Theorizing School Bullying: Insights from Japan

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This paper identifies a lacuna in the existing paradigms of bullying: a gap caused by the frame of reference being largely limited to the highly industrialized societies of the 'west': Europe, North America and Oceania. The paper attempts to address this gap by presenting research developed in Japan. In Japan, sociological discourse on school bullying, i.e. the analysis of institutional factors relevant to understanding bullying was established relatively early, as was the epistemology now referred to as the second paradigm of bullying. The paper attempts to integrate the research strengths of Japan with this new trend in bullying research, with the view of incorporating 'non-western' research traditions into mainstream discourse on bullying. It introduces a typology of school bullying: Types I&II, and discusses 1) hierarchical relationships in schools, focusing on corporal punishment and teacher-student bullying, and 2) group dynamics surrounding bullying. The paper illustrates how bullying among students is entwined with various aspects of schools as social institutions. It argues that school bullying may represent a state of anomie in both formal and informal power structures in schools, which have become

dysfunctional communities unable to deal with bullying, while at the same time it can be students' way of compensating their sense of alienation and disconnectedness from school.

Ever since bullying among school students was established as a research topic in the 1970s, the discourse on school bullying has been constructed primarily within the framework of the '*first paradigm*'[158], which sets its etiology in the personal attributes of the bully and the victim. One weakness of this paradigm is its limits in addressing the structural factors associated with school bullying. In his 1993 review of literature on bullying, Farrington remarks that 'further research should attempt to investigate school factors that are correlated with the prevalence of bullies and victims'[159] and that if 'important school features are discovered, they could have momentous implications for the prevention of bullying'[160]. The factors identified in his review were limited to school size, class size, whether the school is single or mixed-sex school, location of the school, and teachers' attitudes to bullying[161].

Ten years later, a survey of literature on school factors available in English found some additional aspects[162] from studies that might be considered to be based largely on the first paradigm today. Such factors include: the presence of a 'culture of bullying' at school[163], authoritarian teachers[164], presence of teachers who, because of their strictness or inability to keep

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[158] Schott & Søndergaard, 2014
[159] Farrington, 1993:402
[160] Farrington, 1993:403
[161] Farrington, 1993
[162] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003
[163] Rigby, 1997
[164] Rigby, 1996

order in class, cause pupils to dislike school[165], a teacher's negative attitude towards a student[166], use of sarcasm and subtle forms of ridicule by teachers [167], inadequate school intervention[168], as well as boredom and a sense of failure associated with academic competition [169]. These factors, however, were by no means part of a systematic enquiry as to how structures underlying schools as a social institution might contribute to bullying among students. Rather, they were presented in a peripheral manner in each study, almost as passing remarks[170].

Schott and Søndergaard[171] pointed out that in the past decade, while the first paradigm has remained dominant, social psychologists and sociologists have begun to focus on bullying as a social dynamic, shifting away from *paradigm one* and moving towards *paradigm two* [172]. This is a significant development as it enables researchers to envisage school bullying in a broader and more flexible manner, incorporating knowledge from other fields, such as philosophy, sociology, and education. Paradigm two opens up a new research space unconstrained from a strictly empiricist, quantitative approach. Although such research is no doubt important, it 'may be poorly suited to understanding social complexities and complicated interactions, which paradigm two researchers argue are central in bullying dynamics'[173].

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[165] Junger-Tas, 1999; Olweus, 1999
[166] Olweus, 1999
[167] Rigby, 1996
[168] Rigby, 1996
[169] Rigby 1996
[170] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003
[171] Schott & Søndergaard, 2014
[172] Schott & Søndergaard, 2014:2
[173] Schott & Søndergaard, 2014:7

This paper aims to further pursue the question of school factors in this new research milieu. It adopts the 'second paradigm' of bullying as its epistemological framework. It explores how institutional aspects of school may be pertinent to school bullying. This does not mean that other factors such as individual attributes, family backgrounds, and broader social factors such as racism, sexism, and the impact of media, are denied. Rather, the paper focuses on aspects of school that are under the direct jurisdiction of teachers and educators. The paper is also primarily concerned about 'why' and 'how' school bullying occurs (i.e. causality and association), rather than 'what to do' about it (i.e. intervention), because as Galloway and Roland assert 'the direct bullying-focused approach is not necessarily the most effective in the long term'[174] if underlying causes remain the same after the period of the intervention programs.

A particular strategy adopted in this paper is to incorporate references from Japan. Bullying research available in English is largely dominated by studies conducted in the 'west' about schools in the 'west'. This paper attempts to fill in the gap, by drawing on the literature on school bullying in Japan available in Japanese as well as English. As pointed out by Yoneyama and Naito[175] in 'Problems with the paradigm: the school as a factor in understanding bullying', the strength of research on school bullying in Japan lies in its sociological perspective, and in that sense, the perspectives from Japan augment the new theoretical orientation of bullying research: paradigm two. For instance, the conceptualization of bullying proposed by the advocates of paradigm two: bullying as the problem of 'oppressive or

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[174] Galloway & Roland, 2004:38
[175] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003

dysfunctional group dynamics'[176], 'social exclusion anxiety'[177], and bullying as 'longing to belong'[178] resonate well with the study of bullying in Japan as discussed below.

