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8th May 2015
Boys’ Perspectives of Peer-Bullying in Ghanaian Secondary Schools

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PhD Thesis

University of Edinburgh
2015
Abstract

This research explores boys’ perspectives on peer ‘bullying’ in one Ghanaian secondary school. Since the 1970s, empirical studies on bullying in the UK (and other global north countries where the term bullying is commonly used) have received increasing attention (Sondergaard, 2012). This extensive body of work, which is often multidisciplinary, has examined bullying in schools and focused particularly on harassment and aggression amongst peers (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). To date however, no empirical studies on understanding bullying in schools in Ghana have been conducted.

This exploratory qualitative study is positioned within a constructivist paradigm using a case study design. Twenty boys from one secondary school in Ghana were interviewed using one-to-one semi-structured interviews, which were supplemented by using a vignette (hypothetical scenario) in order to stimulate discussion among boys. In addition, group interviews, observations, school mapping exercises, and interviews with adults were conducted. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The key findings of this research include the observation that while the boys engaged in interactions and competitive behaviours that have been readily associated with ‘bullying’ in other national settings such as the UK, boys who participated in this study did not use the term bullying (or any similar word) to describe such behaviour. Many of ‘bullying-like’ behaviours amongst the boys were not construed as negative; rather, they tended to be normalised and viewed as a ‘natural’ way in which children mature and grow up. They were also interpreted by boys as a way of gaining status which warranted little or no adult intervention. This study suggests that ‘bullying’ acts were not named or labelled as such because they happened in a friendly and generally supportive atmosphere, where the boys related to each other as members of a cohesive community.

The boys coped with such ‘bullying’ behaviours by acting in ways defined as masculine, as expected in their socio-cultural (as well as institutional) context. It followed that those boys who did not play out the expected and quintessential masculine roles were disadvantaged in such interactions. The informal socio-
cultural conventions of the current case study school dictated a hierarchical environment where boys (men) were placed on a socially advantageous platform that also expected them to be tough and to hide their vulnerabilities.

The current study emphasizes the need to thoroughly examine the socio cultural setting when understanding the phenomenon of ‘bullying’ and related behaviours. This study’s approach, informed by symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1959), has unveiled an alternative understanding of ‘bullying’ behaviours in the case study school which has some implications for understanding the phenomenon of bullying behaviour more generally in other national settings.
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God bless you all!
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Chapter 1

Introduction and background of the thesis

1.1 The journey and background of the current study

This chapter introduces the thesis by explaining the aim, the background and the approach taken in this case study; to understand boys’ perspectives of peer-bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools. This introduction explains my journey from how I became interested in this topic through to an explanation of the interactionist approach taken. Furthermore, sociological definitions and meanings of bullying are offered as a means to lay a foundation for the focus of the study. I continue by identifying child rearing practices in Ghana, such as attitudes towards punishment, and how childhood is viewed. This will provide the basis for understanding boys’ experiences and actions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the organisation of the thesis.

My interest in peer bullying began when I relocated from Ghana to the UK. Unlike the Ghanaian context, I observed in the UK that the concept of bullying seemed to be perceived as a social problem. It was a word which was regularly used by people of all ages and it was a notable theme prominent in quality press (Brown and Munn, 2008). It seemed to be a broad ‘catch all’ term used to refer to a wide range of behaviours including extreme physical violence, as well as relatively minor acts of aggression amongst people in various settings, but with a particular focus on young people in schools (Smith, Madsen, and Moody, 1999; Brown and Munn, 2008). I became aware that it was a requirement for schools in the UK to formulate policies for preventing and dealing with bullying. An implicit assumption evident in literature which addressed tackling the issue in schools was that the idea that a ‘bullying-free environment’ was desirable and possible within the UK context (Cowie et al, 2008). Yet, despite popular and professional concerns expressed about bullying and its high profile nature, it became evident that not everyone understood it in the same way.

In trying to understand the issue, I reflected on whether ‘bullying’ was a term
which identified a set of behaviours, or whether it was more concerned with
the intentions of those involved, and the consequences of these acts. Over time
I came to the view that the best way to understand it was as the way in which
(some) people in the UK interpreted, understood and labelled particular acts,
which are also usually perceived as negative.

My experience of growing up and working in the education sector in Ghana
appeared to be similar in terms of children and young people’s actions and
interactions in the case study school, but I held quite different ideas about how
such actions were categorized and labelled. I did not recall ever using the term
‘bullying’ or any analogous term being used in schools or elsewhere in Ghana.
From my experiences in these two national settings, it appeared that ‘bullying
like behaviours’ was not used in Ghana (if at all) in the way that it is used in
an explicit manner in the UK. I therefore became intrigued to understand how
the terminology was being used in the UK. Exploring how behaviour, which
would be labelled as ‘bullying’ elsewhere, is understood in Ghana provides
the opportunity to examine taken for granted assumptions about the nature of
bullying, which may prove informative across national settings. It is important
to note that I did not start from the position that the approach to understanding
and labelling behaviour in Ghana is better than in the UK or vice versa. I did,
however, think that an investigation into the Ghanaian way of understanding
behaviour might present alternative ways to understanding some of what I
had observed being labelled as bullying and negative in the UK. I searched
for academic literature to try to help me make sense of my experience of the
contrast between how behaviour was understood in Ghana and in the UK.
These initial questions developed into the focus of the current study, and also
led to the interactionist approach taken which is explained fully in section 1.2.

While the word “bully” could be traced to the 1500s, which at that time referred
to a ‘good friend’, it’s meaning and interpretation shifted to become negative
by the 1700s and has remained so (Harper, 2008). In the UK, a move towards
reforms to protect and improve children’s lives and their welfare, such as the
ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1991,
brought bullying to the forefront of popular discourse, extending its meaning
to many different forms and types of interactions (Donnelly, 2012). Sercombe
and Donnelly (2012) vividly capture this when they maintain that,

the rapid expansion of the bullying discourse is also an issue. It
has happened partly because of the moral power of the word: it
is a word that gets traction, it commands action. As with all such words, there is significant potential for over-use, for misuse, for a general inflation of the linguistic currency so that bullying is used to name any unpleasant interactions. In the process, the word loses its meaning. This is already happening. In order to preserve the power of the discourse, commentators need to be clear not only about what bullying is but what it is not. Sercombe and Donnelly (2012, p.494).

This process of expansion of the use and recognition of the term appears to have happened in the UK in the early 1970s after the media portrayed several institutions such as homes, schools and churches as unsafe places for children (Childline, 2005). There has been a parallel growth in empirical studies on bullying in the UK since the 1970s, especially within schools in the UK. In contrast, no empirical research on understanding bullying in the Ghanaian context, and from Ghanaians’ perspectives, had been carried out in Ghana. This was possibly because the phenomenon had not been identified as a problem in this particular national setting. As a result, throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘bullying-like’ to refer to behaviours which are termed ‘bullying’ in some settings. I preferred to use the term ‘bullying-like’ to describe how I constructed the boys’ interactions that would be seen as bullying in a UK secondary school setting.

The expansion of the use of bullying within the UK from the 1970s can be seen as following on from early research on bullying in global Northern countries, which mostly began in Scandinavia (Pikas, 1989). According to Pikas (1989), Paul Heinemann was one of the first academics to bring bullying to public attention when he observed a group of boys chasing one boy out of the playground in 1969. He drew on further observations of this type of behaviour by school children and theorised the phenomenon in relation to similar activities in the animal world. Heinemann’s observation bears a striking equivalence with that of Lorenz (1966), when he posits that,

… aggression elicited by any deviation from a group’s characteristic manners and mannerisms forces all its members into a strictly uniform observance of these norms of social behaviour. The nonconformist is discriminated against as an outsider and, in primitive groups, for which school classes or small military units serve as good examples, he is mobbed in the cruel manner. Lorenz (1966, p.66).

Heinemann compared such behaviours in a human social context within a
largely ethological paradigm, and termed the interactions of these children as ‘mobbing’, and regarded their occurrence as natural spontaneous incidents where an outsider disturbed the stability of a social group (Lorenz, 1966). The group responded to the disturbance by a show of aggression and collective strength and stability was thus restored.

Due to the widespread popularity of Heinemann’s books, the term ‘mobbing’ (Scandinavian translation of the term ‘bullying’) became very common and was oversimplified to become synonymous with any minor social aggression and bullying (Heinemann, 1972). Professor Dan Olweus, one of the pioneering researchers on bullying, also built on Heinemann’s work but moved from his concentration on innate behaviours towards a greater consideration of the influence of childrearing on the personality of bullies and victims. Olweus’ (1973) study on bullying received widespread attention because of the incident where three boys (aged 10-14) committed suicide in 1982 as a result of being bullied in a school in Norway. This led to a Government funded national campaign against bullying in Norwegian schools the following year. Whereas Heinemann was primarily concerned with the investigation of group cohesion and collective aggression, Olweus was concerned mainly with the phenomena of male aggression. The current study, however, does not seek to portray a quintessential use and/or construction of the term bullying, it seeks to focus on understanding how behaviours that would be labelled as bullying in an environment such as the UK, would be understood or constructed in an environment such as Ghana, where the use of the term bullying is not common (see 3.6).

1.2 A case for an interactionist approach

In this section, I set out the rationale for drawing on a symbolic interactionist approach. As, detailed in Chapter 2, this approach offers opportunities to gain insights into how meanings are attributed to behaviour in boys’ peer-cultures and the wider school culture where it occurs. Given that my study focuses on boys’ interactions in a Ghanaian secondary school setting, taking a symbolic interactionist approach enables an investigation into the meanings they attribute to their behaviour through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

This is in line with Blumer’s (1936) belief that an act is best understood when the processes involved in the conception of the social self are also understood.
Relating this to the current study, boys’ interactions are symbolic where they interpret each other’s actions based on the meaning derived from the negotiated meanings given to each situation.

The position taken in the current study is that while children and young people within different national settings may exhibit the same behaviour, such behaviour occurs within a particular social and cultural context (Blumer, 1936) which involves role-taking (Mead, 1912). Adopting this approach enabled me to capture the complexity, meanings and richness of the boys’ behaviour as it is understood in a Ghanaian secondary school setting. This opportunity is important as the boys’ actions are explained in relation to others in the case study school context in which both the boys and others are viewed as reflective individuals, who make their meaning through their unique interpretation of actions. In this way, while the boys are actively involved in making and creating the meaning of their actions, they are also involved in a process of role-taking during interactions (Mead, 1912; Blumer, 1936). Whilst describing the theoretical approach to this thesis as symbolic interactionism, it is important to note that symbolic interactionism comes in many forms (Rose, 1962a). Therefore, in Chapter 2 of this thesis I provide an account of the version of symbolic interactionism which underpins this thesis.

From my experiences of living in Ghana and in the UK, although behaviour understood as bullying in the UK does occur in the school context in Ghana, how this behaviour is understood in Ghana is quite different. In particular, I was interested in the meaning-making processes of how some acts come to be seen as deviant in some peer-cultures, and the wider school culture, but not in others. How I explored the boys’ behaviour in Ghana, and how they understood and talked about it, was informed by my reading of how behaviour comes to be identified as bullying elsewhere.

Given that ‘bullying’ appeared to be largely a ‘global north’ concept, this study presented some methodological challenges. It was important to take great care to ensure that I did not import terminology which was alien and unfamiliar to the boys, as some researchers have been accused of doing. Therefore it was essential that I found creative ways to talk about bullying behaviour with the boys without using the term (see Chapter 4 for more on the methodological implications). Taking this approach allows me to ask questions about the process whereby behaviour which is seen as deviant in boys’ peer culture and the wider school culture, is understood differently in another. It gives insights
into how childhood is understood and how behaviour between young people is perceived, specifically in the case study school.

It may well be that in Ghana, bullying is seen as a private trouble and not a public problem, indeed Pearson (1983) argues that this was the case in the UK until the 1970s. One possible consequence is that there may be some children and young people in Ghana being hurt by their peers but with no easy way of getting help and support because it is not recognised as a problem. This is in contrast to the UK where bullying has been suggested to be “the most malicious and malevolent form of deviant behaviour widely practiced in schools” (Tattum 1989, p.13).

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s (1858-1917) study of deviance is illuminating to the interactionist approach taken, as he posits that “behaviour is not inherently deviant or normal, but instead, it is defined by the people in charge of defining” (Erikson, 1966, p.11). Erikson describes the uniqueness of each community in terms of its set of moral boundaries and, for that matter, the uniqueness in deviance. This is based on one of the foundations of the study of deviance postulated by Durkheim that “groups tend to induce, sustain, and permit deviant behaviour.” (Erikson, 1966, p.11). While Durkheim maintains that deviant behaviour is inevitable within societies and social groups, Erikson maintains that the reaction of the society toward deviance is contingent on the perceived threat posed by such deviance. In effect, “a group is distinguished in part by the norms it creates for handling deviance and by the forms of deviance it is able to absorb and contain.” (Erikson, 1966, p.11). In this way, what is understood as bullying in one cultural setting may not be perceived of as such in another.

1.3 Meanings and definitions of bullying

Clearly the concept of bullying is understood differently from within various disciplines, such as psychology and sociology. Further, within each discipline there can be multiple perspectives. Moreover, identifying clear-cut conceptual boundaries between empirical studies that have adopted a particular disciplinary approach may not be a simple task (even though it is outside the scope of this study to do so). Nevertheless there are elements within the definition of bullying that tend to run across many definitions of bullying. Researchers generally agree on four elements as essential in defining bullying:
intention to harm; repeated actions; causing harm and imbalance of power. Olweus’ (1993, p.9) definition is helpful and he maintains that, a “student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.” While Smith and Sharp (1994, p.4) define bullying as “a systematic abuse of power within relationships,” gives a more expansive definition by defining it as a “repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person.”

The source of power could be from occupying a higher social status; numerical advantage; or physical and psychological strength (Craig and Pepler, 2007). The elements that are common amongst definitions of bullying are seen in Rigby’s (2002, p.51) definition which portrays bullying as “a repeated desire to hurt/hurtful action, where there are power imbalances, where there is evidence of enjoyment by the aggressor and a general sense of being oppressed by the victim.” Some researchers (eg, Bosworth, Espelage, and Simon 1999; Espelage and Swearer 2003; Nansel et al, 2001; Newman, Murray, and Lussier 2001) identify bullying as a behaviour, which involves physical (eg, hitting, pushing, shoving and kicking) and verbal (eg, taunting, teasing, threatening, spreading rumours and rejection) forms of aggression amongst children and young people as identity based bullying which involves the prior victimisation relating to children’s identity such as their religion and sexual orientation. In summary, bullying has generally been described as a type of aggression which involves an imbalance of power and which is done repeatedly to another person who cannot defend him/herself easily.

Recognising or quantifying these elements may not be a simple task to perform; how does one measure somebody’s intentions even if an action appears to be negative; and how does one look out for repetition of behaviour or what counts as a repetition of behaviour? For example, one action may be recalled back in a victim’s mind many times, which could mean a repetition of consequence without a repetition of actions. In addition some victims may not be able to comprehend the impact of their actions as a result of their reasoning ability or their age. Despite these difficulties the four elements have been seemingly embraced by many as basic parameters in defining bullying (Espelage et al, 2003).

In empirical studies on ‘bullying’, a range of different terms has been used (Brown, 2011). For instance, countries have adapted and used different terms: “mobbing” in Scandinavian countries, Germany, and Italy (eg, Hoel
and Cooper, 2000); “emotional abuse” and “school mistreatment” in the USA, and “moral harassment” in France and Spain. In some cases, it is also referred to as “harassment” (eg, Björkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back, 1994a) and “victimisation” (eg, Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). Still, Hoel et. al, (2001), distinguished bullying from “victimisation” in that “bullying” can be understood as an umbrella concept while “victimisation” encompasses the suffering end of a continuum of bullying. Bullying has also been distinguished from harassment which has been associated with social injustice, “usually linked to gender, race, prejudice, discrimination” (Kaiser-Ulrey, 2003). While aspects of the research on bullying in the UK tend to focus on the behaviours of the bully, Scandinavian and German researchers tend to emphasise the experience of victims.

The current study constructs bullying as a label that has been used by a group of individuals (whether bounded together by cultural, situational, disciplinary or other shared principles and values) to describe a set of behaviours. What constitutes such label is arrived at by forces from people within a particular context/society (Thornberg 2010). The label is usually created by forces such as the media, politics and culture. This thesis does not attempt to make a normative statement about how behaviour ought to be understood or constructed. Yet, it purports that it is not enough to simply say, for example, that in the Ghanaian context certain sets of behaviours are not constructed and/or labelled as bullying and that therefore bullying does not exist. Rather, a creative approach is used in order to understand the participants’ own voices and perceptions and experiences of behaviours. As discussed in Chapter 2.2, how people feel about and respond to situations and interactions is inextricably bound with how behaviour is interpreted within the context. Hence my study seeks to understand the social norms and interactions within which certain kinds of behaviours emerge. In order to understand the meanings attached to behaviour and boys’ interactions in Ghana, there is the need to understand the context within which such behaviours occur. In doing this, the next section discusses the key elements in the Ghanaian situation that provide an important backdrop to understanding children’s behaviour and experiences.

1.4 The research setting: the social and cultural setting of Ghana

An understanding of the social and cultural setting of Ghana provides a background for understanding the context within which bullying-like
behaviour occurs. Ghana is a West African country bordered by Ivory Coast to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south, and with a 335-mile (539-km) stretch of coastline. It lies 400 miles (644 km) north of the equator and the annual mean temperature is between 26 and 29 °C. The climate is broadly divided into a hot, dry north and a humid south zone. This climate nurtures a range of vegetation and agricultural activities. Ghana covers a total area of 239 305 square kilometres and it has been divided into 10 regions and 137 district assemblies for administrative purposes. The ten regions are: Western, Ashanti, Greater-Accra, Eastern, Central, Brong-Ahafo, Northern, Upper West, Upper East and Volta. Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions constitute Northern Ghana. There are disparities in infrastructural developments between the south and the northern parts of the country. Factors such as the dry weather conditions, inequitable governmental developmental policies and continuing tribal conflicts have been attributed to the underlying causes of the hampered development of the north (Agbenyega, 2006; Owusu-Banahene and Amedahe, 2008; Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

Even though a combination of these factors may be detrimental to the growth of northern Ghana, this part of the country has many natural resources that the south does not have. There are particular cash crops such as Shea butter and vegetation that can only flourish in the weather conditions of the north. Some of Ghana’s main tourist ventures are located in the northern part of the country and one of the country’s six public universities, amongst other tertiary institutions, is also located there.

The other cachet of the north is the recent influx of many non-government organisations in their bid to fill up any disparities in developments that may exist between the north and the south. The idea of the south being privileged over the north, then, may be a notion of antiquity. Yet, the south is endowed with many of the industrial and commercial centres of the country, as well as the capital city, Accra, where the current research was undertaken.

A notable difference between the north and the south is the disparity in the quality and access to education in these two zones (Twum-Danso, 2012). Compared to the south, there are proportionally fewer schools in the north. These are less well-resourced than those of the south. For example, whilst you may find two out of 20 untrained teachers in a school in the south, it is common to find the opposite balance in a school in the north. Schools in the north, especially those in the rural areas, are typified by poor classroom
facilities and inadequate learning resources (Kyei, 2011; UNESCO, 2012). Yet, the issues affecting education in the north seem to have links with other issues in the area such as poor health, transportation and social services as compared to the south. Consequently, there is migration of both children and adults from the north to the southern parts of Ghana, especially notable cities like Kumasi and Accra (Agbenyega, 2006; District Directorate of Health Services 2012). Education is important to the people of Ghana; and a person’s level of education plays a key role in their status within the community and the respect accorded them. Education in Ghana falls under two broad categories, formal or informal, and it is the formal education sector which is directly relevant to this thesis.

The formal education sector is an organized education model, structured and administered according to the laws and regulations of the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education (MOE). These two bodies usually administer the curriculum which states objectives, contents and methodologies for all the subjects taught in institutions. Both teachers and students in such institutions are required to follow some form of program and such programs are assessed in order to confer certificates on students. The structure of the formal education system in Ghana does not appear to give much consideration to students’ interactions, values and attitudes that are relevant to the education system but which are not tested or assessed (GOG, 2002; MOE, 2002; GES 2012).

1.5 The organisation and structure of Ghanaian schools

The first cycle or ‘Basic Education’ level is comprised of two years of pre-school (kindergarten), 6 years of primary, and 3 years of Junior High School. Before 2002, pre-school education was not part of the first-cycle (Basic Education) system of Ghanaian education. It was introduced as a result of recommendations made by the President’s Committee on Review of Education Reforms in October, 2000, and had, by September 2006, become a progressive part of the universal, free and compulsory basic education structure (Agbenyega, 2006; Owusu-Banahene and Amedahe, 2008). The programme runs for two years, starting from the age of 4 to 6. It prepares children for formal education and it is mandatory that every child goes through it before starting their primary education.

Even though basic education is supposed to be compulsory, whether children attend school or not still rests on the jurisdiction of parents, as there are no
enforcements of children’s compulsory education. Parents or guardians who do not live up to their responsibility to see to the educational needs of their children make children vulnerable to child labour and, particularly for young women, early marriages; as early as 12 years old (Agbenyaga, 2006). Yet some of such children decide at a later age to educate themselves by enrolling in a school. When they do enrol in school, they are made to start from the primary stage, regardless of their age. This is one reason why it is possible to find a wide range of ages in the same level or class in Ghana which had implications for the organisation of classes in the present study.

Children in rural and remote areas, such as those in the northern parts of the country or in predominantly farming communities, are more likely to be affected by non-school enrolments than their counterparts in towns and cities (Twum-Danso, 2012). Some parents or guardians in farming communities see children’s non-school attendance as a benefit to them because they can use children as an additional work force on their farm (Agbenyega, 2006; Acheampong, Djangmah and Hunt, 2007; Owusu-Banahene and Amedahe, 2008). Yet, such parental practices seem to be diminishing, possibly due to the increase in awareness about the importance of formal education to children and their families and communities and their futures. The next subsection discusses childhood in Ghana in order to provide contextual insights on the wider background of children’s behaviour in the case study school.

1.5.1 Attending secondary school in Ghana

The minimum secondary school starting age in Ghana is 11 or 12, on condition that students had started at the official entrance age for the lowest level of education, and have continually studied full-time. However there is no upper limit on the entry age, which makes it possible for a student to start secondary school at age 14 or even later. Therefore it is very common to find students in one year group to have different ages in schools in Ghana. Another reason why one class may have children of different ages is because students often repeat years until they have passed the required examinations. In terms of leisure time at secondary school compounds are usually fenceless and play time unsupervised by any adults/teachers. Children and young people are expected to be competent negotiators in play and social interactions with their peers (Adinkra, 2012).

Secondary school education in Ghana is in two phases; Senior High School
is for 4 years (SHS) and Junior High School is for 3 years (JHS). At the end of JHS, students take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in 9 or 10 subjects. Since the number of places in SHS is usually not sufficient to accommodate all students who graduate and qualify from JHS, admission to senior high schools is competitive. At the end of Senior High School students take the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The current research focuses on students from senior high schools (there are about 500 secondary schools and each of them graduate between 300 to 800 students annually). All year groups in Senior High Schools usually have the same break time/lunch time (as schools usually have large playgrounds); thus enabling students from various year groups or levels to interact with each other during school time, in addition to classroom interactions. Some secondary schools have boarding facilities, where some students live in built facilities throughout term time. Schools have an official mid-term break for about a week, when students go home; otherwise boarding house students require special permission from a designated tutor to go home.

1.6 Childhood in Ghana

The UNCRC is described by UNICEF as the first legally binding international instrument that incorporates the full range of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (Twum-Danso, 2012). Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of its 54 articles and two optional protocols seek the interest of children under the age of 18 based on four core principles: non-discrimination; advocating for children’s best interest; the rights to survival and development, and children’s right for their view to be respected (Twum-Danso, 2012). Ratification of the convention requires member countries to submit a progress report within every five years.

The republic of Ghana ratified the UNCRC in February 1990, although it was not in force until September of that same year. This ratification was part of Ghana’s move towards creating a healthy environment for childhood and children (Agbenyega, 2006). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Ghana has demonstrated her commitment to improving the welfare of children through the signing and implementation of the UNCRC since 1990.
Situation analysis by UNESCO (2012) classified some children under 11 years as poor, with inadequate access to food, safe drinking water, health and education. The report showed that many children were being subjected to physical, emotional and sexual abuse. These forms of abuses included abuse, harassment, and corporal punishment and sexual and domestic violence. Children with disabilities also suffered from outright neglect and denial of access to education by parents ashamed of having a child with a disability. Punishment was a consistent theme in findings from the case study school, as presented in Chapters 5 and 6. As a consequence, the next subsection focuses on the issue of punishment in Ghanaian schools and its implications for children’s childhood experiences. This focus on corporal punishment is important as it is a commonplace and socially acceptable mode of discipline in Ghana, employed by teachers and parents. In Ghana the phrase ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ is a frequently heard saying with regard to child discipline (Agbenyega, 2006).

1.7 Corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools

Although many countries such as the United Kingdom have ceased to use corporal punishment due to its negative effects, (Agbenyega, 2006), Ghana still adopts the practice of inflicting physical pain as an official means of punishment. Using the cane is a typical form of corporal punishment in Ghana as a means of publically punishing students by teachers. When teachers cane students, it breeds fear in students Agbenyega (2006) and breeches their fundamental rights to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity, yet it is perceived as somehow breeding discipline and facilitating learning amongst pupils (Agbenyega, 2006; Owusu–Banahene and Amedahe, 2008; Kyei, 2011). In the late 1970s Ghana Education Service (GES) prohibited corporal punishment in schools by most teachers, yet allowed head teachers, or their assistants, to administer it to children. This was because it was identified that some teachers were abusing it and as a result causing physical harm to students (Agbenyega, 2006 Owusu– Banahene and Amedahe, 2008; Kyei, 2011). Some Christian perspectives, which influence policies in this area, support the ideology that discipline in children should be carried out by the rod or by using the cane. Teachers and head teachers, who are legally permitted to use corporal punishment, are only to use it as a last resort, provided alternative disciplinary measures have failed. Pursuant to the Education Act (1961), the Ghana Education Code of Discipline
for second-cycle school provides for caning up to six strokes by a head teacher or the person authorised by the head.

