participants for my study.

I am conducting an exploratory study looking into the language of bullying. My Thesis title is:

**Investigating young people's conceptualisations of different types of bullying such as; bullying of a person's race, gender or sexual orientation.**

My research consists of two phases:

**Phase 1:** This includes two focus groups of about 5-6 children preferably Year 10 and 11. A 45 minute discussion regarding bullying. I would like to ascertain their definitions of bullying. What they think bullying is what types of behaviours are considered as bullying and what language is involved in different types of bullying. I would hope to gain some terminology heard or used by children and young people which can be linked to different forms of bullying such as race, gender or homophobic bullying.

**Phase 2:** Based on the focus group data I would then develop a questionnaire which would assess the prevalence of certain types of bullying behaviour within the case study (Secondary School selected to do the focus groups). I would design a questionnaire using the definitions and terminology obtained by the children in the focus groups.

The questionnaire will be anonymous and I would like to get at least 100 children completing it.

I have consent forms prepared for children and parents; these will only be needed for children who opt into the focus group.

This letter is a request for support in recruiting participants for the study. This study would be an opportunity for the participating school to become involved in a piece of research which could be viewed as a good practice approach to bullying in schools and an opportunity for the participating school to link with anti bullying schemes across the county and nationally.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me directly.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Z. Akthar', enclosed within a light blue rectangular box.

Zobiah Akthar (Trainee)  
Educational Psychologist

## Appendix 2

Ext: [REDACTED]  
Ask for: Zobia Akthar  
Your ref:  
Our ref:  
Date: January 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, currently in my third year of a Doctorate course. As part of my training I am conducting a research project for which [REDACTED] are kindly helping with.

My research project includes finding out what children and young people think bullying means. This is bullying in general but also different forms of bullying such as homophobic bullying. I also aim to find out what children and young people perceive are the language/words associated with different forms of bullying, again this includes bullying such as homophobic bullying.

Your child has highlighted his/her interest in coming to a focus group and completing a follow up questionnaire in March 2010 both of which I will be running at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] In order for him/her to attend this group and to complete the anonymous questionnaire it is important for me to gain your consent.

Please sign the slip below agreeing to your child taking part in this study and return the form to the school no later than **Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2010**.

Yours sincerely

Ms Zobia Akthar  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

.....

I agree to my child attending the focus group.

Child's name

.....

Signature of Parent/Guardian

.....

Date.....

Appendix 3

## Young person's Consent Form

This is a request to ask if you would like to take part in a questionnaire that I have set up in your school.

The questionnaire looks at the use of homophobic language and whether students think this is homophobic bullying.

I have provided you with some definitions based on my understanding of what homophobic bullying is and this is based on information given to me by students in your school.

The questionnaire is confidential and you have the right to withdraw from completing it at any time.

The information from the questionnaire is going to be used to complete my Thesis and only myself and the people involved in working with me will see the results of the questionnaire.

If after you complete the questionnaire you feel you would like to talk to someone further about any of the issues raised. I will provide you with the contact details of a professional in your school who you will be able to talk too confidentially.

If you wish to continue please proceed to the questionnaire



-----

**Thank you!**

#### Appendix 4

Ext: [REDACTED]  
Ask for: Zobiah Akthar  
Your ref:  
Our ref:  
Date: February 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, currently in my third year of a Doctorate course. As part of my training I am conducting a research project for which [REDACTED] are kindly helping with.

My research project includes finding out what children and young people think bullying means. This is bullying in general but also different forms of bullying such as homophobic bullying. I also aim to find out what children and young people perceive are the language/words associated with different forms of bullying, again this includes bullying such as homophobic bullying.

A questionnaire will be available at the [REDACTED] for the pupils in year 10 to complete on the week commencing **15<sup>TH</sup> March 2010.**

Please sign the slip below agreeing to your child taking part in this study and return the form to the school no later than **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2010.**

Yours sincerely

Ms Zobiah Akthar  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

.....

I agree/do not agree to my child taking part in this study

Child's name

.....

Signature of Parent/Guardian

.....

Date.....

## **Appendix 5**

### **Focus Group Outline**

#### **Ice breaker and Introductions-**

Getting to know each other name one thing that has gone well for you today

#### **Why I am here**

- Explain my interest in this research area and my reasons for talking to them today
- Explain my role as an Trainee Educational Psychology

#### **What do you think bullying is?**

- Ask what individuals see as bullying
- What do you think are the characteristics of bullying?
- Bullying behaviours
- What do you think is not bullying

#### **What do you think Homophobic bullying is?**

- What do you think are the characteristics of Homophobic bullying?
- H. Bullying behaviour
- What do you think is not Homophobic bullying

#### **What do you think is the Language of Homophobic bullying?**

- what names or words to you commonly hear around school that you think is the language of Homophobic bullying
- What words or names to you hear or use that you think are not Homophobic bullying

## Appendix 6

### Focus Group 2

Q- this is a 45 minute discussion on what you think bullying is and your views on what you view homophobic bullying and homophobic language as.

q- what do you think bullying means, if I said bullying, what does that mean to you.

P1) taking the mick out of someone

P2) picking on people

q-ok what else

P3) picking on people all the time

q-ok what does picking on people look like.

P3) physically abusing someone

P2) any amount of things you can do to one person that are not very nice.

Q-what do others think

P4) the same as that, apart from that it doesn't have to just be physical it can also be in between the lines, like you could wind someone up to the point where they don't want to come to school.

Q- Right ok

P5) teasing, verbal, mental or emotional

Q- ok can you give me some examples of situations that you view as bullying.

P2) I don't know, when

P1) people who aren't with anyone else, who are always on their own.

q- Right ok, do you think that's bullying

p2) yeh

P1) yeh I don't know sort of. It's like no one wants to hang around with them because they look different.

P3) sometimes they can have mates but still get bullied, they get hit all the time.

P1) mucking around with your mates that's not bullying though.

Q-ok

P3) to us that's having a laugh

Q-what else is bullying.

P2) umm I think there's lots of different things, like if it's persistent, then I reckon that's bullying.

But if it's a one off incident then I wouldn't call that bullying.

q- so why do people get bullied

p2) for being Fat,

P3) appearances are a main reason for bullies

P4) could it also be what your parents do for a living, like if your dad's a dustbin man.

