



## Birds of a feather bully together: Group processes and children's responses to bullying

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Recent research has shown that a group-level analysis can inform our understanding of school bullying. The present research drew on social identity theory and intergroup emotion theory. Nine- to eleven-year olds were randomly assigned to the same group as story characters who were described as engaging in bullying, as being bullied, or as neither engaging in bullying nor being bullied. Participants read a story in which a bully, supported by his or her group, was described as acting unkindly towards a child in a different group. Gender of protagonists and the bully's group norm (to be kind or unkind to other children) were varied. Identification affected responses to the bullying incident, such that those who identified more highly with each group favoured this group. Moreover, children's group membership predicted the group-based emotions they reported, together with the associated action tendencies. Implications for understanding the processes underlying bullying behaviour are discussed.

Bullying can happen in any setting where power relations exist (Smith & Brain, 2000). Of particular concern in this paper is bullying in primary (elementary) schools. Over the past 30 years it has been revealed that bullying is an experience encountered by 12% of UK schoolchildren on a regular basis (Smith & Shu, 2000). Recently, research attention on bullying has started to focus on the role of group processes. The present paper builds on the literature that adopts this approach by studying the roles of group membership, group identification, and group-based emotions in schoolchildren's perceptions of and reactions to hypothetical bullying scenarios.

Bullying can be defined as 'the systematic abuse of power' (Smith & Brain, 2000, p. 2). Victims may suffer academically, have problems with later relationships, and have increased susceptibility to depression and other psychiatric disorders (Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000). Research on bullying has taken different approaches, with some researchers focusing on the bully (Rigby, 2005) and others on the victim (Tanaka, 2001). Such research has tended to adopt an individual level of analysis. In contrast, other researchers have begun to examine the role of the peer group (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). More recently, group-level analyses have been applied

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to bullying behaviour, with studies demonstrating that group processes are pertinent to school bullying (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). One aim of the current research was to build on this previous work by manipulating the group membership of participants and measuring their identification with their assigned groups, in order to examine how these factors affect responses to a vignette describing a bullying incident that takes place between members of different groups of children. A further aim was to examine the role of group-based emotions (emotions experienced as a result of group membership; Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005) in perceptions of bullying behaviour.

Olweus (1978) noted that peers do have an influence on bullying, and Atlas and Pepler (1998) found in an observational study that peers participated in 85% of bullying cases. Other research on the role of peers has examined the relative popularity of bullies and victims. Here, researchers have found that high levels of aggression in a child are positively correlated with peer rejection (Salmivalli *et al.*, 2000), while Olweus (1978) found that victims are less popular in school than bullies or children not involved in bullying. Moreover, victims perceive themselves to be less popular than other children (Slee & Rigby, 1993) and have fewer friends (Salmivalli *et al.*, 2000). However, bullies do not in reality have more or fewer friends than other children; rather, they have *different* friends. Overall, then, friendship networks are clearly pertinent to bullying. This is a feature of Salmivalli's (2000) *participant-role* approach, from which it is clear that the phenomenon of bullying extends beyond dyadic interactions between bullies and victims.

### **The role of group membership**

The above contributions notwithstanding, focusing on the behaviour of specific children nevertheless still entails viewing bullying at the individual level. A different approach involves examining the group dynamics that underpin bullying (Humphrey, O'Brien, Jetten, & Haslam, 2005). Mirroring the adult literature, it has been shown that *group membership* influences children's behaviour. For example, Bigler, Jones, and Lobliner (1997) asked children to wear a blue or a yellow t-shirt, on the basis of either (a) a biological attribute, (b) a drawing they had done, or (c) at random. Children in the first two conditions subsequently attributed positive characteristics to their own colour group, but not to the other group.

What is the explanation for these effects of group membership? According to social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), part of a person's self-concept – their social identity – derives from group memberships. Group members are motivated to positively differentiate their (in) group from comparison outgroups, and in many cases to actively favour the in-group and its members (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Further, the extent to which one *identifies* with a membership group influences the intensity of one's reaction to a group-relevant event. For example, Crisp, Heuston, Farr, and Turner (2007) showed that identification affected the extent to which soccer fans felt sad about their team's loss. The importance of group identification (over and above group membership *per se*) has also been observed in children. For example, Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, and Griffiths (2005) found that children's propensity to display ethnic prejudice was positively related to the extent to which they identified with their in-group. These findings parallel those of research examining children's perceived similarity with in-group members and liking for their group (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2004; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001).

### **The role of group norms**

When defining themselves in terms of group membership, group members will tend to conform to the attitudes and behaviours that are typical of a given group, and which differentiate it from other groups (Turner, 1999). It follows that conformity to group norms is likely to be greater when social identity is drawn to a group member's attention (i.e. when that group membership is salient; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, one would be more likely to bully others when one belongs to a group with a culture of bullying. Indeed, the effect of group norms on *aggression* has been demonstrated with school-age children. Researchers have shown that children's beliefs, held at the classroom and peer group level, about the acceptability of aggression influence the amount of aggression they display (Henry *et al.*, 2000; Stormshak, Bierman, Bruschi, Dodge, & Coie, 1999). It is possible, then, that normative effects on aggression extend to bullying behaviours.

Here, too, identification is likely to play a key role. Researchers working in the social identity tradition have found that identification with the in-group has a moderating effect on the extent to which one adheres to in-group norms (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002, Study 2; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996, 1997). Specifically, strong identification is associated with strong norm adherence.

### **Social identity and bullying**

There is comparatively little work, however, on social identity and bullying. Ojala and Nesdale (2004) showed that children are sensitive to social identity concerns, understanding that an individual usually goes along with group norms even if doing so involves bullying. Jones, Haslam, York, and Ryan (2008) found that assigned group membership affected judgements of the acceptability of bullying behaviour, such that those who shared group membership with a bully judged his or her behaviour to be less acceptable than did counterparts in other groups, thereby deflecting attention away from the role of their group in the incident. The role of social identity processes in bullying has been further corroborated in studies reported by Gini (2006, 2007) and Duffy (2005). However, none of the studies mentioned above assessed the role of identification with the group as a moderator of children's responses to bullying scenarios. One aim of the present study was to take fuller account of the role played by group identification.