Officials may resort to corporal punishment, because they see that as an easy option and they may use that as a means of covering up their own inability to manage students properly. For example, Agbenyega (2006) reports on the practice of corporal punishment in two basic schools in the Greater Accra District in Ghana. He found that the majority of the teachers use corporal punishment on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis to enforce school discipline. Behaviours such as late coming, poor performance in class, or failure to perform an assigned school duty can all be liable for corporal punishment. Furthermore, the results indicated that the majority of the teachers in both schools that administered corporal punishment to such students were not willing to cease using corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment, in some instances, is used as a means of blaming students, without exploring the actual causes of the symptoms or behaviours. This is because there may be many reasons why students may be late to class or perform poorly in class, for example. Nabila (1988) questions the effectiveness of corporal punishment to correct behaviour in schools, and underlines the side effects of corporal punishment such as running away, fear of teacher, feelings of helplessness, and aggression. Similarly, Gershoff (2002) maintains that corporal punishment leads to increased aggression and lower levels of moral internalization and mental health. Cryan (1995) is of the view that the psychological effects of corporal punishment may be as harmful as their physical effects. An incident on 16th March 2008 in Adisadel College (an all-boys’ secondary school) depicts the devastating effects of corporal punishments experienced by some students. A student jumped to his death from the fourth floor of the school’s newly constructed classroom block to escape corporal punishment from the senior housemaster who had gone to the block to find students who had not attended a church service. A student witness, testifying before a committee set up by the Minister of Education to investigate the incident, maintained: “some of the punishments given to students are too harsh”. The report of the committee further stated: “there was evidence of fear on the part of students, that those who reported late for the common church service on Sunday 16th March 2008 were being caned by the tutors as punishment”.

Despite such extreme outcomes, the implications and consequences of corporal punishments can often be underestimated, as it seems to have been normalised
in Ghana. Some people and groups are calling for it to be fully reintroduced in schools in Ghana (Abgenyega, 2006) as a means of raising standards of students’ behaviour and learning. If this happens, it would mean that some of the teachers, who are currently not legally permitted to use corporal punishment, may begin to use it on students. A possible reason why people are calling for corporal punishment in schools to be made available to all teachers once again is because it remains lawful at home in Ghana. The Ghana Children’s Act (1998) allows for a degree of “reasonable” and “justifiable” punishment of children, stating in article 13(2) that “no correction of a child is justifiable which is unreasonable in kind or in degree according to the age, physical and mental condition of the child and no correction is justifiable if the child by reason of tender age or otherwise is incapable of understanding the purpose of the correction.” Children have limited protection from violence under the Criminal Code (1960, amended 1998), the Constitution (1992), and other provisions in the Children’s Act. The words ‘reasonable’ and ‘justifiable’ in the 1998 Children’s Act seems to be interpreted as giving room for, rather than prohibiting, corporal punishment. Still, the gap between theory and practice needs to be bridged in policies to be effective.

The challenge is with the issue of awareness of the law and how such laws can be enforced. Even if corporal punishment was totally abolished at home and in schools, it might take strict measures on the part of the government to be able to break cultural beliefs and practices that see its use as justifiable. Due to this background of what constitutes acceptable punishment in Ghana, it is broadly accepted that seniors can use physical chastisement on juniors, and that this normalization of physical punishment between boys may influence how behaviour between peers is understood in this context, as exemplified in the summary of the main findings.

1.8 Children as social actors in the current study

Childhood is not a fixed or natural state. Rather, it is socially constructed through historical, social, political and cultural factors. What may separate children and adults then, may have little to do with their biological ages.

Phillipe Aries (1979, p.128) maintained that “in medieval society, the idea of childhood did not exist: this does not suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised”. Aries (1979) explains that once children passed the
stage of infancy, their social lives were not different from adults. Over time, the notions of childhood has become an important reality (James and James, 2008). Yet, this reality is continuously and socially being constructed and re-constructed. As discussed in 2.1 under symbolic interactionism, individuals (children) are actively involved in this construction and meaning making process (Goffman, 1959).

Within the writings of the sociology of childhood, “generationing” and the life course perceptive, the active and complex role that children play in their own lives and the lives of others was highlighted (James and Prout, 1997). Arguably, when children are seen as social actors, it is easier to understand the complexities of their worlds and experiences. However many of those who hold to traditional beliefs do not conceptualise Ghanaian children as having the resources or the power to influence their own lives, or their surroundings. In contrast in this thesis, by emphasising the child as a social actor within this study, I enquire about the boys’ experiences from their own point of view and do not assume that adults or parents can speak on the behalf of children.

1.9 Overview of chapters and conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the research problem by depicting ‘bullying’ as a label produced by social interactions, which has often been researched with methods informed by psychological perspectives, which often does not address how some behaviours become identified as bullying. I have presented some empirical studies in global Northern countries that have used slightly different terms to represent bullying and how these might aid our understanding of the concept. While I differentiate between psychological and sociological perspectives and understandings of bullying, I also acknowledge that such differences are not always clear or distinct. An overview of the remaining chapters is now presented.

Chapter 2 explains symbolic interactionism as a framework for understanding bullying. I start with a definition of symbolic interactionism and debate the contributions and shortcomings that it presents. I argue that symbolic interactionism provides opportunities to study bullying as social processes, interactions and meaning-making in the everyday contexts of particular settings. It offers the possibility of developing a deep understanding of the culture and understandings that precipitate the concept of bullying.
A definition of bullying is not suggested to, nor forced on, participants, but they are able to offer their own understanding in their own words. Symbolic interactionism is used as a fundamental framework for understanding the sociology of bullying, which is buttressed by empirical evidence. This chapter then explores the concepts of power and gender in support of the interactions in the Ghanaian context, as a means of further explaining symbolic interactionism. Through an understanding of gender as a social construction rather than something that is naturally or biologically fixed, this thesis explores the differential experiences of boys in the case study school environment and how this impacts on their behaviour towards their peers and, finally, how this would aid the understanding of interactions and relations amongst students.

In Chapter 3, I explore the sociology of bullying and offer a rationale for adopting a sociological perspective by positing that ‘bullying’ can most usefully be understood as a meaning which is attached to behaviour. The chapter explores the interactions and factors that have been shown to contribute to such externalising behaviours, contextually understood as bullying.

Chapter 4 is focused on the methodological framework used in this research. I explain the rationale for a case study approach based on a series of methods and activities organised during the field work. This is followed by a discussion of thematic analysis used in this study.

Chapters 5 is the first of the ‘findings’ chapters. It evaluates the themes arising from the interviews and mapping activities. The term ‘bullying’ was not used in the case study school, nor was any analogous term employed. Whilst some bullying-like behaviours amongst the pupils appeared to be completely normalised, others appeared to be viewed as ‘normal’ only when teachers/adults were not present. Most of the interactions and behaviours that were reported that would be identified as bullying in other national settings were physical in nature. What respondents termed as extreme deviation from the norm was when a pupil abused others’ relatives. Issues of sexual and/or homophobic nature were said to be seen as taboo.

Boys were expected to take on some ideal forms of masculinity through a demonstration of strength, domination and control. The relationship between seniors and juniors, which dominated the discussions with the respondents in the study, was marked by the abuse of seniors’ authority through the use of force to make juniors perform duties and/or punish them. While interactions...
amongst all juniors and or all seniors were marked with mutual support and competition, seniors maltreated juniors when it came to interactions between seniors and juniors. Being a junior or a senior appeared to be central to a student’s identity in the case study school, which exemplified the hierarchical nature of the case study school environment. The fabrics of such identity are interwoven by an expression of masculinity and power within and amongst participants’ interaction.

Chapter 6 explores the terminologies used by the boys when describing the ‘bullying’ incident, and how it connected to both their experiences in the case study school and in the wider environment of the school. Furthermore, in line with the aims of the current study, it examines the implications of how the boys and others responded to such incidents.

Friendship amongst juniors was used by the boys as a coping mechanism to withstand maltreatments from seniors. Students who came from the same Junior High School or who came from the same village/city/home were likely to become friends or groups in the case study school. Students in the boarding system had more time at school to interact with each other than those in the day system.

Seniors in the boarding house had more access and ‘legitimate’ authority (which was usually translated into, or confused with, force) to punish/maltreat juniors in the boarding house than seniors in the day system had. Juniors in the boarding system experienced more maltreatment in their interactions with seniors than juniors in the day system experienced from any senior. Consequently there were differences in the experiences of day and boarding students’ experiences of their peer relations and interactions at school.

Whilst there appeared to be multiple perceptions of ‘childhood’ amongst the adult participants, the idea that childhood was a transition to adulthood dominated. Adults’ views of childhood appeared to be influenced by their own childhood experiences. There was a perception that childhood was characterised by negative interactions (behaviours that would be considered as bullying in the UK context). This was an adult perception that seems to have been embraced by the boys, because adults’ views are deemed important to young people in the case study school and context.

Chapter 7 discusses the main themes in Chapters 5 and 6, while Chapter 8 concludes this thesis and provides recommendations for constructing bullying
and understanding behaviour. I also provide a reflexive commentary on the research process and a critique of the methodological framework with the analysis of the findings.
Chapter 2

Symbolic interactionism and structuration: Understanding and constructing boys’ experiences

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical framework underpinning the current study. As introduced in Chapter 1, this thesis is focused on boys’ perspectives of their experiences of peer-bullying in a Ghanaian secondary school. In line with the sociological orientated nature of this study, this chapter explores symbolic interactionism as a foundational theoretical model to explain an aspect of social interaction (sometimes seen as a deviation from the norm and labelled ‘bullying’). The choice of symbolic interactionism rests on the premise that the key focus of the current study concentrates on the respondents’ perspectives, and on the meanings they attribute to their experiences, as introduced in 1.2. Symbolic interactionism is a broad perspective within sociology which is useful for exploring and understanding human beings and their behaviour in their social worlds; its principles rest on the premise that human beings act on the basis of meanings and understandings which arise through their interactions with others (Weber, 1978; Pollard, 1985). Whilst I started out on this research journey thinking that symbolic interactionism would be enough to help me to understand the boys’ interactions, it became clear as I analysed the data that there were broader macro level considerations which were relevant in understanding their experiences. This led me to draw on Giddens’ Structuration theory, which is therefore also discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 Symbolic interactionism

In this section I will discuss some key elements of symbolic interactionism and how these relate to the boys’ represented experiences and understandings of peer-bullying in the case study school. In discussing symbolic interactionism, key components such as the approach of symbols, mind, self, identity, roles and emotions are expanded upon. This is because the current study focuses
on the respondents’ subjective representation of their experience rather than looking for an objective knowledge of the events related within their accounts.

Symbolic interactionism primarily emerged from the works of George Herbert Mead and one of his students, Herbert Blumer, at the University of Chicago. This theory explains action and interaction as resulting from the meanings which individuals attach to things and to social action. In this theoretical approach Blumer (1969, p.2) describes the concept of external reality as subjugated to the interpretation of phenomena by individuals:

Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is a vast process in which people are forming, sustaining, and transforming the objects of the world as they come to give meaning to objects. Objects have no fixed status except as their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of the objects. Blumer (1969, p.2).

Blumer (1969, p.2) encapsulates symbolic interactionism under three premises: ‘The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings which those things have for them. Such “things” include other people, physical objects, organisations, ideals, activities of others and situations. The second premise is that the “meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.”’ (Blumer 1969, p.2). The third premise is that ‘these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process’ used by the person in experiencing their world. (Blumer 1969, p.2). Symbolic Interaction focuses upon micro-social components which underscore the ability of individuals to act and influence phenomena. It portrays human beings as active beings who respond meaningfully to what they encounter and base their actions on such meanings (Blummer 1969). For Mead (1934), people are objects who respond to the world and therefore, demand responses in return; interaction happens when the stimulation from one object provokes a response from another. In this way, humans do not passively respond in this interaction; they actively engage and participate in it.

Within a social environment an exchange of this nature can lead to a series of initiatives with both parties adjusting and readjusting themselves to the other (Mead 1934; Blummer, 1969). As previously discussed (see 1.2), bullying could be constructed as a label given to certain kinds of interactions that is created by certain people’s shared way of interpretation. In the proceeding sections, the
components of symbolic interactionism are used to expand upon such shared ways of understanding.

2.2.1 Symbols

Humans respond to, and define their worlds through communication; communication with interaction is used as tools or channels through which people’s understandings and definitions get to be shared (Mead, 1934). This implies that meanings and understandings of the world may not be static and are continuously being constructed and re-constructed (Mead, 1934). As people are born into communities, they are socialised through symbols which are expressed in the form of language, rules/norms, culture and the meanings of objects and actions. In as much as there may be multiple meanings and interpretations of such symbols within a given community, some of their understandings and interpretations are shared within the community or context. In other words, the interactions and behaviour may not be constructed as natural coincidences with universal meanings, but a unique and/or contextually bound symbol (Mead, 1934; Weber, 1978).

People actively learn the meanings of symbols both formally and informally through the socialisation of childhood, such as a child learning from their parents and learning at school. In doing so, they do not passively taken on everything they encounter but are creating and co-creating meanings while using the learnt and created symbols to gain their understanding of the world (Mead, 1934; Weber, 1978). Furthermore, this process, contributes to people’s understanding of themselves and the interactions they participate in.

In this way, it follows that, if bullying is used as a term in a particular community to represent certain behaviours and interactions, its contextual meaning may be shared amongst the members of that community. Accordingly, the term becomes a symbol that can be understood and interpreted by the members of that community, in ways which may differ from how others, in other communities, may interpret the same term.

2.2.2 Identity

In this thesis, and consistent with the symbolic interactionist approach taken, identity is understood as how an individual positions him/herself within a society and the environment; it involves our relationship with our environment
and our definition of the self within the society. Identity forms an important element in analysing the accounts of the participants as it gives clues into what it means to be a boy in the case study school and in Ghana. Importantly, a situational identity is subject to change and transferable under different contexts. A person’s social identity impacts on how s/he sees him/herself and how others see him/her, which influences interactions. Personal identity is about the uniqueness of an individual which is carried across to different social and situational circumstances. An understanding of these categories is important to the experiences and perceptions of the boys (participants) in the case study school. The accounts of the boys in the case study school about their interactions, the cultural preconceptions about their social identities as boys, give important clues to how behaviour is understood and/or perceived within the case study school context.

It could also be said to be a label which individuals or others use to situate the self in relation to other objects and people. Although identity emerges through interaction, one’s own can be confirmed through repeated interactions and outcomes. One’s identity can also be a lens through which an individual judges and interprets their interactions. As an individual’s identity is established through repeated similar experiences and outcomes, it may not be likely for it to be changed or altered by a single exceptional event.

2.2.3 Self

In this section I use Goffman’s (1959) notion of the social determination of human behaviour. This discussion is immediately followed by Mead’s (1934) exploration of the notion of the self, under which he discussed the relationship and distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ elements of that self. All these concepts are discussed as part of elucidating the theory of symbolic interactionism, which in turn will aid understanding of how ‘peer-bullying’ is perceived in the case study school. Goffman (1959) used the concept of dramaturgy to depict people as actors, whose actions may be influenced by the type of interaction they make with others. This is encapsulated in Blumer ‘s (1937, p.180) view that, ‘the term symbolic interactionism refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings’. So, when bullying has been used as a label (symbolising certain meanings with implications), it may not necessarily focus on one particular individual but more on interactions leading to externalising behaviours. Goffman (1959)
describes the social world as being a performance on stage. His understanding of performance is outlined concisely in his early statement that; a ‘performance’ may be referred to as one’s activity which has influence on others.

The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance, and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a part or ‘routine’, (Goffman 1959 pp. 26-27). Individuals are seen as actors participating in social action and interaction, often following a pre-established pattern, often in accordance with social norms. An individual’s behaviour then may be well understood and/or explained within the context where it occurs.

In the context of the current research, an understanding of bullying behaviour could be compared to performance, which revolves around the idea of ‘front’ (Goffman 1959). This idea is expressed in three different contexts. Firstly Goffman presents it as part of an individual’s performance/behaviour; in that the front “functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance; and it is the expressive equipment of a standard kind”, intentionally or unknowingly employed by the individual during behaviour/performance (Goffman 1959 p.32). He also discusses the idea of a personal front to refer to items of expressive equipment such as clothing, age, racial characteristics, body shape or facial expressions which can be most intimately identified with the performer him/herself (Goffman, 1959). Finally, he uses the idea of a front region to refer to the physical location where a behaviour/performance occurs (Goffman, 1959).

When in the presence of other people, some aspects of an individual’s behaviour or role are accentuated whilst other aspects, which might present a less favourable impression, are suppressed. For Goffman (1959), performances and behaviours are also influenced by their setting, for example the physical layout, as well as other background items which provide scenery and stage props. In order for a performance to be successful, the audience, observers and/or co-participants must be convinced that the performer is sincere. Such a performance is often maintained through the use of socially constructed scripts which set out how the performer should behave or interact with others in a given role or setting. Thus, performances are socialised, moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented (Goffman 1959 p. 44). Socially constructed scripts or norms can be a macro or broad phenomenon, made up of micro elements.
According to Branaman (1997) there are apparent paradoxes in Goffman’s work on the self with behaviour. The self is portrayed to be an entirely social product and also portrayed to contain an isolated component which drives individuals’ engagements with, and withdrawals from, social interactions. In addition Branaman (1997) argues that the suggestion of Goffman (1959) that individuals are not entirely socially determined, due to their ability to manipulate social situations and the impressions which others gain from these, contradicts his emphasis on ways in which individuals are constrained by social norms and expectations. I would suggest that rather than presenting unworkable contradictions, Goffman’s work embraces imperative tensions and the connections between individual autonomy and agency and the impact of societal norms and expectations (Goffman, 1959). Such tensions are somewhat discussed by Goffman himself when he suggested that when individuals present themselves to others, their performances tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society where they find themselves (Goffman 1959). The interplay between young people’s autonomy and societal norms and expectations will be explored further in Chapter 7 in relation to how ‘peer-bullying’ is experienced and perceived in the case study secondary schools.

Goffman’s work on stigma helps to clarify the focus of the current study and thus help provide insight into bullying in Ghana (Goffman, 1963). He identifies three categories of stigmatisation: blemishes of the body such as physical deformities, blemishes of character or behaviour such as alcoholism and tribal stigma associated with membership of a particular social group. For Goffman, stigma may be either enacted or felt. Enacted stigma is experienced through the ways other people act towards, or around, the stigmatised person, whereas felt stigma is where the stigmatised person internalises their fear of stigma being enacted and does this in a manner which limits their behaviour or opportunities. Enacted stigma is based on a perceived distinction between self and others, where the self is seen as normal and the other as abnormal or defective.

Beale (2010) maintains that experiences of stigma or ordering can have a deleterious impact upon an individual’s self-esteem, confidence and sense of self-worth. Thus Goffman’s work on performance and interaction rituals offers a useful starting point for exploring the ways in which young people relate to each other and to other people, and the ways in which this can be shaped by social and cultural norms and expectations.

In a number of the works discussed here, Goffman highlights the importance
of individuals presenting an image which will be accepted by others and of being able to employ face-saving tactics or avoid enactments of stigma. As mentioned earlier and as discussed later in Chapter 3, power is an element that seems to form an essential fabric of people’s performance and image presentations, alongside some of the other issues raised in this section. Being able to reflect on our actions and the way in which we interact with others enables individuals to view themselves as objects which have acted and been acted upon. Perceiving ourselves as social objects and reflecting upon our actions produce the capacity for us to judge the way in which the individual self acts. This allows us to develop a self concept, while our sense of judgement leads to the formation of a sense of our identity. Our identity involves who we are and our view on our actions and reactions in different circumstances. This ability to view the self as an object gives us the capacity to direct and control those actions. Also, how we view ourselves is influenced by how we perceive other people’s actions and reactions towards us. This emergence of the self is described by Mead (1934), when he viewed it, as a process which produces and reproduces itself.

With the concept of individuals acting strategically, Goffman (1969) maintains that people act to influence both their own behaviour and the actions of others. Individuals present themselves to others in social situations by aiming to guide or gain control on the impressions of others on them. Goffman (1969) used game theory to explain strategic interactions and discusses how individuals act with an intention to influence activities with the aim of achieving certain expected outcomes in the interaction. Individuals within interactions may be aware that, to some extent, their actions and reactions are mutually dependent. As Goffman (1969, p.101) posits, people’s actions and interactions are made ‘in the light of one’s thoughts about the others’ thoughts about oneself’, and the interchange and interactions associated with the self and others can be called strategic interactions. As the child learns gestures and meanings, this emerging self is identified by significant others and the child begins to value the views of those others who recognise the self. Through language, the meanings, objects and words are recognised to have shared meaning in interaction with others. The child learns to see itself from the identified view of another and by taking on the role of the other; becoming identified as a social being. The child’s appreciation of significant others extends to an appreciation of generalised other as it understands its role within a society.
When the individual interacts in different contexts, their perception of the generalised other becomes more varied. As individuals interact with different groups, these groups become reference groups, individuals use or transfer their experience of these groups to interact in certain ways according to this experience. According to Mead (1934), the mind, self and society relate the individual to the social world, which in turn affects his/her thinking and behaviour. The self can be seen as two things at the same time; an object that can be known and the knower of that object, which creates the possibility of reflexive knowing and reflexivity (Mead, 1934). Under reflexivity, individuals appreciate the views of others towards themselves and their actions. These views may be from relevant others, or generalised others. The individual’s ability to take on the perspective of a generalised other allows the individual access to a wide range of social discourses and common symbols and meanings.

Charon (2004) discusses self-communication; self-perception and self-control as three ways in which an individual relates and acts towards his or her self. Through self-communication, individuals interpret situations through talking and thinking to themselves in order to understand what they experience. They can be both communicator and object of that communication and by so doing, are able to interpret how to present themselves to others. In this way, “the continuous active ongoing process of thinking, conversing with one’s self when alone and during interaction with others, is key to understanding action” (Charon, 2007, p.28). People’s self-perception determines how they engage with others and over time they come to anticipate how others will react to them and how they should act towards them according to their previous experience of interaction; making people’s interaction to be somewhat cumulative (Harter 1999). In a national culture where certain behaviours have been understood as bullying and as negative, people who experience them are likely to attribute such negative interpretations to their experience. Related to the two ways discussed earlier is self-control. The self is seen as an object which individuals can control to some extent, through choices and decision making. How individuals view and understand the development of the self-concept is linked to how they are viewed and understood by others.

2.2.4 Mind

The understandings of symbols become the fabric of individuals’ actions and interactions. In symbolic interactionism, the mind is conceptualised as the
actions of the individual and for that matter a process. It is the symbolic activity which a person directs towards his or her self. It is the mind which allows us to take control of external stimuli (Mead, 1934). Apart from instinctive reactions under a physical reflex, the mind enables individuals to choose how to react to their environments; through processing, application and interpretation of data before acting. Mead (1934) discussed the development of the mind using the example of how an infant learns to adapt to his/her social world and environment, which is made up of rules, roles, relationships, language and action; the mind is perceived as an interaction that an individual involves themselves in. The mind makes it possible for humans to make a choice on how to respond to external stimuli or respond to and interact with their environment. Humans’ actions are precipitated by the interpretation of data. This process primarily involves understanding the world through the worldview of others, such as acting in a way expected to by others. The individual being has to have an internal dialogue, which leads to thinking. As a result the mind is constructed as a product of social processes through human interactions.

The interactionist perspective on how people interpret or respond to a label such as bullying involves some active responses. Though such responses may differ from person to person, Mead (1934) maintains that responses could encompass routines like perception, identification, reasoning, interpretation, imagination and emotion. Mead (1934) categorises such routines into four stages in human action: impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation.

Impulse marks the beginning of human actions when the external environment impacts on a person disturbing their stability or equilibrium. At this point an individual would be presented with a need to respond or act, which also involves a choice on what to respond to and how. Such a choice is influenced over time by the individual’s knowledge of previous experiences which are used to make sense of the world. Perception is a way of an individual’s unique defining of any situation, which sets a goal of action in response to a stimuli s/he faces (Mead, 1934). In the third stage, manipulation, the individual acts in relation to the environment based on their perception of the situation by pursuing to achieve its related set goals. When such set goals have been achieved, consummation, which is the final stage, is attained (Mead, 1934). Consummation may not always happen before the process is started again, and even if it happens, it could lead to another act; which precipitates to a cyclical spiral. This understanding of the mind as found in symbolic interactionism
leads to an understanding that individuals have a degree of choice and liberty in their actions. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that one’s perception and definition of environment may influence one’s choices and actions. A boy in Ghana who may understand certain acts (such as name calling and teasing) as a normal and accepted part of growing up, would respond and interpret such acts differently from a boy in a UK context who may have the perception of such acts as being labelled bullying and hence negative. The range of choices they can identify, and the impact of such acts on these two individuals, may vary. Consequently, the impact of such acts on these two individuals and the choices they are likely to make under such situations will be affected by their past experiences and the way in which such behaviours are made sense of in their community, which would help to determine future anticipated responses from self and others. This also affects the way in which such behaviours are made sense of in their community.

2.2.5 Roles and emotions

An individual’s ability to communicate with others is influenced by their ability to see the interaction from the others’ perspective; and by so doing, taking on the role of the other. Taking on the role of the other in turn helps the individual to develop and understand his/her own self and interactions. As the individual interacts in group situations, s/he controls his/her actions in order to fit in or identify with the group. To fit within a group, the individual may need to take on roles by taking on the rules and social norms within its micro and macro community environment, in order to cooperate with the members in the group. As individuals take on roles, they are influenced by their direct interactions with others within the group but their actions are also based on their own definition of the role in the context they find themselves. Though some roles can be somewhat stable, the roles individuals take are dynamically being created and recreated. As discussed under the findings in chapters 5 and 6, being a secondary school pupil, being a boy and being a child in Ghana, involves role taking. The role of an individual boy child exists in collaboration with the role of other children and roles of other members of the community.

Emotions are perceived under symbolic interactionism as objects which influence actors and actions. This can be characterized through language and cultural definitions. Being a boy or a man in Ghana is typified by experiences that repress some types of emotions, such as the outward expression of
How boys understand themselves, their identity and roles within their communities impacts their interactions and behaviours; and an understanding of these processes gives insights into their perceptions and their experiences of behaviours and interactions.

One general criticism aimed at the symbolic interactionist approach is that it focuses on easily observable interactions among individuals and not on macro-level structural relationships involving social institutions. For example, whilst Stryker (1980) questions the suitability of symbolic interactionism in addressing issues of power, Dennis and Martin (2005) maintain that the interactionist tradition addresses the issue of power, even though it does not appear to show how disparities in power are handled during interactions. Though how symbolic interaction can be applied to macro level structural issues is debatable, the next sub section discusses Structuration in order to examine the social processes with agents and structures that produce bullying.

2.3 Structuration

In this section, I will use Structuration as an approach to draw the relationship between an individual’s agency (defined as the ability to change and influence social interactions and situations) and the social structures (defined as systems, norms and rules, cultural practices etc) within society. Anthony Giddens’ Structuration theory maintains that interactions are not only made up of individual actions on a micro social level, but also includes social structures on a macro social level (Giddens, 1984); whilst individuals have agency, there are social structures within societies that impacts on individuals’ capacity to act. Giddens’ (1984) theory synergises the individual’s agency and societal structures as dualistic concepts complementing each other.

