
Book review

Rigby K (2002) *New perspectives on bullying*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

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In this latest excursion into the world of bullying, author Ken Rigby explores not only that which occurs in the schoolyard, but also pursues the broader perspectives of bullying by drawing the reader's attention to the contribution that anthropologists, ethologists, evolutionary psychologists and sociologists can make to the discourse concerning this phenomenon. In doing so, he widely casts his net in examining bullying across cultures, contexts and historical eras.

This book guides the reader through the difficulties of defining bullying across cultures and contexts (Chapters 1 and 2); an understanding of bullying in childhood and in the schoolyard domain (Chapters 3 and 4); a consideration of the health-related issues of bullying (Chapter 5); an exploration of what 'bullies' and 'victims' are like and what drives their behaviour (Chapters 6 and 7); a review of the role of differences (Chapter 8); where and how bullying can occur (Chapter 9); the attitudes and beliefs that exist in the community (Chapter 10); and some approaches that could counter bullying (Chapters 11 and 12).

Drawing upon his own extensive research in Australia, Rigby explores the key contributing factors to this phenomenon using a relaxed writing style. He reports complex research simply, clearly and concisely, shaping conclusions in relation to the contribution of the broader perspectives mentioned above. The reader must be aware, however, that Rigby presents a decidedly Western research emphasis. Whilst Eastern cultures are represented throughout the book, the paucity of available research from more collectivist cultures is apparent when 'stocktaking' such as this is embarked upon. On the other hand, it is refreshing to read a text that recognises the important contribution of Australian research to the international perspective.

The Preface presents the reader with an historical perspective, which suggests that the notion of bullying is almost as old as the human race itself. Rigby poses the question: Why should we expect things to change? In reply he posits that the strong

have always purposefully exploited the weak (p 11). In calling upon the Psalms of the Old Testament in the Introduction to articulate the antiquity of bullying, he inadvertently highlights the Judaeo-Christian heritage of the research base. He correctly asserts that as the study of this phenomenon matures, there is recognition of its complexity and durability across time, cultures, genders and contexts. The corollary therefore, is that the deficits in the research base are systematically exposed as knowledge and understanding is increased.

The difficulties associated with defining bullying are presented in Chapter 2. Here, the increasing sophistication in understanding as a result of continual refinement is evident. The association between aggression and bullying is discussed, with an accompanying examination of the notion of whether bullying occurs along a continuum of severity (p 41). The author also critically examines such issues as the *power imbalance* between the parties; the notion of *justified* versus *unjustified* aggression; *sub-types* of bullying; and racial and sexual bullying, and bullying due to disability. Some detailed consideration is given to the differences and complexities of *individual* versus *group* perpetration of bullying. In terms of the evolution of the definition of bullying, the differing perspectives of adults and children are raised. Finally, Rigby suggests that a distinction be made concerning malign and non-malign bullying when considering definitions of this phenomenon. From this chapter, it is obvious that as knowledge and understandings are extended and developed, the very complexity of the nature of bullying makes it more difficult to clearly define it. What also becomes apparent to the reader, once again, is the dearth of contributions from Eastern cultures in the struggle to define this construct.

As most current knowledge about bullying has derived from studies undertaken within the schooling context, in Chapter 3 Rigby has provided a comprehensive review of what is presently recognised about bullying in childhood: who is bullying whom, and what hurts; the severity of bullying; and issues of gender and sexual identity. Noting that there have been few systematic studies undertaken in the family context, Rigby reports on studies focused on *early childhood*, stating that there are relatively few of these in comparison to studies on older children. The focus of the review on bullying in *later childhood* clearly sits with Rigby's extensive Australian research, whereby some 38 000 school children between the ages of 8 and 18 responded to anonymous Peer Relations Questionnaires (Rigby & Slee 1993).

The author presents several models to account for how bullying occurs in schools, all inferring that a cycle of bullying is taking place that involves the bully, the victim and others present in the social context of schooling. The ethos of the school itself, the classroom climate and the behaviour of bystanders are noted as contributing school factors, which can also be employed positively in the struggle to overcome this phenomenon when a systematic, whole-school approach is adopted.

Rigby shifts attention away from the school in Chapter 4 by arguing that the notion of bullying as the 'systematic abuse of power' can be applied in various contexts. Noting that specific studies of bullying in the home are generally lacking, but that spousal abuse, child abuse or domestic violence are commonly recognised

terms, Rigby challenges readers to consider these in the context of their understanding of bullying. The other areas of focus for this chapter are on the workplace, prisons, sport and politics, with some attention to stalking. Again, the issue of defining bullying in these contexts is raised as being problematic.

The peppering of anecdotes, real life examples, and quotes from literature and poets provides the reader with not only some insight into the nature of bullying in other contexts, but occasionally an insight into bullying in Australia. Rigby's use of Les Murray's poetry, reference to the 'Bodyline' cricket series and quotes from a former Australian Prime Minister (Paul Keating) all highlight the flavour and varieties of bullying in this culture.

Whilst many have suggested that the relationship between bullying and health issues is one of concern, Rigby asserts that much is subjective, and so adopts yet another perspective – that of an empirical researcher – in order to address this association in Chapter 5. The relationships between poor health and peer victimisation; social adjustment of bullies and victims; psychological distress; physical symptomology; and suicidal tendencies are explored in children and in the workplace. In sum: the assertion that there is no relationship between bullying and health status is deemed to be untenable; no evidence is found that being bullied has any positive health consequences; and the growing number of longitudinal studies strongly support the view that victimisation contributes to ill health (p 121). His overriding conclusion is clear: bullying is a major mental health issue that must be taken seriously, and it is not just the victim who is at risk. This perspective needs to be widely distributed throughout the community, and is perhaps the most powerful message of this book.