### **Emotions and bullying**

As noted earlier, a second aim was to examine the role of *group-based emotions*. The idea that emotions play a role in bullying behaviour is not new. Woods, Hall, Dautenham, and Wolke (2007) found that children responded to bullying incidents with anger and empathy, while Menesini and Camodeca (2008) found that prosocial children experienced more shame and guilt in relation to bullying scenarios than did children who bully. Nevertheless, *group-based* emotions have not as yet been studied in the context of bullying. Group-based emotions are those which take groups rather than individuals as the subject and object of the emotion (Parkinson *et al.*, 2005). Building on SIT and self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987), theories of group-based emotion (Smith, 1993) look specifically at the role of group membership on affect. Such theories propose that the degree to which we define ourselves and others as group members, rather than individuals, plays a role in

determining (a) whether we experience a given emotion, and (b) the intensity of that emotion. There is good evidence in support of these propositions. For example, Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Gordijn (2003) showed that the amount of *group-based fear* experienced by their participants in relation to terrorist attacks depended on whether they were led to categorize themselves as sharing or not sharing group membership with victims of a recent attack. There is also evidence that different group-based emotions give rise to different *action tendencies* (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). Whereas pride leads to a tendency to seek out others, and to talk about one's achievements (Tracy & Robins, 2007), anger leads to tendencies to act against a harming party (Smith, 1993). Action tendencies also serve as a basis for distinguishing shame from guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Shame, which arises from the attribution of a bad event to the self, is associated with a tendency to distance oneself from the source of one's shame, whereas guilt, which arises from the attribution of a bad event to a specific set of circumstances, rather than to the person more globally, is associated with a tendency to make reparations for the wrongdoing.

Harth, Kessler, and Leach (2008) showed that *group-based pride* could be elicited where in-group members perceive that they have an advantage and that this advantage was fairly obtained. This points to two appraisals leading to group-based pride: positivity and fairness. In contrast, according to Lickel, Schmader, and Barquissau (2004), *shame* at the group level arises when perceivers integrate negative behaviour into the in-group image. Thus pride can be distinguished from shame on the basis of a judgment about the valence of a behaviour. In the present research a measure of the perceived *nastiness* of the bullying behaviour was used to assess its perceived valence. Shame rather than guilt is felt where a behaviour is regarded as typical of the group, rather than as a one-off incident. Building on this, we propose that the distinction between guilt and shame is grounded in group norms, such that when a behaviour is judged negatively and is also norm consistent it should lead to shame, because the behaviour in question is presumably typical of the group. In contrast, behaviour that is judged negatively but is norm inconsistent should give rise to guilt, because, the behaviour in question is atypical of the group. This hypothesis will be tested in the present research.

### **The present study**

We examined the roles of (a) social identity processes, and identification in particular, and (b) group-based emotions in perceptions of and responses to bullying. Nine- to 11-year olds were randomly assigned (ostensibly on the basis of a dot-estimation task) to one of three group conditions: to the same group as someone later described as engaging in bullying, (the bully's group); to the same group as someone later described as being the victim of that bullying (the victim's group); or to a third party group. These groups were described as having equal status. No information was given regarding the power of the different groups. Children then read one of four vignettes. In the vignette a bully, supported by his or her group, acts unkindly towards a victim, who belongs to a different group. There were parallel versions of the vignette for females and males in which the protagonists were of the same gender as participants. The norm of the bully's group (to be kind or unkind towards others) was also manipulated. Responses to the vignette were measured in terms of the perceived nastiness of the bullying behaviour. Further, each child's identification with his or her group was measured, along with

group-based emotions pertinent to bullying (pride, shame, guilt, and anger), and the action tendencies associated with each of these.

The model shown in Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationships between group membership, group norm, identification, and group-based emotions; and between group-based emotions and action tendencies. Specifically, we predicted that group membership would affect the group-based emotions experienced by participants and that these effects would be moderated by the group norm of the bully's group, by identification with the group, and by participants' judgements of nastiness of the bullying. We also predicted that specific emotions would be associated with specific action tendencies, such that (for example) anger would be associated with stronger motivation to stop the bullying behaviour.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in a rural area in the South West of England where less than 1% of the population are from an ethnic minority, and where nearly half of the population have an annual income below the UK national average. Head teachers of local primary schools were asked whether their Year 5 or 6 pupils would participate. A total of 126 consent forms were sent to parents, resulting in a sample of 98 children (47 Year 5 and 51 Year 6). All of the recruited children were white; 55 were male and 43 were female. Thirty-three children were classified as being in the bully's group, 32 as being in the victim's group, and 33 as being in the third party group, using a procedure described below. The mean age of the sample as a whole was 10.34 years ( $SD = 0.61$  years). The mean age and standard deviations of each group membership are given in Table 1.