It is not the purpose of this present paper to present a cultural explanation of bullying in Japanese schools. As critically reviewed by Toivonen and Imoto, bullying in Japan is often discussed as a unique cultural phenomenon that stems from the '*supposedly* homogeneous, conformist group-oriented nature of Japanese society'[179]. As pointed out by Morita[180], such cultural explanations became less influential as researchers became aware of common mechanisms behind bullying across different societies and cultures. The aim of this paper is to present the case of Japan to illuminate school factors that may be relevant for its understanding elsewhere – to present it for theoretical considerations. To discern what actually constitutes common mechanisms requires a greater exchange of knowledge across various socio-cultural and linguistic zones, and this paper is an attempt to contribute to this general project.

A Typology of School Bullying: Type I and Type II Bullying

The sociological discourse on school bullying was established in Japan as early as the 1980s. It began with the pioneering work by Morita and Kiyonaga[181], *Bullying: Classroom Pathology*, to be followed by works by other sociologists such as Taki[182] who

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[176] Schott, 2014

[177] Søndergaard, 2014

[178] Hansen et al., 2014

[179] Toivonen & Imoto, 2012: p.9, emphasis added

[180] Morita, 2010

[181] Morita & Kiyonaga, 1986

[182] Taki, 1996

wrote: *Classroom characteristics that cultivate ijime* (the original titles were in Japanese). As these titles suggest, the epistemology referred to as the second paradigm of bullying research was established relatively early in Japan. Based on a similar perspective, Yoneyama argued in *The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance* that bullying is an over-adjustment to the school's hidden curriculum[183].

One of the fundamental understandings of school bullying in Japan can be found in a key official document on bullying produced by the Ministry of Education (MEXT): 'School Bullying: Basic Understandings and Guiding Principles', which states that: 'bullying can happen to any children at any school'[184]. In other words, they recognize that bullying is not limited to a small number of 'bullies' or 'victims' with certain innate personality traits, or particular family situations, but that it can involve any 'ordinary' student at any school.

Taki[185] claims that this sociological understanding of school bullying was first established in Japan based on evidence-based research. The finding that 'ordinary' (as against 'problematic') students are involved in bullying is coupled with another finding that the status of bullying is not fixed, and that students tend to swap the roles of bully and victim at different times[186]. Taki also reports that these findings were subsequently confirmed in the international context in a study including Japan, Australia, Canada, and South Korea[187]. These studies point to the significance of school factors as a cause of bullying among

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[183] Yoneyama, 1999: pp. 157-185
[184] MEXT, 2014: Section 1 Introduction
[185] Taki, 2007:120
[186] Taki, 2007
[187] Taki, 2010

students. They provide empirical justification to frame school bullying as an issue of 'ordinary children'[188]: a fundamental position of the second paradigm of bullying research.[189] [190]

Based on an analysis of discourses on school bullying in Japan and elsewhere, Yoneyama proposed two types of bullying: Type I and Type II.[191]

	Type I	Type II
Bully	'Problem student'	'Ordinary/good' students
Mode of bullying (1)	Bullying by a single student	Collective/group bullying
Mode of bullying (2)	Mainly physical	Mainly relational and verbal, but can be physical
Status/role played	Fixed	Rotated
Victim	Outside the friendship loop	Within the friendship loop
Causal factors	Individual factors	Environmental/school factors
Solution	Individual solution	Structural solution

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[188] Horton, 2011a:269

[189] Schott, 2014:37

[190] This does not necessarily mean that a student's personality and family situation (e.g. domestic violence) are totally irrelevant in explaining cases of bullying, rather, it means that these factors are not *structural* causes of school bullying, which can be effectively dealt with within school walls. At the same time, it seems unnecessary to over-emphasize the difference between 'bullying' and '*ijime*' (the Japanese equivalent of bullying). Although *ijime* tends to be more collective than singular, more verbal and relational than physical, and thus more similar to the mode of bullying prevalent among girls in the 'west', there are few fundamental differences between the two that make it necessary to distinguish one from the other *theoretically*.

[191] In Yoneyama (2008), this was presented as Type A and Type B, which has been refined to Type I and Type II, to suggest that they correspond roughly to paradigm one and paradigm two of research on bullying.

Type I is the style of bullying carried out by an individual 'problem student' or a group of 'problem students' who bully others who are often outside their friendship loop, and it often involves physical bullying. The bully's 'role' as perpetrator is more or less fixed, although they could very well be victims in different settings (e.g. domestic violence). The cause of the bullying can be unrelated to school, such as personality and family situations, although it is possible that the student's school experience may aggravate the problem. Solutions to this type of bullying lie mainly outside the school.

Type II bullying, on the other hand, mainly involves 'ordinary' students who show few signs of 'problematic behaviour'. This model was derived using Japan as its reference. In this model, students tend to engage in collective bullying, and there is considerable swapping of the roles of bully, victim, or bully-victim. Type II bullying usually occurs within a circle of friends, although it can also extend to the whole class. The prevalence of this type of bullying, which involves substantial numbers of 'good students' with rotating roles, suggests that there are *structural factors* at work, and thus, its solution can be found within institutional aspects of the school.

Type I and Type II are conceptual models that aim to map out different categories of school bullying. In reality, the distinction between the two may not be as clear-cut as indicated here, and it is also possible that there are some overlaps. In that sense, they should be taken as indicating two ends of a spectrum. In the current research environment, the two models can be used as a conceptual map to help distinguish different understandings of school bullying: *they correspond to the first and second paradigms*.