Q-yes that could be a reason.

Q-what else

P2) if you're gay. If you talk funny, so like if you have an accent, so like if you talk funny.

q- What else

P4) if it's constant

P3) a one off incident is not bullying it's just some one being a dick.

P3) if someone came up to me and punched me I wouldn't be that bothered

P2) it depends who it was, if you were an isolated person and someone came up to and punched you then it would be a whole different matter.

P1) it's only bullying if you let people bully you. If you stand up for yourself people wouldn't do it would they.

q-tell me more about what you mean by this

p1) well if someone is shy and you pick on them, they won't stop doing it.

P2) if someone is being bullied and they stand up for themselves then they might look like a bigger mug. Like if they have been bullied for that long then obviously the bully is more powerful than them.

Q-what do other people think, do you think bullying comes in different forms

P1) what like cyber bullying

P2) yeh msn, that happens a lot. If you're on the internet you can say a whole of things worse then you could face to face, that's why it causes more trouble.

Q- So is this bullying

P2) nah I wouldn't call that bullying I would say that persistent nasty comments make these situations bullying.

P3) but other people might think that's bullying though.

Q-ok tell me more about that.

P3) well if you're saying a one off comment depending on how bad that is and if you're on your own and the people saying it are in a group, that's bullying.

Q-what do you think homophobic bullying is

P1) bullying people who like men. So men who like men.

Q-right ok

P3) yeh I agree with that

P2) I don't it's not just a man who loves a man is it?

q-tell more about what you mean

p2) homophobic bullying is not just about a man being gay it can also be if a woman's gay.

q-right ok

p2) yeh lesbians

Q-what else do people think homophobic bullying is?

P4) I agree with what has been said so far, homophobic bullying it is for both genders of people

Q-so what characteristics do you think are associated with homophobic bullying?

P1) being called gay and that that's HB

P2) if you're saying it in a nasty way then yeh it is, but if you're actually gay and someone calls you gay then that's not really bullying because you are gay. If you were like comfortable in it, then you would be comfortable in it. But if you were not confident in it like in your sexuality then someone calls you gay then yeh you will find that offensive.

Q-ok

P3) people are bullied even if there not gay, so like if they talk or act like it or something then they'll get bullied for that.

P4) yeh like someone in touch with their feminine side.

Q-right ok so what else.

P4) like a camp person or something

P3) or if a woman is really manly

P1) when you refer to someone who is a lesbian you automatically think of someone quiet butch with short hair.

Q-what types of language do you think is being used in school that you view as homophobic

P1) Like batty boy, is like the main one, there's loads

P2) there's not actually any particular word for it, it's just random stuff

P4) they're probably made up

P3) like saying you're so gay, but that's not really seen as homophobic bullying though.

P2) yeh like if you're in class and you like hear someone say oh you've not done your homework and then your mate say's "oh that's so gay".

P3) you just get used to saying it.

P3) it can be seen as homophobic bullying sometimes but we mostly hear it linked to just general conversation.

Q-what do others think

P4) If a person isn't gay and your calling them gay then that's bullying but like, if the person is gay and they don't like you calling them gay and you keep calling them it, that is bullying.

P3) bender

P2) Puff

P4) bent

P3) a lot of that is heard in the younger years. As you get older you don't get a lot of it linked to any sexuality its more general

Q-ok tell me more

P4) it's more offensive, the insults get worse

P2) homo that's quite common.

P4) rug muncher

P2) les

P4) muff diver

Q-what else

P2) tomboy

P3) I wouldn't say that's an insult though

P2) yeh I would agree with you it's not really an insult

P4) tomboy is more about girls who are in to sports and wear tracksuits.

Long pause

P2) I can't think, there were loads when we were younger,

P3) it's more just words like gay

P2) if someone was to come up to me and call me a gay lord now I would just laugh and say alright then. Because it's just such a pathetic insult.

P3) if there's a boy and he talks like a girl and say he's always got the correct equipment for school and does his hair all neat, and he thinks he perfect then he will get called gay.

And others laugh

P2) also you've got homophobic rumours going on around school that's bullying

P4) I can remember about one person it going around about them being gay, it went on for ages that was bullying

P2) Stuff went around about a girl being a lesbian and that, so that's like bullying, like even now some people are like get away from me and erggghh , stuff like she looking at you when you're getting changed and she's blatantly not it's so childish.

Q- So what other language do you hear?

P2) queer

P5) pufter

P6) Willy woofter

P5) lez

P6) can't really think

P5) bell end

P6) but some of them are not just names that you directly say like “you like cock”

q- Do you think that’s bullying

P2) depends if you mean it or not, if it’s just banter it’s

P3) if you sincerely meant it to anyone whether you knew them or not then that’s obviously bullying

P2) if you said it to someone you didn’t know then yeh I could be bullying not if you only said it once though. I still think you have to be constant.

P3) if you really wanted to annoy them you would say it often.

P2) there are loads of words but only a few that would really offend you.

q- Could you give me examples?

P3) like swear words

q-ok

P4) like when you talk stuff at them, just verbally abusing them

P2) it’s like if your calling them gay you could say “oh you had sex with your dad” because your assuming there gay so must have done something like that.

P3) that type of stuff is bullying

P2) stuff like snidy comments, when you walk past someone that’s offensive

P3) if they say to other people and not to you that’s bullying

P5) if you think someone is gay you won’t just use gay insults you will use other insults too.

P4) they is no specific insult for gay

P2) you wouldn’t just stick to your gay

P3) because there gay, you just wouldn’t like them so you will say other stuff, like go and get fucked.

P2) because there gay, there opening themselves up to being bullied

P3) it’s because there different

P4) also stuff from the media, if you think there gay you might start calling them Bruno

P3) errrr

P2) the gay man from little britian

P3) what david Thomas

P2) yeh

P4) I called someone david Thomas

P2) Christian from eastenders

P3) yeh I’ve heard someone say “Oh you act like Christian from eastenders”.

Q-do you think this is homophobic bullying?