Structuration describes a cyclical process whereby the developments through which the structures, systems and institutions within society shape individuals’ activities and interactions within that society, are concurrently recreated by the actions of those individuals (Giddens, 1984). In other words, the cultural norms and structures do not exist by themselves but have been created by the individuals within the society; ‘the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize’ (Giddens 1984, p.25). Individuals’ interactions are seen as actively shaping structures within the society. Giddens (1984) argues...
that structures do not exist outside temporality by challenging functionalism and structuralism which takes time out of social theory. Structuration involves the continuous recreation of structures which do not exist outside the process of their recreation: ‘Structures do not exist in time-space, except in the moments of the constitutions of social systems.’ (Giddens 1984, p.117). He posits that the developments and interactions between elements within societal structures and its continuity are sustained only through human agents’ actions (Giddens 1984, p.115). These actions go through the process of knowledge as memory traces (the expected way of doing things by social actors); how this knowledge is interpreted and organised into practices and the capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes.

2.3.1 Knowledgeable agents

According to Giddens (1984) people’s actions are influenced by their intentions and their knowledge of anticipated outcomes. Whilst he recognises that there are unknown factors which impact on the actions of people, Giddens uses the concepts of discursive consciousness; practical consciousness and the unconscious, to describe people as the agents of their own actions. The concept of the unconscious identifies the individuals’ mental being as in a state where they have the requisite knowledge and understanding to conduct their everyday, taken for granted and normalised activities effectively within social situations; and hence maintaining ontological security and consciousness (O’Donnell, 2000; Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1984) describes practical consciousness as the sensible activities which are undertaken without attention paid to the thinking process.

A person’s practical consciousness may be interrupted in a way that will cause them to give thought to certain taken for granted and assumed knowledge so as to consider alternatives. Whilst the practical consciousness enables individuals to participate within their societies based on the norms and rules within that environment, discursive consciousness arises when there are impediments. Giddens (1984) recognises this process as that which influences actions which leads to its rationalisation prior to a reflective monitoring of the actions, which then leads to further actions. Reflexive monitoring encompasses the monitoring of the actions of both the self and others within its context. It is essential to note that such monitoring may not always work as intended because people may not always be aware of (the social norms, rules and culture of their society), or willing to share their motivations even if they knew.
2.3.2 Mutual knowledge

Under Structuration, mutual knowledge is a shared understanding of the world by people who have been socialised in a particular culture. This knowledge gives people the capacity to understand and predict the actions of others. Social structures and institutions continue to exist as a result of practices which follow rules or procedures, and members of that society have an understanding of how they relate to structures (Giddens 1984). The reciprocity of relationships which form the foundation of Structuration is that structures are maintained because of the way that members of society act over time, which creates the patterns to establish the structure; in turn people learn to act and interact parallel to the laid down patterns and thereby continue, sustain and recreate the institution or structure (Giddens, 1984).

As discussed later in this chapter, the concept of masculinity can be seen as a case of a social construct which could create mutual understanding and interaction amongst young men. As they learn to act based on the behaviour of others within their community, they reflexively monitor their actions through their assumptions and expectations of others.

2.4 Symbolic interactionism, structuration and bullying

Relating symbolic interactionism to the social construction of bullying, it could be argued that the existence of bullying is inextricably bound to the (usually negative) reaction and interpretations of the context of interaction. People are classified as bullies or victims only because someone or some group responds to them in this manner. Symbolic interactionism creates the platform to examine and/or explore the processes by which certain types of behaviour become viewed as unacceptable and by which certain types of people become prone to the manipulative mechanisms of societal control within specific contexts, as exemplified in the situation of Ghana in the next subsection. People go through a socialisation process based on social structures; societal structures restrict or promote certain behaviours. Yet, at the same time, people’s activities and behaviour are altering, creating and re-creating these societal structures. In this way, symbolic interactionism and structuration offers new insights into the theory and methodology of constructing bullying; taking the activities at the micro and macro level into consideration.
2.5 Gender and power and their centrality in the Ghanaian culture

The previous sections centred on the use of symbolic interactionism and structuration as lenses through which to understand observable interactions among individuals at a micro level and structural relationships involving social institutions at the macro-level. This provides a basis for approaching the issue of complexities in contextual definitions of bullying as discussed in Chapter 1.3. This section builds on this basis by offering a review of some of the important structures in the Ghanaian context that would aid our earlier understanding. As presented in my analysis in Chapter 6, gender and power were central in understanding the boys’ experiences. The processes by which behaviours and interactions are perceived are also explained to further clarify the dynamics underlying such social interactions. The discussion commences with a review and critique of masculinity as an approach to understanding gender in the case study school. Through an understanding of gender as a social construction, rather than something that is naturally or biologically fixed, this chapter explores the differential experiences of boys in both the case study school environment and how this impacts on their behaviour towards their peers.

2.5.1 Towards an understanding of gender

According to Paechter (2007), ‘sex’ has often been used as a key term to describe the components of physical bodily characteristics denoting male or female assignment, and ‘gender’ has been used to refer to a person’s attributes of masculinity or femininity. Paechter (2007) flags up a common confusion of how ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ have been used as synonyms, so that the naming of a baby’s sex bears a parallel equivalence with the naming of their gender. In order to avoid this confusion in this thesis, I use the term ‘sex’ to refer to children’s assigned label of boy/girl, and I use the term ‘gender’ to refer to the ways those children are positioned or constructed as male or female within their culture. An individual’s role as a boy or girl could have some links to the ‘sex’ that they were assigned at birth, and to their material body. Yet, gender is not fixed by the sex assigned; but rather, it is a contested social category that is open to cultural change (Butler, 2004; Robinson and Jones Diaz, 2006).

As discussed in 2.2, children learn meanings from their culture based on people’s interactions towards them which are sometimes dependent on the ‘sex’ they are assigned at birth, as discussed under symbolic interactionism in 2.1. Paechter (2007) maintains that how children choose to behave as male or female, and
how their physical structural development is processed, is dependent on their understanding of themselves through the lenses of how society constructs them; even affecting the structural development of their brains.

My understanding of ‘masculinities’ and ‘femininities’ runs parallel with Butler (2004) and Paechter (2007); it is the manner in which one performs the role of a boy/girl, man/woman, through actions, thoughts, speech, and bodily gestures. Masculinity and femininity are often constructed in a dualistic relationship to each other, positioning femininity as an absence of masculinity. Paechter (2006) suggests the need to pay attention to the multiple constructions of ‘masculinities’ and ‘femininities’ as there could be the variation of possible individual embodiments. Individuals uniquely interpret and process actions and hence rework and reconstruct their ideas and feelings about their masculinity and femininity in different places, with different people and at different times. How individuals within a society view being a girl/woman/boy/man ends up becoming how individuals understand their gender and behaviour; ‘a person’s masculinity or femininity is not innate, is not natural, but instead is something that is learned, constantly reworked and reconfigured, and enacted to the self and others’ (Paechter, 2007, p.14).

Another way of understanding gender is to look at the concept of social roles within communities and societies. Colley (1998, p.20) maintains that in any society certain roles are considered appropriate for people with different gender assignments and that these roles ‘provide stereotypes of normative male and female behaviour’. Parallel to the theory of symbolic interactionism discussed in 2.1 and 2.2, Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory postulates that children’s socialisation encourages and reinforces behaviour deemed consistent with their roles and discourages or sanctions behaviour which is not.

The role of an environment in sharpening people’s behaviour is highlighted by Bandura (1977) when he posits that people learn through observations and playing active roles of what they see, whilst expecting implications of their behaviour in a form of sanctions and rewards. Such reinforcements and sanctions are carried out by ‘agencies of socialisation’ (Connell, 1987, p. 191). These agencies include ‘the family, the media, the peer group and the school’ Connell (1987, p.191), through a variety of complex processes of learning (Bandura, 1982) which internalise the appropriate norms. This often results in ‘a gender identity that in the usual case corresponds to the social expectations for that sex.’ (Connell, 1987, p. 191).
2.5.2 Hegemonic masculinities

Connell (1987, 1995, 2002) maintain that hegemonic masculinity is the dominance of certain groups and/or individuals as a result of the nature of cultural processes and institutions. An understanding of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ then, could contribute to elucidating interactions amongst the boys in the case study school; as discussed further in Chapter 7. Parallel to Remy’s (1990, p.43) usage of ‘androcracy’ (rule by men or rule of the brotherhoods), I believe that discussing hegemonic masculinities will lead to an understanding of the patterns of gender order in the case study school context, which will in turn help understand boys’ behaviour and their perceptions of such behaviour. Institutions and processes support the ascendancy of such dominant groups in a way that presents unequal power relations as normal. As Connell (1987) posits, hegemonic masculinity has often been conceptualised in relation to subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. However, subordinated masculinities are often not clearly defined; as part of achieving hegemony sometimes consists of preventing alternatives from gaining cultural definition and acceptance (Connell, 1987).

The social and cultural nature of hegemonic masculinity calls for the need for it to be continuously defended, and re-enacted through the operation of power in institutions and in social and sexual practices (Connell, 2002, p. 92). In Chapter 7, I discuss the narrations of the respondents in the current study alongside the continuous re-enactment of hegemonic masculinity. It is important to contextually examine hegemonic masculinities in order to avoid universalising and stereotyping ‘masculine’ behaviours (Paechter, 2007). Contextual definition is important because the construction of masculine and feminine depend on historical, political, social and cultural attitudes and practices.

Boys learn to practice masculinity as they learn to fit within the male categories deemed acceptable by the society/context within which they find themselves. In other words, as discussed under the next subsection, on masculinity and culture in Ghana, people have certain perceptions of what is deemed as ideal masculinity. For example it has been likened to physical strength and a sense of aggression; ‘access to power may be correlated with such factors as physical build and strength, sexual orientation and prowess (even if only rumoured), social class and advantage’ (Buchbinder, 1994, p.33). Boys learn about dominant masculinities through observing other men within the context of the culture and there is a sense of imitation and competition when boys begin to practice
what they learn from other men in patriarchal societies.

Boys in such societies face the tension of having to behave in such a way as to be accepted as a ‘proper’ male (such as having a dominant position), belonging to a male community of practice. In order to become a ‘proper male’ or have a dominant social position, boys negotiate their identities by finding ways of exercising power over others to achieve status. According to Connell (1995), boys who do not embrace the idea of negotiating their way to a dominant masculine status align themselves to alternative masculinities, which carry the risk being of looked upon as a subordinate by their peers. As subordinate masculinities could carry some subtle sanctions, some boys for example, have displayed sporting skills as a way of belonging to a dominant male community, which confers considerable benefits of authority and dominance on those who display such skills (Swain, 2003; Paechter, 2007).

Later in Chapter 7, I will present data which suggests that, the ways and manner in which boys achieve the status of dominant masculinity is important in this study. This is because many of the interactions and actions that the boys used to negotiate their identities would be labelled as bullying, and even violence, in some other societies. Boys engaged in normalised negative interactions as part of their social roles and as a way of distancing themselves from practices that may be deemed as feminine. In effect, masculine-marked forms of knowledge and practices ‘convey and confer actual power on those who ‘master’ them, it becomes important for boys to claim privileged access to this knowledge, practice and hence this power’ (Paechter, 2003a, p.71).

2.5.3 Masculinities and culture in Ghana

This section discusses sociological perspectives of masculinity as a means of understanding boys’ socialisation and behaviour in Ghana. From this point of view, masculinity varies across cultures, over time, and among different groups of men at a given point in time. In the Ghanaian context, a man is considered masculine and successful if he is married, has children, has a home and is able to provide for his family. Certain household tasks such as cooking and washing are culturally seen to be feminine roles and men who are seen performing them may be labelled as ‘feminine’ or not man enough (Boakye, 2006). Men are expected to be physically and emotionally tough and strong as heads of their families. They are expected to do any activity that involves hard
physical labour or danger, such as digging or hunting. From the beginning of childhood, boys are allowed the freedom and exposure that socialises them into their expected roles as men in their communities. This means that fights and fall-outs amongst boys are seen as a way of toughening them up to take up their roles. This relates to this thesis as it explores the ways in which specific cultural conceptualisations of masculinity may impact on behaviours which in other contexts might be labelled as problematic or bullying.

Aggressive behaviour, including physical violence, is important to the presentation of hegemonic masculinity within the case study school community (Murnen, Wright and Kaluzy, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity requires constant validation, and by proving itself dominant and in control of itself and others, it attains that validation (Murnen, et al 2002). This form of validation is related to the discussion of seniors and juniors later in Chapter 7. Similarly Cheng (1999) posits that one way of proving one’s hegemonic masculinity is to act aggressively, and even violently, toward what is regarded as feminine, women, homosexual and/or ‘nerds’ (that is men, who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity). Connell (2001) states that the patterns of conduct that a society defines as masculine can be observed in the lives of individuals.

The collective process of constructing and enacting masculinity has been observed in various settings (Connell, 2000), from face to face interactions in classrooms and playgrounds of schools (Martino, 1999; Skelton, 2002; Swain, 2001), to the interaction between adolescents, (Lobel and Bar, 1997) also in various career options within the military (Barrett, 1996; 2001; Enloe, 1988). Institutional practices such as those of schools may contribute in the construction of masculinities and the relationships that are involved in the process. This is shown by Swain’s (2001) investigation of the relationship between the formal school culture and the informal pupil culture, with a focus on the options available for boys to construct their masculinity and establish status or prestige within their immediate peer group. Also Skelton (2002) shows how two schools with different social class backgrounds promoted and produced different masculinities. Skelton (2002) compared the two schools on the extent to which they enabled young boys to draw upon violent attitudes and behaviours to define their male identities. Although it appears that the enactment of gender is traditionally based on, or determined in part by, biology, it is not always the case (Cheng, 1999). Furthermore there appear to be frequently contradictory discourses on masculinity offered to men. Edley
and Wetherell (1997) have shown that masculinity is defined by discourses that construct men both as sensitive and caring and as tough, competitive and emotionally inarticulate. Weisbusch, Beal and O’Neal (1999) found that there are discrepancies in how masculine men behave, how others thought they should be, and what they, the men themselves, thought they should ideally be. Similarly, Phoenix et al (2003) found that boys behaved differently in a group than individually. Their study showed that boys in individual interactions generally spoke out about emotions and relations in ways that would be defined as ‘soft’ and ‘wimpish’ within the group (Phoenix et al, 2003).

Morrell (2002) suggests that there is overwhelming proof that masculinities, that is how different men negotiate their identity, can change. Masculinities are defined and sustained collectively; such as through peer groups and friendship cultures. As discussed above, masculinity has been shown to be a fluid entity; it changes over time and in context and actively produced using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as patterns of social practices (Connell, 2000, 2001). What might be termed as a normal masculine behaviour may be termed as bullying if that happened in another context. Therefore understanding how such interactions are understood in the Ghanaian context might prevent a situation where the behaviour is misrepresented or mislabelled, based on what happens in other contexts.

2.5.4 Masculinities and peer groups/friendships

Masculinities have an existence beyond the individual and are, importantly, a collective enterprise (Pattman et al, 1998; Connell, 2000; Lesko, 2000). Peer group and friendship cultures in school settings and amongst adolescents, provide influence for the construction of masculine identities as shown in research (see, for example, Pollard, 1985; Woods, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1996; Adler and Adler, 1998; Connolly, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Harris, 1998; Connell, 2000). Masculinities are socially organised and what children value most in school are opportunities for interaction with their peers. As Adler and Adler (1998 p.7) postulate, ‘peer interaction is not just a preparation for life, it is life itself’; children want to become successful children and hence other children are very important to them (Harris, 1998, p.241). Peers and peer culture are the main conduit by which cultures and behaviours are passed from one generation to another; every peer group has its own cultural identity.
which can be said to refer to a ‘way of life’, or ‘shared guidelines’ (Dubbs and Whitney 1980 p. 27), providing boys with multiple meanings of what it means to be a boy.

2.5.5 Bullying and masculinity perspectives

This section employs the concept that hegemonic masculinity as such, forms of masculinity in the case study school and also promoted bullying-like behaviour amongst the boys. The link between the bullying-like behaviours in the case study school and hegemonic masculinity could be described with what Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997, p.121) posit that,

At this stage of Western history, hegemonic masculinity mobilizes around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity and rationality.

In this way, how children behave and what they see as normal or a deviation from the norm is contingent on their socialization and what society expects (Ma et al, 2001; Sullivan et al, 2005; Qureshi, 2011). Consequently, the differences in the socialization of boys and girls become important; the engagement in an activity’s normality depended on whether those involved are males or females. Whilst dominant traditional views on boys’ expressions of masculinities in Ghana tends to lean towards a hierarchical culture, the notion of celebrating multiple expressions of gender is gradually being embraced. In this way, traditional notions of masculinity in Ghana are being challenged and what is seen as legitimate expressions of masculinities are being broadened and renegotiated (Adinkra, 2012).

As captured by Goodey (1997, p.401) when discussing the gendered differences in socialization,

While various theories from anomie, subcultural studies and psychoanalysis have offered explanations from criminal and anti-social behaviour, the processes by which boys can become criminal men demand contextualization within what it is to become and be male in its various guises; that is, in the context of the individual’s class, race, age and sexuality. Examination of growing up male
through research on childhood, adolescence and masculinities can present criminology with a solid base from which well-established and reworked facts can be readdressed and reinterpreted.

Goodey’s theory could be related to bullying even though the original discussion was in relation to criminality. When society expects the ideal boy (hegemonic masculinity) to become fearless and to deny their vulnerability, even though that is inextricably bound to every human, it presents negative implications such as a hierarchy of oppression (Goodey 1997). The implications from Goodey’s (1997) theory is that boys may exhibit bullying like behaviours as a means to hide their vulnerability and in order to meet societal expectations.

As discussed in 1.6, boys who chose not to exhibit the dominant form of masculinity, to be tough and/or be in control, stood the risk of being called names or being bullied. This bears a parallel equivalence with what Goodey (1997, p.405) posits that ‘to step outside the realms of acceptable masculinity is to endanger oneself as an atypical male.’

As discussed in Chapter 2, gender is important in this study. This is not only because I have chosen to focus on boys’ perspectives but also because there is an increasing debate over the issue of gender differences in bullying; often meant to describe sex differences. Debates on this subject have rather focused on sex differences instead of gender differences, which can be forms of social control as discussed in the next subsection.

2.5.6 Being a boy in Ghana

Meanings attributed to interactions in the school may bear a parallel equivalence with meanings attributed to interactions in the home. Connell discusses masculinity as a ‘life project involving the making and remaking of identity and meaning’ (cited in Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997, p.119), while Gilbert and Gilbert posit that ‘being masculine is an accomplishment which boys and men must constantly achieve in every situation they enter, a project by which they construct their life histories in particular and institutional contexts’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998, p. 47).

The thought of men/boys expressing physical or emotional pain, such as through tears, is seen as strange in Ghana. Men who are caught in such expressions are either seen as weak men or sometimes nicknamed/labelled ‘obaaba’ or ‘kwojo basia’ (translated: ‘a feminime-like boy’) (Adinkra 2012). Men or boys who are
labelled in this way are usually denied the respect that they would otherwise have received from their peers. These societal expectations and/or roles of boys (men) have implications on their interactions. Reported cases of fatal and non-fatal suicide amongst men in Ghana has been associated with them dealing with their feelings of shame and dishonour (Weber, 1946; Adinkra, 2012). Expectations of boys may compel them to suppress how they feel about certain actions and behaviours they might encounter. Therefore boys’ views and perceptions of bullying may be indirectly influenced by what they perceive as normal and/or what is perceived as normal within the Ghanaian context.

2.5.7 Gendered school settings and communities in Ghana

An understanding of the constructions and understandings of gender within the school and community settings of Ghana provides insights into understandings of behaviour. Dunne (2007) explores how the institution of schooling is gendered in Ghana. Children’s behaviour in schools is perpetuated by a ‘gender regime’ within the naturalistic daily routine of the school, which is structured by rules and regulations.

A Ghanaian boy’s identity is formed by the cultural messages and practices received in childhood. For example, both boys and girls are usually punished in order for them to conform to their society’s perception of how they should behave, based on their gender. Those who do not conform to such acts, considered as feminine, are mocked and sometimes ignored. Still, the boys’ socialisation process could be influenced by whether they were brought up in a village or a city. The school context, however, provides a background for people from various backgrounds to interact; making it rich and complex.

In as much as insights into the gendered nature of schools and communities within the Ghanaian contexts helps our understanding of interactions within institutions and communities, it is also important to see things from the perspectives of those being observed. In as much as incidences such as physical violence may be clearly against children’s rights and hence considered generally as having negative consequences, there are other incidences that may requires further insights before they could be described as having negative consequences on those involved.
2.6 Understanding conceptions and forms of power

Edley and Wetherell (1996) maintain that any acceptable theory of masculinity will have the concept of power at its centre. Like bullying, power is difficult to define and there is little agreement on either what constitutes power, or how it is expressed (Skelton, 2001). While some writers have expressed the need to give up any attempts to search for any unifying definition of power (Lukes, 1986; Deem, 1994), others have argued that it is a multifaceted concept that needs to be constructed with the view of showing its complex embodiments, without necessarily having a unifying definition (Connell, 1987). For Connell (1987) understanding some of the components embodied under power are essential, even if understanding power as a whole is too complex, and that force is one important component that presents itself in both macro and micro relationships and contexts.

As the current study is concerned with human relations and interactions occurring within their natural contexts, I have found myself being drawn to Hearn’s (2012) conceptualisation of power, which I find particularly germane in an attempt to understand how power works within relations in the school setting. Power is fundamentally conceived and expressed during social interactions. Hearn (2012, p.3) maintains that power holds how people relate to one another; how they influence social relations and the connections that exist between them; ‘power is not just one of the things social scientists study, but the central thing.’

As power is broad in its scope and meaning, he uses the ‘usually researched’ concepts of domination, authority and legitimacy to represent and elucidate the ‘all-embracing’ term power. While there may be other areas and connotations of power not usually researched, he posits that understanding these concepts, might at least, give some clarity to the concept of power.

Domination is a situation where an agent exercises relatively stable, ongoing control over the actions of other agents. Relations and interactions of domination are by definition, ‘firmly established, and often naturalised and often taken for granted’ (Hearn 2011a, p.203). Hearn (2012, p.20) discusses how power and domination have been synonymously used in many instances. When people have talked about power, what they really mean is domination; domination can be understood as a neutral and naturalised description of some relationships, which tends to have strongly negative evaluative
connotations. While domination can be constructed as a form of control from agents within the society that are identified as dominant or less dominant, it is possible for domination to emanate from society itself. Domination then can be constructed as a relationship between those with more and less power, while power is the ‘enduring capacity of an object normally indicated by agency and the realisation of intentions’ (Hearn, 2012, p.3). Thus, in order to understand domination, there is the need to have some understanding of power.

For Giddens (1984), domination in interaction can be seen as the strategies that an actor possesses, and is able to bring and use in a situation to influence or alter its course and/or the behaviour of others involved. This may be in the form of status (or authority), physical force or other symbolic signifiers, and the extent of a person’s influence is restricted by the resources at their disposal (and the strategies they are able to employ), and these will, vary at different times and in different circumstances (Giddens, 1984). As posited by both Hearn (2012) and Giddens (1984) domination is a form of resource that agents use in interactions and relationships in the society.

Hearn (2012) separates the resultant force of domination and positions it under power. This reduces the complexities surrounding the definition of power. The other two components of power are authority and legitimacy; ‘power and authority have close defining relationships because while authority is usually defined as power that enjoys legitimacy, legitimacy is seen as a way of regarding authority’ (Hearn 2012, p.173). Authority is a form of power that goes on in a communicative relationship, whereby an agent gives a command and has it obeyed and cannot be entirely self-constituting. A common thread that runs through domination, authority and legitimacy, is the issues of definitions and/or jurisdictions of various actions and behaviours within a given situation or culture. This would include what they accept as dominant or a powerful/weaker agent. Once these terminologies within a situation have been understood, the above explanations of power can be placed in context. I posit that the conceptualisation of power in research situations should encompass what it means to the people being researched and how it is displayed during interactions. In this way the context within which power is being used and the definition/s assigned to it is clarified, which in turn provide useful insight into interactions within a research situation. While the Ghanaian culture tends to socialize women to be accommodative and intuitive, men tend to be socialized to be aggressive, active and dominating (Dunne et al, 2005). While this may be an oversimplification
of gender dynamics, within this context, it gives a clue as to its patterns.

Yet the relationships between gender and influence and between gender and power are not easily identifiable; though an attempt has been made to discuss domination, legitimacy and authority as major expressions of power. In the current study, the discussion of power and masculinity are used as a form of lenses through which to understand the context of interactions and behaviour in the case study school, constructing a sociology perspective of bullying, as discussed in Chapter 3. Yet, it is imperative to note that the expected sets of social roles that are exhibited during interactions are ‘culturally and historically variable and evolving’ (Hearn 2012, p.172). This leads to an understanding that there may not be straight forward and simple answers, but ‘discernable patterns and clues’ may be arrived at (Hearn 2012, p.189).

2.7 Summary

This chapter has offered insights into micro and macro theoretical considerations, which I considered relevant in understanding the boys’ experiences in the case study school. It has been argued in this chapter that both symbolic interactionism and structural approaches, such as power and gender, are complementary in understanding the boys’ experiences. These two approaches also offer some distinctive grounds, where a true reflection of the boys’ meanings and experiences could be captured. This would enable us to escape what Blumer (1969, p.3) posits as, ‘the meanings of things for the human beings who are acting are either bypassed or swallowed up in the factors used to account for their behaviour’. So far, I have argued that in order to understand human behaviour or actions, there is the need to show how the social self is conceived and acted out through decisions and choices. In this chapter, Symbolic Interactionist perspective has been shown to be situated within cultural and symbolic realms of meanings where individuals articulate their action. As Blumer (1966) argues, an individual can decide whether or not to act in a way and time they wish. In this way, the boys in the case study school are perceived as emotional beings whose actions and behaviours are viewed in terms of interactions within a framework of a social context.

Blumer (1980) maintains that ‘reality’ is a socially shared one; with bullying being viewed in this study as a subjective and shared symbolic interaction. Adopting this perspective creates the possibility for me to capture the
complexity and richness of boys’ experiences and meanings. The implication for this thesis is that the boys in the case study school are the creators and interpreters of their behaviour and its meanings, which are linked to macro elements within the Ghanaian context such as gender and power (Becker, 1973; Hargreaves, 1975; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Thus this study draws on the constructs of symbolic interactionism and structuration; and on those elements within them that enhance the nature of actions/behaviours and how these can be explained and not presumed.
Chapter 3

Understanding bullying: Psychologically and sociologically informed perspectives

3.1 Introduction

In previous chapters of this thesis, I discussed issues of social and personal identity formation and masculinity in culture (including school culture) with a focus on Ghanaian schools. This chapter draws heavily from psychology literature to introduce the concept of bullying, partly because psychology literature dominates academic literature on bullying. Individuals’ personalities and other characteristics (which are the topic of psychology literature) certainly help explain bullying (Sondergaard, 2012; Sercombe and Donally, 2012), but, like others who have studied bullying, I take the position that social structures, agents, and interactions that create and sustain bullying are also important (Williams and Guerra, 2011; Sercombe and Donelly, 2012). Consequently, this chapter also discusses the sociological perspectives on bullying that underpin this study of Ghanaian boys’ ‘bullying-like’ interactions.