What then are the environmental/school factors associated with Type II bullying? This paper focuses on two sources of power at school: hierarchy and group dynamics, both of which are particularly pertinent in explaining school bullying in Japan. Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to link studies of bullying in Japan with those from other societies in Asia, emerging studies from Asia suggest the relevance of these sources of power in explaining school bullying. It is well known that teacher-student relationships tend to be more hierarchical and power-dominant in schools in Asia than in the 'West'[192]. With regard to power dynamics, a recent study of Chan and Wong found that in Chinese societies (e.g., mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau), 'school bullying is often regarded as a collective act' and 'social exclusion is frequently observed as a key school bullying issue'[193]. It is with this understanding that the paper pays particular attention to these two factors that are likely to be strongly associated with school bullying.

School Factors

Hierarchical Relationships

Bullying can be defined as 'the systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relationships'[194] by 'more powerful persons or by a group of persons against individuals who cannot adequately defend themselves'[195]. A teacher-student relationship, which is inherently hierarchical and allows a lot of room for power-abuse, has the potential to become a relationship where the

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[192] e.g. Horton, 2011b; Yoneyama, 1999
[193] Chan & Wong, 2015:1
[194] Rigby, 2008:22
[195] Rigby & Slee, 1999:324

boundary between legitimate use of power and abuse of power (or bullying) is blurred. Despite this risk, there has been a general paucity of research on the issue of teacher-student bullying [196]. This has been the case even in intervention programs that claim to use a 'whole-school' approach[197]. The paucity of research that clearly focuses on teacher's bullying of students reflects one of the shortcomings of the first paradigm of bullying research: it frames school bullying primarily as a student problem[198].

In contrast, researchers who work on the premise of the second paradigm of bullying research have opened the discursive space to talk about the legitimate and normative use of violence in schools and outlined how violence can be used as a means of maintaining the moral order and collective ethos of schools[199]. Corporal punishment, a form of institutionalized violence, is a case in point. While it might be less of an issue in the west, it still exists in many parts of Asia. Horton, for example, has demonstrated through extensive ethnographic work, how *ad-hoc* corporal punishment is an integral part of school management in Vietnam and how power-dominant teacher-student relationships impact on school bullying among students[200]. In Japan as well, teachers who use physical violence are often part of the school management group[201] and thus corporal punishment has a significant role in the school even if the actual number of teachers engaged in it is relatively small.

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[196] Weller, 2014:2
[197] James et al., 2008
[198] Schott & Søndergaard, 2014
[199] Ellwood & Davies, 2014; Horton, 2011a; Yoneyama 1999:91-118
[200] Horton, 2011b
[201] Yoneyama, 1999:91-118

1) Corporal punishment

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child[202] refers to the use of corporal punishment by teachers as one of its key concerns in its county report on Japan (section 47). The Japan Federation of Bar Association (JFBA) Committee on the Rights of the Child follows up on this by pointing out that, while the School Law prohibits corporal punishment, it is ineffective legally because the Civil Law (clause 822) and the Child Abuse Prevention Law (clause 14) both approve of the use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline[203].

A 2013 special national survey by the Ministry of Education illustrated the extent of corporal punishment. It found that in the previous year, corporal punishment was reported in approximately 1 in 20 primary, 1 in 6 junior high, and 1 in 4 senior high schools nationwide. The incidents happened mainly in class or during club activities. The most common method was hitting or beating a student by hand (around 60% at all school levels) followed by kicking (around 10%) and hitting with a stick. Such use of physical violence administered in the name of 'corporal punishment' caused injuries to over 1,100 students or 17% of the reported incidents. Injuries included broken bones, sprains, ruptured eardrums (caused by slapping), lesions, and bruising. Public schools accounted for over 80% of the reported cases, where about half of the reported teachers were 'disciplined' mostly only by verbal reprimand. Only 16% of teachers who caused injuries to students, or a bit over 2% of teachers involved in the reported cases of corporal punishment, were disciplined with harsher measures[204]. The results suggest

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[202] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2010
[203] JFBA, 2011:9
[204] MEXT, 2013

that teacher violence in the form of 'corporal punishment' is not rare in Japanese schools, and that the majority of teachers who use violence against students do so with impunity. Corporal punishment operates as institutional violence against students.

Statistics on corporal punishment also give an indication of the political nature of discourse on school violence. The number of teachers who were reprimanded for the use of corporal punishment in the special survey mentioned above was almost 7 times as many as that reported in the official data collected annually by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry reported around 400 teachers per year from 2003 to 2011, in contrast to the 2,752 cited in the special survey[205]. Miller points out that official statistics, which have been used to record details of corporal punishment since 1990, ceased to exist in 2004[206]. Now, the statistics collected annually on corporal punishment are limited to the number of teachers disciplined, which is only a fraction of the actual incidence as seen above. Miller argues that the status of corporal punishment as a 'problem' has been marginalized in Japan[207].

What Miller[208] alludes to in relation to corporal punishment is the need to look at 'youth problems' from a social constructivist perspective which focuses on the process of how a particular issue comes to be problematized[209]. With regard to student-to-student bullying in Japan, Toivonen and Imoto demonstrated how its discourse 'has been linked to powerful actors in educational reform agendas as well as to a new 'industry' of

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[205] Hirai, 2013
[206] Miller, 2012
[207] Miller, 2012:89.
[208] Miller, 2012
[209] Goodman et al., 2012

experts and professionals, and how its measurement has undergone changes in the wake of new ideas about children's rights'[210]. As paradigm two of bullying research advances, this kind of study based on a framework of sociology of knowledge, more specifically a social constructivist approach, will be particularly useful in further deepening our understanding of school bullying.

The above discussion of corporal punishment illustrates the need to think critically about the established categories. Although corporal punishment itself may not be an issue in many schools, it is relevant in the second paradigm of school bullying which defines bullying in terms of social violence[211]. Also, the use of power by teachers is part of everyday life in schools, the distinction between clear-cut cases of abuse of power, such as corporal punishment, and 'legitimate' use of power by teachers which students may still find hurtful is not always clear.