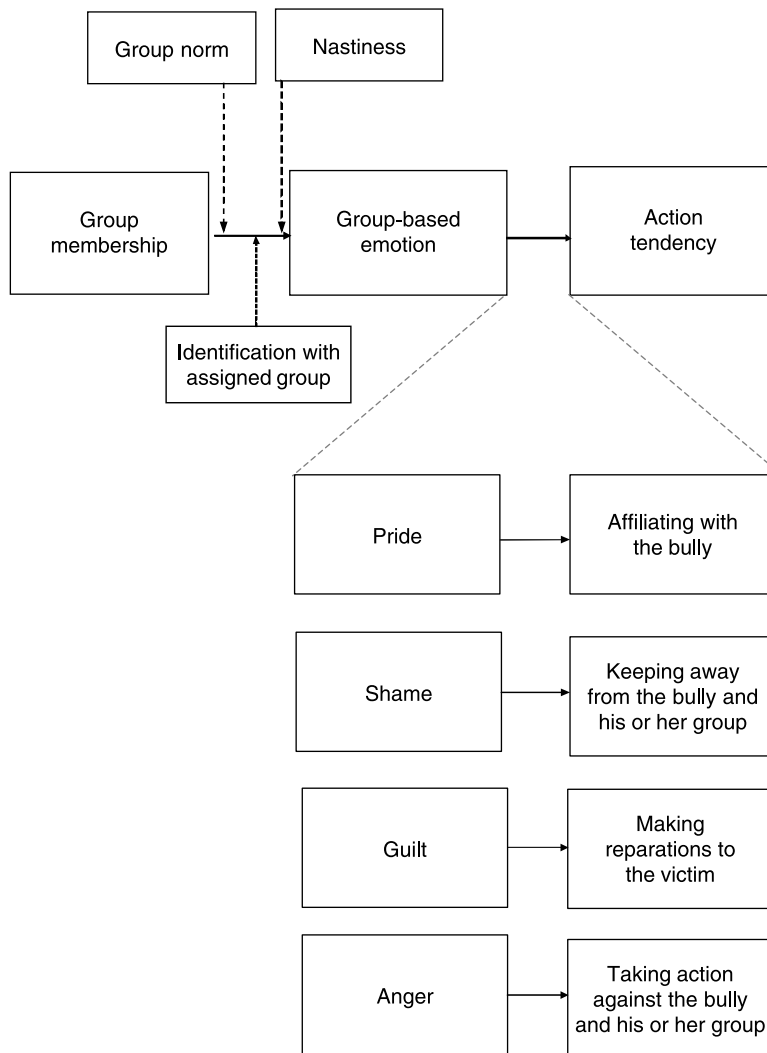
### *Design*

The study had a factorial design, where the three between-subjects factors were children's gender (male or female), the norm of the bully's group in the vignettes (to be either kind or unkind to other children), and the group membership of the participants (shared with the victim [victim's group], shared with the bully [bully's group] or shared with neither victim nor bully [third party]). The extent to which participants identified with their assigned group and the extent to which they judged the bullying behaviour as nasty were measured as potential moderators of these variables.

The dependent variables were (a) the extent to which participants felt group-based emotions of pride, guilt, shame and anger, and (b) participants' reported action tendencies: to affiliate with the bully; make reparations to the victim; distance oneself from the group; and tell an adult what had happened.

### *Materials and procedure*

The study was conducted in school classrooms, with one class group at a time, each consisting of between 15 and 36 pupils. A teacher was always present. The session began with an explanation that the researcher was interested in finding out about children's friendship groups. The three activities in which children would have to take part if they wished to help with the study were then described, and children were reminded that their participation was voluntary.



**Figure 1.** The hypothesized relationship between group membership, group norm, group-based emotions and action tendencies. Inset: Showing the relationship between specific group-based emotions and their associated action tendencies.

**Table 1.** Showing mean and standard deviation of age, and gender, as a function of group membership

Participant's group membership	Participant's age		Participant gender	
	Mean	SD	Male N	Female N
Shared with bully	10.34	0.67	19	14
Shared with victim	10.38	0.57	18	14
Shared with neither bully nor victim	10.29	0.60	18	15

#### *Dot estimation task*

Children were first randomly allocated to one of the three groups. This was done using a dot estimation task (See Tajfel *et al.*, 1971). Each child was introduced to the activity, and subsequently shown five slides, each displaying between 20 and 100 yellow dots on a blue background. Each slide was presented for 3 seconds. Participants were asked to record their responses.

Participants were then instructed that their responses to the dot estimation task would be used to place them into one of three groups. The researcher exchanged each participant's response slip for one assigning them, at random, to a particular (gender-consistent) group, and giving information about that group. Membership of each group was indicated by the statement that 'Your guesses show that you are an under-estimator. Most children in a group called the [Eagles/Falcons/Kestrels] are also under-estimators. The [Eagles/Falcons/Kestrels] are an [active/fun-loving/bright] group of [girls/boys], who enjoy [listening to music together/watching DVDs together/playing games together]'. The descriptions were devised so as to encourage participants to identify with their group and participants were instructed to keep this information private.

#### *Vignettes*

The researcher then distributed a copy of the vignette to each pupil. Vignettes describing the different group norms were distributed at random. Group norm was manipulated via information given in the vignette, either 'The Eagles [bully's group] are sometimes unkind to others, but other children in the school admire them' (for the unkindness norm condition) or 'The Eagles [bully's group] are always kind to others, and other children in the school admire them' (for the kindness norm condition). The vignettes provided information about the groups, about two named members of these groups, and about an incident that could be construed as mild bullying. Names of the vignette characters were carefully chosen such that no child at the school went by them. Girls received a vignette about typical activities of the female bully's group, victim's group and third party, and about events on a school climbing frame in which one prototypical (i.e. a good exemplar of the group) member of the bully's group, supported by the bully's group, is unkind to a named member of the victim's group. Boys received a vignette about typical activities of the male bully's group, victim's group and third party, and about events on the school football field in which a bullying incident containing the same verbal and physical actions as in the girls' vignette occurred. The vignettes ended with a depiction of upset on the part of the victim and the ringing of the school bell to signal the end of break. The school in which events were described as taking place matched the school from which participants had been recruited. An example vignette for each gender is shown in the Appendix, where information that was matched to the participating school is denoted by square brackets.

Participants were asked to read the vignette carefully and quietly, but were also told that they could keep it for reference. Some children were assisted in vignette and questionnaire reading, so as not to exclude those with reading difficulties. Participants were given approximately 10 minutes to read the vignette.

#### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was then distributed to pupils. Before it was completed, the researcher highlighted her interest in pupils' opinions about the story and read aloud

the instructions on the front of the questionnaire. It was stressed that answers would be kept private, and not read by staff at the school. Pupils were asked to work individually and quietly. There were two versions of the questionnaire, one for the female vignette, and one for the male vignette. Each questionnaire opened with brief instructions about the purpose of the questionnaire and procedures for responding to items, with examples. Most items took the form of statements. Children were asked to indicate their agreement on five-point Likert scales, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* through *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, and *agree*. Participants were instructed to respond to each item by placing a tick at the relevant point on the scale. Copies of the questionnaire are available from the first author on request.

A first set of items related to the behaviour described in the vignette, starting with manipulation check items relating to the named story characters' group affiliations (for example: 'Which group was Jenny [bully] a member of?') and asking respondents to report their own group membership. There was also a manipulation check concerning the group norm of the bully's group. The final paragraph of the vignette, describing the bullying incident, was then repeated. Following this, 12 items called for judgements of the behaviour, for example, 'The Eagles' [bully's group] behaviour was unkind'. Among 10 filler items was a two-item measure of the *nastiness* of the bully's group's behaviour, formed from the items 'Jenny's [bully] behaviour was unkind' and 'The Eagles' [bully's group] behaviour was unkind'. Nastiness was assessed by averaging respondents' scores on these two items ( $r = .52$ ).