P2) YEH

P3) IT could be used just to annoy someone

P4) if it is constant then yeh

P2) when you’re calling someone gay and that, and it becomes persistent I would say that’s bullying but then you could start mixing it with other words like “gay wanker”.

Q- ok

P2) sometimes you don’t even know what they mean

P2) stupid things like “go have sex with a man”

P5) but generally people stick to saying these things in their little groups. If you did say it someone outside your group then they might take it offensively.

P2) batty boy

P5) used to be said regularly but not anymore.

P2) get away from me your gay

P3) like if you spread a rumour about them and no one talks to them then that’s bullying

P4) or someone saying you're a prick

P5) everyone sees bullying differently. Like if you're saying something to someone you don't know that you're bullying them, you might think you're just having a laugh.

P6) a lot of people have the same view, some might have experienced it and others might not but they still have the same view.

P3) I'm just trying to think.

P4) the worst think about bullying is not being able to do anything about it. They say tell the teacher and that

P2) at the moment if you go tell the teacher it doesn't make a difference. I know if you want to stop bullying then get other people to stick up for you.

P4) power in numbers

P3) but then if you bring someone then the bully brings someone bigger than that then it does escalate

P4) but the only way to stop it is to stick up for yourself.

P6) my uncle was being bullied and he ran all the way home and my granddad said go outside and fight or else I'm going to bully you and then he did and the bullies ran off.

P1) yep stick up for yourself, don't make a fool of yourself.

P3) i know it sounds bad, but it's not the only way.

P4) if you get other people involved and then the bully gets known for being that way other people will know that their doing it it's like shaming them.

P1) I definitely agree, because telling the teacher escalates things

P3) yeh putting people in the inclusion room don't work because they're back out the next day and it starts all over again.

P2) I think what you should do is just get the families together and talk it through then the bully should get excluded depending on how bad it is then there should be a punishment.

P3) I think teachers can stop for a while but can't get rid of it

P2) even if you ban kids using certain words like gay it will still happen. It would not make a difference.

P4) it's part of life, it's just something that happens

P3) only you can control what happens to you

P4) hit back harder so they will stop.

P2) that's not going to work really

P4) I don't mean physically hit back, people judge in the first 10 seconds of meeting you, so you got to look confident, even if you are different so what look confident

P2) if you come to the school and you say you're hard or you look hard, then people will leave you alone.

Q- ok I think I would like to end the session there as we have come to the end of our time. I would like to thank you all for sharing your views and thoughts with me today.

## Appendix 7

### Codes for focus group one

Q what does homophobic bullying mean?

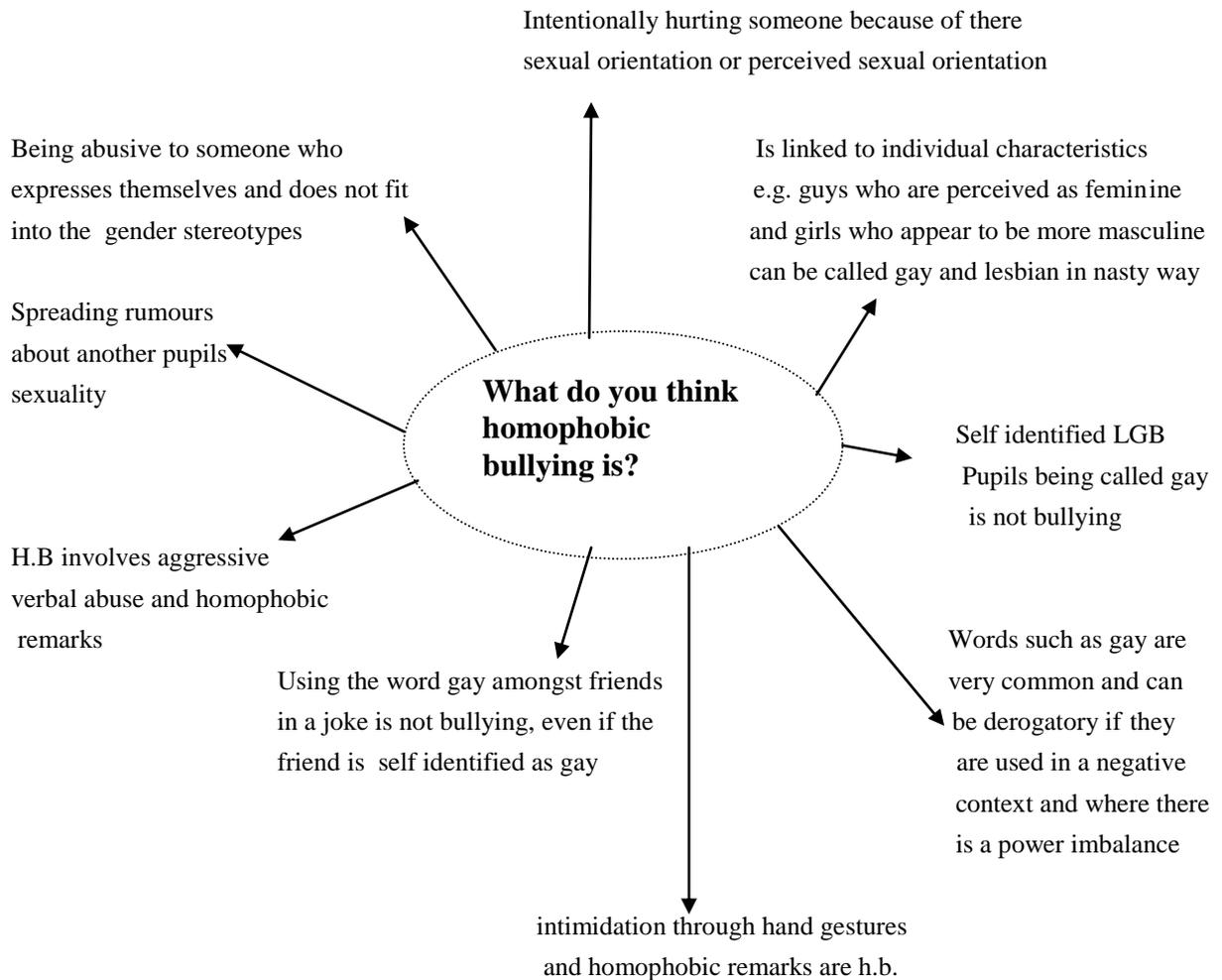
<b>Data Extract</b>	<b>Codes</b>
it's obviously if you gay or lesbian and stuff and being bullied for that	1. Being bullied for your sexual orientation
Again if you don't look in a certain way. I think like its differences again, if you don't look very masculine like, or like women who wear football tops, or if a guy wears something which is more feminine type of thing.	2. Being treated differently if you're a girl who more masculine or a guy who is very feminine
If you're not one of the lads then, then you're called the word gay which is used quiet a lot.	3. If you do not fit into the masculine stereotype then you are called "gay".
Like how people talk and that, say if you don't have a deep voice. So if it's squeaky and talks in a weird accent, not weird accent, but like	4. Talking in a soft voice, means you're more likely to be singled out for homophobic remarks
I Thinks it's done a lot as a joke and a laugh. Is someone is gay and they are saying to them and they don't want people to know then it can sort of cut into them.	5. Being called gay can be seen as a joke. 6. If someone is sensitive about their sexuality then being called gay may be offensive to them.
Like taking the Mick out of them is bullying but calling them gay isn't really an insult.	7. Taking the micky out of someone who is gay is not offensive.
I think the word gay can be used out of context, say you can hear someone calling something "oh that's so gay".	8. Gay remarks can be used to refer to people or objects. To call something gay in a negative or derogatory way.
It depends what type of person they are if, they are sensitive then yeh they might take it offensively.	9. If a person is sensitive to being picked on they may take homophobic remarks offensively.
girls get called tomboy	10. Girls who present themselves in a way which is perceived by other s as masculine can be called names