2) Teacher-student bullying

Despite the phenomenal increase in research on school bullying in the past three decades, there has been a general paucity of research on bullying of students by teachers and vice-versa[212]. The first empirical study on this issue is probably the 1996 survey by Hata[213]. His data, collected from 767 teachers (423 primary, and 344 junior high) and 1,211 students (712 primary, and 449 junior high) in Japan indicated that: 12 % of students at both primary and junior secondary levels felt that they were

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[210] Toivonen & Imoto, 2012:9
[211] Schott, 2014:31
[212] James, 2008; Weller, 2014
[213] Hata, 2001

bullied by teachers either 'often' or 'sometimes' (as against 'rarely' and 'not at all')[214]; 14% of primary school teachers and 11% of junior high school teachers felt that they have bullied students either 'often' or 'sometimes'[61]; 37% of primary school teachers and 24% of junior high school teachers thought that what they do or say influences student-to-student bullying 'greatly'. Another study conducted relatively early in Norway by Olweus[215] also found that approximately 2% of 2,400 primary and lower middle school students were bullied by teachers, 10% of the teachers bullied students, and bullying by teachers occurred in about 50% of the classes investigated. Weller surveyed the literature on bullying of students by teachers and concluded that the range of teachers reported to have bullied students is 7.7 to 18.0% and the range of students reported to have been bullied by teachers is 25.0 to 86%[216]. Although there is considerable difference in the percentage of students who reported having been bullied by teachers, existing research suggests that teacher-student bullying is prevalent and is likely to be part of everyday life in many classrooms and schools.

What would be the implications of bullying of students by teachers? The negative impact of abrasive teachers outside Japan[217] as well as in Japan[218] on the students who were directly targeted has been discussed. As Peter Smith writes: 'What teachers do in the classroom is an important consideration in understanding bullying among students'[219]. The

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[214] Hata, 2001:139
[215] Olweus, 1999
[216] Weller, 2014:45
[217] Weller, 2014:38-39
[218] Yoneyama, 1999:174
[219] Smith, 2014:154

association between students' perceptions of classroom climate and peer bully/victim problems has been reported, and the measure of classroom climate included students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers[220]. While there has been a paucity of empirical studies that focus directly on the relationship between teacher-to-student aggression and peer victimization, the question of 'how (or whether) student-teacher relationships may affect bullying behaviour among students'[221] has been empirically explored in a recent study in Spain involving 1,864 students aged 8 to 13. Lucas-Molina et al. found that 'students' reports of direct and indirect teacher-to-student aggression are associated with students' reports of physical-property attacks and verbal-social exclusion victimization by their classmates'[222].

While such behaviour by teachers is no doubt problematic, the power relationship in school 'can flip over between power-dominant teachers and power-dominant students, depending on the actual profile of teachers and students'[223]. It is quite possible that abrasive teachers are responding to threat[224], and this could very well be threat from students. The power dynamics within a classroom are very complex and teacher-student relationships need to be understood in that context. In order to understand it, it is essential to understand how groups work in relation to bullying in the institutional setting of schools.

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[220] Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006:39
[221] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003:318
[222] Lucas-Molina et al., 2015:13
[223] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003:323
[224] Weller, 2014:32-35

Group Dynamics

It has been recognized that Japanese researchers have been 'particularly attentive to bullying as a group phenomenon'[225]. Behind this research strength lies the fact that student-student bullying in Japan is mainly group bullying[226]. To put it into perspective, based on the empirical data compiled by Morita et al.[227] and adjusting the parameters to make the comparison possible: single bullying comprises about 8% of bullying in Japanese schools[228], whereas it is 30-40% in Norway[229] and 61% (male) and 44% (female) in Australia[230]. Referring to the mode of bullying elaborated by Morita[231], that a victim is inside the group rather than outside (i.e. Type II bullying), Schott remarks:

> This approach is in alignment with recent research that considers bullying to be a process of social inclusion and exclusion. And it opens the door to understanding the ways in which social exclusion is a significant mechanism for defining processes of social inclusion[232].

What follows is an attempt to integrate this knowledge of the dynamics of group bullying, available only in Japanese, into an English discourse in order to augment the theoretical understanding of the second paradigm of school bullying.

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[225] Schott, 2014:35
[226] Akiba 2004; Morita & Kiyonaga 1996; Morita et al. 1999; Yoneyama 1999
[227] Morita et al., 1999
[228] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003:319
[229] Olweus, 1993
[230] Rigby, 1996
[231] Morita, 1996
[232] Schott, 2014:36

The Four-tiered structural theory

Reflecting the fact that bullying in Japan (*ijime*) is primarily group bullying, Morita defines bullying as:

> A type of aggressive behaviour by which someone who holds a dominant position in a group-interaction process, by intentional or collective acts, causes mental and/or physical suffering to others inside a group[233].

This definition fits with his 'four-tiered structural theory' developed on the basis of a study involving over 1,700 students in primary and junior high schools in Japan in the mid-1980s. In this theory, bullying is explained as a group interaction of students classified into four categories: victim, aggressor, spectator, and bystander. Their relationships are illustrated by four layers of circles. In the innermost circle is the victim, who is surrounded by aggressors, who in turn are surrounded by spectators, and then bystanders. According to Morita, spectators participate in bullying 'with interest and jeering' and thus give positive approval. Bystanders, who form the most outer circle, 'witness the event but pretend not to see it' and thus implicitly condone the bullying[234].