The next set of 13 items concerned participants' identification with their assigned group and feelings towards the story characters. Among these 13 items was the six-item group identification scale ( $\alpha = .77$ ), consisting of the items: 'How sad do you feel about being in your group (reversed)?', 'How happy do you feel about being in your group?', 'How important is it to you to be in your group?', 'How happy would you feel if someone said something good about people in your group?', 'How sad would you feel if someone said something bad about people in your group?', and 'How proud do you feel to be in your group?'. This scale was adapted from Barrett, Arcuri, Bennett, Berti, Bombi, and Castelli *et al.*'s (2007) 'strength of identification' scale, a five-item measure of identification.

Following this, a further six items concerned respondents' group-based emotions pertaining to events described in the vignette. Four of these items measured the emotions of pride, shame, guilt and anger ('How [proud/ashamed/angry] do you feel about the way the Eagles [bully's group] behaved?'; and 'How guilty do you feel about what happened to [victim]?'). Group-based emotions were measured on a five point scale from 'not at all' to 'very much'. Two filler items asked about emotions not of central concern to our research hypotheses.

A further 12 items concerned participants' action tendencies (i.e. beliefs about how they would feel and what they would do, had they been present when the incident took place). Again, four of these action tendencies, 'I would tell my friends proudly about what [bully]'s group did', 'I would say sorry to [victim] and his or her group', 'I would keep away from [bully]'s group', and 'I would tell a teacher what had happened' mapped on to the emotions of pride, guilt, shame, and anger respectively, while the others were filler items, not relevant to emotional reactions. At the end of the questionnaire participants were asked to confirm their age and year group.

At the conclusion of the session, which lasted approximately 45 min, participants were debriefed about the research and the reasons for the deception concerning allocation to groups. Any questions that pupils had were addressed by the researcher,



and pupils were reminded of positive strategies for dealing with any experiences of bullying. Participants were thanked and received a pencil as thanks for their participation, and each participating school received £50 in gift vouchers.

## Results

### Data screening

One case had more than 30% of values missing, and was dropped from subsequent analyses. Missing value analysis revealed no serious problems regarding patterns in missing data. Log transformations were performed on variables that were skewed significantly at  $p \leq .001$ . However, with the exception of responses to the item 'How angry do you feel about the way the Eagles [bully's group] behaved?', there were no differences between analyses carried out on transformed versus untransformed variables, so only the logarithmic function of the above-mentioned variable was used in further analyses. Otherwise, untransformed scores were used for all variables. Each variable was checked for the presence of univariate outliers. To ensure that the (few) outliers were not disproportionately influencing the results, analyses were carried out with and without the outliers, yielding no significant differences in the results. In accordance with the recommendation of Aiken and West (1991), means-centred scores were used for measured predictor variables, as indicated below.

### Was the behaviour seen as bullying?

More than 85% of participants believed that the action of the bully [Jenny or Pete] constituted bullying, either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item, '[Individual] is bullying [victim]', while 64.7% of participants believed that the bully's group was bullying, agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item 'The Eagles [bully's group] are bullying [victim]'.

### Manipulation check for group norm

Examination of the manipulation check for group norm revealed that it was effective: 68% of participants passed this check, while 27% failed it. A further 5% failed to respond to the question. A breakdown of the manipulation check by group norm is given in Table 2. A  $\chi^2$  analysis confirmed that more children answered the manipulation checks correctly than would have been expected by chance (i.e. if the manipulation had no effect),  $\chi^2 = 9.02$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .003$ . Further,  $\chi^2$  analysis revealed that significantly more children failed the manipulation check in the kindness norm condition, than in the unkindness norm condition,  $\chi^2 = 7.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .008$ . Despite this, running the analyses with and without children who had failed these checks revealed no differences in results. Thus, the norm manipulation was considered to have been successful.

**Table 2.** Showing results of the manipulation check according to group norm

Participant group norm	Manipulation check of group norm	
	Fail (N)	Pass (N)
Kindness	21	29
Unkindness	7	41

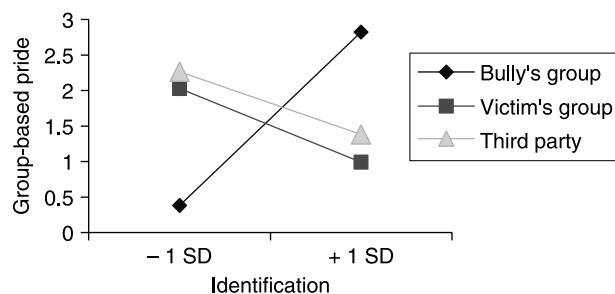
**Social identity processes: Group membership, group norm and social identification**

In order to test the hypotheses that group membership would affect the emotions children experienced when reading the vignettes, and that this effect would be moderated by the norm of the bully's group, by children's level of identification with their assigned group, and by their perceptions of nastiness in the bullying incident, each emotion was submitted in turn to a 3 (group membership: bully's group, victim's group, and third party)  $\times$  2 (bully group norm: kindness or unkindness)  $\times$  nastiness (measured)  $\times$  identification with assigned group (measured) ANOVA, with the last two factors treated as continuous variables. A version of this analysis including gender as a between-subjects variable revealed that there were no main effects or interactions involving gender. In the interests of simplicity, the results of the ANOVAs without gender as a factor are reported below.

**Pride**

There was a significant main effect of *group membership*,  $F(2, 93) = 3.19$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ , which was qualified by a marginally significant interaction between *group membership* and *identification* with one's group,  $F(2, 93) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . Further analysis showed that this interaction arose because, consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the bully's group reported more pride when they identified more strongly with their group,  $B = 0.61$ ,  $SE = 0.208$ ,  $p = .006$ , whereas participants in the victim's group reported marginally less pride when they identified more strongly with their group,  $B = -0.26$ ,  $SE = -0.140$ ,  $p = .072$ . In the third party group there was no association between pride and identification with own group,  $B = -0.22$ ,  $SE = -0.265$ ,  $p = .411$ . These relationships are depicted in Figure 2.