	such as tomboy
it's mostly boys who get bullied for saying there gay or something.	11. Boys are more likely to be targeted for homophobic bullying.
it's more common among boys, it does get said a lot, there are a lot of words that get said, whether he is gay or not.	12. Boys are subjected to homophobic bullying for being gay or being perceived in a way which leads to people thinking they are gay.
So is this language common? P2) Yeh all the time	13. Homophobic remarks such as you're so gay are very common.
like if someone thinks they are hard and that, they pick on some who is different and say "OI" your gay or something like that. Some people don't even really know what the word means and they say it.	14. Calling someone gay is seen as bullying when there is a power imbalance. 15. It is just another way bullying some people may not necessarily know what it means to use such language in the context of bullying.

## **Appendix 8**

## Appendix 9

### Focus group question two: what do you think homophobic bullying is?



## **Appendix 10**

### **Form EC2 for POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH (PGR) STUDENTS**

#### **MPhilA, MPhilB, MPhil/PhD, EdD, PhD IS**

This form MUST be completed by ALL students studying for postgraduate research degrees and can be included as part of the thesis even in cases where no formal submission is made to the Ethics Committee. Supervisors are also responsible for checking and conforming to the ethical guidelines and frameworks of other societies, bodies or agencies that may be relevant to the student's work.

#### **Tracking the Form**

- I. Part A completed by the student
- II. Part B completed by the supervisor
- III. Supervisor refers proposal to Ethics Committee if necessary
- IV. Supervisor keeps a copy of the form and send the original to the Student Research Office, School of Education
- V. Student Research Office – form signed by Management Team, original kept in student file.

#### **Part A: to be completed by the STUDENT**

NAME: Zobiah Akthar

COURSE OF STUDY (MPhil; PhD; EdD etc): Applied. Education. And Child. Psychology

POSTAL ADDRESS FOR REPLY: 11 Ingress Park Avenue. Greenhithe. Kent. DA9 9FE

CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER: 07867868574

EMAIL ADDRESS: zobiah.akthar@kent.gov.uk

DATE: 19.10.2009

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Huw Williams

PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE: An investigation into the Language of bullying: exploring the use of homophobic language in a secondary school.

## **BRIEF OUTLINE OF PROJECT:**

Research highlights that the most common form of bullying occurs in the form of verbal attacks and abuse. A growing area of research has highlighted the verbal harassment of children and young people through use of homophobic language.

From the research identified it is clear that many children in the U.K are subjected to verbal harassment which consists of homophobic language and comments. In the U.S. recent research has highlighted that homophobic language is highly predominant and frequently used amongst school children and by teachers. Some research within the U.K has also mentioned homophobic language is being used as a form of verbal abuse. This research highlights the impact of bullying on children's mental health and general emotional well-being in school.

### Research Questions:

- What are young people's perceptions of verbal bullying such as the use of homophobic language?
- Do they view this as a form of homophobic bullying? And how prevalent is this in secondary schools?

### **MAIN ETHICAL CONSIDERATION(S) OF THE PROJECT (e.g. working with vulnerable adults; children with disabilities; photographs of participants; material that could give offence etc):**

The topic of Homophobic bullying is sensitive in nature; therefore participants will have the opportunity to withdraw at any time. The principle of informed consent highlighted by the British Psychological Society, Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research with Human Participants will be adhered to and children will be provided with as much information as possible before the start of the study.

Parental consent is an issue which needs consideration in this project. Parents/guardians will be informed and will be provided with a background to the project. They will also have to return a signed consent form before the student can participate in the project.

There is a possibility of participants becoming distressed if they have experienced homophobic bullying, in these cases the participants will be withdrawn from the study and signposted to the appropriate support services.

Schools and Parents will be provided with relevant information about the study and also instructions about how to access support in case of a disclosure by any participant.

### RESEARCH FUNDING AGENCY (if any):

DURATION OF PROPOSED PROJECT:

Between November 2009 to March 2010

DATE YOU WISH TO START DATA COLLECTION:

December 2009

**Please provide details on the following aspects of the research:**

**1. What are your intended methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis? [see note 1]**

*Please outline (in 100-250 words) the intended methods for your project and give what detail you can. However, it is not expected that you will be able to answer fully these questions at the proposal stage.*

A school will be approached at the initial stage of participant recruitment. The school will be provided with a research proposal which will outline the purpose, timescale, participants and data analysis process. The school will then be asked if they would like to become involved. The school that agrees to the study will be asked to invite the researcher to their Physical, Health and Social education lesson (PHSE). Students in this class will be provided with information regarding the study and will be asked to opt in to the focus group. The participants will include children in National Curriculum Year 10 and Year 11 aged between 15-16.