3.2 Why bullying matters

Acts of bullying are aggressive and harm victims emotionally, physically, or both emotionally or physically. These immediate impacts are enough reason to intervene and reduce bullying, but bullying also has long-term impacts. Students who are bullied are more likely to commit suicide, leave school without qualifications, and become depressed (Greenbaum, Turner, and Stephens, 1988; Farrington, 1991; Olweus, 1993; Rigby and Slee, 1999; Salmon et al, 2000).

Additionally, bullying may be a sign of bullies’ having underlying issues. Studies have shown that childhood bullies are more likely to engage in criminal and anti-social behaviour as adults (Olweus, 1993; Batsche and Knoff, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1999; Nansel et al, 2004; Salmon et al, 2000; Sourander et al, 2007). A comprehensive review study found that ‘school bullying is a strong
and specific risk factor for later offending’ (Ttofi et al, 2011, p.80). Bullying harms victims and predicts anti-social behaviour in bullies, so researchers should continue to investigate bullying to prevent and mitigate the damage it causes. And in general, many people see school as having an important role not only in children’s education but also in their socialization; school should ‘promote kindness, tolerance and respect towards others’ (Munn et al, 2007, p.52). Both bullying and victimisation harm this process, as evidenced by the statistics cited above.

### 3.3 Defining bullying

#### 3.3.1 Psychological perspectives

I take the position that bullying is socially constructed, partly because what constitutes bullying varies according to social context. However, scholarly research on bullying is dominated by the psychological perspective. Below, I review definitions of bullying from this literature because they serve as a valuable anchor for discussions of bullying.

#### 3.3.2 Characteristics of bullying

As introduced in Chapter 1, the work of Olweus (1978, 1993) has been highly influential. Olweus describes bullying as a negative act between two or more individuals; it is an unprovoked form of aggression (Olweus 1993). Olweus’s definition has dominated psychological approaches to the study of bullying (Galloway and Roland, 2004; Meyer, 2007; Bansel et al, 2009; Schott, 2009). Most authors agree that the following are characteristics of bullying: unprovoked aggression, power imbalances (abuses of power), reoccurring, and intent to harm (Olweus, 1993; Boulton and Hawker, 1997; Cowie, 2011; Whitted and Dupper, 2005; Vreeman and Carroll, 2007).

Power differences are an important feature of bullying. In a bullying act, an individual or a group abuse their power over someone who they see as inferior (Sullivan, 2000; Cowie, 2011). There are many bases for bullying-related power differences including the following: age (Cowie, 2011); ability and social status (Rigby, 1996; Sullivan, 2000); physical strength and size (Sullivan, 2000), and gender differences (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996).
As noted above, most researchers view intent to harm as a characteristic of bullying behaviour (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Rigby, 1996; Cowie, 2011), but Rigby (1996) asserts that intent to harm may not always be present. Rigby makes a distinction between *malign bullying* (in which there is intent to harm) and *non-malign bullying* (in which there is no intent to harm). Rigby writes that there are two kinds of non-malign bullying: mindless bullying and educational bullying. According to Rigby, someone who mindlessly bullies, does so largely because others in the bully’s social group approve of it: ‘The bullying is almost literally mindless. It is maintained less by the evil will of the bully: more by a vague desire to be part of a bit of fun’ (Rigby, 1996, p.18). Educational bullying can be a misguided attempt to help the bullying victim. Rigby provides an example from his own experience when he made an overly sustained and ardent attack on a student’s discussion responses and caused the student (and others in the class) to view Rigby as bullying the student. Rigby’s goal was ‘straightening out the kinks in the student’s “logical thinking”’ (p.18), but the result was a suffering student.

I summarize Rigby’s discussion of non-malign bullying here for completeness, but Rigby’s distinction between malign and non-malign bullying has not been widely adopted by other researchers and for good reason. Bullying harms victims regardless of whether the bully has ill intent. However non-malign bullying is fundamentally different from malign bullying. Rigby’s own anecdote illustrates that non-malign bullying is much easier to interrupt than malign bullying. As soon as Rigby discovered that he was inadvertently bullying a student, he stopped and likely felt remorse about the episode. In general, once non-malign bullies become aware of the harm that they cause, they are likely to stop. (But one of the particularly destructive features of bullying is that it is on-going.) It follows logically from the definitions of malign and non-malign bullying, that if non-malign bullies continue bullying while fully aware of the harm they cause, they become malign bullies. If the practical goal of research on bullying is to reduce it, researchers should focus on malign bullying, as I do throughout this research project.

### 3.3.3 Bullying as a relationship

Bullying occurs in the context of a relationship; there would be no bully without a victim and vice versa (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). To assert his or her dominance, a bully needs a victim to acquiesce to the bully’s attempts
at subordination (Sercombe, 1998). Based on this line of thinking, Sercombe and Donnelly rework Olweus’s definition of bullying to be ‘a relationship of violence involving practices of domination that strip another person of the capacity for agency, using interventions carrying the sustained threat of harm’ (2012, p.494). This definition can be expanded as follows:

- Bullying is a two-way relationship because dominance can only take place if an individual is susceptible to subordination.
- Bullying relationships are based on violence because they involve intent to harm.
- The intent of bullying extends beyond dominance to the destruction of the agency of the victim.
- Bullying is a deliberate and active action.
- Threats may vary in form and intensity over a period of time.

Note that like many researchers, Sercombe and Donnelly implicitly disagree with Rigby. Sercombe and Donnelly would not consider non-malign bullying to be bullying, though Rigby would. Similar to the discussion of intent to harm above, this definition of bullying helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of bullying, in this case, by placing more focus on the victim. Sercombe and Donnelly’s definition extends Olweus’s definition to include a victim that is subordinated and that loses agency in ways that may change over time. It also emphasizes an on-going relationship. Bullying is not just an incident or even a series of incidents. Bullies and their victims participate in an on-going, dysfunctional relationship, and stopping bullying involves either transforming or, more likely, ending this relationship.

### 3.3.4 Forms of bullying

Though bullying has the common features described above, it can take many forms, namely (1) physical, (2) verbal, (3) relational, (4) electronic, and (5) non-verbal, non-physical (Hawker and Boulton, 2000). Physical bullying refers to actions such as pushing, punching, forced confinement, kicking and tripping. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, insults, mockery and verbal intimidation (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996; Sullivan; 2000). Relational bullying, also called social bullying or covert bullying, is perpetrated through gossip, social
exclusion, sending nasty notes and spreading rumours. Electronic bullying, also called cyber bullying, is verbal or relational bullying perpetrated via the Internet (Rigby, 1996). Electronic bullying is the same as verbal or relational bullying, except for its medium of transmission – the Internet. Having a separate name for this type of bullying (ie, cyber bullying) misleads some people to view electronic bullying as different from other forms of bullying; however, it is not (Li, 2007). There is also non-verbal, non-physical bullying, for example, making faces and making rude gestures. Because this form of bullying can be particularly ‘sneaky and manipulative’ (Sullivan 2000, p.11), it is also more difficult to expose and consequently, determining its effects is more difficult.

Some studies have found gender differences in forms of bullying. The authors of one study write, ‘extreme [physical] forms of violence, in particular, are definitively masculine’ (Burman et al, 2001, p.443). It follows that non-physical bullying is more often associated with girls (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996). Beldean-Galea, Jurcau and Tigan (2010) similarly found that girls use verbal bullying (eg, spreading rumours) more than boys. And an exploratory study of Scottish girls’ experiences with violence found that violence most often manifested verbally rather than physically (Batchelor et al, 2001).

3.4 Sociological perspectives

3.4.1 Justification for a sociological perspective

What constitutes bullying varies according to social context, and this variation complicates research on bullying. Empirical data on bullying may mislead researchers due to multi-interpretations of interactions (Hamarus and Kaikkonen, 2008) and cultural meanings that act as staging cues for participants (Goffman, 1959, p.177). According to Hamarus and Kaikkonen, ‘the meanings given to bullying behaviour can often be understood only by the pupils in the community’ (2008, p.333). Hamarus and Kaikkonen were making a point about the hidden nature of bullying, that adults (including teachers) who do not have access to the same set of interpretations as students, are often unaware of bullying behaviour. But their point also serves as justification for using a sociological perspective to investigate bullying. Bullying is socially constructed, in part, by the students who engage in it, observe it, and are harmed by it; therefore, bullying depends on its cultural setting.
As discussed in the previous paragraph, ignoring cultural context may lead to misunderstandings, but it may also lead researchers to ignore important research questions. Thelin argues that the ‘commonly used understanding of bullying is overly narrow and can exclude certain questions from research’ (2004, p.28). Specifically, psychological research, which has dominated research on bullying, emphasizes individuals and individual characteristics; however, the cultural setting in which bullying occurs matters, too. Moreover, the psychology perspective tends to dominate discussions about policy and interventions, particularly with regard to certain behavioural problems that have been ‘medicalised’, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Macleod et al, 2010). To avoid misunderstandings and to thoroughly investigate bullying, studies should incorporate sociological perspectives. Smorti et al (2003) and Gubrium and Holstein (1995) maintain that the terms used in a particular society represent aspects of its culture, so interpretations of words are inextricably bound with the cultural context in which they are used. Additionally, bullying is a concept from the Global North; in languages spoken outside the Global North, there is often no word that closely matches the meaning of bullying (Smith and Monks, 2008). The absence of an equivalent term does not imply the absence of bullying (Hatty, 2000), but the absence of an equivalent term makes it more difficult to conduct generalizable research on bullying. In her communication with Italian teenagers about bullying, Baldry (2005) used the term *prepotenze* instead of the more accurate translation of *bullying*, which is *bullissimo*. She justified this decision, arguing that her participants might not have understood the formal term (bullissimo) because it was a relatively new concept (Sondergaard, 2012). And she acknowledged that the word *prepotenze* did not include repeated acts. As a result, the definition of bullying used in her study does not match the most popular definition in academic literature (Farrington, 1993), and consequently, her findings are less useful for comparative research. Researching a social constructed phenomenon, such as bullying, requires careful consideration of local contexts. Human behaviour is shaped not only by individual personality but also by interpersonal and social forces (Gergen, cited in Thornberg et al, 2013). These social forces manifest in norms, roles, cultural systems and political systems that influence everyday activities in social settings, such as schools. Norms are beliefs held by people about behaviours and attitudes that are considered desirable or acceptable in a given social context, and norms often shape the
behaviour of people in that context. Therefore, determining whether behaviour is an instance of bullying depends not only on individuals’ judgement but also on the social structures in which behaviours occur.

3.4.2 Consequences of a sociological perspective

In this thesis, bullying is understood as inextricably bound up with the socio-cultural environment in which it occurs. It follows that it is necessary to understand a given environment to fully understand the dynamics of bullying within that environment. Rather than focusing on the bully or victim, the focus is on the roles, interactions, relationships and communications within the system that creates and sustains or prevents bullying (Sullivan, 2000).

Incorporating a sociological perspective in research about bullying entails complementing data about individuals with data about social structures. Researchers can minimise misinterpretations by using the culture of research participants as the primary lens to understand interactions (Hamarus and Kaikkonen, 2008). Norms, rules and the judgment of stakeholders in a particular social context should complement data from individual participants to establish whether bullying has occurred. Consequently, bullying research should use an eclectic approach that is ‘surrounded by a family of concepts through which research into bullying can be deepened’ (Eriksson et al, 2002, p.106).

The socially constructed nature of bullying calls for a holistic examination that takes into account the social climate of the school (Siann et al, 1993; Galloway and Roland, 2004). Students’ behaviour is influenced by what is modelled in their social environment (Roland and Galloway, 2004). As a result, schools that are marked by effective discipline, high expectation of students and a cordial sense of community are less associated with bullying than schools that do not have these characteristics (Rutter et al, 1979; Ma et al, 2001; Galloway and Roland, 2004).

This thesis investigates bullying in the context of Ghanaian schools using sociological perspectives. Contextual data are collected from many actors including children themselves and adults (parents and teachers). And this study focuses on the unique ways that boys in the case study school explained, responded to and coped with ‘bullying-like’ behaviour. I provide a more detailed discussion of research methods in Chapter 4.
3.5 Researching bullying

Researchers’ definition of bullying and their theoretical approach to bullying affect their research designs. If researchers treat bullying as an event that involves an individual who possesses a particular personality trait, researchers will likely ask the individual questions to get the most accurate information possible about him or her (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007). If researchers view bullying as a product of, or mediated by social context, they are likely to gather data on social context. For example, if disciplinary policies are seen as important, researchers are likely to study documentation of such policies.

Whether collecting self-reports via questionnaire or interviewing school leaders for context, interview methods are a common tool for investigating bullying. In studies that attempt to generalize to a population, statistical power is important, and more interview participants improves statistical power (Schwarz, 1999; Biau, Kerneis and Porcher, 2008). Questionnaires and interview guides need to be carefully crafted. A minor change in, or misunderstanding of, ‘question wording, question format, or question context can result in major changes in the obtained results’ (Schwarz 1999, p.93).

The most popular method for studying different types of bullying incidents and their frequency is self-report questionnaires (Lewis, 2002). Such questionnaires rely on the assumption that children understand what bullying is and are able to accurately report whether or not they have been involved in bullying and, if so, in what manner.

Semi-structured interviews are better than self-report questionnaires at illuminating participants’ unique experiences and perceptions of bullying (Teräsahjo and Salmivalli, 2003). Questionnaires with close-ended questions are usually too rigid for this type of research question. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher can ask probing questions to contextualise participants’ answers and investigate each unique bullying incident (Cowie et al, 2002).

Interviews have been used to investigate reasons for bullying, the consequences of bullying and how people respond to or cope with bullying (Owen, Shute and Slee, 2000; Teräsahjo and Salmivalli, 2003). Interviews have also been used creatively, alongside vignettes, to investigate children’s experiences of bullying and are particularly well suited to obtaining the views of young children who are unable to fill out questionnaires on their own (Monks, Smith and Swettenham, 2005). For example, researchers have used cartoons displaying
bullying and non-bullying behaviour and then asked children to describe what they see (Cowie, Olafsson and Liefooghe, 2002; Smith and Monks, 2008). This type of creative research method has influenced the methodology of this study (see Chapter 4 for details). Methods, such as interviewing, which illuminate participants’ perceptions of bullying help researchers explore participants’ own perceptions of bullying and facilitate comparative research on bullying in different contexts (Smith et al, 2002).

Though interviews and self-report questionnaire are popular research methods, research uses other common social science research methods, such as focus groups, too (eg, Brown, 2013). The authors note that ‘Single-sex focus groups of this kind have been shown to be well suited to discussing personal and sensitive information’ (Brown, 2013, p.63). And in general, researchers should use any tool in the social scientists’ toolkit (eg, any in the suite of ethnographic research methods as in Burman et al, 2001) if the research project would benefit.

Children’s responses to questions about bullying are contingent on whether they are victims or perpetrators of bullying. In one study, students who defined themselves as teasers, people who mock their peers, used fewer words to explain their experiences than their victims. They also used terms that differed from victims’. For example, they described themselves as ‘friends’ of those they teased, but victims of teasing described teasers as ‘school mates’ (Kowaski, 2000).

Young people’s perceptions of bullying also change as they get older. Several studies have shown that young people often attribute bullying to victims’ physical characteristics, such as the height and body size (eg, Mooney et al, 1991; Josecelyn and Holtuun, 2006), but slightly older children perceive bullying to be more of a relational issue (Kowaski, 2000).

Similarly, a variety of factors can influence how adults perceive bullying and what adults consider to be bullying. For example, Munn et al, write, ‘studies have shown that whether behaviour is conceived of as negative or troublesome is highly context specific, with the teacher’s mood, the time of day or year, the subject matter of the lesson and the previous history of relationships with particular classes or pupils all having an influence’ (2013, p.135).
3.6 Extent of bullying

It is clear that bullying is common in schools in Global North countries. However, it is unclear exactly how common it is. Studies report different rates of bullying for all of the following reasons: they use different research methods, they define bullying differently (eg, physical versus emotional aggression), they measure bullying in different time periods, and they collect data in different schools in different countries. The first three reasons lead to superficial differences in rates of bullying, but the last (collecting data in different locations) likely reflects differences in rates of bullying that exist in reality rather than as an artefact of studies’ research designs. Regarding research methods, most studies rely on self-reports, although some make direct behavioural observations (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). The issues discussed above hinder comparing results from several studies; however, due to the complexity of researching bullying and behavioural problems in general, it can be difficult to interpret results from a single study, as well (see, for example, Munn et al, 2013).

Studies have found rates of bullying as low as 10% (Olweus, 1999) and as high as 44% (Cinkir, 2001). Almeida (1999) reported that 20% to 22% of students in Portugal were bullied. Olweus (1999) found that 10% of students in Norway were bullied, and Bentley and Li (1995) found that 21% of Canadian students were bullied. Genta et al (1996) reported that 28% of middle school students and 40% of primary school students in Italy were bullied. Yates and Smith (1989) reported that 10% students in English schools were bullied a week before the study was conducted and 22% of students were bullied a month before the study was conducted.

As discussed above, researchers have found gender differences in the forms of bullying that boys and girls employ. In terms of the extent of bullying, some studies have found that boys are more likely than girls to be bullied and victimized (Olweus, 1993; Espelage, Bosworth and Simon, 2000; Elliot, 2002; Smith and Rigby, 2007; Card et al, 2008). However, other studies have found no significant gender differences (Kristensen and Smith, 2003; Peskin, Tortolero and Markham, 2006), so it is unclear how common gender differences in the extent of bullying are.
3.7 Why bullying occurs

Both psychological and sociological research have investigated factors associated with bullying and why bullying occurs. Factors commonly associated with bullying (ie, attributes of both typical victims and bullies) help illustrate bullying as it commonly occurs. These bodies of literature also inform the current study as they identify variables of potential interest and relevant theoretical frameworks.

3.7.1 Individual attributes

Researchers have identified attributes of victims and bullies that are associated with bullying relationships (Donald et al, 1997; Sullivan, 2000). La Fontain (1989) found that children reported being bullied by their peers due to being obese, being relatively short for their age group and having poor academic performance. Similarly, Mooney et al (1991) found that victims of bullying were teased because they looked different from their peers. This finding accords with findings from other studies in which children with special needs reported that their physical disability was the main reason they were bullied (eg, Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999). Any of these individual attributes could be the source of power differences between bullies and their victims as discussed above.

3.7.2 Young people's perceptions

According to some young people, the causes of bullying are rather complex. Smith et al (2004) conducted interviews with 406 English pupils, age 13 to 16, who had been bullied. Researchers asked pupils why they believed they were victimized and obtained 217 reasons. Victim-related reasons (eg, victims’ physical characteristics, victims’ social characteristics, their being different or their wrong behaviours) were the cause according to 100 respondents. Bully-related reasons were the cause according to 49 respondents. Examples of bully-related reasons include the following:

- anger
- immaturity
- strong character
- jealousy
• social gains (eg, fame, authority or power)
• physical gains (eg, materiality or money)
• emotional gains (eg, fun)

This list of reasons highlights the complexity of bullying behaviour.

The complexity of bullying behaviour is evident in other studies, too. Karhunen (2009) investigated reasons for bullying among 120 Finnish adolescents, age 13 to 18. He reported that 37% of respondents attributed bullying to the victims’ being different. Bullying occurred as a result of interpersonal conflict in peer relationships according to 22% of respondents. Examples of conflicts include fights, arguments, and breaking up relationships. Mishna (2004) studied perspectives of bullying among 61 Canadian pupils in 4th and 5th grade (age 8 to 11), their parents and their teachers. The participants themselves reported that identifying bullying behaviour was complex because it depended on whether the victim was perceived as responsible, whether the incidents were regarded as serious, and whether there was a power imbalance. A study in England by Smith et al (2002) suggested that most 14-year-old pupils categorized verbal and physical aggression, where a power difference existed, as bullying, but social exclusion and physical aggression without a power imbalance were only sometimes categorized as such.

An important consideration highlighted by young people’s responses in these studies is whether the bully or the victim is responsible for bullying. Graham and Juvonen (2001) used a self-report survey of scaled questions with 243 American participants, age 11 to 15, to investigate why certain students were victimized. Roughly a quarter of respondents attributed victimisation to uncontrollable factors, such as victims being younger, weaker and unable to defend themselves or fight back. Roughly half of respondents believed victims’ behaviour was controllable, and they were victimized because they ‘show off’ or because of what they said or did to others. The remaining 24% of respondents attributed victimisation to victims’ being unattractive, ‘different’, unpopular or ‘not cool’. Thornberg (2015) groups reasons for bullying into the following three categories:

- Victims’ being different, odd or deviant
- Bullies’ seeking to improve their social position
- Bullies’ having psychosocial problems
Thornberg finds that young people view social positioning as the dominant reason for bullying.

An earlier study identified two of the same general reasons for bullying as in Thornberg (2015). Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008) interviewed a group of 10 key informants to obtain a more in-depth understanding of bullying. Results suggested that bullying was a way to create status within pupil culture. It involved the pupils’ way of creating and recreating their values as well as rewarding and punishing differences between themselves, but the determining element in bullying is the peculiarity of the victim that is coined by the reputation attributed to them.

3.7.3 Intergenerational factors

The behaviour or absence of parents has also been linked to bullying behaviour. Bullies often lack positive role models at home, and their parents or guardians may physically abuse them (Dussich and Maekoya, 2007; Farrington and Hawkins, 1991; Kim et al, 2006; Roberts and Morotti, 2000). Children who witness or experience abusive disciplinary practices may perceive these practices as acceptable in child-rearing. Such punitive disciplinary measures, especially corporal punishment, have been linked to aggression in children (Gershoff, 2002; Graziela et al, 2013). And Pirrie et al (2011) provide anecdotal evidence that parents’ mental ill health contributed to their children’s behavioural problems.

3.7.4 Social learning theory

I have discussed attributes associated with bullying to illustrate how commonly it occurs. However, these attributes are not a theory of why bullying occurs. For that, I first turn to Bandura’s social learning theory. Social learning theory was, in part, a response to theories of learning that held that learning occurs through mainly, or solely through, direct reinforcement (eg, classic conditioning). According to social learning theory, people can also learn just by observing others’ behaviour and the rewards and punishments they receive for their behaviour (Bandura, 1977). That is, people learn by observing their role models’ behaviour (Stouten et al, 2010). Consequently, social environments affect individuals, and individuals affect their social environment (Bandura, 1977; McAra and McVie, 2010).
According to social learning theory, children’s social environment affects their tendencies to bully each other, and results from the studies mentioned in the previous section on intergenerational factors that contribute to bullying, fit predictions of social control theory. Children who witness one parent victimizing the other (without themselves being abused) may learn to either be a bully or be a victim. Bandura (1986) posits that children are able to learn, or acquire, aggressive behaviours by witnessing violent interactions. Those who become bullies ‘might identify themselves with the … perpetrator and learn that violence is an acceptable way to respond to disagreements and become aggressive with weaker peers’ (Baldry, 2003, p.715). Whether children copy violent behaviour also depends on factors such as whether they have an open dialogue with responsible peers or adults about such behaviours. Next, I discuss another explanatory theory, social control theory.

3.7.5 Social control theory

Hirschi’s social control theory proposes that delinquent behaviour tends to be the result of weakened or broken social bonds (Curran and Renzetti, 2001). Therefore, bullying behaviour is less likely to occur in a community (or family or school) where the members have strong bonds and attachments (Curran and Renzetti, 2001).

Hirschi (1969) presents four elements of the social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. There are a variety of ways to strengthen social bonds in a school setting and thereby reduce delinquent behaviour and bullying. For example, Hirschi argues that when pupils commit to extracurricular activities, such as choirs and sports teams, they invest their time and energy into something positive that builds healthy relationships. Also, when children engage in conventional school activities and hold conventional values, it builds their sense of awareness and sense of belonging. As a result, students avoid delinquent behaviour and bullying (Espelage and Swearer, 2009). And in fact, subsequent research has found that young people who engage in school activities are less likely to bully others at school (Mahoney, 2000 in Espelage and Swearer, 2009; Qureshi, 2011). Social control theory points out the significance of the school environment, which is discussed in greater detail below.
3.7.6 School environment

Olweus (1999) emphasizes the role of the school in bullying and suggests the need to create a positive school environment as a preventative measure. Every school has a unique culture that includes ‘the hidden curriculum and the way they conduct their affairs’ (Donald et al, 1997, p.87). It is the ‘norms and values that influence behaviour in the school which often become the shared ethos of the school’ (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2002, p.145). Ethos has the most powerful influence on behaviour and determines how such behaviour is interpreted (Pepper, 1995; Rutter, 2002). Using a hierarchical analysis of data from 5,037 11th grade students in 33 schools in the United States, Zaykowski and Gunter (2012) found that school environment positively influenced offending and victimisation. The authors maintain that school environment theory provided a useful framework for contextualizing individuals’ behaviour without focusing exclusively on individual characteristics (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). Welsh (2001) administered a six-item scale of threat (including hitting, pushing and theft) with 4,640 middle school students. Results suggested that a cohesive school environment (e.g., having positive peer-associations and clear, fair rules) reduced delinquent behaviour and victimisation.

Rigby (1996) maintains that school environment is crucial to interactions among students and teachers. In accordance with social learning theory, he argues that teachers need to model good behaviour in their interactions amongst themselves and with their pupils. Schools that offer counselling might be able to reduce bullying by positively changing the values and norms that encourage bullying. On the reverse side, not taking action or remaining silent about bullying creates favourable conditions for perpetrators (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

It follows that schools’ disciplinary systems affect bullying, too. To reduce bullying, schools’ disciplinary systems should ensure mutual interactions and equal opportunities between the students (Smith and Sharpe, 1994).