There was also a significant interaction between *group membership* and *group norm*,  $F(2, 93) = 8.08$ ,  $p = .0007$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .19$ , a significant interaction between *group norm* and *nastiness*,  $F(1, 93) = 5.00$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ , and a three-way interaction between *group membership*, *group norm* and *nastiness*,  $F(2, 93) = 3.14$ ,  $p = .049$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ . These interactions were explored by examining the simple slopes of *group norm* and *nastiness* at each level of *group membership*. This analysis indicated that those in the bully's group and in the kindness norm condition experienced less pride the nastier they perceived the behaviour to be,  $B = -0.83$ ,  $SE = 0.30$ ,  $p = .01$ ; however, for their counterparts in the unkindness norm condition this effect was not significant,  $B = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.52$ ,  $p > .05$ . Neither of the simple slopes was significant for those in the victim's group ( $B = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $p > .05$  and  $B = -0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ,  $p > .05$ ,



**Figure 2.** Pride in the bully's group behaviour as a function of group membership and identification with assigned group.

for those in the kindness and unkindness norms, respectively). For those in the third party group, less pride was experienced the nastier the behaviour was perceived to be for those in the kindness norm condition  $B = -1.31$ ,  $SE = 0.38$ ,  $p = .002$ , but not for those in the unkindness norm condition,  $B = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.48$ ,  $p > .05$ . These relationships are shown in Figure 3. No other effects were significant.

#### Shame

There was an interaction between *group membership* and *identification* with one's assigned group,  $F(2, 94) = 7.11$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ . Consistent with our hypothesis, those in the bully's group reported less shame when they identified more strongly with their group,  $B = -0.57$ ,  $SE = -0.264$ ,  $p = .039$ , whereas those in the victim's group reported more shame when they identified more strongly with their group,  $B = 0.70$ ,  $SE = 0.249$ ,  $p = .008$ . There was no association between these variables in the third party group,  $B = -0.37$ ,  $SE = -0.327$ ,  $p = .267$ . These relationships are shown in Figure 4.

There was also a significant interaction between *group norm* and *nastiness*,  $F(1, 94) = 3.73$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ . Simple slopes analysis revealed that this interaction arose because participants in the kindness condition experienced greater shame, the nastier they perceived the behaviour to be,  $B = 0.99$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ; although, the same was true in the unkindness condition,  $B = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ,  $p = .02$ , the relationship was weaker. The simple slopes are shown in Figure 5. No other effects were significant.

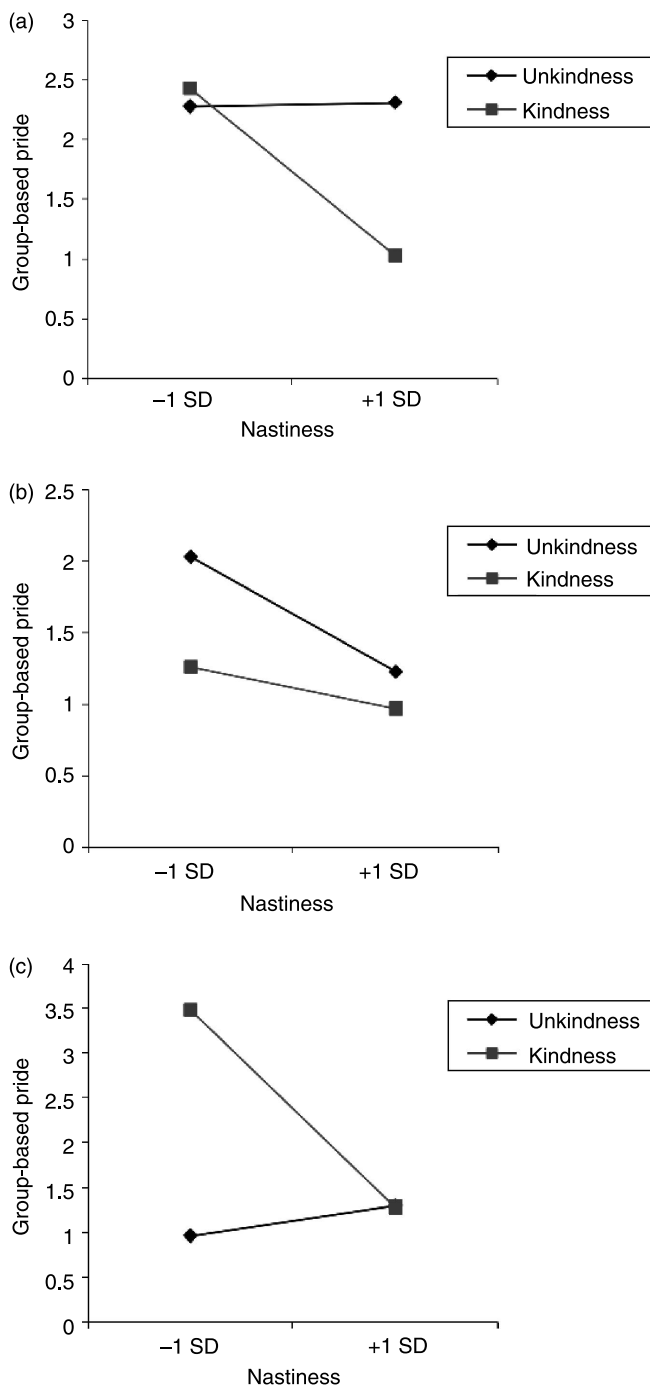
#### Guilt

This revealed a near-significant effect of *group membership*,  $F(2, 70) = 2.73$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ , which arose because participants in the bully's group felt more guilty than participants in the third party group, or in the victim's group. Planned contrasts revealed that there was a significant difference in the guilt experienced by the bully's group and the victim's group,  $F(1, 70) = 6.02$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $Ms(SDs) = 3.45 (1.43)$  and  $2.40 (1.16)$  respectively, but not between the victim's group and the third party group,  $F(1, 70) = 3.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $Ms(SD) = 2.40 (1.16)$  and  $3.29 (1.55)$ , respectively, or between the bully's group and the third party group,  $F(1, 70) = 0.93$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $Ms(SDs) = 3.45 (1.43)$  and  $3.29 (1.55)$  respectively. No other effects were significant.