So what are bullies and victims really like? In Chapter 6, Rigby outlines the physical and mental characteristics of both, drawing upon literature on the Theory of Mind, social information processing, social intelligence and self-esteem, before exploring notions of social integration and 'connectedness'. Finally, he questions the use of typologising and concludes that categorisations in simplistic terms 'will never do' (p 146). It is imperative that the variance in each group is recognised. Bullies and victims do not represent homogenous groups and they suffer the fate of any stereotyping; the characteristics of the individual are lost in the rush to label.

The perennial question is: Why do bullies bully? The short answer is that this complex phenomenon requires consideration of multiple facets. In Chapter 7, Rigby reviews the general explanations offered by various perspectives: religion; evolutionary theory; genetics; social environment; and parenting/child rearing practices. Drawing conclusions from these perspectives is difficult, for there is no simple explanation regarding this human behaviour. Rigby offers the reader the opportunity to explore the empirical evidence, and leans heavily on studies that examine the perspectives of family/parenting/child-rearing. He rightly presents views that challenge the link between parenting and bullying, but cautions against abandoning this perspective. In the end, more questions are posed than answers.

Chapter 8 is a consideration of the issue of difference and the contribution it makes to the bully/victim scenario. In exploring issues pertaining to gender, race, disability, social class and the elderly, Rigby highlights the diversity of difference and the situational and contextual nature each contributes to our understanding of differing perspectives on bullying. More importantly, he alerts the reader to the politicisation of the construct when government departments privilege one aspect of diversity above another in funding terms. His final call, however, is not just to recognise the broader social groups that might experience victimisation within the wider social context, but also the rights of *individuals* to be supported.

In discussing the places and situations where bullying can occur (Chapter 9), Rigby cites the frustration-aggression hypothesis (p 195) as a perspective that could assist our understanding of how aggression is aroused – acknowledging, however, that aggression is a necessary but not sufficient condition in producing bullying behaviour (p 195). In this chapter he explores *where* children are bullied, drawing upon cross-cultural studies to highlight similarities and differences; *when* children bully, emphasising the transition year from primary to secondary education as pivotal; *roles* and *obedience*, considering classic social psychological studies (Zimbardo 1972; Milgram 1965, cited pp 199–201) as a means of understanding situational pressures; institutional pressure; threats to personal survival; the notions of competition and cooperativeness; and the involvement of bystanders. Finally (p 212), the question is posed: *Situation, person or both?* In endeavouring to shed light on this age-old question, Rigby draws the reader back to the notion of individual freedom to make decisions about behaviour.

By way of another perspective, in Chapter 10 Rigby focuses upon the attitudes and belief systems of children, parents and teachers, and those in the workplace and the home. Rigby firmly believes these are important, as they assist in guiding the actions of others. A great divergence is apparent; even though most people deplore bullying, some will defend and justify it. As with any societal change, the whole community needs to own the construct and address it within the existing systems – and where those systems are inadequate or incapable, then agents of change must act. The message from this chapter is that if we are to move towards successfully intervening in bullying, then we need to have consensus in our attitudes and beliefs as a community.

Finally, in Chapter 11 Rigby poses the question: What is to be done about it? Here, he reviews divergent approaches to counter bullying in schools: policy; parenting non-bullies and non-victims; promotion of non-bullying behaviours; and actions to stop the bullying. He also considers: who should help? Bullying in other places is not forgotten, but receives little emphasis. Rigby provides a wealth of possibilities that could be adopted or interpreted according to contextual needs. The caveat to these, however, is that there is no one way of dealing with bullying; no quick fix to this complex phenomenon. His overriding message, however, is that the community is increasingly wanting something to be done – thus the quest is just beginning.

In Chapter 12 Rigby proposes the notion of moving beyond blame in an effort to deal with bullying, and thus discusses blaming the bully; the victim; the family; the school; the nation; and the system. Apportioning blame is a natural, reactive response to conflict situations, and to not engage in this act requires a considerable change of attitude. Rigby alerts the reader to alternative approaches to blaming in the struggle to deal with bullying behaviours: the *No Blame Approach* (p 276); and the *Method of Shared Concern* (p 277). He critically appraises these, and then queries the role of punishment and consequences, calling upon empirical researchers to continue their efforts in refining our understanding of how to intervene successfully.

Rigby has compiled a wealth of research to document the differing perspectives he presents on bullying, and it is understandable that all research in this field cannot be reported in this single volume. It was surprising, however, that the research on participant roles within the group (Salmivelli and associates) was not discussed, nor the work of Owens in relation to girls' aggression in Australia. Further, the paucity of research from Eastern and collectivist cultures is a problem if we are to fully comprehend this human phenomenon and eventually make a difference to individuals' lives. Rigby's use of examples from Christian writings serves to highlight this deficit. In taking stock of the procession from the earliest studies to those being undertaken today, it is critical that this gap be acknowledged and gradually addressed by the researchers in this field of enquiry. This is an easy-to-read book that should be informative to practitioners and professionals in their quest to address and understand bullying behaviours in schools and other contexts.