The quality and extent of supervision by teachers affects bullying behaviour in schools (Olweus, 1993; Boulton, 1994). The Sheffield project found that 75% of the bullying incidents took place in the school playground where there was less adult supervision (Whitney and Smith, 1993). However, the effect of adult supervision depends on the teachers’ and pupils’ attitudes towards, and definitions of, bullying (Siann et al, 1993).
3.8 Researching bullying in Ghana

In this section, I discuss implications of the above literature review on such research in Ghana. In much of the Global North, there is guidance on how schools should respond to bullying behaviours (Thornberg et al, 2013), but there is a general lack of concern about bullying in Ghanaian schools (the rationale behind my use of bullying-like behaviours). In fact, Ghana does not have any government policies on bullying in schools or in the workplace (Adinkra, 2012), whereas many countries in the Global North do (OPSEU, 2007). Similarly, bullying is a popular topic among researchers in Europe, America and Australia (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012), but empirical research on bullying has not yet reached Ghana. For example, one study investigated the way English public schools regard parents of children with significant behavioural problems (Macleod et al, 2013); this type of study is only possible in the context of both a body of academic literature about, and government policies that address, bullying, violence, and behavioural problems among schoolchildren in the UK, but no such body of literature or government policies about these issues in Ghana exist. Due to the absence of such a body of literature, researchers who study schoolchildren’s behaviour in Ghana also have less guidance regarding pragmatic matters, such as how to gain access to research participants (eg, see Macleod and Pirrie, 2010 for such a study in the context of the UK). Therefore, researchers who conduct studies in new contexts need to draw what insights they can from existing literature while remaining aware that such insights might not translate directly into the new context.

Relevant social interactions are perceived differently in Ghana than in countries where empirical studies have already been conducted. Such differences in understanding acts and interactions are contingent on the fact that norms of appropriateness are contextually negotiated (Sondergaard, 2011). It follows that the context of the current study represents a culturally and historically situated place and time, in a specific here and now (Graue and Walsh, 1998). Thus, bullying is examined as a phenomenon that is part of children’s interaction within a socio-cultural context (Eriksson, 2001; Swearer and Doll, 2001) where ‘bullying is a phenomenon broken out into social processes under certain circumstances and as a result of these processes’ (Beran, 2009, p.249).

In the current study, the local community of the case study school, the school environment, and the peer group constitute a socio-cultural framework
within which ‘bullying-like’ meanings are understood (Besag, 1989; Siann et al, 1993; Gubrium and Holstein, 1995; Souweidane and Huesmann, 1999). Specifically, the current study focuses on the participants’ own experiences and the meanings they attribute to their interactions, focusing on language and their perceived roles during interactions with their peers. In this way, the respondents’ unique school situations, relationships and interactions at school, and their spatial boundaries are taken into account to understand the context of their behaviour (Graue and Walsh, 1998).

Not only is there no research on bullying in the Ghanaian context but there is also no corresponding term for bullying in any Ghanaian language (Adinkra, 2012). The situation in Ghana is even more complex because many languages are spoken in Ghana, although the official language is English. Because there are many languages, this study has to contend with diverse terminology. I used a creative method to understand bullying-like behaviours without imposing any particular terminology on the respondents (see Chapter 4).

This method helped overcome the obstacles pointed out by Smith et al (2002) regarding cultural differences in understanding bullying.

Ghana’s hierarchical culture has been shown to be marked by authoritarianism (Dunne and Ananga, 2013), which could also encourage ‘bullying-like’ behaviours (Rigby, 1996, Macdonald, 2003). According to Macdonald, ‘a culture that encourages and celebrates perceived strength and dominance breeds bullying’ (2003, p.15). Also, Ghana has a male-dominant culture wherein females are seen as inferior to males (Adinkra, 2012). In general, such beliefs are carried into school settings with many male students trying to maintain their dominance over female students (Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Dunne et al (2005) suggest that most subordinate positions in Ghana are occupied by female students in highly gendered institutions and that female students are routinely subjected to violence.

The link between bullying and punitive disciplinary measures is relevant to the study of bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools, where it is legal to administer certain levels of corporal punishment both within homes and in schools (Abgenyega, 2006). Policies on corporal punishment influenced how the boys in the case study school perceived bullying-like behaviours (see a detailed discussion in Chapter 5).
3.9 Conclusion

Many aspects of the research discussed in this chapter are essential for understanding bullying, but there is also a need for understanding how pupils, as actors in their own community, interpret the phenomenon of bullying or bullying-like behaviours. By using a creative and informed approach to explore the views of the boys in the case study school, I will have gained a particular understanding, which gives insight into their social worlds without imposing understandings from other research settings. In this way, the scope of what is known about bullying and how to respond to it can be broadened or reconsidered. This chapter explored psychological and sociological views on bullying, and the next chapter discusses the methodological decisions and tools employed in the current study.
Chapter 4

Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an account of the study’s underpinning paradigm and principles, where this project is located within qualitative approaches. The use of an exploratory case study design is explained and justified. Furthermore, I discuss the data gathering tools employed and strategies for data analysis. I provide a reflexive account of the researcher’s role in the research process, both as a Ghanaian living abroad, as well as a person who returned to Ghana to conduct fieldwork. Further, issues relating to my ongoing consideration of research ethics are elaborated, in keeping with a reflexive account of the research process.

4.2 Research aim and questions

The research aim was to understand boys’ perspectives of peer-bullying in one secondary school in Ghana and to explore boys’ own understanding of bullying in the case study school. It uses a creative approach to investigate their awareness and experiences of bullying-like behaviours. The study seeks to understand the context of bullying-like behaviour in the Ghanaian context, as little was empirically known about the topic at the time of the study. The research questions are set out below:

Research questions:

1. How do boys define and describe the ways of ‘peer-bullying’ in Ghanaian secondary schools?

2. What coping strategies do boys use to deal with bullying-like behaviours in schools?

3. How do boys interpret significant adults’ response to peer-bullying in school?
4.3 Interpretivist paradigm

Human interaction is an interpretive process where interpretation and definition are central features (Blumer, 1956). As a result, capturing a given situation by understanding individuals’ interests and perspectives is an important element of human interaction; as individuals shape their own social context (Zimmerman 1970; Brittan, 1973).

The interpretive paradigm, which is underpinned by observation and interpretation, involves gathering and interpreting in order to understand the meanings which have been attributed by people to such events (Deetz, 1996; Myers, 2009). Accordingly, interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges and unfolds (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Hermeneutics, which is a foundational concept in interpretivist thinking, can be used to expand on this paradigm further; “it can be used as a combination of empirical investigation and subsequent subjective understanding of human phenomenon.” (Wood 1996, p.555)

The fundamental principle of hermeneutics is that all human understanding is achieved by iterating between considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the whole that they form (Woodward, 1996; Myers, 2009). In the current study, this approach was adopted to understand how the boys “understand and act in social, religious, and economic contexts” (Woodward 1996, p. 557). In this way, the nature of understanding under hermeneutics involves a movement “from the whole to the part and back to the whole” (Gadamer, 1976, p. 117).

As the purpose of the research is to understand boys’ perspectives of peer-bullying in a Ghanaian secondary school, the ontological arguments presented in the thesis imply that all reality is interpretation and hence there are multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2004). Such multiple interpretations, or realities, exist due to varying human experience, including people’s knowledge, views, interpretations and experiences (Trinder and Reynolds, 2000; Thomas and Pring, 2004). Still, events and situations are understood through the mental processes of interpretation that is influenced by interaction with social contexts (Thomas and Pring, 2004). In line with the assumptions above, the methodological path of the current research involved processing data gathered through a school/space mapping activity, observations, semi-structured
interviews and focus groups. The interpretive approach made it feasible for me to adopt a qualitative approach and to engage in the activities and actions as they are expressed within specific social contexts (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

4.3.1 Rationale for qualitative study

In order to interpret the boys’ subjective accounts of bullying-like behaviours, I deemed it necessary to understand the nature of peer interaction and the culture of the case study school, which also involved identifying how language was used to interpret peer interaction and behaviour. It is established that using a qualitative approach is an appropriate means to understand such human behaviour and interactions (see Richardson, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit, 2004; Domegan, and Fleming, 2007).

Since qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with processes rather than outcomes or products, personal interactions and perceptions of those involved in events can also be understood (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Richardson, 1995). In this way, adopting a qualitative approach in the current study made it feasible for me to obtain the insights necessary to understand the participants’ roles in events, and their perceptions of their experiences (Richardson, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln). For example, the approach to data collection was ‘open ended’ in the sense that it did not follow through a rigid and inflexible plan set up at the onset.

Research design is similar to an architectural outline; the research design serves as a plan, structure and an execution strategy for the research, which seeks to maximize the validity of the findings (Mouton, 1996; Yin 2003). There are many types of qualitative research such as grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, life history, action research and case study (Patton 2002). Whilst there are common features that run across these forms of qualitative research, each type presents its own uniqueness in relation to methodological and theoretical implications.

4.4 Case study design

Whilst there are different disciplinary approaches to case study research, there is a general agreement that it is concerned with the in-depth study of a particular case in its natural context, through a variety of methods, to generate qualitative and/or quantitative data (Thomas 2011). Case study has been referred to as a research design rather than a research method. As a case study
involves the use of other methods, Yin (2009) defines it as a research design which spells a flexible action plan for the entire research process.

A case study is a form of research design that is used as a means to explore facets of human behaviour in their social contexts through the use of multiple lenses or data gathering tools (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). Robson (1993, p.146) defines a case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, using multiple sources of evidence”; whilst Stake (1995) admits that multiple practices and disciplines in the use of case study seem to have bred a myriad of definitions. Stake (1995, p.5) maintains that certain characteristics run across many definitions as he defines it as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case; coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.”

Whilst the above definitions provide distinctive guidelines for using a case study approach for an empirical inquiry, such as the current study, it does not necessarily provide rigid laid down principles to be strictly followed.

Some have seen this form of flexibility as creating inconsistencies (Robson, 1993) when different studies using this approach have been compared (Simons, 1996). Hence, this flexibility must be managed by establishing well-defined steps that are relevant to the research aims in order to ensure methodological rigour (Ragin and Becker 1992). In effect, using a case study enables the researcher to understand simple or complex situations by answering “how” and “why” type questions, whilst taking into consideration, how a phenomenon is influenced by its context (Thomas, 2010).

As this thesis stems from a constructivist paradigm which assumes a multiplicity of truth (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006), I sought to use an approach that allows for the subjective emergence of meanings (Searle, 1995), that are associated with interactions and relationships between events and situations (Verma and Mallick, 1999; Stake, 1995); and which can be found in any bounded-system of interest such as an institution, a programme, a responsibility, a collection or a population (Stake 2000). A case study was found to be appropriate because it is an investigation to answer specific research questions which seek a range of different evidences from the case settings; especially when the contextual conditions of the study are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold (Gillham 2000a; Yin, 2003). In this way, a case study examines a bounded system or a case, over time and in detail, employing
multiple sources of data found in the setting (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001; Bassey, 1999). Given the interpretive position adopted in this research, coupled with the nature of the research question, a case study design was considered the most appropriate approach to employ as it provided a systematic way to collect data, analyse information, and report the results to provide a thick description (Yin, 2003). Such thick descriptions gave me access to the subtleties of changing and multiple interpretations (Walsham, 1995b; Yin, 2003). However, I was also clear about the scope of the study or what my case was not; and the study was bounded by time, definition, place, activity and context (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003). In this way, a case study becomes an umbrella term that is concerned about interactions and relationships between events and situations (Verma and Mallick, 1999; Stake 1994). As such, it can be used under any bounded-system of interest, for instance the boys’ experiences of bullying, in the current study (Stake 2000). Thus, the purpose of using a case study could be:

an investigation to answer specific research questions which seek a range of different evidences from the case settings; especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined; when the contextual conditions of the study are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold. (Gillham 2000a p.1)

In this stance, I used a variety of methods in gathering data, and this approach made it feasible for me to have a systematic way to collect data, analyse information, and report the results to gain a thick description (Yin, 2003). The flexibility in using multiple sources of evidences allowed me to arrive at what I deemed as the best possible responses to the research question (Mertens 1998; Bassey, 1999).

Various research situations have called for specific types of case studies. Whilst some are based on their functionality, others are based on attributes of the case itself and others by their analytical outcomes (Bassey, 1999). For example, Stenhouse (1985, p.50) uses the functionality of the case study to show the types by classifying case studies under four categories: ethnographic; evaluative; educational and action research. Ethnographic case studies investigate structural or causal patterns of actors from an outsider’s perspective; whilst evaluative case studies evaluate a program or an institution.
Yin (1993) uses the analytical level of a study’s outcome to classify case studies under three categories: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Exploratory case studies are usually considered to be a prelude to social research and explanatory case studies may be used for doing causal investigations. Descriptive cases require a descriptive theory to be developed before starting the project (Yin, 1993).

Stake (1995) also identified three forms based on the purpose of the study: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Intrinsic case study is where the case is of primary interest; instrumental case study is when the case is used to understand more than what is obvious to the observer and collective case study is when a group of cases is studied (Stake, 1994). Whilst this study has some limited degree of description and explanation, it was an ‘exploratory’ case study as there was little baseline information on peer-bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools and on bullying in general in the Ghanaian context. Furthermore, it was ‘intrinsic’ in the sense that the case, which is the boys’ experiences of bullying, is of primary interest (Stake, 1994). Yet, as I was an outsider who was also interested in the structural patterns of boys’ behaviour, the study could be said to have strong ‘ethnographic’ elements.

As critics of the case study approach focus on the unrealistic nature of generalisations based on a case, due to its possible limited coverage (Abercrombie et al 1984; Cohen et. al 2007), it is very important to emphasize that the aim of the current study was not to draw generalisations. The aim of using the case study was to understand both the boundaries and the complexities of the boys’ experiences of peer-bullying and bullying-like behaviours. To unpack the boundaries and complexities associated with the unit of analysis, it was necessary for me to understand that “every instance of human interaction represents a slice from the life world, carrying layered meanings, which come in multiples and are often contradictory (Denzin, 1983 p. 134)”.

By providing the readers with rich contextual data, Lincoln and Guba (2002, p.32) maintain that, “if the generalizations are accepted, they should be as indeterminate, relative and time and context bound”. Whilst the current study did not aim to generalise findings, providing depth to the nuanced accounts of boys gives some level of insight into the case study school, which might be used as a building block for other studies in contexts with similar characteristics (Flyvberg, 2006). The current study commenced from the premise that students are creative, active and critical actors in their learning places.
In the social sciences, research is increasingly conducted with children on the assumption that childhood is socially constructed and that children are competent social actors who have a particular perspective on the social world that adults should listen to (James and James, 2001). Children construct their own meanings and have a right to share this meaning. Researchers working with children need to collaboratively collect data as opposed to collecting data about children (Alderson and Morrow 2004). One important reason for researching with young respondents is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on adult interpretations of their lives (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001).

In the past, assumptions about children’s limited competence has been one of the main factors restricting their active involvement in research; yet Morrow and Richards (1996) and Alderson and Morrow (2011) challenge this thinking and encourage researchers to ignore issues such as age and competence, but to rather recognise the differences in perspectives between adults and children. Researchers are encouraged to use a variety of “child friendly” data collecting techniques as long as they ‘resonate with children’s own concerns and routines’ (Christensen and James, 2000 p.7). The idea of children playing an active role in the current study was demonstrated during the data gathering and ethical procedures, as discussed in 4.6 and 4.8. For example, they led the mapping activity, which enabled them to list and explain the forms and patterns of behaviour in the case study school. Similarly, using an introductory scenario (see Appendix 9) to begin the one to one interviews enabled the boys to use their own language and explanations relating to bullying-like behaviour, instead of myself (as an adult researcher) imposing definitions or terminologies on them.

### 4.5.1 Selecting and accessing the case study school

The total number of secondary schools in Ghana is 840 - 566 public (7% day only, 13% day with hostel, 9% mainly boarding, 11% Boarding/Day and Hostel, and 60% Boarding and Day) and 284 private (18% Day only, 39% Day with Hostel, 2% Mainly Boarding, 11% Boarding/Day and Hostel and 30% Boarding and Day) (EMIS, 2014).

The current study was conducted in one boys’ residential and day secondary school. This school was located in an urban area in Ghana and had around
2000 students. I selected the school based on the criteria that the school was recognised by the Ghana Education Service; that the school had both day and boarding systems; that I felt a receptiveness to the project, not just from the head teacher, but more importantly from the pupils and staff. The number of pupils on roll in the selected school was significant as it needed to be large enough to facilitate consideration of the subject from inter year-group and intra year-group perspectives. Sampling a large school presented opportunities to access a diversity of views from a fairly large number of respondents. By considering intra year-group perspectives, I hoped to have a fair representation of views across the sections of pupils in the school. As the Ghana Education Service is the official regulatory agency for secondary schools in Ghana, it was not legal for a secondary school to operate until it has been granted permission to do so. Hence, I found it necessary to choose a school that has been recognised by the Ghana Education Service.

I had the option to either contact many different schools that all met the criteria and then choose from the responses or to just contact one potentially suitable school in the first instance. Contacting many schools appeared to be a safe option, on the assumption that at least some of them might respond positively. Yet in a situation where many, or even all, the schools would respond positively, it would have been uncomfortable to turn them down; coupled with the time factor in writing and waiting for all the responses. Hence, I made a list of 10 schools meeting the criteria and chose to contact the first one (which has been given the pseudonym, Holyrood) to start with.

4.5.2 The school

Holyrood was a missionary, all boys, secondary school located close to the centre of a medium sized town in Ghana. It operated both the boarding and day systems of secondary education and had newly built and renovated structures. According to the head teacher, the school had a large number of children from elite backgrounds even though it took pupils from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. As the school had produced many notable alumni in the country and beyond, and was rated amongst the top in the country’s league table, many people wanted their children to be admitted to this prestigious school.

After getting approval from the Moray House School of Education Ethics
Committee (The University of Edinburgh), I wrote to the head teacher at Holyrood Academy; explaining the aims and procedures of the research and was honest and transparent regarding my intentions (see Pirrie and Macleod 2010). Fortunately, the response of the head teacher was positive. I kept in touch with the school and arranged a suitable time to visit. Upon arrival I had a meeting with the head teacher, during which he gave a brief verbal account of their ethos.

He took me round the school and also introduced me to the school during assembly time. Through him I was able to contact some key members of staff, who would later prove very helpful in recruiting participants. I discussed my research with these officials, and how I might proceed, with their approval, and we negotiated my access to various venues in the school in order to discuss the research with potential participants with a view to gaining their consent (see a full discussion of ethical issues in 4.8). I was invited to introduce myself and explain my research to the students during an assembly of all the years, after which I gave out information leaflets and consent forms (see Appendices 1 to 5 for copies of information leaflet and consent forms). While I talked about the importance of my work and my desire to have people participate, I also emphasized that it was not compulsory and that people could change their minds at any stage of the process.

### 4.6 Data sources

The primary data source was 20 one-to-one, individual interviews with the boys (see their profile in the Observation Schedule below and in Appendix 6). The observation, documentary evidence, mapping activity and focus groups provided a backdrop for the individual interviews as presented in Table 1 below. It emerged from the the mapping activity, that 20 pupils would be an appropriate sample as I had reached a theoretical saturation with this number. As it was a baseline study, it was not feasible to be guided by the sample of a similar study as suggested by Thomas (2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot interviews</td>
<td>10 boys from London</td>
<td>To inform development of interview schedule, practise skills and to test out the scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (4.6.1)</td>
<td>60 (observations)</td>
<td>To immerse myself in the case study school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To inform development of interview schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping exercise</td>
<td>90 (number of boys)</td>
<td>To familiarise myself with language usage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 exercises</td>
<td>To identify authentic scenario for interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To provide contextual information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>9 (4 pupils in each)</td>
<td>To access Interactive collective accounts on boys’ behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To provide contextual information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews – boys</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>To address research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews adults</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>To gain additional perspectives which would contribute to understanding boys’ accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews – girls</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Boys Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Boarder or Day</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Senior or Junior</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>One to One interviews, Mapping Activity and Focus Group (All 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Boarder</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>All 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kwame</td>
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<td>Kojo</td>
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<td>Richard</td>
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4.6.1 The scenario and piloting the interviews schedule for boys

Informed by creative techniques in gathering data from young people (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009), the scenario was developed as a means of engaging children in conversations about their behaviour and interactions. The scenario was constructed to be used to talk about bullying without using the word bullying (and can be found in Appendix 9). The main purpose of the pilot was to test the understanding of the scenario, in order to reduce potential problems such as lack of clarity (Cohen and Manion 1994).

While the boys in the pilot were not recruited through their school, I still followed some ethical considerations by seeking their informed consent and conducting the interviews in a local London library. As my interest was to understand how they would respond to the scenario for the interviews, the interviews did not last for more than 10 minutes. In effect, all the respondents in the pilot study indicated that there was bullying going on in the scenario. While data from the pilot study was not used in the main study, the experience of piloting the interview schedule enabled me to develop the scenario and to sharpen the follow up questions I used during the main study.
I began the fieldwork in the case study school with a series of observations of daily informal interactions (such as boys chatting and playing) as I initially walked around the school, usually during play-time; as they came in to school, and after normal school hours as they went to their homes or their dormitories. For the first two days, I would go to a venue, for example at the playground, and stay for approximately 45 minutes, simply sitting or standing as was appropriate (and possible), taking notes in my journal as I observed the interactions and the setting. The aim of these observations was to get a general sense of acclimatisation to the context. To some extent the initial observations could be seen as ‘descriptive observation’ (Angrosino and de Perez 2000).

There is a distinction between different stages of writing field notes; moving from ‘mental notes’ or ‘headnotes’, on to ‘jotted notes’, which are later written up in a more formal version or descriptive field notes (Emerson et al 2001). Such distinctions are marked by the different levels of involvement of the researcher in the field notes, going from apparently objective description to an experiential account of being in the setting (Emerson et al 2001). In my case, for these provisional observations I passed through the ‘jotted notes’ stage and then moved to writing/typing a descriptive field notes in full sentences when I returned home. The descriptive notes comprised of the jotted notes and ‘headnotes’ which were not jotted.

Regarding the content of these notes, I operated at a range of levels as described by Emerson et al (2001), I would note the ‘objective’ positions, type of behaviour, who was present, what was the occasion, what was the language being used (if I could hear from the vantage point of my observation), what happened before and after the incident, and what I felt about the incident or how I described it. I would also relate my experiences and feelings in the venue, particularly where I was talking to other students. In addition, I would hope that someone reading my field notes would be able to gain a sense of what it was like to be in that venue. For example an extract from my field notes reads:

Three boys were walking towards the playground from the corridors while two others meet them from another direction starting a conversation amongst them all. They talk with each other nicely and then all of a sudden one of the boys pushes another and runs off whilst he is chased by the one who pushed him. The others seem to be laughing...
and urging the one who was pushed on to chase the one who pushed him. I try to follow them to the playground and later found the two boys returning to join the others and chatting as if nothing had happened.

In writing up my field notes, I adopted headings similar to those put forward by Lindsay (2006):

- **outside environment**
  - incorporating information about the venue’s location in the research environment, for example, who used the venue and for what purpose/s;

- **inside environment**
  - observations of the furniture/resources (if applicable), arrangement of space in the venue and general décor

- **pupil characteristics**
  - this would include my descriptions of the clothes students were wearing, the size and mix of the groups they were in, what activities they were engaged in, their distribution through the venue, and any changes noted over the period of observation

- **forms/patterns of behaviour**
  - what were the students doing or saying to each other

- **information on management style**
  - This would include information about the sort of uniforms the staff were wearing, if any, and other general observations about the staff, whether there were any present and what they were doing; personal impressions of the venue

These headings and reflections on personal observations were incorporated into an observation schedule (see a copy in Appendix 6) as I conducted the participant observations, to try to ensure that I was consistently thinking about all the different aspects of each scenario observed.

4.6.3 Participant observation

Having conducted 20 initial observations within 3 days, as a way of immersing myself in the setting, I then engaged in 40 more formal participant observations in play-grounds and in the corridors. In this way, I could engage participants
in opportune and incidental conversations. As I had already been introduced
to the all the students, the students knew why I was there and they knew that
I could ask for their individual consent to participate in the project. I used this
method to begin recruiting participants in order to avoid being tied to, either,
specific venues or specific groups of people. I was fortunate to have a teacher
available each time I needed help with finding the names and year groups of
students.

While some previous studies, using student samples, have been based on
samples of university students, chosen simply for ease of access (eg, Gill et al,
2007; Moss et al, 2009), whilst on the field, I found observing students under
different circumstances to be a more suitable way to get to know a little bit
about them before proposing to recruit them (Ritchie et al, 2009). Observing
students before recruiting meant that, I could avoid recruiting through
teachers, though that option was offered to me, as that could limit my sample.
More importantly, students may have felt obliged to participate if recruited
through teachers.

I purposely chose to observe at locations that were understood to be places
that students were expected to go during normal school hours. Yet, it was
possible that I may have missed a few children who did not come to such
places such as the playground and other locations in the school. For example,
not all the boys moved out of their classrooms during break times and some
of them went straight to their dormitories. What was important to me was to
have the views of both boarders and day students across the different levels
and classes in the case study school, so as to have a fair representation of both
day and boarding students.

My method of recruitment broadly followed that used by Lindsay (2006). I
would approach students in the corridors or the playground after some brief
observation, briefly explain/remind them of who I was and the purposes and
methods of the research; encourage them to read my research information
leaflets and consent sheets and contact me if they needed further clarification
and/or indicate their consent to get involved.

I was mostly ‘hanging around’ the playground during lunch time to collect
the forms back or they could deliver it in the staff common room in my
temporary allocated pigeon hole. On visiting the venues, I tried to remain
open to approaching as many students as possible, sometimes inspired by the
activities I found them engaged in, eg, during playtime when I found students exchanging words or arguing. Almost all the people I spoke with were willing to participate even though not all of them eventually submitted their consent form.

Some of them were asking me when I would actually ask them proper questions. They were also interested to know about life in the UK was, and how I found living away from home. I tried to maintain a professional relationship with the boys while establishing a friendly rapport. For example, I introduced myself as a research student, instead of a PhD student so that they would not see me as ‘too senior’. The rapport I built up over time enabled me to engage in some relevant conversations with a wider group of students during the observations, who were not formally involved in the subsequent research. They were happy to talk with me about the research even before their consent forms were returned. Also I was reluctant to take notes so I was able to listen to them properly. However given that my ethical approach rested on keeping participants well informed and trying to represent them as fairly as possible, it seemed only sensible to take notes having assured participants that they would remain anonymous in any reports I might write up.

4.6.4 School/space mapping exercise

The school mapping exercise was used as a creative means to talk with the boys about their interactions at school. It has been argued that traditional research methods such as interviews and focus-groups with children may not be sufficient for obtaining children’s perspectives since children’s language, culture, age and ability may pose limitations to their ability to understand and to fully engage with the research process (Punch, 2002b). Therefore, I found it necessary to explore ways of conducting a creative ‘child-friendly’ and ‘context appropriate’ research (Scott, 2000; Thomas & O’Kane, 2000), using the physical space of the school.