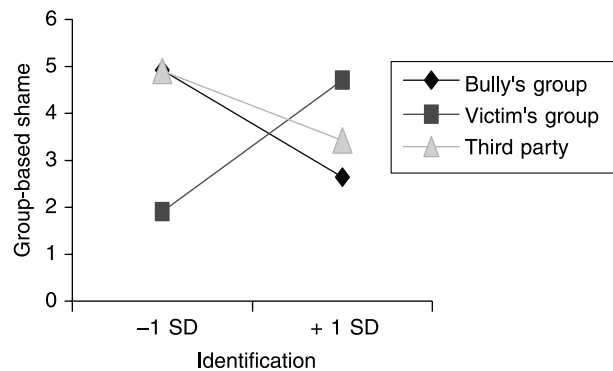
#### Anger

This revealed a significant main effect of *group membership*,  $F(2, 95) = 3.69$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . This was qualified by a two-way interaction between *group membership* and *identification* with one's group,  $F(2, 95) = 7.58$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .18$ . Simple slopes analysis showed that this interaction arose because, consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the bully's group reported less anger when they identified more strongly with their group,  $B = -0.21$ ,  $SE = -0.12$ ,  $p = .09$ , whereas participants in both the victim's group and the third party group reported more anger when they identified more strongly with their groups,  $B = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.090$ ,  $p = .002$ , and  $B = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.089$ ,  $p = .002$ , respectively. These relationships are shown in Figure 6.

There was also a significant interaction between *group membership* and *group norm*,  $F(2, 95) = 5.29$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ . Analysis of the simple main effects of *group membership* at each level of *group norm* showed that while there was no effect of group membership in the kindness norm condition,  $F(2, 49) = 0.71$ ,  $p > .05$ ,



**Figure 3.** Pride in the bully's group behaviour as a function of perceived nastiness and group norm of the bully's group for those in (a) the bully's group, (b) the victim's group, and (c) the third party.



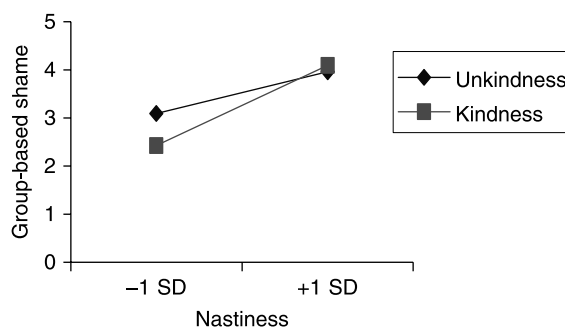
**Figure 4.** Shame in the bully's group behaviour as a function of group membership and identification with assigned group.

$\eta_p^2 = .036$ , there was a tendency in the unkindness norm condition for anger to be higher in the third party group than in the victim's group or bully's group,  $F(2, 46) = 6.54, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .272$ .

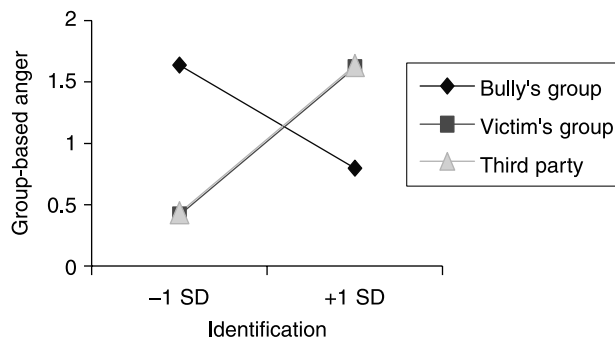
There was also a three-way interaction between *group membership*, *identification* and *nastiness*,  $F(2, 95) = 5.39, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . Analysis of the simple slopes of identification and high, medium, and low nastiness, at each level of group membership revealed that there was no significant relationship between these variables for those in the bully's group, but that in the victim's group the positive relationship between anger and identification was significant at low ( $B = 0.71, SE = 0.33, p = .05$ ) and medium ( $B = 0.31, SE = 0.15, p = .05$ ) levels of *nastiness*, but not at high levels of *nastiness* ( $B = -0.10, SE = 0.16, p > .05$ ). For those in the third party group, there was a significant positive relationship between *identification* and *anger* at high ( $B = 0.42, SE = 0.12, p = .003$ ) and medium levels of *nastiness* ( $B = 0.39, SE = 0.11, p = .002$ ), but not at low levels of *nastiness*, ( $B = 0.36, SE = 0.23, p > .05$ ). These relationships are displayed in Figure 7. No other effects were significant.

#### Relations between emotions and action tendencies

To test our hypotheses regarding the relations between specific emotions and action tendencies, each action tendency was regressed simultaneously on all of the emotions



**Figure 5.** Shame in the bully's group's behaviour as a function of group norm and perceived nastiness of the bully's group's behaviour.



**Figure 6.** Showing anger at the bully's group's behaviour as a function of group membership and identification with one's group.

(thereby controlling for the effects of other emotions). The results of these regressions are reported below for each action tendency.

#### *Affiliation with the bully*

Two questions were asked of participants concerning the likelihood that they would affiliate with the bully, 'I like [bully]' and 'I would like [bully] to be my friend'. These items were averaged to form a scale for affiliation with the bully ( $r = .83, p < .001$ ). We reasoned that this action tendency would be predicted by pride in the bully's behaviour. The model for this regression was significant,  $F(4, 87) = 5.84, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .175$ . Pride was positively associated with affiliating with the bully,  $B = 0.26, SE = 0.12, p = .02$ . No other emotion was a significant predictor of this action tendency.