Phase 1

The data will be collected through a focus group consisting of 4 pupils in each group one group of year 10 pupils and one group of year 11 pupils. The focus groups will be recorded and the data will be transcribed by the researcher (Zobia Akthar). The data will be analysed using Discourse Analysis.

Phase 2

This will include a questionnaire created from the information obtained from the emerging themes highlighted in the initial focus groups. This questionnaire will be distributed to students in year 10-11 in the sample school. The questionnaire will attempt to ascertain the children's views about the prevalence of certain types of verbal harassment/bullying, using their definitions and constructs of bullying which would have been obtained from the focus group data.

**2. How will you make sure that all participants understand the process in which they are to be engaged and that they provide their voluntary and informed consent? If the study involves working with children or other vulnerable groups, how have you considered their rights and protection? [see note 2]**

Participants will be given written information about the research topic. This will include a written outline of potential difficulties associated with taking part in the focus groups. On this form there will also be a parental consent section which will provide parents the option to opt-in to the study. Children will only participate in the focus groups once parents have agreed for their child to be involved in the study.

Once parental and pupil consent is gained, a debriefing meeting will be held prior to the commencement of the focus group. This will be an opportunity for students to voice any

concerns and for the researcher to ensure that participants are consenting to the study with a full awareness of the process. Due to the nature of the topics being discussed, pupils will be debriefed individually so that they are safe to disclose their feelings regarding the topic. If any disclosure is made which may suggest a pupil has been subjected to types of bullying, then their participation in the study may be reviewed.

Parental consent will also be obtained at phase two of the research study, a letter detailing the research with a letter of consent will be sent to the parents. Pupils will also be provided with the opportunity to opt out on the day of the questionnaire distribution.

### **3. How will you make sure that participants clearly understand their right to withdraw from the study?**

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at the initial information stage. Prior to the commencement of the focus group the participants will be verbally informed of their right to withdraw at any stage with subsequent destruction of data without giving reasons. This will also be included on the information letter given to participants after they have volunteered to take part.

Before the focus groups begin, the ground rules will be set, these include standard group rules such as; confidentiality, respecting views of others and feeling safe. Briefing will also be included at this stage; this includes verbal information to the groups regarding withdrawal from the study without any subsequent follow up.

The questionnaire will be provided to students who wish to complete this. Participants who choose to complete the questionnaire will also be provided with verbal information about their right to withdraw at any stage. This will also be printed on the questionnaire.

### **4. Please describe how you will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Where this is not guaranteed, please justify your approach. [see note 3]**

Participants who volunteer for the study will provide their names when they sign up to the study. Their names may be disclosed during the focus group. The participants will be notified of this when they sign up to the study. They will be notified that their information will not be divulged to anyone other than the researcher.

The focus group data will be analysed using a coding system. This means that participants will be provided with a code (i.e. participant 1, 2, 3 etc.). Therefore every participant's identity will be protected. The researcher will be the only person to have access to the coding system (which will only include the participant's initials, gender and age). This information will be stored in a locked cabinet within the researcher's office (Kent Educational Psychology service). The coded data will be locked in a separate place away the original (pre-coded) data set. Once the research is completed the data will be destroyed.

The questionnaires will be completed anonymously. Therefore, confidentiality will be maintained. Once the research is completed the data will be destroyed.

**5. Describe any possible detrimental effects of the study and your strategies for dealing with them. [see note 4]**

The topic being discussed has possible detrimental effects, particularly surrounding possible disclosures of experiences of certain types of bullying, which may evoke strong emotions. The researcher will provide support, to any participant who has been affected by the contents of the study, through a direct link to services such as “Time to talk” (in school counselling service) and to the Local Authority Adolescent Resource Centre which provides support for young people who are dealing with emotional issues (including bullying).

Confidentiality will be reinforced throughout the study and participants will be informed that data will be anonymous and the resulting data will not be identifiable as being sourced from them.

**6. How will you ensure the safe and appropriate storage and handling of data?**

All data will be held securely by the researcher, including electronic recordings of focus groups and written notes. No one except the researcher will have access to research data. All research information will be secured in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

**7. If during the course of the research you are made aware of harmful or illegal behaviour, how do you intend to handle disclosure or nondisclosure of such information? [see note 5]**

If a participant discloses behaviour deemed to be harmful to themselves or to others or if it is illegal, then the researcher would notify the participant of a possible disclosure. If such disclosure is planned the participant will be informed of the researcher’s intentions and the reasons for it.

The researcher will follow the employers ( [REDACTED] Educational Psychology Service) child protection policy and procedures to take this further.

**8. If the research design demands some degree of subterfuge or undisclosed research activity, how have you justified this and how and when will this be discussed with participants?**

There is no deception or subterfuge within this research.

**9. How do you intend to disseminate your research findings to participants?**

Participants will be advised they can request a copy of the summary of findings from the researcher.

**Part B: to be completed by the SUPERVISOR**

1. Have the appropriate guidelines from relevant research bodies / agencies / societies (e.g. BERA, BPS, SRA, Research Governance Framework, Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act) been checked and applied to this project?

Yes  Not applicable

If Yes, which:

2. If relevant, have you ensured that the student holds a current Criminal Records Bureau check for the participants they will be working with during their research project? [see note 6]

Yes  Not applicable

If not applicable, please state why:

3. Have you seen information and consent forms relevant to the present research project? [if not relevant at this time, please review this within 6 months]

Yes  No

4. Is a referral to the Ethics Committee necessary?

Yes  No

5. Do you require a formal letter of approval from the Ethics Committee?

Yes  No  Not applicable

### **Declaration by Project Supervisor**

I have read the University's Code of Conduct for Research and the information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate.

I am satisfied that I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations as Project Supervisor and the rights of participants. I am satisfied that those working on the project have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached document and that I, as Project Supervisor, take full responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research in accordance with the School of Education Ethical Guidelines, and any other condition laid down by the School of Education Ethics Committee.