There are some key points in this *group model* of bullying.

- Bullying is a *relational problem* and not a problem arising from individual attributes[235] and thus happens among ordinary students, as discussed earlier.

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[233] Morita, 1996:1
[234] Morita, 1996
[235] Morita, 2010:75

- Bullying happens most within a *group of friends*[236].

- Bullying is *fluid*, and rotation and reshuffling of status among those involved in the bullying can occur (although it can be stabilized when power-relationships have been solidified). For example, spectators and bystanders can be the victim at one particular time and aggressor at another time; and an aggressor can be a victim one day, and spectator the next[237].

- *The vulnerability of the victim is a product of the group interaction*, rather than the other way around[238].

- The instability of the victimization fills the class with *anxiety*[239].

- *Human relationships are thin* within a group involved in bullying. Students tend to be indifferent to the problems of others, and when their friend is victimized, they either ignore it, or take part in the bullying[240].

Morita's theory of collective bullying has been elaborated by other researchers. In relation to the vulnerability produced in the group's interactions, Akiba describes in her ethnographic study how labelling someone to have non-conforming characteristics and/or to be 'hated by everyone' constituted a reason for exclusion, and how students blindly follow the group once the labelling is 'decided'[241]. This accentuates an additional point in the theory of collective bullying that *conformity*

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[236] Morita, 2010:90
[237] Morita, 2010:134
[238] Morita, 2010:76
[239] Morita, 2010:134
[240] Morita et al., 1999:322
[241] Akiba, 2004

provides the syntax of vulnerability, and the logic of inclusion and exclusion[242].

Bystanders play a pivotal role in the maintenance of conformity, and Morita[243] claims bystanders determine whether bullying will be stopped or not. If a class functions well as a community, Morita argues, bystanders can intervene to stop bullying. The incidence of peace making declines with age however[244], leaving the class as a *dysfunctional* community that has lost its mechanism to counter bullying[245].

Morita points out that bystanders tend to be good students who are doing well academically and plan to go to university, who have internalized the conformist values of school, who are least selfish and most cooperative in class activities, and who find meaning in the school and in school structures[246]. Instead of providing a norm to stop bullying, 'good' and 'ordinary' bystanders in a dysfunctional community/class endorse bullying tacitly and thus bullying becomes the norm in the classroom.

Morita's theory can be used to explain the situation of 'Alex's class' as described by Søndergaard[247], where 'the children who had contributed to the intensification of contempt leading up to the physical attacks … remained invisible actors in the bullying scenario, and … were not included in the adults' condemnation and punitive reactions'[248]. The applicability of the theory goes

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[242] Yoneyama, 1999:169-170
[243] Morita, 1999
[244] Morita, 1999:318
[245] Morita, 2010:130
[246] Morita, 2010:133
[247] Søndergaard, 2014
[248] Søndergaard, 2014:62

beyond the role of bystanders. Søndergaard continues with a description of the class:

> Alex's class is also an example of a school class that perpetually sets the stage for anxiety, which reverberates throughout the group and generates a continual hunt for something or someone to despise. The level of noise is high. The jokes that the group finds funniest are sharply personal and ridiculing. There is a constant stream of contemptuous appraisal via text messages and the available online social-networking websites. The children struggle against each other in their attempts to gain control through reciprocal definitions of and conditions for humiliation. And the positions change: there are variations in who is assigned the position of being excluded and who is chosen as the primary target of contempt and humiliation[249].

In addition to what is explained by Morita's theory of bullying: the role of bystanders, anxiety and change in social positions in victimization, there seems to be another element operating here: what Akiba calls the 'dominant flow'[250]. In a Japanese class which was equally dysfunctional as Søndergaard's in Denmark, Akiba found that all students 'appeared quite sensitive to the dominant flow of what others thought and how they acted [and that this] dominant flow decided everything, regardless of the morality or justice of the dynamics and circumstances'[251]. This dominant flow seems to be referring to two things. One is '*nori*', the unpredictable, collective mood of the group at a particular point in time[252], and the other is '*kuki*', originally meaning 'air' (as in 'sniffing the air') or 'mood' (as in 'reading

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[249] Søndergaard, 2014:62
[250] Akiba, 2004:228
[251] Akiba, 2004:228
[252] Yoneyama & Naito, 2003:323

the mood'), but best translated as 'vibes' as in 'reading the vibes'[253].

The 'Dominant flow' (nori) and 'Reading the vibes' (kukiyomi)

According to Naito[254], *nori* is the collective feeling of exaltation students enjoy while being engaged in the 'game' of bullying. This shared feeling of emotional uplift with others in the group is the most important part of their value judgment: it constitutes their norm and functions as the foundation of their social order. Students in such a group fear, fetishize, and revere the collective emotional high they gain from the bullying. As in a party, what is considered most important is to enliven the atmosphere, and they will do whatever is required to get this high. Naito explains that in this context, bullying is an important way to produce and maintain the collective sense of high; and that for those who engage in bullying, bullying is a 'moral' action which is followed in their effort to gain, reproduce and maximize the collective thrill[255].

Based on the *nori*-principle, Naito[256] argues that a dysfunctional class has its own social hierarchy. The power in the hierarchy is based on how well a particular student can enliven the group emotionally. Those who can take a leadership role in it become the leaders of the group. Conversely, those who say or do things that go counter to the dominant flow are despised and hated as being 'immoral': to stick out of the dominant flow is unquestionably 'bad'; to stick out and be confident is

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[253] Yoneyama, 2008
[254] Naito, 2007
[255] Naito, 2007:167-174
[256] Naito, 2007

'unforgivable'; for those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy to appear confident and smiling is 'extremely bad'. Those who bring up such things as human rights, humanism, and the dignity of individuals are definitely 'hated' as they deflate the *nori* energy[257].