#### *Keeping away from the bully's group*

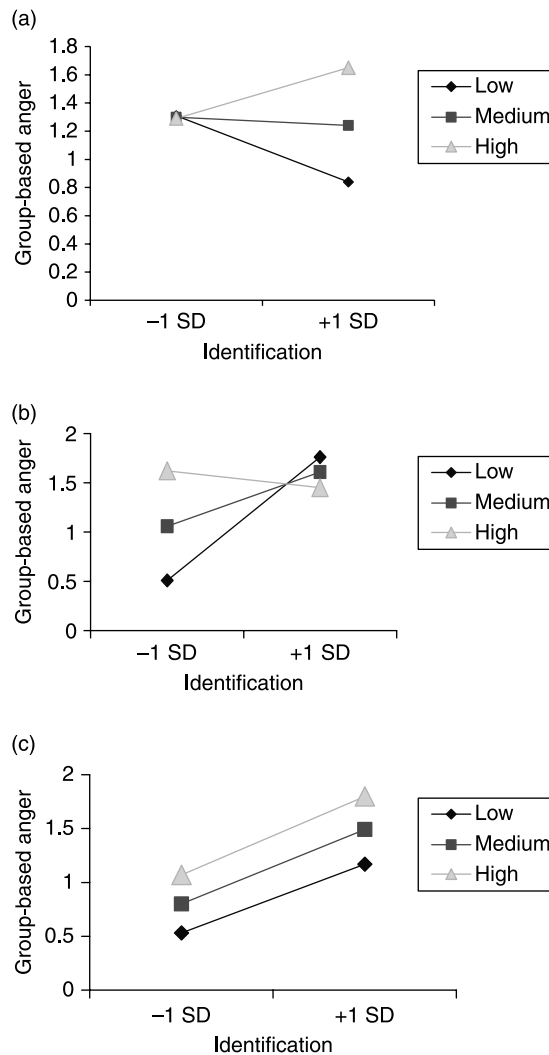
This action tendency was measured by the item 'I would keep away from [bully] and [his/her] group', and is hypothesized to arise from shame. The model for this regression was significant,  $F(4, 86) = 3.49, p = .01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .09$ , although none of the emotion predictors was significant. Thus, although this action tendency was not uniquely associated with one particular emotion, together they had significant predictive value.

#### *Saying sorry to the victim*

This action tendency was measured by the item 'I would say sorry to [victim]' and is hypothesized to arise from guilt. The model for this regression was significant,  $F(4, 87) = 3.31, p = .01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .09$ . Guilt was the sole significant predictor of saying sorry,  $B = 0.27, SE = 0.20, p = .009$ . Thus, the guiltier participants thought they would feel, the more likely they were to think that they would say sorry.

#### *Telling the teacher*

This action tendency was measured by the item 'I would go and tell a teacher what had happened' and is hypothesized to arise from anger. The model for this regression was significant,  $F(4, 88) = 8.19, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .24$ . Anger was a significant predictor of telling the teacher,  $B = 0.37, SE = 0.09, p < .001$ . Thus, the more angry participants thought they would feel, the more likely they were to say that they would take action against the bully's group.



**Figure 7.** Anger in the bully's group behaviour as a function of perceived nastiness and identification with assigned group for those in (a) the bully's group, (b) the victim's group, and (c) the third party.

In summary, there was good support for the model shown in Figure 1. There were effects of group membership on emotions experienced by participants, which were moderated in some but not all cases, by group norm, perceived nastiness and identification; and these emotions were in turn related to the hypothesized action tendencies (and no others) in all but one case (group-based shame).

## Discussion

We aimed to examine the role of identification with an assigned group in a group-level analysis of bullying behaviour, and to explore the role of group-based emotions on children's responses to this behaviour, using hypothetical bullying scenarios. Overall, the results provided encouraging support for the hypothesized relationships between these variables.

First, it is apparent that *group membership* had a significant impact upon the levels of group-based emotions experienced in ways predicted by the model in Figure 1. Specifically, *group membership* affected levels of *pride* such that those in the bully's group experienced more pride than those in other groups. The effect of group membership also approached significance, and was of small-medium magnitude, in the cases of *guilt* and *anger*. Regarding pride, shame and anger, there was a significant interaction between group membership and identification with one's group, such that identification moderated the impact of group membership on these emotions. In turn, *group norm* moderated the effect of group membership on levels of pride and shame in the ways predicted by Figure 1. *Nastiness* also acted as a moderator in the cases of pride, shame and anger. The model was also well-supported in terms of the links between group-based emotions and action tendencies. Pride predicted affiliation with the bully, guilt predicted making reparations to the victim, and anger predicted taking action against the bully (namely telling the teacher what had happened). Shame, however, did not predict the tendency to keep away from the bully's group, pointing to a need to look at other forms of avoidance behaviour in future research.

These findings represent a novel contribution to our understanding of bullying at the primary school level, and show how social identity theory and intergroup emotion theory can enhance this understanding. The findings lend general support to the role of social identity processes, and corroborate previous work in this area (Duffy, 2005; Gini, 2006, 2007; Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). Specifically, there was evidence of changes in the way that children responded to the vignette, for example in levels of group-based shame and anger, as a function of their group membership. Moreover, group membership played an important role in interaction with participants' level of *identification* with their assigned groups. For example, those who identified more highly with the bully's group reported a higher level of shame in that group's behaviour, while those who identified more highly with the victim group reported more anger about the bullying incident.

Over and above the effects reported in previous research by Ojala and Nesdale (2004), we have also demonstrated that children are sensitive to the norms of a relevant membership group. Here, we found evidence that children experience more group-based shame and less group-based pride in relation to a group that has a group norm of kindness to others but nevertheless engages in bullying than they do in relation to a group that has a norm of unkindness to others and engages in bullying.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this contribution is that it is, as far as we are aware, the first study to demonstrate the role played by group-based emotions in reactions to bullying behaviour in children. Indeed, to our knowledge this is the first demonstration of the role played by children's group-based emotions, regardless of context. This research therefore extends the work on adults by other researchers (Crisp *et al.*, 2007; Dumont *et al.*, 2003; Harth, Kessler, & Leach, 2008; Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003) indicating that, to the extent that individuals share group membership with others, they will experience higher levels of emotion in response to a group-relevant target, even if they are not personally affected by the target.

Group-based emotions changed as a function of group categorization and were also linked to the action tendencies proposed by previous researchers (Lickel *et al.*, 2004). Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Dumont's (2006) finding that group-based emotions vary between perpetrator and victim perspectives was echoed here. However, our prediction that group norm would moderate the effect of group membership on group-based emotion, such that guilt would be more likely to be experienced where the



behaviour was counter-normative, and shame when the behaviour was normative, was not supported. This is a point we shall return to below.