Print name:

Signature:

**Declaration by the Chair of the School of Education Ethics Committee (only to be completed if making a formal submission for approval)**

The Committee confirms that this project fits within the University's Code of Conduct for Research and I approve the proposal on behalf of the University of Birmingham's School of Education Ethics Committee.

Print name:  
(Chair of the Ethics Committee)

Signature:  
Date

Date:

**Supervisor – please keep a copy of this form for your records and send the original to the Student Research Office, School of Education.**

Date sent to Student Research Office:

**STUDENT RESEARCH OFFICE – PLEASE OBTAIN SIGNATURE FROM  
MANAGEMENT TEAM AND RETAIN ORIGINAL IN STUDENT FILE**

Date Form Received:

Print name:

Signature

For and on behalf of  
Student Research Office

Date:

Appendix 11

**A Questionnaire on The Language of Bullying.**

This questionnaire is designed to gain your views on bullying and in particular homophobic bullying.

The questionnaire is to be completed anonymously and you have the right to withdraw from completing it at any time. The information collected will be used to complete a Doctoral Thesis and only the researcher will see the results of the questionnaire.

If after you complete the questionnaire you feel you would like to talk to someone further about any of the issues raised, please see [REDACTED]. He will be able to put you in touch with someone you could talk to.

If you wish to continue please proceed to the questionnaire

## Questionnaire on the Language of Bullying

In your school students have defined bullying as incidents that involve:

- **Verbal abuse** –such as name calling, teasing or picking on someone.
- **Physical abuse** – such as hitting someone, or a gang of people beating up a lone person.
- **Emotional abuse** – such as spreading lies about someone or isolating someone so no one talks to them in school.

Students have also said that bullying can come in different forms such as through SMS text, MSN, Facebook etc. Students also said that bullying occurs when these behaviours are:

- Repeated persistently over a period of time.

Or

- A one-off incident where one person is on their own and they are beaten up by a group of people.

**What do you think bullying means?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

In your school **homophobic bullying** is defined as **bullying** someone because they are gay, lesbian, or because they act in a way which leads other people to think they might be gay, lesbian.

**What do you think Homophobic bullying means?**

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.....  
.....  
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## Appendix 12

### Pilot Study

The questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of twenty (20) year-10 pupils aged between 15-16 years old. Children who were involved in the focus groups were excluded from the survey. The quantitative results of the questionnaire were analysed to assess the overall validity of the questions.

The results of the pilot study highlighted that young people perceived there to be a high level of homophobic language and homophobic bullying within the school. The results are highlighted under each question. Participants were asked to answer from four possibilities: very frequently (more than once a day); frequently (more than once a week); sometimes (less than once a week); and rarely (less than once a month).

#### Results of the pilot study

1. How often are phrases such as “that’s so gay or “you’re so gay” heard in your school?

1.1 Do you think these phrases are homophobic bullying?

The results highlighted that 10 of the 20 participants stated that they heard these phrases very frequently and 6 participants commented that they heard these phrases frequently. 17 of the participants did not think these phrases were homophobic bullying. A correlation coefficient test was conducted to identify if these results were significant. The researcher wanted to identify whether there was a correlation between how prevalent certain phrases were in the school environment and whether there was any link between prevalence rates and whether young people perceived these phrases as homophobic bullying. The results suggested there was a significant correlation between the two questions at the 0.01 level within a two tailed spearman’s rho correlation coefficient test.

2. How often have you heard phrases like “poof”, “queer”, “batty boy” and “bender” in and around school?

2.1 Do you think these phrases are homophobic bullying?

For question 2, 10 pupils reported hearing such phrases very frequently and 9 reported hearing them frequently, only one pupil responded as rarely to the question. For question 2.1 16 pupils reported these phrases as homophobic bullying.

3.1 How often have you heard swear words used with homophobic language for example “You’re \*\*\*\*\* gay” in and around school?

3.2 Do you think the above language is homophobic bullying?

For question 3, 8 pupils stated that they heard this language frequently and 6 pupils stated they heard this language very frequently. For question 3.1 16 pupils viewed this language as homophobic bullying.

- 4.1 How often are TV/movie characters such as “Daffid Thomas” (character from Little Britain) or “Bruno” mentioned when students are talking about other students in school?
- 4.2 Do you see the above remarks as homophobic bullying?

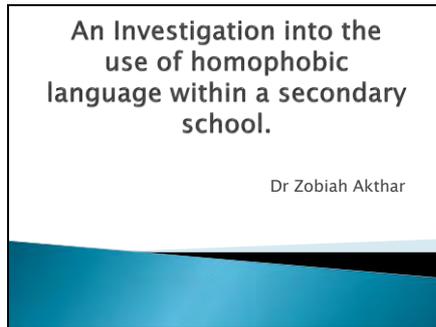
For question 4, 6 pupils stated that they heard these words only rarely within the school environment, 5 pupils reported hearing these remarks sometimes. For question 4.1, 17 pupils stated that they did not view these remarks as homophobic bullying.

The feedback received by the pilot study highlighted that the questions were deemed as relevant and identified that most pupils perceived these remarks, language and phrases to be prevalent within the school environment. Question 1 and question 4 were contentious as most pupils did not view the phrases and remarks as homophobic bullying. However, the researcher felt that the results from the main study would be important to ascertain the validity of these findings. Therefore, the questions used in the pilot questionnaire remained the same in the final questionnaire design.

Feedback from the participants in the pilot study had stated that the questionnaire appeared too complex and difficult to follow. The content of the questionnaire was amended by adding clearer guidance, definitions of both homophobic bullying and bullying in general were shortened and less verbose. The final questionnaire was designed and distributed to the students in their history lessons. Teaching assistants were available within the classrooms to support children with literacy difficulties to complete the questionnaire (questionnaire available in appendix 11).

## Domain Briefing One

Slide 1



An Investigation into the use of homophobic language within a secondary school.