Doi[258] explains that students in such a dysfunctional community shudder with fear at the thought of sticking out in the group. Students fear being seen as non-conforming. In order to reduce the anxiety, he continues, they *read the vibes* and *go with the dominant flow*, so as not to spoil the fun[259]. In the book titled: *The hell of friendship: Surviving the 'read-the-vibes' generation* (original in Japanese), Doi remarks that the spectators who formed the third layer in Morita's model have largely disappeared in recent school bullying in Japan, and have merged into a large number of silent bystanders[260] Following Miyadai, Doi also points out that classes these days often consist of small 'cosmic islands'[261], with each small group working as a closed independent world, with few interactions between them. A student describing the situation said: 'a different group is like a different prefecture, and a different class is like a different country'[262]. In this situation, students' biggest fear is not having a group to belong to, and they will thus do anything to avoid being excluded.

Bullying occurs *within* such small friendship groups, as illustrated by the words of Sachiko, a student in Akiba's

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[257] Naito, 2007:172-173
[258] Doi, 2008
[259] Doi, 2008:27
[260] Doi, 2008:23
[261] Miyadai, 1994
[262] Doi, 2008:24

ethnographic study[263], who also described the process of how the vulnerability was initially established within the group:

> We were a group of six students. When I arrived at school one morning, I found that one of the group members was totally isolated from the others. Then my friends told me that they had decided to ostracize her, so I joined too…. I am not sure [why she got ostracized] but they said a lot of bad things about her… like she was "selfish" and never listened to people, or talked bad about us behind our backs. So I thought she should be bullied[264].

Akiba points out that students who belong to a 'friendship' group do not always have trusting relationships and many students in her study 'expressed concerns that they could not feel comfortable with their peer group'[265] for various reasons. These include not sharing the same interests and the fear of being seen to be associated with students who are 'hated' by others in the class. Despite being unhappy with the group they belong to, students have little choice but to cling to it as other groups are already firmly established, and not belonging to any group means being placed at the very bottom of the social ladder, the most vulnerable position in the class[266].

According to Doi[267], the function of bullying is to release tension in a group which otherwise would become extremely intense and suffocating. In particular, the laughter associated with bullying, i.e. taunting, jeering and making fun of the victimized member, becomes important as it creates 'light-heartedness' in the group and helps divert attention from other

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[263] Akiba, 2004
[264] Akiba, 2004:227
[265] Akiba, 2004:231
[266] Suzuki, 2012:111
[267] Doi, 2008

potential causes of conflict within the group. The techniques of provoking laughter are often learnt by watching TV variety shows where the words and deeds of comedians provide textbook-like examples of bullying[268].

Fujiwara[269] asserts that some teachers adopt the same technique of using laughter as a strategy for class management:

> When a homeroom teacher cannot be the pivot of the class, the atmosphere of the class becomes permanently unstable. Such a class is in need of a clown. The model to follow can be found in variety-shows in television, which revolve around a clown – the bullied – who is constantly laughed at each time s/he screams at being poked and pushed. The class follows the same power dynamics. To 'read the vibes' means to grasp instantaneously the role to be played by each individual, to select a victim, and to direct the whole scene. The skill to operate 'vibes' can be regarded as a 'petit-fascism' in contemporary society. Some teachers have fallen into using this technique as it is an easy way to manage a class. Thus bullying has become a method[270].

In such a situation, Doi[271] explains, teachers are like 'big students' who 'read the vibes' at the same level as students. In such a class, Doi continues, the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students collapses and the traditional teacher-student relationship diffuses into the student-to-student relationships, which in turn provides the social environment that cultivates bullying[272].

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[268] Doi, 2008:32
[269] Fujiwara, 2006
[270] translated and quoted in Yoneyama 2008
[271] Doi, 2008
[272] Doi, 2008:42

Suzuki[273] also points out this blurred boundary between the teacher and students. In his enormously popular book, *School Caste* (original in Japanese), Suzuki argues that there is often a 'school caste' system of hierarchically ranked small groups of students within each class at secondary schools in Japan. Different levels of social power are assigned to each group and this creates a classroom climate that is conducive to bullying. He also argues that teachers usually get along well with the students who belong to the high ranked group, and use this hierarchy to maintain order in the class. Other students see this as a situation where teachers 'share/borrow' power from the group of powerful students[274].

The phrase 'school caste' suggests degradation of the management system in the school where it happens. As explained earlier, tacit approval from bystanders adds legitimacy, and a feeling of normalcy, to the bullying. The meaning of bullying as a norm gets stronger when students who belong to the most powerful group use the dynamic flow, i.e. the collective feeling of exaltation (*nori*), to their advantage. Bullying as cultural norm is legitimatized further when the teacher becomes part of it and uses the bullying as a method of classroom management by siding with this powerful group of students.

The accounts of group dynamics presented above do not mean that all classrooms in Japan are like this. The discussion is not about the prevalence but rather the morphology of group bullying and is highly relevant for understanding 'the extremely high level of social exclusion anxiety' in other parts of the

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[273] Suzuki, 2012
[274] Suzuki, 2012:208

world, as discussed by Søndergaard in the context of a Danish school[275] and by Bibou-Nakou *et al.*[276] concerning secondary schools in Greece.

What would be the implications of the above discussion in the broader context of a theoretical exploration of the second paradigm of school bullying?