It is clear not only that children experience group-based emotions when reading about (and by inference, when witnessing) a bullying incident, but also that these emotions are associated with tendencies to act in certain ways. This points to potential new ways of tackling bullying behaviour. For example, given that there was a strong association between anger levels and a propensity to tell the teacher, it would be worth devising an anti-bullying programme that would focus on (1) fostering a sense of social identification with non-bullying rather than bullying children, (2) the emotions that children subsequently experience when witnessing bullying, and (3) defining the most appropriate ways of acting upon those feelings. As such, the social identity aspect of this research seems to suggest that, as well as being part of the problem when it comes to bullying, groups – and more specifically, a sense of group identification – may also form part of the solution. That is, children assigned to the victim's group in this study showed greater inclinations to resist the bullying (in their propensity to tell a teacher) and also indicated that they would protect the victim (in that they would be less likely to affiliate with the bully).

In summary, the results of this study suggest that there would be much practical value in applying these insights to a group-level approach to tackling bullying. Such an approach would encourage children to think critically about the decisions they make when they are part of a friendship group, with the aim of reducing children's apparent tendency to favour and protect members who bully children outside the group.

### **Limitations**

Children's responses to the manipulation check items suggested that not all of them reacted to the manipulation of group norm in the intended fashion. This may have been at least partly because the check was taken after the entire vignette had been read (i.e. after participants had also read about the bullying incident). In certain conditions, the stated group norm (e.g. kindness to other children) was inconsistent with the behaviour described in the vignette (bullying), and may have somewhat reduced the influence of the norm manipulation on responses to the check. In other words, the failure of some children to respond correctly on the check may therefore simply reflect its placement in the questionnaire (a minor methodological issue), rather than something more problematic with the manipulation itself. The potential influence of the bullying contained in the vignette on reactions to the norm manipulation may also help to account for the relatively weak support for the hypothesized effects of group norm, including the distinction between guilt and shame. This in itself would represent an interesting avenue for future research, suggesting that the observed behaviour of group members is not only judged in terms of group norms, but also has the potential to bolster or contradict pre-conceived ideas about what those group norms are.

Although gender was not a central variable of interest in this study, we recognized its potential to influence the processes under investigation and sought to take it into account in the design and analyses. The fact that no systematic effects of gender emerged here does not preclude the possibility that gender might play an important role in shaping bullying and group-based emotion processes. Directly examining the role of gender is therefore an important consideration for future research.

Some unmeasured factors may also have had a bearing upon the results. Notably, Smith (1993) argues that group-based anger will be expressed when group members believe themselves to be in a relatively strong position. Another point is that Lickel *et al.* (2004) suggest that whether people experience anger or guilt is determined by how responsible individuals feel for negative behaviour. Specifically, guilt should be experienced when an individual feels responsible for negative behaviour, whereas anger should be experienced where others are seen as responsible. Directly assessing perceived group strength, and responsibility for the bullying behaviour would therefore be welcome features of future research.

It is also worth noting that only one form of bullying was portrayed in the vignettes that we presented to children in this study, namely verbal bullying, and that the behaviour of the bystander group members in the vignette did not change. It is possible that group-based emotions (and indeed the willingness to act upon them) would vary as a function of the method of bullying that is employed, and the ways in which others behave. For example, Gini *et al.* (2008) found that more blame was placed on the victims in the case of physical bullying, and that victims were liked more when bystanders sought to defend him or her. In this vein, the form of bullying (physical bullying or covert, relational bullying) and the behaviour of bystanders should be examined in future work.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study show that the degree to which children identify with a group affects their responses to a bullying incident, including the ways in which they believe they would have acted if they had been present. The findings also demonstrate the relevance of assessing group-based emotions in children, showing that children respond emotionally to behaviour enacted by or directed against a fellow group member, even though they are not a direct party to the events in question. These emotions were systematically related to how children thought they would respond to the bullying incident. Further clarification of the role of group processes in bullying should help with the development of more effective anti-bullying strategies for schools.

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## Appendix

*Please read the following story carefully.*

Lingley Primary School is one of the schools in a small town near the English seaside. It is quite a [large] school, with [two] classes in each year. The school has a large playground, where many groups of friends enjoy playing together at break-times. In Year 6, the boys' favourite break-time activity is a game of football. There are three main friendship groups in Year 6, the Falcons, the Eagles and the Kestrels. The Kestrels are a bright group of boys, who like to play games together while the Eagles are an active group of boys, who enjoy listening to music together. *The Eagles are sometimes unkind to others but other children in the school admire them. [The Eagles are always kind to others, and other children in the school admire them].* The Falcons are a fun-loving group of boys who enjoy watching DVDs together. They are also well-liked by other children in the school. When it comes to football, the Eagles, the Falcons and the Kestrels are just as good as each other.

One break-time, the Eagles played football against the Falcons. Simon one of the Falcons was running, when he tripped and fell over. Pete, who is one of the most active members of the Eagles, laughed. The other Eagles gathered around him. Pete pointed at Simon and laughed at him. The other Eagles laughed with him.

"Serves you right you tripped" Pete sneered, "you're rubbish".

Simon hid his face in his hands. Pete and the Eagles had really upset him. Pete was about to call Simon another name, but the bell rang for the end of break-time before he could.

*Please read the following story carefully.*

Lingley Primary School is one of the schools in a small town near the English seaside. It is quite a [large] school, with [two] year groups in each class. The school has a large playground where many groups of friends enjoy playing together at break-times. In Year 6, the girls' favourite break-time activity is playing on the climbing frame. There are three main friendship groups in Year 6, the Eagles, the Falcons and the Kestrels. The Kestrels are a bright group of girls who like to play games together while the Eagles are an active group of girls who enjoy listening to music together. *The Eagles are sometimes unkind to others, but other children in the school admire them. [The Eagles are always kind to others, and other children in the school admire them].* The Falcons are a fun-loving group of girls, who enjoy watching DVDs together. They are also well-liked by other children in the school. When it comes to using the climbing frame, the Eagles, the Falcons and the Kestrels are just as good as each other.

One break-time, the Falcons and the Eagles played on the climbing frame. Debbie, one of the Falcons, fell off a balancing bar. Jenny, who is one of the most active members of the Eagles laughed. The other Eagles gathered around her. Jenny pointed at Debbie and laughed at her. The other Eagles laughed with her.

"Serves you right, you fell off," Jenny sneered, "you're rubbish".

Debbie hid her face in her hands. Jenny and the Eagles had really upset her. Jenny was about to call Debbie another name, but the bell rang for the end of break-time before she could.