The physical space of the school, and the spatiality of social life, have been largely neglected in educational research, and the concept of space tends to be metaphorically used rather than analytically, as adopted in the current study (Massey, 1993; Gorden et al 2000a). In this sense, the school mapping activity was a ‘trial and error’ approach inspired by a quest to find activities that may help investigate children’s perspectives in a child-friendly and creative
manner. This made it possible for me to talk with the boys about peer-bullying without explicitly mentioning the term bullying or substituting it directly with any other word in order to avoid the possibility of imposing my views or interpretations on them.

I used the various spaces/locations in the school site (as represented on a map, partly included in Appendix 6) as a starting point when talking with students about their experiences and interactions in the school. Since the earlier observations helped me to immerse myself in the school environment and had aided me to familiarise myself with the physical spaces/locations in the school environment, I had an awareness of the locations in the school. As I had had a large number of students (see table 1) indicating their interest to participate, I included as many as possible, so as to have a wider representation and spread of students’ views in the case study school. In this way, I had 9 groups of 10 or 11 students in each activity.

There were 2 groups for only juniors in SHS 1; 2 groups for pupils in SHS 2 including both juniors and seniors and 2 for only seniors in SHS 3. The other remaining 3 groups were a mixture of both seniors and juniors from all levels. All groups were mixes of day pupils and boarders. These groups were formed in order to see if there would be any differences in responses between day students and boarders and between seniors and juniors. Yet, I also wanted to also give the juniors space to freely express themselves (see a discussion on the hierarchical nature of Ghanaian schools in Chapter 2.5). I aimed to have each activity in a classroom during lunch time, each lasting for approximately 25 minutes.

I would always give a brief introduction of the research and the task and alerted the participants that some may be invited for a follow up discussion in a much smaller group and later on a one-to-one interview basis. First I asked participants to indicate their favourite and least favourite sites on the school map, which was then followed by asking volunteers to write the activities they engaged in at these sites on A4 sheets. After they had listed these activities I encouraged them to use different colours to indicate which activities made them or others happy/not so happy/sad/angry. While they were writing and interacting, I observed and took notes of who was writing what. I looked for and selected people who were active participants and those who were not so active, to be asked to take part in the focus group in order that boys may not be excluded based on how quiet they appear to be (Robson, 1993). I was also looking for those
who were using words representing negative interactions such as ‘fighting’ and ‘insulting’. In view of this, I approached the focus group exercise with the aim of trying to have a deeper understanding of the some of the words listed in the activity; to understand the unseen experiences/activities beneath those colours and words in an interactive and sociable manner. In this way, the selection of boys for the focus groups was not to cover the range of experiences, even though some particular forms of behaviours which related to the aim of the study were of interest. Rather, I selected respondents who held particular views that I was interested in exploring further. The process I adopted in selecting respondents bore a striking equivalence with theoretical sampling, which is used to “collect data from places, people and events that will maximise opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts.” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 143)

4.6.5 Focus groups

A focus group is a form of interview which is used as a tool to gather “qualitative data, which essentially, involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion, ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues” (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). Focus group discussions were used as a time economic and efficient approach to gather data (Krueger and Casey, 2000) from the many participants who, it was noted during the mapping activity held particular views of relevance to the study. In this way, a large number of respondents could participate; which could also create a friendly social environment and encourage active participation and cohesiveness or interpersonal attraction (Peters, 1993; Krueger, 2000). Such interactions could create and build essential data which might represent the participants’ shared views (Morgan, 1988), as a result of possible spontaneous interactions Butler (1996), which may not be possible during one-to-one interviews.

Given the large number of respondents who were willing to participate, I conducted 9 focus groups (4 for all juniors; 2 for all seniors and 3 for both seniors and juniors) which served a number of purposes. These were to follow on from some of the key issues arising from the mapping activity in understanding the context of the boys’ interactions, and to help select participants for the individual interviews. In this way I followed on from what they had said themselves during the mapping activity. Each focus group discussion began
with an introduction, followed by instructions explaining the nature of the activity, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw. Prior to data collection, children were invited to each complete two copies of the consent form, one for their records and one for the researcher.

To allow the boys to discuss the issues they raised, I had noted key points that would be revisited. I opened the focus group discussions with questions like ‘do you remember what we looked at during the mapping activity; what colours did we use, which colours were used to indicated sadness/happiness?’ I encouraged them to talk about general reasons why they thought people may have used those colours, rather than their own personal experiences. This was done to encourage active participation within the groups. I noted those who held particular views of interest and alerted them that they may be invited for a one-to-one interview, if they were interested. As they discussed, I tried to avoid too much discussion around sensitive individual personal experiences in the focus groups and rather noted any such stories for the individual, semi-structured interviews. Yet, some of the data from the focus groups were important to the findings as I used my judgement, or what Smith and Morrow (1991) describe as purposive or convenient sampling, to choose participants who were more engaged in the discussion and those who were using key words of interest such as ‘fighting’, ‘pushing’, and ‘quarrelling’.

I wanted the boys to have an opportunity in the individual interviews or in the focus groups to discuss how they saw their own experiences and perspectives of behaviour amongst their peers, and in their school generally. In this way, I was open to include discussions or incidents that may not have seemed relevant initially during the observation or/and or mapping activity. Consequently, whilst my primary data source was from interview data with the boys, data from the other activities became a subsidiary source. I was aware of what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) posited, that it is impossible to remove the ‘researcher effect’ from the process of research completely; what I sought to do was to allow myself to be guided to by participants’ concerns and beliefs, and to understand my influence on their voices.

I was also careful not to ask about any personal information that might lead to exposure and negative interactions amongst members of each focus group. Since all the groups were from the same school and had already participated in the mapping activity, I reserved questions which probed their personal experiences for the one-to-one interviews. Each discussion lasted for
approximately 40 minutes. With the agreement of all participants, these were audio taped for later transcription. All focus group discussions were conducted in a semi-private space usually an empty classroom; with participants seated on chairs around a circular table.

4.6.6 Individual semi-structured interviews with boys

Interview is a notable data gathering tool in qualitative research, which is purposely used to seek meanings from participants’ experiences; which might contribute to existing knowledge on a particular phenomenon (Kvale, 1996; Creswell, 2007). It is conducted when a researcher questions respondents with the view of obtaining their views or responses on a particular topic or theme (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Creswell, 2007). It can be one-to-one or one to more, depending on the purpose of the interviews. While ‘virtual’ interviews, such as by telephone, can be useful under some circumstances, face-to-face interviewing is commonly used to investigate the worlds of respondents (Holstein and Gubrium, 1999).

The three broad categories of interviews have been noted to be unstructured; semi-structured and structured (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Unstructured interviews take a more informal and spontaneous approach (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003), similar to the ‘on the spot’ interviews which I conducted with the boys as discussed earlier under participant observations. Such questions are less pre-planned and are only based on the issues being observed at each particular moment (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003). In other words, the participants or interviewees are more in control and the researcher has little control on what to include in the conversation, such as with an interview guide (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, such interviews have been seen to be inconsistent, in terms of the vast data it could produce and how different that might be across participants; thereby making it difficult to analyse data from such interviews (Creswell, 2007). Similarly, I found structured interviews, which have been more associated with gathering quantitative data (Creswell, 2007), to be inconsistent with the ontological stance taken in this thesis. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were seen as suitable, as it allows for some guide and flexibility for both the respondents and the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Using semi-structured interviews enabled me to probe for more depth on issues of interest, while participants also had the liberty to tell the stories behind their accounts (Hitchcocks and Hughes, 1992). Yet, such
liberty for respondents could be time consuming and hence pose limitations, if not well controlled (Bodgan and Biklen, 1992).

To ensure that both the individual and group interviews were successful, I adopted advice given by Creswell (2007) to prepare well for the interviews and to construct an appropriate interview guide. As presented earlier the pilot interviews, observations, mapping activity and focus groups were all partly used to prepare for the interviews. In this way, I was able to gain some background knowledge such as language usage, which proved helpful during the construction of a flexible but effective interview guide questions and follow up questions (Creswell, 2007).

Twenty one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted during lesson time, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. Each interview commenced with standardized instructions regarding the general nature of the interview, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw. With the agreement of all participants, audio tape recordings were made. The interviews were prompted with a scenario (this was an updated version of the vignette that was used in the pilot study in London see Appendix 9). Using scenarios and/or vignettes in gathering data has been shown to be advantageous when trying to understand complex issues and the general cultural backgrounds of respondents (Finch, 1987). I was however cautious that people are more likely to provide accounts of general, rather than their individual experiences; “asking what a third party ought to do in a given situation is not the same thing as asking respondents what they themselves think they ought to do” (Finch, 1987 p.113). Yet, while it could be said that scenarios and vignettes could generate a less authentic response but rather, more fictitious accounts Poulou (2000), I still found it useful as it gave room for boys who did not want to discuss their own personal experiences to participate by discussing others’ (Rahman, 1996). In this way, it gave them control on whether to disclose their personal experiences or not; and to discuss issues from a “non-personal and therefore less threatening perspective”. (Hughes, 1998 p.383)

I used guided questions based on the scenario and informed by data from observations, mapping activity and focus groups, to initiate, develop and maintain a collaborative conversation where shared meaning emerged; enabling me to collect relevant data (Raz, 2005). Yet, I avoided personal interpretation or personalising the characters and rather probed their views on what might be happening in the scenario. In this way, the interviews were
co-creating and generating data from the boys. I understood that respondents’ motives for participating and sharing their experiences had implications for their performance and the information they shared; which were explored during the analysis of the data (Huber, 1973).

Following presentation of the scenario, participants were asked a series of questions (see attached Appendix 9) to explore how they interpreted the hypothetical story. The important questions and discussions were:

- what kinds of terminologies/definitions they used to describe the scenario?
- what kind of causes they attributed to what was happening in the story?
- what kind of emotional experiences they attributed to the story’s characters?
- what type of coping strategies they would adopt?
- what type of ending they would anticipate as the conclusion to the story?

These questions then prompted the interview questions which were based on the relevant issues and themes arising from the focus groups and explored their in-depth understanding.

### 4.6.6.1 Debriefing

At the end of each interview participants were offered the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the process and content of the interview. If they felt that participating had disturbed them in any way, they were reminded about the additional support listed at the end of the ‘Participant Information Leaflet’ (Appendices 1 and 2), should they require discussing their experiences with a third party. However, it was quite difficult to find any relevant institution, such as that equivalent to ‘Childline’ in the UK, which they could resort to for help. Hence, if they needed such help (though the need did not arise during the fieldwork); they were encouraged to speak with their head teacher or their parents/responsible adults or even myself whilst I was still available. Still, each participant received a thank you certificate (see Appendix 11 for a sample certificate) of participation, as a means of addressing reward and ending issues (Harker, 2002).

I acknowledge the existence of multiple views in the data, which could be understood by making sense of the boys’ thoughts and actions (Seymour, 2001; Illingworth, 2006). In this way, during the interviews (and the focus group and
mapping activities), the boys’ verbal and non-verbal cues, which were noted in brackets, such as gestures, facial expressions and emotional mannerisms, all gave insights into their accounts and activities (Fontana and Frey, 2003; Hammersley, 2006). Importantly, using the observation, mapping activities and focus groups to gain an initial understanding of the school setting, enabled me to gather contextually rich data, which helped to understand the boys’ peer culture and experiences (Silverman, 1999).

4.6.6.2 Peer de-briefing

The findings of this study were reviewed by experienced researchers (my supervisors) as a way of cross checking issues which I may have taken for granted, in order to make the findings credible to the intended audience. Guba and Lincoln (1985, p. 308) define peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind.”

4.6.6.3 Interviews with others

I found it necessary to conduct interviews with 3 girls, 2 teachers, and 3 parents so as to understand the background of the context of the boys’ peer-interactions in the case study school (see Interview Schedules attached in Appendices 9 and 10). Interactions at school may have some links to, and/or may be influenced by, the norms and traditions within which the case study school is situated (Adinkra, 2012). In this way, the girls, teachers and parents were able to provide some accounts of the expectations of being a boy within the case study school environment. With the help of 2 teachers, I was linked with some parents (one of whom was an education officer), who agreed to participate after I had given them the information research information leaflet and consent forms. These parents were also able to link me with some secondary school girls, who also agreed to participate in the study. All the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality (see a detailed discussion in 5.8). I used a theoretical proposition as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18), to use which data was most relevant to the aims of the study; for example, “which one I would choose to use if I only had 5 minutes.” Yet, while some of the data from parents, for example, was not explicitly drawn from, they still helped me to understand the broader picture behind the stories that
were told by the boys. I chose these other participants on the premise that they had regular interactions with the boys and that they may hold important clues that would contribute to my gathering of contextual information in the school setting. The sample represented the number by which a saturation point was reached in obtaining information.

4.7 Interview data and framework for analysis

The process of analysing the interview data had the purpose of making sense of it, by organising it to “present a narrative that explains what happened” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.229). This was necessary as the interview data initially appeared confusing, unrelated and bulky. As indicated earlier, data from the mapping activity was built on during the interviews and therefore, it would have been difficult to arrive at the interview data obtained. Amongst the many ways of analysing qualitative data, Walliman (2005) discusses the use of typologies, taxonomies and the generation of concepts/theories as options. Miles and Huberman (1994) used the concept of ‘transcendental realism’ for their analysis; which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (see Appendices 9 and 10). The choice of analytical frame for the current research was both contingent on the theoretical and philosophical perspectives which informed the aims of the study, the key questions to be addressed and the type of methodology used (Walliman, 2005). In line with this, the interview data analysis was done manually using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2005; Grbich, 2007). I also noted verbal and facial expressions such as laughter in brackets as they contributed towards meanings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I fully transcribed all data from the interviews in English. I played back and listened to each interview carefully and repeatedly in order to familiarise and immerse myself with the data; by taking notes of core ideas/concepts and by identifying sensitive stories/experiences (Schmidt, 2004; Creswell, 2005). As I was interested in the boys’ own accounts of peer-bullying, I used an inductive approach (see Frith and Kitzinger, 2004) to engage with the data. I was guided by the advice of Bryman (2004, p.401) who posits that coding is a central process in data analysis and it is done by reviewing transcripts and field notes and giving labels (names) to parts that seem of potential relevance theoretical and/or contextual significance. In this way, the codes served as “shorthand devices to label, separate, compile and organise data” (Charmaz, 1983, p.186). These codes are then grouped into
categories. As Dey (1993, p.102) posits:

The meaning of a category is therefore bound up on the one hand with the bits of data to which it is assigned, and on the other hand with the ideas it expresses. These ideas may be rather vague at the outset of the analysis. The meaning of a category is something that evolves during the analysis, as we make more and more decisions about which bits of data can or cannot be assigned to the category.

I read, and re-read through the data to identify themes and subthemes. These themes were abstracts identified through key words in context (KWIC), metaphors, (Bryman, 2004). I used Spradley’s (1979) domain analysis as a guide to identify similar concepts and patterns across the data to set up codes and categories. The codes were parts of the data which I found to be relevant or interesting; “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). A typical example of a code in the data was, “laughing at”, which was used as a coping mechanism and as a means of teasing or humiliating. During the coding, which was a key stage of the analysis, (Miles and Huberman, 1994), I was grouping and also narrowing down the data into meaningful categories by avoiding repetitions (Tuckett, 2005).

This led me to develop perceptiveness to the data through familiarisation, reflection and conceptualisation which led the significant features in the data to become more visible to me (Watson, 2009; Bradley, 2007). This also helped in putting things into perspective, again revisiting the data in order to further identify relations between themes; and which ones were overarching or subsidiary themes (Watson, 2009; Bryman, 2001; Bradley, 2007). Furthermore, I revised the themes. Overarching themes were then studied, refined and defined in the context of the study and also related to the literature and theories underlining the study.

**4.8 Ethics of the research**

My approach to ethics is encapsulated in the balance struck between the consequentialist (how the research affect participants) and deontological (how can I reflect on what are considered the rights of the participants) approaches as noted by Murphy and Dingwall (2001). They outline some underlining principles of ethical research: non-maleficence, which suggests that researchers
should avoid harming participants, and beneficence, suggesting that the research should produce some identifiable benefits.

In attempting to note a balance between these two principles, Angrosino and De Perez (2000) maintain that the means of study should not generate any more harm than is necessary to achieve the value that the research can create. Therefore as much as possible, one should seek the least harmful methods possible for a given purpose, and be careful that this choice will not undermine the value that is created during or after a piece of research. It can be difficult to assess consequentialist approach principles because the consequences of research can be unpredictable; a report can be interpreted by others in a way that is detrimental to the participants even though the researcher may have had the best intentions. As outlined in the rationale of this study and through the findings and conclusions, there are benefits to this research. In terms of non-malfeasance, to the best of my knowledge, it is unlikely that my research processes harmed any of the participants. The conversations and discussions were all done in a friendly manner and where I felt a discussion was leading to very complex issues; I used my discretion to either ask further questions or advised them accordingly based on the help available.

4.8.1 Securing informed consent

The concept of informed consent implies that participants are fully aware of the project and what it will entail before agreeing to participate. As the British Educational Research Association stipulates, the key to informed consent is to ensure that participants are aware of the purpose(s) of the study, and the anticipated consequences of the research; the identity of funders and sponsors; the anticipated uses of the data; possible benefits of the study and possible harm or discomfort that might affect participants; issues relating to data storage and security; and the degree of anonymity and confidentiality which may be afforded to informants and subjects (British Educational Research Association, 2010). Informing and actively involving children in the consent process respects their rights; reduces the risk of harm and helps improve the quality of the research processes and findings (Alderson, 2004; Alderson and Morrow, 2004). Further, researchers who respect children’s rights and their informed consent are more likely to feel accountable to their participants and take their views more seriously (Alderson and Morrow, 2004).
When participants have a clear understanding of the research plan and the implications of their participation, it is more likely to improve the aims, theories and methods of the research and participants are less likely to withdraw (Alderson, 2004; Alderson and Morrow, 2004). As a consequence of the preceding discussion, this research attempted to utilize procedures, such as introduction sessions, information materials and informed consent forms, which maximized the opportunities for children to actively grant their informed consent, or comfortably refuse to participate. Eventually none of those who signed up to participate refused to take part.

During the various activities, I introduced myself and the aims, purpose and process of the project before asking if people would be interested in participating. I assured them that they would be anonymous in any material I produced from the research. According to BERA (2010), consent should be seen as a ‘process’ and may require renegotiation over time. In this way, I stated in the information and consent leaflets, and during introductions, participants were able to withdraw their consent from the research process at any point.

All participants had my contact details and information about the project from the flyer, and were encouraged to get in touch with me if they had any queries or concerns about the research or wanted to withdraw their consent. However as far as the initial participant-observation was concerned, I was observing students who had not actively consented, even though I had been introduced to the school. As Murphy and Dingwall (2001) postulate, in many settings it is impractical to seek active consent from all present. Yet from a deontological perspective, given that I did not negatively affect those observed in any way or invaded their privacy, and given the anonymity associated with all involved in the research, this approach may not be said to be unethical.

4.8.2 Recruiting participants and access

To obtain meaningful data about children and to understand their perspectives, researchers need to develop ways of engaging children in a wide range of different settings and circumstances (Masson, 2004). Children’s socio-political position within society means that researchers are rarely able to approach them directly to request their participation or involvement in research. Thus children are rarely entirely free to decide for themselves whether to participate. Adults or gate keepers can use their jurisdiction to prevent children from being
approached by researchers and/or deny them from participation (Harker, 2002; Hood, Kelley and Mayall, 1996; Masson, 2004).

Primarily, gatekeepers control both researchers’ access to children and children’s opportunities to participate, due to issues relating to child protection (Harker, 2002; Masson, 2004). For instance for Solberg (1996), to have access in a school to carry out research he was required to obtain consent at different levels including the Local Education Authority (LEA), the head teacher, the class teacher, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the children’s parents. However, the participating children were not asked to give their consent. Such a practice may vaguely give indications on how childhood is conceptualised in the context of the research. Nevertheless in this research, as children are seen as active agents and participants; I sought to gain their own consent in their own voices, in addition to going through the gatekeepers.

The information I provided to the gatekeepers helped them to negotiate opportunities on my behalf, which allowed the participating children in the case study school to decide for themselves as to whether to participate or not (Masson, 2004). Similarly to how I provided information to gatekeepers, David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) distributed information leaflets as a means of communicating their study to head teachers and class teachers as they negotiated access to schools and to children, the aim of which was to ‘sell’ the research.

While it is the role of parents, carers and organizations as gatekeepers to ensure that children are protected from potential harm, over-protection challenges the notion of children’s rights and raises important ethical questions concerning the exclusion of children from research participation (Alderson and Goodey, 1996; Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Hood et al, 1996; Morrow and Richards, 1996).

I was aware of the possibility that children who wanted to participate in the current study could be denied the opportunity deliberately by their parents, carers or schoolteachers (Harker, 2002). Thus the authority of gatekeepers can conflict with the notion of a child’s right to participation, as their duty to protect children could take precedence over the child’s right to participate (Hood et al, 1996). In all, issues of access may be best understood in relation to a specific situation where more information about the context and aims of the research; the profile of the participants and researcher are known.
4.8.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an essential ethical issue, particularly, given the power imbalances between researchers and participating children (Davis, 1998; Masson, 2004; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). Thomas and O’Kane, (1998) maintain that factors such as when and where the research takes place, who else will be present during data collection, and who will be told, are all likely to have an effect on a child’s consent to participate and what information they disclose, and how they disclose that information during the research process. For instance the school context is usually seen as a place for children to learn but which is organized and controlled by adults.

While children should be entitled to the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as adult participants (Morrow and Richards, 1996), Mahon et al, (1996) suggest that there appears to be an emerging consensus amongst researchers that complete confidentiality can never be guaranteed to child research participants. This is especially applicable when dealing with sensitive issues such as peer-bullying. For instance The National Children’s Bureau (2003), maintains that that there are limitations to confidentiality in terms of protection; if the child discloses that he, she or others are at risk of significant harm, they suggest that the researcher has a duty to pass on such information to the appropriate professionals.

As I was not aware of such reliable professionals in the context of the case study school, I used my judgement to avoid probing too much for information that might prove to be very sensitive but not too much related to the focus of the research. Yet limitations of confidentiality were clearly explained in the consent information and discussed with the participants prior to data collection at the time that informed consent was sought. To ensure confidentiality in this research the location where the research took place will not be identified, participant anonymity has been ensured by the use of pseudonyms, and facts which otherwise might identify participants have been changed or omitted (Masson 2004). The case study school will not be named in any reporting or discussion of the findings. My conceptualisation of children as active participants and social actors in the research process led me to employ similar strategies by offering complete confidentiality in the hope that participants would view me as trustworthy. In this way, I assured the participants that what they told me would not be repeated to others, as suggested by O’Kane (1998). However, in the event that a participant disclosed potential harm, I had stipulated that I
92 would discuss with them what strategy they would like to pursue and which would be in their best interest (Morrow and Richards, 1996; O’Kane, 1998).

4.9 Reflexivity

Being reflexive in research is essential (Denzin, 1997; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) as I understand that my experiences are integral to what I am investigating; and ‘my representations could reflect my self-presentation while the others’ presence could be connected to my self-presence in the text’ (Denzin, 1994, p.503). Researchers are usually perceived as ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ in the field (Hartas, 2010, Sharan et al, 2001) and these terms are used to refer to the researcher’s positionality in the field. According to Hartas (2010) a researcher’s positionality refers to their position in the research context, such as their gender, class, race, attitudes and other social dimensions.

The research process is affected by the researcher’s positionality and how that is demonstrated in the field. My experiences of being a native of Ghana (speaking the languages; being familiar with the culture) coupled with my experiences of living in the UK, led the respondents to perceive me as both an insider and an outsider, depending on the situation and context. Being perceived as an insider had some advantages in the field as this identity encouraged the boys to be involved in the study. As I have experienced secondary school life in Ghana, I was able to create rapport easily with them. Yet, I also consciously adopted the role of an outsider alongside the pseudo insider role in order not to take things for granted or overlook some questions due to my familiarity with the school context (Hartas, 2010).

As part of being reflective, I used a research journal throughout fieldwork; writing ideas down as they happened or shortly afterwards. Maxwell (1996, p.11) posits that ‘field notes can convert thoughts into a form that allows examination and further manipulation’. I engaged continuously in dialogue with myself and used my discretion to annotate tacit knowledge; observing behaviours and events that struck me as noteworthy. I also created a general guide using Lofland and Lofland’s (1984, p.48) list of things to look out for:

- who is he;
- what does he do;
- what do you think she meant by that;
- why did she do that;
- why is that done;
- what happens after;
- what would happen if;
- what do you think about that;
- who is responsible if.
My note taking was also shaped by Spradley’s (1980, p.78) list of things to consider when taking field notes: “space; activity; object; act; event; time; goal and feelings”. Yet, taking field notes may not be as straightforward as it may appear because what is written may not always convey what happened.

4.10 Research evaluation: trustworthiness of the study

In traditional scientific and experimental research, the criteria for ensuring the credibility of research data are objectivity, reliability and validity. Consequently, researchers often use standardized instruments which can be assessed in a relatively straightforward manner. However, since qualitative studies do not use standardized instruments and often utilize smaller, non-random samples, such evaluation criteria may not be strictly applied to the qualitative paradigm. As there are fewer quantifications and standardizations in qualitative research, assessing the accuracy of qualitative findings can be challenging. Yet there are alternative strategies and criteria that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings; which in turn serve similar purposes as the objectivity, reliability and validity. Trustworthiness is the corresponding term used in qualitative research as a measure of the quality of research, which features the extent to which the data and its analysis are believable, and trustworthy (Guba and Lincoln 1981). The trustworthiness of qualitative research can be established by using the following strategies, as discussed below: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability and are constructed parallel to the analogous quantitative criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality (Krefting, 1991; Creswell, 1998).

4.10.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy; it is analogous to internal validity or how research findings run parallel with reality (Smith and Ragan, 2005). The focus on the participants’ voices in the findings, gaining feedback on the data, interpretations and conclusions from the other participants form part of the ways of increasing credibility in this study (Benner and Wrubel 1989; Cutcliffe and Mckenna 1999). Through my analysis, I sought ambiguities, denials, concealing of, or making light of, emotions, statements and experiences (Altheide and Johnson, 1994). Yet, my interpretation of the boys’ voices is not superior to their own. Rather, I put forward that not all
positions are consciously known, willingly accepted, or freely shared (Hollway and Jefferson 2005), and that people represent their experiences in particular ways subject to surrounding circumstances (Hammersley, 1992).