Dr Zobia Akthar

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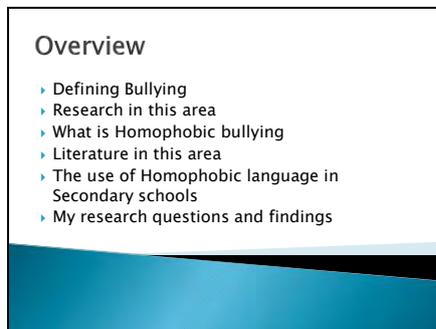
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Slide 2



Overview

- Defining Bullying
- Research in this area
- What is Homophobic bullying
- Literature in this area
- The use of Homophobic language in Secondary schools
- My research questions and findings

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Slide 3



Defining Bullying

- No universally accepted operational definition of bullying (Rivers 2001).
- Some research shows variable and broad definitions of bullying
- Early literature focused on terminology such as "mobbing" (Pikas, 1994).
- USA literature uses terms such as "victimisation". (Smith 1992).

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Slide 4

**Defining Bullying**

- ▶ Although there is varied terminology within the literature there are some key themes that emerge.
- ▶ Bullying includes several key elements:
  - ▶ - physical
  - ▶ - verbal
  - ▶ - psychological attacks
  - ▶ - intimidation
- ▶ Which are intended to cause harm, fear or distress to the victim

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Slide 5

**Defining Bullying**

- ▶ More recently a review conducted by Berger (2007) noted three crucial elements
- ▶ Repetition
- ▶ Harm
- ▶ Unequal power
- ▶ Physical, verbal, and relational bullying.
- ▶ Finally cyber bullying

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Slide 6

**Defining Homophobic Bullying**

- ▶ In comparison to bullying research, considerably less is known about homophobic bullying specifically and in particular the bullying of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people.

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Slide 7

**Defining Homophobic Bullying**

- ▶ Rivers (2001) and Warwick, Aggleton and Douglas (2001) have summarised homophobic bullying as occurring

"when individuals are singled out for their actual or perceived sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, or bisexual)" p. 430

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Slide 8

**Defining Homophobic Bullying**

- ▶ Rivers (2001):
- ▶ **verbal abuse** including spreading rumours that someone is gay, suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are "gay" for example, "you're such a gay boy!" or "those trainers are so gay!" , and/or
- ▶ **physical abuse** including hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour (Rivers, 2001, p. 430).

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Slide 9

**History of Bullying Research in the UK.**

- ▶ Early studies on bullying within the education system include Besag (1989) and Tattum and Lane (1989).
- ▶ Whitney and Smith (1993), commonly known as the Sheffield Project, conducted a large scale study in both primary and secondary schools in Sheffield.
- ▶ Sharp, Thompson and Arora (2000) followed up Whitney and Smith's (1993) study

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Slide 10

**School-based Initiatives**

- In response to the findings of research such as that carried out by Whitney and Smith (1993) and Sharp et al. (2000)
- The government has developed a number of initiatives such as "No Blame Approach" and "Don't suffer in Silence" (DfES, 2000).

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Slide 11

**Bullying Research**

- More recently Samara and Smith (2008) investigated how schools tackle bullying and the impact of whole school policies.
- They reviewed two policies "Don't Suffer in Silence " and "Safe to Learn".

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Slide 12

**Psychological Impact of Bullying**

- Studies such as Seals and Young (2003) and Beaty and Alexeyev (2008) have noted low self esteem, feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression in victims of bullying.
- Rivers (2004) reported that most LGBT adults who talked about their experiences of bullying at school had experienced homophobic bullying and as a result had contemplated suicide when they were at school

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Slide 13

**Research into Homophobic Bullying**

- ▶ Early research in the UK focused on children self-identified as LGBT.
- ▶ Some studies focused on retrospective accounts of school.
- ▶ Rivers (2001) cited many children were called names that were sexual in nature or related specifically to sexual orientation.

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Slide 14

**Continued.....**

- ▶ Warwick et al.'s (2001) were commissioned to undertake an exploratory study to describe to what extent homophobic bullying was a concern for school staff, how staff responded to the needs of lesbian and gay pupils who were being bullied, and what factors hindered and might enable future work in this area.
- ▶ This project was funded by the Stonewall Organisation and the Terrence Higgins Trust

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Slide 15

**How are schools addressing homophobic bullying.**

- ▶ Early studies (Trenchard and Warren, 1984) identified very few incidents where homosexuality was mentioned in their secondary school curriculum subjects.
- ▶ Ellis and High (2004) revisited this and found that when comparing results with the original study they found a significant increase in reported discussions about homosexuality.

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Slide 16

**Continued...**

- ▶ More recently the Stonewall Organisation (2007) conducted a large scale survey to gain the views of LGBT young people.
- ▶ The postal survey received 1145 responses from young people at secondary school.

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Slide 17

**Continued...**

- ▶ The Stonewall group followed their School Report with a Teachers Report (2009). The Survey collated views from 2043 teaching and non-teaching staff
- ▶ Their findings concluded:
  - ▶ – 95 per cent of secondary school teachers report hearing the phrases 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in their schools.
  - ▶ Eight in ten secondary school teachers report hearing other insulting homophobic remarks such as 'poof', 'dyke', 'queer' and 'faggot'

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Slide 18

**The use of homophobic language.**

- ▶ Thurlow (2001)- states that Few studies have looked explicitly at the use of homophobic pejoratives among school children
- ▶ Is not always an easy group to access, nor a comfortable subject to discuss.
- ▶ In this study, 377 14 and 15 year olds listed the pejoratives they heard at school and identified the ones they considered most taboo.

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Slide 19

**Homophobic language**

- › Kosciw (2003) investigated the experiences of LGBT .
- › More than 4 out of 5 LGBT students reported being verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and more than 9 out of 10 reported hearing homophobic remarks such as "faggot," "dyke" or "that's so gay" frequently or often.
- › Kosciw and Diaz (2006) conducted a school climate survey focusing on homophobic language

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Slide 20

**Summary**

- › Key issues relating to research in this area include:
- › Definitions
- › Inconsistencies in studies reporting the impact of homophobic bullying on young people
- › UK research appears to be dominated by the Stonewall Organisation
- › Self-report surveys

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Slide 21

**My Research**

- › An Exploratory study looking at the views of young people regarding homophobic bullying and the prevalence of homophobic language/pejoratives within the secondary school environment.
- › A two part investigation addressing the issues of defining bullying, homophobic bullying and homophobic pejoratives

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Slide 22

**My research- Part 1**

- ▶ 2 focus groups were conducted in a local secondary school
- ▶ Emerging themes included:
  - ▶ Bullying was defined as: Verbal harassment, physical acts and social isolation
  - ▶ Homophobic bullying was defined as: being verbally abused for your actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender stereotypes and social isolation.