Reflections for a Theory of School Bullying

This paper has focused on Type II bullying and attempted to use the knowledge on this aspect of bullying available in Japan, with the view to incorporate it into the theory building on school bullying in English. The paper has thus been framed as a discourse on school bullying that belongs to paradigm two. As such, it shares various ideas and points addressed by Schott[277] and Søndergaard et al.[278] who articulated the significance of the second paradigm in *School Bullying: New Theories in Context*. The following is an attempt to tie in this paper with some points raised in the book. It also raises a more fundamental question of frame of reference for further exploration on the theory of school bullying.

Binding power of school as social institution as precondition of bullying

The point raised by Schott in her definition of bullying that bullying occurs 'in relation to formal institutions, such as the

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[275] Søndergaard, 2014:50
[276] Bibou-Nakou *et al.,* 2012
[277] Schott, 2014
[278] Søndergaard et al., 2014

school, where individuals cannot easily leave the group'[279] is extremely relevant to the discussion in this paper. Without the binding power of schools as a social institution, it is hard to imagine how students and parents would put up with the obvious abuse of the human rights of children by corporal punishment and teacher-student bullying. In Japan and other East Asian societies, the pressure to attend school is extremely strong. This reality is best illustrated by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey [280], which indicates that students in Japan, Korea and Hong Kong, show some of the highest school attendance rates. Underlying this reality is so-called 'school faith', the belief that in order to be successful and happy in life, it is mandatory to do well at school[281]. The PISA data shows that with this 'school ideology', students in East Asia, including Japan, are bound to their school to a greater extent than students in other parts of the world. In addition, the homeroom system in Japanese schools further confines students with the exactly same group of students, not only for the whole day but for the whole year, leaving them little room to escape from this mini-community. The binding power of classroom community is further exacerbated in Japanese schools by the fact that school activities are organised into small-groups for learning, eating lunch, cleaning, doing chores, school events, and holding responsibilities [282]. The discussion presented in this paper about corporal punishment, teacher-to-student bullying and the negative power of group dynamics needs to be understood in this context.

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[279] Schott, 2014:39
[280] OECD, 2004:121
[281] Yoneyama, 2000
[282] Naito, 2001:119-37

Anomie in the formal and informal power structure of schools

The discussion of corporal punishment and teacher-student bullying has shown how violence used by teachers can be legitimised and hence ignored. It thus supports the attempt to define school bullying in terms of school violence[283]. At the same time, the discussion on group dynamics presented above has indicated the complexity of school factors that goes beyond the institutional teacher-student relationships. As pointed out by Schott:

> The ongoing process of constituting informal groups through the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion provides a social context for bullying. Changes in position are dangerous to group order, becoming a source of fear and anxiety since all members of the group risk being excluded. Bullying occurs when groups respond to this anxiety by projecting the threat to group order onto particular individuals; these individuals become systematically excluded as the 'other'[284].

Morita's theory of the four-tiered structure of bullying has explained well how this informal social structure encompasses an incident of bullying, maintains it through the tacit approval of bystanders, and thus turns the class into a dysfunctional community that has lost its power to deal with the bullying. The discussion on group dynamics on the other hand has illuminated the workings of an anxiety-laden informal group: bullying is a way of using 'having fun' to reduce tension within groups, conformity functions to provide the justification and 'grammar' of bullying, students (and teachers) need to read the

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[283] Schott, 2014
[284] Schott, 2014:39

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vibes as the ultimate sign of conformity in order to ride successfully on the flow of negative but intoxicating energy of informal groups, and bullying based on groups leads to an informal hierarchy on which even teachers may depend.

The discussion of corporal punishment, teacher-to-student bullying and the power dynamics of informal groups suggests the possibility that anomie, i.e. a collapse of social norms and ethical standards, has occurred in some classrooms and schools, not only among students but also among teachers, turning such classes and schools into dysfunctional communities that have lost the ability to deal with or stop bullying. Although examining the usefulness of the concept of anomie is beyond the scope of this paper, the relationship between some institutional aspects of school and characteristics of school bullying has been examined as will be discussed below.

Bullying as an undesirable school avatar

It has been pointed out that bullying in Japanese schools is often committed using social and institutional norms as a justification. Similarities between the institutional structure of schools and the morphology of group bullying have been pointed out[285] in relation to a school norms group-based management, pressure to conform, and the organizational arrangement of the school. For instance, 'bullying that is exercised on the grounds that someone is not following a group norm or implicit agreement of the group, is legitimatized by the power of justice, and has the characteristics of sanction within a

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[285] Morita 1996, 2010; Naito, 2001; Yoneyama, 1999; Yoneyama & Naito 2003

group'[286]. This explains why students are bullied after being labelled as 'selfish, egotistical, troublesome to others because of slowness in doing things, forgetful about bringing things to school, not following rules, unclean, having unusual habits, etc.'[287]. With detailed analysis of the school rules and the morphology of bullying, Yoneyama[288] argues that bullying is an over-adjustment to the institutional aspects of school, and thus has a complicit relationship with them. Although students themselves may not be aware of it, bullying 'serves as an illegitimate, "school-floor", peer-surveillance system, which helps to perfect the enforcement of school rules'[289]. Such conformity can be a 'by-product' of bullying, which takes place in a social environment where being different is seen as weakness[290]. In particular, in an environment where corporal punishment and/or teacher-student bullying prevails, bullying can become a learned behaviour or a school avatar which represents the negative and undesirable aspects of power relations in the school.