4.10.2 Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of observing the same findings under similar circumstances (McKenna, 1997). It refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in a similar contexts. Dependability emphasizes the importance of the researcher accounting for the possible disparities within contexts and circumstances that are fundamental to consistency of the research outcome (Mckenna, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). However it can be difficult to obtain reliable findings, as human behaviour is not easily predictable; behaviour is highly contextual and changes continuously, depending on various influencing factors (Hammersley, 1992). The quality of inferences also depends on the personal construction of meanings based on individual experience of the researcher and how skilled the researcher is at gathering the data and interpreting them (Altheide and Johnson, 1994; Cavanagh, 1997). In this study, reliability was achieved by adopting the following techniques:

- explaining the assumptions and theory behind the study;
- using multiple methods of data collection and analysis;
- explaining in detail how data was collected to allow for an audit trail if necessary.

(Searle, 1999)

4.10.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to how research findings fit into new contexts outside the actual study context; it is analogous to external validity, or the extent to which findings can be generalized (Smith and Ragan, 2005). To allow for transferability in this study, I sought to provide a detailed, rich description of the settings studied to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know (Seale, 1999; Kupa, 2008). By this, one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times or setting than those directly studied (Maxwell, 2002; Bassey, 1999).
In qualitative research, generalizability is sometimes overlooked in favour of enriching the local understanding of a situation (Anderson, 1983). Yet in this study, I have provided a detailed description of the study such that data and description speak for themselves to enable readers to appraise the significance of the meanings attached to the findings and use their own jurisdiction regarding the transferability of the research outcomes (Anderson, 1983; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The thesis provides a detailed description of the Ghanaian (secondary school) context in chapter one in order to assist readers interested in making use of the study outcome in other situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Thus issues relating to generalizability rests on readers of the research report based on how close the researcher’s and the readers’ contexts may be (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

4.11 Methodological limitations

As the focus of this study is to provide understanding of boys’ experiences and perceptions of bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools, there are some hindrances to the development of research into understanding the participants’ experiences. The boys’ experiences could only be revealed in some way from the mapping activities, focus groups and interviews, parallel with Becker and Geer’s (1970) thoughts on gaining access to students’ experiences and perceptions. In this way, the retrospective account of past emotion depends on memory and the account that the individual wishes to convey (Lazarus, 1999). While Becker and Geer (1957) do note that participant observation provides more comprehensive insight than any other method, they do suggest that interviewing can take on some of the characteristics of participant observation. They suggest that the researcher needs to understand the common meanings around which the group being interviewed organises action (Becker & Geer, 1957).

Members of churches speak differently from members of informal tavern groups; more importantly, members of any particular church or tavern group have cultures, and languages in which they are expressed, which differ somewhat from those of other groups of the same general type. So, although we speak one language and share, in many ways, in one culture, we cannot assume that we understand precisely what another person, speaking as a member of such a group, means by any particular word.
My experience of living in Ghana and experiencing secondary school life may fulfil the issue of learning the language that Becker and Geer (1957) mention. This knowledge helped me to address the problems Becker and Geer (1957) perceive with interview processes.

4.12 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm and research methodology, design and strategies employed in the study; including participants, data collection tools, credibility of the data collected and method/s of analysing the data collected. The study used an exploratory case study design and a qualitative thematic analysis for analysing data. This design enabled me to have an insight into the practices and discussions of young people themselves while still allowing analysis of the context and structures that shape these. I took an epistemological approach that emphasised the primacy of participants’ own interpretations and claims, but recognised that these interpretations were themselves accounts constructed for a particular situation: the research encounter. My ethical approach was based on the principle of informed consent; confidentiality and issues relating to access and recruitment. Though this chapter explores some of the processes and developments in the research, the findings Chapters (5 and 6) give a more detailed account of how some of the tools and concepts discussed here were applied.
Chapter 5

An exploration of the boys’ interactions and relationships

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore boys’ perceptions and understandings of peer-bullying in one Ghanaian secondary school. It presents the unique situation in the case study school by focusing on how the boys reported that they responded during such interactions, and their reflections on these events. The boys’ perceptions of ‘bullying’ behaviour as presented in the scenario (4.6.1) are elucidated in Chapter 6. First, Chapter 5 sets the scene for a deeper understanding of the boys’ behaviour, by exploring how they made sense of their affiliations and interactions, particularly with their peers.

I begin the chapter with an account of the town in which the school is situated, (drawn from informal and incidental observations, as well as field notes), to provide social context for the interactions. I go on to discuss the shared meanings which the boys ascribed to their experiences. In this chapter, I define context as ‘a group of people within a bounded geographical area who interact within shared institutions and who possess a common sense of interdependence and belonging’ (Outhwaite and Bottomore, 1993, p. 98). Understanding the shared meaning is central to the findings of this study given the position taken that no behaviour is inherently deviant until society labels it as such (Lemert, 1972). Whilst actions such as rape and murder are recognised as a deviation in almost all societies, such an assumption does not explain how the meaning of behaviour (defined as the ways in which people of a given setting interpret and respond) is context bound (Lemert, 1972; Welford, 1975). How society assigns meanings to behaviours can be a complex combination of micro and macro factors that are unique to each given social situation. In this chapter, one of the key themes to be discussed is the shared assumption of the characteristics of the children’s social behaviour where, the same behaviour happening in two different social settings can be interpreted and termed differently.

The chapter also presents evidence of how behaviour (which was also
understood in this thesis as a performance: see Chapter 2) can unfold from the boys’ own interpretations of shared meaning, by exploring the boys’ school life, the role of hierarchies and gender roles. This thesis provides a general exploration upon which further discussions can be built. The basis of this exploration can be found in Goffman’s (1959) description of how an understanding of the interactions that materialise in everyday life can be developed (discussed more fully in Chapter 2.2.) Throughout this chapter, I explore the symbolic meanings of the formal and informal culture within the case study school setting by focusing on its characteristics and those of the town in which it is situated. It is important to note that what could be described as the boys coping strategies, ie overtly masculine and/or aggressive ‘bullying’ behaviours, were enshrined in their daily practices.

5.2 Context of the study

5.2.1 The town of the case study school

The school was situated in an economically vibrant and heavily populated region in Ghana (population approximately 4,000,000 in the region). The town was known for its multi-cultural populace, as people from various parts of the country travelled to settle there for reasons such as employment, what they regarded as ‘better lives’ and a ‘good education’ (Adinkra, 2012). Due to the different backgrounds of many of the inhabitants, which included some who emigrated from other African countries such as Nigeria, and from Asian countries such as China, the town is referred to by local residents as a ‘no man’s land’ (as they seemed to see diversity of cultures as a good thing).

Despite the diversity, there seems to be some commonalities amongst the community members, in terms of how warm and receptive they were. In contrast to Londoners (where I currently reside), for example, during fieldwork when I passed by, local residents would spontaneously say hello and ask how I was doing, however, rarely in central London would pedestrians make eye contact with me. Similarly, people greeted each other as they passed by and the pace of life is slow and relaxed, again contrasting with the fast paced life in the city of London. The region in which the town was located had 67 secondary schools, 45 of which were privately owned (eg, churches, charities and private business) and the rest publicly owned. The case study school was categorised by the Ghana Education Service (2012) as being amongst the few elite schools in the
region and hence had high entry requirements. Since the school did not have an education catchment area policy (where only residents of the town are permitted to attend) students came from across the country to enrol in the school.

Many students aspired to attend this school because it was seen as being amongst the best in the country, and had notable and distinguished alumni. For those students coming from distant towns and villages across the country, the boarding system was available. As a result, the boys in the study were not necessarily from the case study school town and they may have had different characteristics and upbringing experiences. Yet, the data suggests that there was a shared understanding of interactions and experiences in the case study school, leading to a high degree of cultural homogeneity, as discussed throughout this chapter.

I noticed during the mapping activity and field observations that pupils called each other by their first name, and all the boys included in my study seemed to know each other well (such as what programme each was studying and whether they were seniors, juniors or day students). Whilst the daily routines associated with secondary school life tended to foster such a communal attachment (eg, compulsory assembly times, dining and play times), there was a sense of understanding and unity within the school premises that caught my attention. They all seemed to be friendly during playtimes and each one could mingle with others with an attitude of friendliness, which created a relaxed and supportive atmosphere.

5.2.2 School life

In this section, I detail how the boys learnt and perceived the rules and ethos in the case study school. As one might expect there were no explicit and formalised ways in which students were introduced to codes of behaviour. The school’s students’ handbook had a list of forbidden behaviours such as not going to town without permission from teachers; not wearing any other colour on the school compound apart from their prescribed uniforms; and instructions not to fight. However, as Mensah (boarder, senior, 18) described it, he learned from other pupils successfully modelling behaviour in school rather than from this book. He stated that observing people made him learn the correct attitude to have towards people at school and more sensible ways to communicate with people.
I have learned the correct attitude towards people at school and have learned to communicate with people in a more sensible way. You look at what others are doing and how they are doing it, then you see the ones that they do not get in trouble with then you also do the same or similar. Sometimes it is difficult because you do not want to do something in a particular way but because you are in school, you have to do it that way. Especially if you are a junior because you have to satisfy both the seniors and the juniors but when you become a senior it’s easier. When we come to school afresh, we do not know how life works here so we rely on information from other juniors and some seniors and some of the things teachers tell us at the assembly hall … with time, when you have spent some time in the school, then you would become familiar with how things work and then you begin to understand what to do and what not to do at certain times, and at certain places. So when you have understood how things work, then you can share it with those who come to first year the following year. Sometimes those ahead of us tell us that they experienced things in their first year that they are not passing on to us, so that means that things change from year to year. Also there are other things that they did not experience but they choose to introduce that to us. (Mensah, boarder, 18)

According to Mensah, with the passage of time, one becomes familiar with how things work, what to do and what not to do at certain times and in certain places. Furthermore, Vincent (boarder, senior, 17) stated that if an incident occurred at school, teachers would make an announcement in order to prohibit others from breaching school rules. The prohibition of the act depended upon where the incident took place, who was involved in it, and who set the rules:

There are certain behaviours that are not really bad but when somebody does something and things go wrong, then the teachers might make an announcement based on that incidence that no one should do/say that again or no one should go there again. Sometimes it is because the thing happened in a different school or something and the teachers would like to take a precaution so that it does not happen in our school so they stand on that and instruct us during assembly time what to do and what not to do. (Vincent, boarder, 17)

For instance, if the headmaster initiated a specific rule, it carried more weight than if a teacher or senior had made the same rule. Yet Atta said:
It depends on the situation; sometimes when you are in the dormitory there are things you are not allowed to do, not because they are wrong, but maybe just because a senior feels like not allowing you to do it. My friends in the other dormitories do things that are not allowed in our dormitory and we also do things here that are not allowed in their dormitories. (Atta, junior, boarder, 16)

Two basic themes emerge from the accounts of boys. The first theme is about the boys watching and copying in order to understand the kinds of behaviours that are punishable. On the other hand, there was a silent and covert understanding about the rules that are in some ways arbitrary and subject to change, which might pose complexities in how behaviour is learnt. Despite inconsistencies and complexities that may be associated with establishing behaviour codes, a school without strict rules or codes of behaviour is common, as parents in Ghana are expected to provide training in behaviour, morals, manners and etiquettes (Adinkra, 2012). In Ghana the family is seen as the prime site for learning about tradition, culture, and behaviours and schools expect that students would enter school with these types of training deeply embedded in their understanding (Nukunya, 2003). Many schools introduce their own school rules but these are focused mainly on the safeguarding of school property; this concept will be further explored in Chapter 7. Further, some school rules were only written for the purpose of meeting regulatory requirements and not made explicitly accessible to pupils.

5.3 Being a boy: The role of hierarchies

5.3.1 Authority within the school

There were various types of pupil leaders in the school, both formal and informal. Prefects were seniors elected by students or formally appointed by teachers. All seniors could also be perceived to be informal leaders within the school in the sense they were expected to collaborate with teachers and school authorities to run the school effectively. Each leader drew on different resources and different strategies to maintain their position and status. As Harris (1998, p. 245) maintains, leaders are the people who tell others what to do and they can have a major effect on their peer group in three main ways: they can influence the group norms in terms of the attitudes and behaviours that the majority of the members adopt and regard as appropriate; they can specify the boundaries
of the group by saying who is with us and who is with them; and they can
determine the image that the group has of itself. They are also exemplars of the
dominant form of masculinity found in the case study school.

Seniors were seen by all, as a valuable asset to the school because they held
various positions which gave them the authority to assist teachers and school
staff to run the school. Seniors naturally came together by virtue of their status
in the school community. As Ato explains:

> We the seniors need to stand together because we have been together
> since we were juniors and we have suffered punishments together
> and so it is natural for us because we have known each other well
> over the period we have been here in school. We have to support each
> other especially when it comes to making sure that juniors continue
> to respect and obey the seniors. (Ato, boarder, senior, 16)

The seniors saw part of their responsibility as reproducing the existing culture
within the school. This will be elaborated upon in Chapter 7. There were many
types of relationships and groupings within the case study school that helped
to explain the kinds of interactions, culture, behaviours and relations in the
school. Every junior in the school automatically belonged to the junior group
while every senior belonged to the senior group and therefore had authority,
power and control over the juniors. Whilst most seniors and juniors were
expected to behave in certain ways, prefects were not expected to behave like
‘ordinary seniors’. They were expected to be able to control juniors, in line
with the leadership roles assigned to them by the teachers.

As the classifications of seniors and juniors in the school arose according to
position, seniority and designation in a school environment, students often
formed into close and interdependent groups according to their classification. In
this way, teachers would organically form one group, prefects another, seniors
another group and of course the juniors were always a group at the lowest
level of the school’s hierarchy. These formations explain how the individuals
within the different groups formed relationships; how they interact between
and across the different groups; the type of culture they form; the behaviours
that they develop and act out, all of which shape the kind of relationships they
form in the school.
5.3.2 Boarding house versus day pupils

While the majority of informants reported feeling positive about learning in school, a small number of boys did not have good feelings about school life. Instead, they found their school life very routine and tiring (as discussed later in Chapter 7), with most of the respondents who fell into this category being juniors. For example, Vincent did not find the activities in school interesting so found his time at school frustrating. When I asked him whether he thought he could have had a better experience in a different school, he said that he didn’t think there would be much difference:

> Sometimes I do not sleep early because some seniors would be making me work for them and I have to get up early and do my normal chores and water my garden plot before preparing to go to class … Sometimes I sleep in class and my friends will be laughing at me.” (Vincent, boarder, junior, 17)

On the other hand, Daniel (senior, day, 17) described school life as a more conducive learning atmosphere than the home. At school, there were learning facilities such as books in libraries for continual learning. Similar to Daniel’s consideration that studying at home was not possible due to distractions, Kojo also complained that he would really like to be a boarder but his parents would not grant him their permission as a result of the supposed negativity associated with the boarding system:

> I am not very happy at school because I would love to be able to be around my class mates after school who are boarders but then I have to go home. I know that the seniors are not very friendly to us but me and my friends are very close together so that means we can be there for each other even if something happens, so I would still like to come to the boarding house if I had the opportunity. (Kojo, day, junior, 17)

Mensah, although a senior, seemed to have distaste for the seniors’ negative acts directed towards juniors as he reported that it was very tiring to study at the school due to the pressures and negativity exerted upon juniors by his fellow seniors. For example, he said it was very difficult for juniors to start a new school day and they needed to gather courage every morning. Also, he disliked some of the extra curricula activities because:
You have to do so much work that is not associated with the course you are doing. You have to clean, weed, wash and scrub. I don’t do these things at home and it has taken me so long to get used to them; maybe I will get used to it later. Before I came to school, I didn’t have to wake up early and live a routine life. However, at the boarding house, you wake up like five in the morning. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)

Whilst most of the boys perceived the boarding house as favourable for learning and a suitable place for interaction with friends, the juniors abhorred negative acts associated with being in the boarding house such as punishments from seniors. Yet, as academic excellence and being seen as resilient were important to the boys (see 6.3), most of them seemed to embrace the boarding system.

5.3.3 Gender roles

The disparities in the roles of boys and girls in the wider case study school environment may help explain why boys spent less time in performing household chores in their home contexts than girls. This is in common with the situation in many developing countries, especially in rural areas (Stephen, 2000; Colclough et al, 2000). In general, boys may have more time to study and play, which may lead them to feel superior to girls (explored further in Chapter 7). As maintained by Adinkra (2012), male roles in Ghana are generally associated with a higher level of social status and prestige than female roles. As a result, boys who perform stereotypical roles normally assigned to females lose status. Consequently men tend to lose more social standing when they are seen to deviate from their normal traditional gender roles than girls do (Colclough et al, 2000).

It was evident from the boys’ narratives that occupying traditional gender roles was a legitimation practice. Some boys stated that they only helped with household chores when their sister was not well or when she was not at home. For example Mensah remarked that whenever his sister got ill, he would handle her duties such as going with his father to his shop and helping him in selling. A minority of the boys came from homes that did not have stereotypical gender roles. For example, Essien came from a home where boys and girls shared and alternated between roles. This happened mainly in the rural areas of Ghana where the gender assigning of roles was not strictly practised. One main
reason for this was that every available person was required to cover a host of different tasks that needed attending to and the only way of accomplishing this was by deploying everyone, boys and girls, men and women. While boys who had experienced this lack of gender role assignment regarded themselves as normal, they admitted that their peers tended to perceive such experiences as unusual. Essien stated that he saw:

Nothing wrong in doing household chores like cooking. If any boy does these chores, his friends would laugh at him, so it is better not to tell anyone about this. (Essien, boarder, junior, 18)

Essien’s view gives an understanding of the acute awareness of boys about the impact of being ‘caught’ doing a job they considered to be only meant for girls to perform, even when they themselves appear to see nothing wrong with it. In this way, the juniors see their masculinities as impacted when taking roles which would normally be associated with girls. Out of the three parent participants, two mothers agreed with the practice of gender-based roles in the home. They were also of the view that boys, unlike girls, spent little time in performing household tasks. Asked whether they could change such gender divisions, they were of the view that it was part of their everyday lives and would not attempt to change it. Adomako Ampofo (2001) and Boateng et al (2006), while exploring children’s and parent’s perceptions and attitudes towards household chores in Ghana, found that the division of labour between the sexes in households differentiated boys from girls, and identified three areas that were considered inappropriate for boys: cooking, washing and sweeping.

Two parents shared the view that even if boys were allowed to perform such chores when they were very young, they should nevertheless cease performing such tasks when they grew older to indicate they had reached manhood. They thought that teaching children about their gender roles was an important part of a traditional upbringing, which prepared children to become responsible adults in the community.

In line with the changing notions of boys’ expressions of masculinities as introduced in 2.5.3, Mrs Kessi (a parent respondent) was of the view that segregating tasks amongst boys and girls was not helpful. She expressed concern that there was a need to stop the older practices of their forefathers in discriminating amongst boys and girls. She felt that both boys and girls should
be given opportunities to handle chores, including cooking, equally. However, those who held a traditionalist view on the issue and wanted boys to be treated differently from girls, thought it would always remain the same no matter how hard the government or others might try to change the situation. For example, Mr Akkufo (a parent respondent) said that his authority arose solely in deciding whom and how to train. In his view, more focus should be placed on training a daughter to deal with household duties that would continue to remain her responsibility after marriage.

While it is important to acknowledge the efforts of many women in leadership and management positions across various sectors in Ghana, they remain a minority compared to their male counterparts. This could be partly to do with the notion that although there are many female entrepreneurs who lead their families, often their efforts are underestimated or ignored (Gedzi, 2009). In this sense, not acknowledging or motivating the efforts of females could create a cyclical scenario where girls or women will live to ‘fulfil prophesy’ as discussed in Chapter 2.2.

5.4 Being a boy: Masculinity

5.4.1 Obaaba and kodjo basia (males perceived of as feminine)

The interviews with the boys showed that they all had a strong sense of ambition and responsibility. While the boys knew that their ability to excel academically was important (see 6.3), they also knew that it was of paramount importance for them to exhibit some sense of ‘toughness’ and ‘control’. Boys who did not exhibit such control tended to be perceived as weak and feminine. ‘Obaaba’ and ‘kodjo basia’ (translated a weak man) were examples of some of the nicknames given to boys who did not exhibit such forms of hegemonic masculinities.

Vincent (boarder, junior, 17) was of the view that a ‘weak’ boy would suffer negative consequences such as ‘being unable to become a school leader, gaining zero respect from juniors, and loss of control and status by not being taken seriously by fellow seniors.’ In this way, when boys chose not to act in a way that was ‘tough’ and ‘strong’ as demanded by their peers, they were consciously or unconsciously bringing it upon themselves to face associated consequences. This is further explored in 6.3.
5.4.2 Boys being tough

Given the importance of being seen to occupy the role of a typical male, the boys in the case study school needed to find means of protecting themselves and preventing others from perceiving them, or their actions, as feminine and labelling them as such. In this way, they needed to find ways of expressing their masculinity which was associated with a sense of pride and acceptance amongst their peers. For example, during his one-to-one interview, Atta recounted that:

‘Boys are more powerful than girls. Unlike girls, they do not complain to their father when they get into a fight with other boys; rather they fight back, since they will be told to do so even if they should report the incident to their father. (Atta, boarder, junior, 16)

Atta’s narration highlights the typical approach that a parent takes when an incident is reported. A report from the daughter of harm done to her would automatically elicit prompt action of reciprocal retaliation from her father (Bendt, 1979). The son reporting a similar event would scarcely receive a response or any form of intervention. Such gender-based responses from parents show how a girl is viewed as weaker and therefore needing protection, while the boy is viewed as more autonomous and being capable of looking after himself. When boys failed to exhibit certain expected masculine characteristics they were sometimes not seen as ‘real men’, which pressurized some boys to suppress their pain. In this way the act of expressing pain or grief (even through complaining) is associated with being feminine; hence the phrase ‘berma nsu’ (translated: men do not cry). For instance, Mensah said that stronger boys are preferred for rough games, whereas weaker boys are considered ‘losers’.

The boys were of the view that behaviours such as fighting, name-calling and mockery were just a ‘normal’ part of how they grew up. Some of these behaviours were seen as inextricably bound to childhood and to masculinity (Dunne, 2007). The boys seemed to embrace this expectation, as reflected in their interactions, which can be seen during the individual interview with Isaac (boarder, junior, 16). He stated that the strength of a boy is better expressed in how he deals with situations in which a fight occurs. He suggested that ‘… it is better to stand up for yourself and to fight back physically or by words instead of staying quiet.’ Isaac’s account highlights how important it is for boys in the case study school to use words or their physical strength as a
means of proving or sustaining their expected statuses. The way boys value the communal outlook that dictates how they (as males) should deal with pain and avoid expressing vulnerability that may cause embarrassment, only adds depth to the importance of the matter. The boys’ responses underpinned a deeply ingrained belief in Ghana that men must, at all costs, maintain their assigned ‘superior’ status.

Adinkra (2013) presents a series of males who committed suicide, as a result of being led to believe that they did not belong to and/or did not have the qualities of the ideal form of being a man within their community in Ghana. He gives a few examples of such cases as relating to men who were not able to father a child and men who were physically too small. In discussing the humiliation that was sanctioned by the community on men who fell into this category; Adinkra (2013) expressed how such victims may prefer to disappear than be dishonoured. Thus, being honoured as a male or a boy was inextricably linked to their status as perceived within that context.

A pain suppressed, however, may not necessarily disappear completely, and may be exhibited in other forms at other times. For example, when I asked Mensah how he thought someone would deal with a situation where he had not been able to play a game with a group of people because they were stronger than him, he had this to say:

> Everyone wants to be seen as strong and it is only when they do something, or play with someone who may not be as strong as them, that they will be recognised. I think if this situation happens, then the person will make sure that they find another group of people where he can be seen as strong. In the group everybody will be trying to do the same thing and so, if you are all with equal strength, then that is how it will be but it is better to play in that group than to join those that are stronger than you. For the group that are equal, it can be that people will take turns, like today one person may be on top but tomorrow another. (Mensah, boarder, senior 18)

While interview data showed that the norms in the school reflected a sense of community and support during times of pain and difficulties (see 6.5), it also demonstrated that expectations of boys led them to be competitive amongst themselves, especially during academic endeavours. The contradiction here is how boys appeared to cause pain amongst each other, whilst supporting
each other during pain. What I found from the interview data was a lifestyle amongst boys that tended to see things from an egotistical perspective. The boys behaved in ways that made them feel accepted or celebrated, without necessarily thinking through how the consequences might affect others. The tension between looking out for oneself and looking out for another is discussed in 5.6. The next section focuses on being academically successful, which was assessed by boys as another vital way of being a man.

5.5 Being a boy: Academic success and the view of intelligence

The award system in the case study school tended to promote competition between the boys and was based on a narrow view of intelligence. Traditionally, schools and organisations measure cognitive intelligence using assessments that are based on verbal and abstract reasoning skills (Gardner, 1983). Gardner (1983) offers alternatives to the traditional view by defining intelligence as the ability to offer solutions for problems and to produce something of value for one’s self and their culture. Gardner (1983) suggests that pupils possess a combination of abilities such as linguistic abilities; visual abilities; musical abilities; interpersonal abilities; intrapersonal abilities; bodily abilities and naturalistic abilities.

However, in the case study school, success is defined as intelligence through verbal and abstract reasoning, reflecting the way that pupils in the school are assessed by the award system. This limited view of intelligence (and academic success) is therefore one of the markers of successful masculinity for the boys. Should they also be judged on their whole range of intelligences, as suggested by Gardner (1983), I believe that it would create more opportunities for fostering cooperation amongst them.

Academic performance was important to students and had implications for the status of pupils. Even though there were no official groupings of students in terms of academic performance and abilities, there were informal identifications of students with high academic performances. Students who perform well in assessments attracted a high respect from both their fellow students and teachers than students who did not; this concept will be examined further in Chapter 7. Assessment procedures in Ghanaian secondary schools generally, as observed in the case study school, are heavily summative and linear. For example in each subject, there was only one place for the best student in each
class. The very seating arrangement seemed to encourage more individuality than team work. All the tasks that were given to students during the lessons I observed, were to be done individually and not in groups or pairs/teams. Team-work was not a common practice and it appeared that each one wanted to prove their ability over the others; this hierarchical system lent itself to the promotion of bullying behaviour, as discussed further in Chapter 7. By not teaming up and/or helping each other, students believed that they would perform better than their peers. Yet when it came to supporting each other during trouble, as presented earlier, they appeared to be united against the trouble or trouble-maker. For example Charles posits that:

You can teach your friend a little bit, but not too much, otherwise they will come and pass you in class and people will think you are not intelligent. Even when you teach them, they may not understand you, so it will be like you are doing yourself harm than good. When you teach your friend and they end up doing better than you in the exams, people will not understand that you even taught them and that is why they have had a good grade in the exams. But sometimes when you teach people they also teach you something you do not know, and so both of you get better at something. There are some people who will not teach you anything even when they know it, they will only learn from you and not share, such people – it’s good to avoid them.