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Slide 23

**Continued**

- ▶ Young people defined homophobic language as:
  - "you're so gay"
  - Homophobic pejoratives
  - More aggressive language was also quoted

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Slide 24

**Part 2**

- ▶ A questionnaire was devised using the definitions and key phrases/pejoratives identified from the focus group participants
- ▶ 80% of the sample identified hearing such phrases very frequently around the school
- ▶ 119 of 127 respondents did not views these remarks as homophobic bullying.

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Slide 25

**Conclusion**

- The results overall suggest that homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives are highly prevalent within the school environment and young people's perceptions of this are varied. Many young people in the survey did not view phrases such as "you're so gay" as homophobic bullying.



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## **Domain Briefing Two**

### **Summary of Research findings**

An Exploratory study looking at the views of young people regarding homophobic bullying and the prevalence of homophobic language/pejoratives within the secondary school environment.

Thamesview secondary school agreed to take part in a study to explore young people's views and conceptualisations of homophobic bullying and homophobic language/pejoratives.

The four main research questions were as follows:

1. What are young people's perceptions of homophobic bullying?
2. What are young people's views on homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives?
3. Do young people think homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives are prevalent within the school environment?
4. Do young people view homophobic language and pejoratives as homophobic bullying?

The study was conducted in two parts, part one addressed research questions 1 and 2, through focus groups with students in years 9 and 10. Part two addressed research questions 3 and 4 through a questionnaire sent to all year 10 pupils.

### **Part 1**

Young people who took part in the focus groups were asked to discuss their views on homophobic bullying. As part of this discussion they also discussed their views on bullying.

The results of the focus groups were summarised under "emerging themes". Young people thought bullying included:

- Verbal harassment which was identified as the type of bullying behaviour hard to distinguish and detect and one that can be prolonged. Overall 18 comments were made referring to this form of bullying. For example, one participant referred to this type of bullying as it "happens all the time".
- The second most common forms of bullying identified were physical acts of bullying and social isolation. Within the definition for social isolation young people referred to this as a young person who is "vulnerable" and someone who is alone and isolated when at school.
- What constitutes a bullying incident was variable among the participants. Some of the young people thought behaviour had to be persistent and constant for it to be bullying whereas others agreed but stated that an exception is linked to the power imbalance of the bully and victim.

- Young people felt it important to comment on the reasons for why people are victims of bullying, which they associated with characteristics such as background, sexuality and general appearance. They also felt that current interventions within school were not necessarily effective in tackling the issue.
- Young people commented that looking confident and standing up to bullies is a way of eliminating the power that bullies have.

Young people thought homophobic bullying included:

- Being verbally abused because of your sexual orientation.
- They also defined homophobic bullying as being abused for your perceived sexual orientation and because of an individual's personal choice in dress and overall appearance.
- Young people also linked homophobic bullying to being abusive to a young person who does not fit the typical gender stereotypes, defined as "what is perceived by others as masculine and feminine".
- Social Isolation through spreading rumours was also seen as an act of homophobic bullying.
- This definition suggests that young people whose individual characteristics do not fall into any particular gender stereotype can be subjected to homophobic bullying.

Young people thought homophobic language included:

- Many of the participants found language such as "you're so gay" as general comments and not necessarily homophobic language.
- Homophobic pejoratives were quoted 33 times and included pejoratives such as, poof, batty boy, bender and dyke.
- More aggressive homophobic pejoratives were also quoted by young people in the focus groups.
- Finally gay and lesbian media references were also noted as homophobic language by some participants.

## **Part 2**

At this stage a questionnaire was sent to young people in year 10. The questionnaire aimed to identify how often young people heard homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives within the school environment and whether they viewed this language as homophobic bullying. A total of 127 young people completed the questionnaire.

The results highlighted that:

- 80 out of the 127 respondents reported hearing phrases like "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" very frequently (more than once a day) and 37 respondents reported that they heard these remarks frequently (more than once a week). This highlighted that young people in the survey viewed these phrases highly prevalent within the school environment.

- 119 out of the 127 respondents perceived the above phrases as not homophobic bullying.
- 66 respondents reported that they heard phrases such as “poof”, “queer”, “batty boy” and “bender very frequently (more than once a day) and 31 respondents stated that they heard these phrases frequently (more than once a week). This suggested that in total 71 per cent of the survey stated that these phrases were highly prevalent within the school environment.
- 82 respondents reported that these phrases were homophobic bullying, 45 respondents answered “no” and did not view these phrases as homophobic bullying.
- Out of the 127 respondents 67 reported hearing swear words used with homophobic language for example “You’re \*\*\*\*\* gay” very frequently (more than once a day) and 38 respondents reported hearing such language frequently (more than once a week).
- 96 respondents perceived this language as homophobic bullying. 31 respondents did not perceive these as homophobic bullying.

The results overall suggest that homophobic language and homophobic pejoratives are highly prevalent within the school environment and young people’s perceptions of this are varied. Many young people in the survey did not view phrases such as “you’re so gay” as homophobic bullying.

When this information is analysed in relation to recent research by the Stonewall organisation (2008) and Kowic (2004) who state that young people who have identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) feel unsafe and vulnerable at school because of the language and pejoratives they are exposed to it is an issue that may need to be addressed at the whole school level. By addressing the views and perceptions of young people regarding homophobic language and its impact on young people, schools could take a positive step in supporting the emotional well being of young people who are self identified as LGBT, or who may be LGBT but do not identify themselves as so and children who are vulnerable to homophobic bullying because of their individual characteristics.

- This can be conducted through addressing homophobic bullying in school bullying policies and making links to the use of homophobic language.
- Making clear what consists of homophobic bullying including language such as “you’re so gay” may help young people’s understanding of homophobic bullying behaviours.
- Raising awareness of the impact of homophobic language on vulnerable young people’s emotional well being may help to tackle the issue at a whole school level.