Bullying as a longing to belong

Quite paradoxically, the analysis of group dynamics presented above has suggested how bullying can be an expression of a longing to belong[291], based on the urge to exclude someone else in order to be included in the group. The PISA results mentioned above also indicate that students in Japan showed the lowest sense of belonging to school among the 44 countries

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[286] Morita, 2010:118
[287] Morita, 2010:118
[288] Yoneyama, 1999
[289] Yoneyama, 1999:169
[290] Yoneyama, 1999:170
[291] Hansen et al., 2014

surveyed, in clear contrast to their high attendance scores[292]. This sense of belonging was based on student responses to questions concerning how they feel about school: whether they 'feel like an outsider' at school, 'feel awkward and out of place', 'feel lonely', 'do not want to go to school', or 'often feel bored'. Importantly, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong formed a cluster in the chart, indicating a similarity of student experiences. They endure the contradictory relationship between pressure to attend school, and emotional disengagement from it[293]. This empirical reality constitutes another socio-institutional context of school bullying in Japan, and also potentially in other (East) Asian societies. It is possible that underlying bullying there is a deep sense of alienation among students, a sense of disconnectedness with the social institution of schools. If so, bullying can be a way of compensating for this void by colluding and connecting with others on the bullying side.

Various sociologists have argued that we have been living in an era called 'late modern'[294], 'second modern'[295], or 'liquid modern'[296] since around the 1980s, which is characterised by the weakening of social bonds that were previously provided by social institutions. The sense of connectedness and belonging that school as a modern institution can provide seems to have declined. In this broad picture, Japan can be seen as a case representing extreme modernity. As McCormack points out 'Japan, as the most successful capitalist country in history, represents in concentrated form problems facing contemporary

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[292] OECD, 2004:121
[293] see Williams & Yoneyama, 2011
[294] Giddens, 2000
[295] Beck, 1999
[296] Bauman, 2000

industrial civilization as a whole'[297]. Likewise, schools in Japan can be seen to represent institutional characteristics of schools in modern industrial societies in the most concentrated form[298]. If this were correct, in order to illuminate further the nature of school bullying, it would be useful to juxtapose the aspects of bullying discussed here with a mode of education that is very different from that of schooling as a modern institution.

Seeking a new frame of reference

In this context, Steiner education provides an intriguing frame of reference. Its highly established philosophy and practice of education illuminates the characteristics of schools that we take for granted in 'modern' and 'conventional' education systems. In one of a limited number of studies on bullying in alternative schools, Rivers and Soutter[299] examined the effect of school ethos upon bullying, the very same topic explored in this paper. They argue that school ethos grows from principles such as non-competition and non-hierarchy, encouragement of groups with diversity, and an underlying emphasis on moral education. They found that although there was some bullying in the Steiner school where they conducted their survey, it was a minor problem when compared with the results of other studies. In a study on the relationship between classroom climate and bullying by Yoneyama and Rigby[300], one of the schools ('School D') included in the study was a Steiner school. The study found that students' perceptions of the classroom climate were far more positive than in the other four schools in the study, which included elite private and government schools. This difference

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[297] McCormack, 1998:5
[298] Naito, 2001:32
[299] Rivers & Soutter, 1996
[300] Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006

between the Steiner school and the other schools has been confirmed to be statistically significant [301], although, interestingly, no statistically significant difference in bullying was found between the Steiner and other schools in the study.

This leads us to a reflective question as to why students find it necessary to 'have fun' through bullying. Yoshida, who specializes in (w)holistic education, which includes Steiner education, asserts that bullying becomes a non-issue when students experience wholehearted enjoyment and happiness that connects their actions directly with their inner self, but that this is often suppressed by social expectations[302]. He writes that:

> If each person listens closely to the voice of her/his inner <self> and lives a life with the power it generates, that will be the best solution to bullying. When you bully someone or are being bullied by someone, take it as an indication that you do not have the kind of joy that livens up your life. If this is the case, you need to create a space where you can really enjoy your life. Wholehearted happiness is contagious. To be able to enjoy learning and teaching at school may seem a long way as a solution to bullying, but it actually is a short cut to it[303].

Yoshida raises an important point that a sense of connectedness might be a good antidote to bullying. This echoes the notion of bullying as a longing to belong in a school community that does not, or cannot, provide an adequate sense of belonging for students, and has turned into a dysfunctional community that has lost the power to deal with bullying.

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[301] Yoneyama, 2015
[302] Yoshida, 1999:49-63
[303] p.49, translated by and quoted in Yoneyama 2007:34

Now that we are moving beyond the first paradigm of bullying research into the second, and paying more attention to schools as a social environment, it is essential to broaden the reference point to include education systems that are different. In this sense, it seems important to include not only Japan/Asia but also Steiner/(w)holistic education in the mainstream discourse on bullying research. In relation to the discussion above, Steiner education suggests a need to examine the key concepts, such as group, authority and hierarchy, and conformity in a different light, as each is discussed in a different, more positive context[304].

From the viewpoint of the sociology of education, schools play two contradictory roles: social reproduction and social change. Research into school bullying based on the second paradigm illuminates the nature of education through an examination of what appears to be problematic behaviour among students. In that sense, it is ultimately an endeavour to improve the school environment and maximize student learning and well-being. Focusing only on the problematic aspect of schools, however, is limiting. For a more critical and fundamental examination of the relationship between school/classroom environment and bullying among students, inclusion of alternative education, such as Steiner education, as a comparative frame of reference is likely to deepen our understanding of bullying further and may lead us to envisage a third paradigm of research into school bullying.

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[304] see for instance, Beaven, 2011

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