Similarly, Adjei narrated that:

When I teach someone something that he did not understand in class, I get to understand it even better, and it does not matter even if the person ends up performing higher than me. It is not likely to happen because I always work hard to be the best I can, but if it that happens I will keep working my hardest and learn from others too. I think that there are some people who face various situations and because of that they need some help from their friends, so we need to help each other in the best way that we can. I may not be able to explain things in the same manner that the teacher will explain but the little I can do, I am prepared to do it.

Academic success was important to the boys as they viewed it as a mark of successful masculinity. The case study school had been identified as the sole
elite school in the area and as such, commanded high entrance requirements. As academia, especially for males, is viewed of immense importance in the region, pressure is put upon the boys to succeed, not only in attaining entrance to the school initially, but by maintaining these standards within a highly competitive academic environment. This ideal, along with the impact it has upon the social behaviour of the boys, their teachers and families, will be examined in Chapter 7.

5.6 Being a boy: Friendships

5.6.1 Establishing supportive friendship networks

Friendship group culture was found to be a powerful influence on the boys’ behaviour in the case study school. For many pupils, their interactions with their friendship groups were very important to them in their school life. Some attributed this to the fact that they obtained emotional support from their friends, and others said they talked with their peers about anything, even personal matters that they could not discuss with adults. As chronological age and immaturity were not necessarily important determinants of the composition of the pupil group in any one classroom, there were mixed ages within friendship groups. It was thus ‘normal’ and acceptable for a 16 year old to be in the same class or friendship group as a 13 year old. By mixing up pupils in this manner, the school unwittingly created a power imbalance which is at odds to commonplace social hierarchies. The impact of this power imbalance upon bullying behaviour, within an environment seeped in a desire for a masculine self-identity, will be closely examined in Chapter 7. According to Rubin (1980, p. 37) friendship groups depict ‘relationships which are likely to foster a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity’ and run parallel to what Pollard (1985) posits as being related to the symbolic interactionist’s concern with the self.

For Pollard (1985) friendship groups serve as a resource and a point of reference that provides a means by which children make sense of themselves and their surrounding world. Similarly, patterns of friendship and interactions within Holyrood Academy were inextricably bound up with what were perceived to be normal and permissible behaviours amongst boys. A number of juniors spoke about being part of groups that were formed organically by children themselves on the shared understanding that the group members would help
each other during times of hardship or difficulties. Group dynamics will be discussed further in Chapter 7, in particular, the ways in which these support networks appear to be in opposition to the bullying behaviours described here and in the literature. This discussion will include the impact of society upon this behaviour, with reference to the literature. Often the groups were formed in classroom situations, or by boarders in the dormitories, with the aim of playing together or supporting each other and making sure that everyone in the group was well taken care of. As some of the juniors highlighted during informal conversations, friendship groups were rooted in their observations of the achievements of adult community-based groups in their local communities. It must be noted that as the school drew pupils from both local areas as well as further afield, pupils from many different societies attended, including pupils from China. When exploring societal influences on communities, societal discrepancies must be recognised. This will be examined further in Chapter 7 with reference to both the literature and pupil interviews.

The boys, especially juniors, knew that through team-work and harnessing their collective strength they were more likely to cope successfully and stand up to the seniors. One way to sustain participation in a friendship group was therefore to share and help other pupils during times of difficulty, such as a junior helping a fellow junior who has been punished, to accomplish a task. Although the sharing of joys, pains, feelings and fun is fundamental to all friendships and relationships, in this particular institutional culture of punishment and mistreatment, sharing such critical moments together became symbolic of the quality and significance of friendship (Schneider, 2000). The school environment was the primary space and place for children to share and establish supportive friendship networks. Mensah explained that if they needed anything in school, their fellow junior friends would share their own items with them. Mensah was of the view that:

Even when your junior friends are not helping you to do a task, you know that they are for you or with you and that is a good feeling and assurance, but sometimes they will physically come and stand by your side when you are doing the work. Sometimes they will help you and other times they will just stand there and watch you. Either way is helpful. But sometimes if a senior sees that your fellow junior is helping you to accomplish a task, you or the person helping you might be in trouble for doing that. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)
Kwame (boarder, senior, 18) highlighted the reciprocity involved in nurturing and accessing these supportive friendships and shared how he had been helped through such friendships. The boys found their classmates to be supportive and some teachers to be caring. For example, according to Charles:

If you see that your fellow junior has been punished and made to do something, sometimes you help him to do it so that it becomes easier for him because sometimes the tasks we are given are just so huge. This means that when you are also in a similar situation, your friend will come and help you; it’s like tit for tat. (Charles, boarder, junior, 18)

Similar to Charles’s comments, Richard (Junior, Day, 16) reported during his one-to-one interview that school and his friends meant more to him than home (see Chapter 7). He considered school to be a free place where he could spend extra time without being asked to do any household chores. He showed great joy in taking extra classes, teasing friends, and participating in inter-school games. In this way, the boys’ sense of mutual relationship was marked by a tension of competitiveness, especially on issues relating to academic success as seen earlier in the last section.

5.6.2 The use of humour in interactions

The boys’ interactions were typified by the use of humour. Understanding of this topic needs to be firmly located in an understanding of friendship amongst the boys, as humour was crucial to understanding their behaviour within, and across, friendship groups. A sociological approach to friendship was used to ground the everyday interaction amongst the boys (Adler and Adler, 1998; Corsaro, 2000).

Understanding the interaction amongst the boys throws light on the active roles they play within their socialization, as drawn from symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Charon & Hall, 2007). I observed that the boys peer relationships were generally warm and harmonious; they would chat amongst themselves during play-time. During the mapping activity, they all interacted so it was difficult to identify specific groupings within the group of students. This bears a parallel with research on boys’ friendships that suggests that they tend to form large, loosely connected groups (Lever, 1978; Woods, 1987).
Although humour (causing laughter or making fun/light of something), with the use of laughter, is a universal phenomenon, how, when, and where humour is used is subject to cultural norms (Hymes, 1972). In this sense it is socially constructed and a ‘symbolic resource’ based on shared understandings of participating members (Sanders, 2004). Therefore, if not seen through the lens of a particular culture, the use of humour may be subject to interpretations (Martin, 2007). Being laughed at and humorous jabs were often used as tools amongst the boys to humiliate those who did not conform to pre-established masculine norms as introduced in Chapter 5. It was a dominant theme in the data that the boys laughed at their peers who were found to be engaging in activities that were considered to be feminine or not masculine enough.

Similarly, laughing off and/or humour were common strategies used by the boys to conceal their emotions and vulnerability. When the boys were laughing at their peers, they usually did it for fun without necessarily being interested in how their victim would be feeling. It emerged in the accounts that the boys sought an opportunity to laugh at each other. When laughed at, the strategy adopted by the boys was to laugh off being laughed at in order to discourage those laughing at them. Whilst it could be said that laughing is generally considered as a common practice in Ghanaian culture, boys from the same year group reported laughing at each other more than boys across year groups. For instance, juniors were more likely to laugh at their fellow juniors. Seniors, on the other hand, could laugh at both their fellow seniors and the juniors, but juniors could get into trouble for laughing at a senior. Juniors would normally laugh at a senior in their absence. As recounted by Charles:

> When you say something wrong in class for example, your friends will laugh and may use it as your nickname if they see that it makes you unhappy.

Humour and laughter is used to dismiss the sting of the ‘bullying’ behaviour but also used to discourage its continuity (Scambler et al, 1998; Cowie and Berdondinni, 2002). The notion of the concept of complimenting one another was not a common phenomenon amongst the boys. Such qualities were considered to be more of a feminine behaviour as described by the respondents. When the boys were laughing at someone, it was sometimes their way of showing admiration of some good thing that the person had done. Yet they would focus on something negative that would cause them to laugh at him.
Amongst the strategies used by the boys to conform to the pre-established social masculine norm, laughter and humour were a subtle but powerful means by which boys concealed their emotions and perceived vulnerability. Teasing, laughing at each other and name-calling were part of the boys’ everyday life. Some of the respondents saw acts of teasing and name-calling as a game and a way of strengthening friendships. According to Leonard:

Laughing and teasing is very common at school. Mostly, if you do something wrong, the person laughing at you first of all will be your friend. We call each other names, laugh at one another, wrestle and still be good friends. Even in class, if teacher will not be around, we will play by teasing and throwing chalks at one another. (Leonard, boarder, junior, 16)

This account by Mensah highlighted that if there was a fight during the playtime, it was not always taken lightly by their parents, even though it was not seen as an issue for the boys themselves:

I know that sometimes my mum asks me what happened at school, thinking that I will complain or something … But actually, there is no fighting among students. They just play with each other, making jokes. School is just fun but sometimes the adults don’t understand, even when we are playing, they think we are fighting and they want to ask you questions and be sure whether you are actually playing or you are just fighting each other. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)

Boys in the case study school hid under the vehicle of game play to engage in unkind acts towards each other, and it might sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the two. It was normal practice for students to create a nickname for themselves or have one assigned by others when they first arrived at secondary school. Some claimed that having a nickname helped boys ‘fit in’ and be accepted. Still, whether the individual name was accepted by the one to whom it had been assigned depended on how pleasant the name was. The teasing behaviour was seen in indoor spaces, as well as outdoors. According to Ben:

When we are on the pitch or playground, those who don’t participate because of shyness will be teased, laughing at the fellow unnecessarily. When you are a shy person they will tease you by laughing at you and also pulling at your shirt. (Ben, day, senior, 16)
On the other hand, Peter said he felt very frustrated with playtime at school. According to him:

Games are fun at school but sometimes it’s difficult because people say negative things and make fun by calling foul names. There are also instances when people call boys nicknames which others like to hear at certain times, but not during classes. (Peter, boarder, junior, 15)

Similarly, Atta described his experience:

Many seniors find a way to tease you and call you names. You can take revenge by beating them up after class, calling them names back and swearing at them. However, the damage is done, and the teasing only makes it worse for the person who was teased. He no longer walks with the pride and the confidence as he used to. (Atta, boarder, junior, 16)

Atta’s account seemed to contradict earlier accounts of juniors which suggest that juniors did not stand up for themselves but gave in and accepted maltreatments from seniors. Whilst some seniors maltreating and punishing juniors have been silently prevalent in secondary schools in Ghana, Atta’s comment seem to represent a growing response to challenge the situation. Throughout the study, it was clear from my interactions with the boys that the tradition of humour within the school premises was accepted, but that different views were held regarding it (see an extended discussion on the use of humour in relation to ‘bullying’ in 6.6).

The physical and psychological harm which bullying can inflict upon a victim has been heavily documented in the literature (Olweus, 1994; Sharp, 1995; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Bullying has been linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Idsoe, Dyregrov & Idsoe, 2012) anxiety and depression (Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle & Mickelson, 2001) among other challenges, for example, lower school attendance (Due, Holstein, Lynch, Diderichsen, Gabhain, Scheidt & Currie, 2005).

5.7 Summary

This chapter has unveiled what it is to be a boy in the case study school, by understanding the boys’ life and their wider environment through three lenses: the role of hierarchies, masculinity, and friendships. Analysing and understanding both the formal and informal interactions that pupils had through these lenses led to the conclusion that most of the negative interactions
discussed by the respondents had been normalised to the extent that very rarely did boys ask questions about them. The respondents accepted some of them as a way of life and hence they did not see them as being strange, irrespective of whether they were the ‘perpetrators’ or being ‘victimised’. The preceding accounts throw light on the nature of boys’ behaviour amongst their peers and within the case study school.

The discussion of the role of hierarchies and legitimacy provides an understanding of the boys’ situation which, according to Ross and Nisbett (1991), is a gap in existing research, believed to be important as Goffman’s (1959a, 1967a) work indicates. This study is situated in a cultural and qualitative understanding of the environment within which ‘bullying’, as defined in Chapter 1, emerges. This meaning is arrived at by understanding the systems of meanings and the processes of how boys interpret their interactions and experiences. This understanding of the nature of boys’ performances, some of which might be termed as ‘bullying’ in a setting such as the UK, arises out of the legitimization of their performances. The boys’ experiences were marked with high expectations within the case study school and community as a result of their future expected roles as leaders because they were males. Having provided a foundation by explaining the social context for interpreting boys’ behaviour, Chapter 6 will now focus on how they responded to the scenario of ‘bullying’, and thus highlight their explanations for it.
Chapter 6

Forms and patterns of peer-bullying amongst boys in the case study school

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the current study is to explore boys’ understandings of ‘peer-bullying’ in one secondary school in Ghana. The study has led to an understanding that behaviour which is labelled as ‘bullying’ in other national settings, and seen as predominantly negative, was neither labelled nor interpreted as such by the boys in the case study school. As there were no previous empirical studies in the institutional culture of Ghanaian secondary schools that examined students’ definitions, interpretations or usage of the term ‘bullying’, this study provides a baseline of information on the topic. The previous chapter explored the formal and informal culture of the case study school by laying the foundation to help understand the boys’ reported behaviours. The current chapter explores reasons offered by the boys in the case study school regarding the incident of bullying which was previously outlined in the scenario (section 4.6.1). This chapter explores the terminologies used by the boys when describing the ‘bullying’ incident, and how it connected to both their experiences in the case study school, and in the wider environment of the school. Furthermore, in line with the aims of the current study, it examines the implications of how the boys and others responded to such incidents. Using the scenario was methodologically important as it enabled me to engage the boys in a conversation about bullying without using the word ‘bullying’. As a result it enabled them to interpret the behaviours in their own words and assign their own meanings to the acts that were depicted.

A core finding identified from this study is the overarching significance of the fact that the boys were expected by their peers and adults to be tough (dominant and powerful) during their interactions. This follows the common notion in the case study school that successful masculinity revolves around the saying ‘berma nsu’ (translated, a man does not cry). This notion is inextricably linked
to the concept of achieving and maintaining status, a predominant theme in
the data as outlined in Chapter 5. Achieving status formed a key part of boys’
negotiations of their masculine identities which governed their behaviour and
interactions.

It was found that whilst boys in the case study school concealed their physical
and emotional vulnerabilities in order to appear masculine, the ways and
manner in which they demonstrated masculinity would be conceptualised as
‘bullying’ and aggression in other national settings (Adinkrah, 2012; Frederick,
However, not all the identities enacted by the boys can be understood in terms
of masculinity, therefore relating the boys’ behaviours only to the concept of
masculinity may be a limited way of understanding their interactions. Yet,
it was evident that the boys’ behaviour was steeped in a hierarchical social
culture where such practices were normalised. Thus, normalisation of bullying
behaviour stems from internalised social norms (Paechter, 2007). Hence bears
some parallel equivalence with what Rigby (1996) constructs as non-malign
bullying.

Whilst using the theories of masculinity can go some way in making sense of
the boys’ behaviours, it is critical to understand other elements of the boys’
experiences that did not seem to be determined by a desire for masculinity
and status. These include their attempts to negotiate in an environment of
hierarchies, and their attempts to establish friendships.

6.1.1 Legitimacy

In this section, I argue that the boys’ interactions and roles taken reflected
the societal norms of the case study school community. Analysis of data from
interviews and observations showed that some aspects of the interactions in
the case study school reflected those of the wider environment within which
the school was situated. Consequently, while the current study focused mainly
on the boys’ peer interactions, some wider affiliations are discussed as they
were reported to influence the interactions of boys. How the boys perceived
and defined the self and their experiences was steeped in societal norms
regarding what was considered permissible expression.

Whilst it can be broadly posited that the boys automatically belonged to
the general community of being a child (or more precisely, teenagers) and
a secondary school student in Ghana, there were dimensions beyond these fundamental affiliations. For example, whilst all the boys could be classified as secondary school students, factors such as whether they were seniors or juniors and whether they were prefects or not, impacted on their affiliations and statuses within the student community. However, I observed that their geographical origins did not seem to recognisably impact on their status, as it did not come up in any of the accounts.

Legitimacy is defined by Goffman (1963b, p. 28) as the ‘placing’ of others within a legitimised act. A key concern of the boys’ behaviours centred on legitimising their performances with others living in their world such as peers, parents and teachers. It was important for the boys that these others recognised their ability to successfully play the role of being a boy. In this way, the meaning boys have for some of their performances could be linked to their drive for gaining acceptance and recognition as a ‘boy’. The boys interviewed believed that they needed to continually negotiate their performance with others without relenting in their efforts to always appear to be strong. Mensah highlighted this point when he said:

If you cry then it can be worse because the seniors will make sure that you are strong so they will do it all the more. But also if you cry then your friend will laugh at you after the punishment is over so you will try your best to make them see that it’s normal for you. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)

The boys’ performances were influenced by the pressure to fit within what was seen as legitimate by those they interacted with (Goffman, 1959; 1963b). In line with Goffman’s (1963) view on self-presentation, the boys perceived others’ view of them as very important. This was evident in how the boys reported aligning their behaviour to the expectations of various audiences in the case study school. This approach reflects key principles of symbolic interactionism; the theory that individual’s self-appraisal is based on what others indicate (Cast, Stets and Burke, 1999). According to Mead (1925), this is also conceptualised as role taking, an idea that was taken up by Goffman (1959). Ongoing negotiation of this process is the essence of symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1959).

In this way, the boys see the need to continue negotiating for legitimacy, through their actions and interactions (see 2.5).
6.2 ‘Fitting in’ and hegemonic masculinities

6.2.1 The ‘ideal’ school behaviours

In order to understand boys’ behaviour, this section explores and contextualises their perceptions by providing insights into their understanding of what constituted an ‘ideal pupil’. During the mapping activity the boys were asked to list the types of activities that are normally performed in the various places in the school and I followed this up with a question on what they perceived as the ideal pupil and ideal behaviour in the school.

Some of the words and phrases listed by the boys as representing the way to fit in were affirmative images: strong; tough; intelligent; able to fight back; sports; football; die hard; funny; friendly; well built (physically, by size and strength); cool. Others were presented as negatives and opposite of what are traditionally viewed as feminine traits: not soft; don’t complain; not afraid; no crying; not a mother’s pet.

Relating the above responses to the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a means of referencing the dominant masculinity within the case study school to the literature could be misleading; as dominant forms of masculinity may differ in various settings. Commenting on the discrepancies in ‘hegemonic masculinities’, Connell (1995, p. 76) maintains that it is not always the most common type on show, nor is it ‘a fixed character type’, but it is historically and socially situated. In the case study school environment, there were common themes that ran across the boys’ behaviour and interactions, regardless of whether they were seniors or juniors, boarders or day students. Whilst issues such as punishment and control were expected from, and associated with, seniors, being strong, fearless and ‘not crying’ was expected of every boy.

Connell (1990, p. 83) used hegemonic masculinity to describe the most ‘culturally exalted’, ‘idealised’ form of masculinity within a setting, which commands the utmost level of power and authority. This form of masculinity is also said to be able to control and influence the actions of the ‘real boy’ within the case study school setting.

Despite the multi-layered nature of the masculinities found within the case study school, some powerful cultural norms were evident, such as ‘oberima nsu’ (men do not cry), that were more predominant and influential than others. The cultural norms which shape the boys who attend the case study school
will be explored further in Chapter 7 with reference to masculinity, including the hypothesis that young boys are attempting to leave behind the female dominated world of childhood and therefore shun all female characteristics.

6.2.2 Demonstrating masculinity

One main way of demonstrating masculinity at the case study school was linked to the status of being a senior, which came with the authority to be able to punish juniors. Whilst being academically successful and physically athletic were also exalted, they did not supersede the status of being a senior or prefect. Being a senior was about having status that came from occupying a prestigious social role in the school.

Boys reported experiencing pressure from their peers to conform to ‘masculine’ behaviours as outlined in 6.3.1 in order to avoid being perceived as feminine or not a ‘real man’. As the status of being a senior was attached to dominant masculine patterns of thought and actions within the school, only seniors exhibited such forms of masculinity through punishing and controlling juniors. The boys accepted this as the ‘natural order of things’; they did not question its legitimacy, and it therefore was reproduced within the school context. As Paul explains:

> When a senior tells you to do something, you just have to do it even if you are older or stronger than him because he is your senior. If you try to challenge him then you are worrying your own self because you cannot argue with a senior and win. If they see that you are being stubborn by not obeying them, then they will be harder on you and other seniors as well will mark you. (Paul, day, 15, senior)

Seniors had the choice as to which form of masculine identity to associate themselves with. Whilst seniors punishing and controlling juniors was a recurrent theme across the data, it is important to note that not all of the seniors engaged in punishing and controlling juniors as a means of expressing their masculinity. In as much as there was pressure from their peers for the boys to conform, some boys drew support from academic and sporting prowess in order to resist this pressure. In this way, other forms and notions of masculinity existed simultaneously with the hegemonic notion (Connell, 2000).

Some seniors who appeared very independent minded showed little
inclination to ‘fit in’ and were inspired by their personal values to hold esteem and respect for juniors. Some of the seniors who fell into this category asserted that they had been unhappy with such experiences during their junior years and therefore said that they would not inflict this on others. While some may have been influenced by their upbringing and personal moral ethics, others related their stand to their religious beliefs. Furthermore, they posited that they did not need to maltreat others in order to gain respect from the juniors. During a one-to-one interview, Mensah said:

Some seniors think that they need to beat the juniors before they will do something for them but that is not true. When the juniors see that you respect them, they will also respect you, but when they see that you don’t respect them, then the only way you can make them do something for you is to punish them if they don’t do it. I hated being punished and I will not punish juniors either. When I tell them to do something and they do not do it, then I try to find out why; if one person does not want to do it then I will find another one who will do it or else I will do it myself. (Mensah, boarder, 18, senior)

Mensah seemed to suggest that the seniors that relied on punishing juniors to get them to do something for them were weaker than those seniors who did not abuse their position by punishing juniors. He was implying that those who use punishments as a means of control have weaker forms of masculinity in contrast to his, since he is able to achieve the same purpose without punishment. Mensah’s strong sense of masculinity was outside the hegemonic masculinity in the school and yet I embraced it more than other forms of masculinities which the boys expressed. For instance when I asked him how he would deal with a situation where a junior refused to perform his assigned chores or duties. Mensah said:

Sometimes they will forget to do it because they have a lot to do every day so I will call the person and remind them later. If I found a junior around, then I will let that junior help if he can; otherwise I will do it myself. For example, if the person needs to sweep somewhere and they have not done it then that place will be dirty and a teacher will come and call the senior in charge of that area. Even if the senior is in class, the teacher will call him to come and do the sweeping. This is why seniors make sure that juniors have done their work. (Mensah, boarder, 18, senior)
In contrast to Mensah’s view, some seniors expressed the notion that they would not be respected by juniors until they were associated with the reputation of subjecting juniors to maltreatments and punishment. For example, Isaac reported that, “people think if you don’t punish the juniors, they won’t listen to you.”

Whilst some of the juniors did not perceive those seniors who chose not to engage in punishments and mistreatments as strong and powerful, compared to seniors who engaged in these practices, the seniors who did not engage in those acts themselves, as exemplified by Mensah above, maintained that they did not feel inferior to their counterparts. Mensah’s approach with the juniors seemed more relational as he reasonably notes that it was not always possible for him to get things done through the juniors. Seniors who did not engage in maltreating juniors were seen in the minds of the juniors to be closely connected with the other seniors who maltreated and punished juniors. Consequently they were ascribed many of the qualities and traits of the ‘idealised’ form without ever quite being one of ‘the frontline troops’ (Connell, 1995, p.79).

For example, when a junior was seen to misbehave towards a senior who did not like to punish or maltreat juniors, a fellow senior could step in and pick up on the juniors in question. Thus, the seniors who did not engage in the maltreatment, in many ways enjoyed the ‘patriarchal dividend’ of being a senior (Connell, 1995 p. 79). As such, they did not seem to aspire to compete with or challenge their peers, who punished and maltreated juniors. The form of closeness and connection amongst all of the seniors mirrored the closeness and connection amongst the juniors. Yet, whilst the juniors may have been united against seniors, there were also underlying tensions and assorted competitions amongst the juniors and amongst the seniors.

Similar to seniors who did not engage in punishments and maltreatment, juniors negotiated their masculinities in alternative ways. The boys who were known to be intelligent and have sporting prowess had the competitive advantage compared to their peers, as they were ‘culturally exalted’ within the school. Consequently, one could talk of hegemonic masculinity with more certainty when the status of the student in question and the circumstances involved are taken into consideration.

For instance, athletic abilities and academic successes were more celebrated within the formal school culture such as during assemblies and formal
functions. The school authorities celebrated high achieving pupils by putting their names and awards on notice boards and by giving them some preferential treatments, which somewhat impacted on their interactions in the informal school culture such as in the playground and in the dormitories. Juniors who were part of the school sports teams were exempted from the daily chores that were normally assigned to juniors.

6.2.3 The origins of masculinity

The respondents saw their motivation to express masculine behaviour as precipitated by social pressures and that it had little to do with the boys’ age or physical size. Many of the accounts refer to boys consciously adopting behaviours in accordance with a socially pre-established representation of masculinity. However, some of the parent respondents attributed the boys’ expressions of masculinity to innate propensities. Remy (1990) posits that socially pre-established representations of reality constrain the behaviours of agents. It follows that social norms can be internalised by agents as natural, intransitive realities and shape their behaviours in ways which go unquestioned (Paechter, 2007). Even so, the respondents’ accounts predominantly refer to boys having a common understanding of the behaviours that constitute masculinity.

Family, the media and schools were key institutions that perpetuated the notion of quintessential masculinity among boys. The family was identified as a key institution in preserving socially pre-established gender norms (Dunne, 2007). According to Messner (2000), parents unconsciously rear and socialise their children with gender-typical behaviours, whilst Dunne (2007) identified this as a deliberate act of socialisation. Also, the data show that boys picked up behaviours and attitudes through lessons learnt via radio and TV. For instance Albert reported that:

Everybody knows what boys should do but some of the things we see in films and on TV celebrities. (Albert, boarder, 16, senior)

The boys talked about characters in popular films, some of which were foreign to their culture, which influenced their behaviour. There were some who had nicknamed themselves with some of the characters in these films, for example Mr Bean, due to wanting to be considered to be funny.
A key finding identified through the interviews with adults was that the media were seen as strongly diluting the pre-established social norms regarding masculinity. Some of the adult respondents blamed the media for the values and cultural etiquettes within their society, which had caused some unacceptable developments, mainly of a foreign origin, to creep into Ghanaian society. The adults’ notions of the media in part contrasted with the boys’ accounts, which suggested that they learnt to be current through the media. As Mrs Kessi puts it,

Nowadays the children speak different and do things different from when we were young; the films they are watching are spoiling them.

What some adults might see as a moral decadence may be seen by the boys as being abreast with time. For example, when asked how Edward thought the media influenced boys’ actions he was of the view that,

When you wear ear rings, some grown up people would say this is for girls but for your friends it’s cool. (Edward, boarder, 19, senior)

The influence of the media (both local and cross cultural) as exemplified by Edward’s words may have implications on what is seen as being masculine within the social context of boys’ interactions and hence amongst the boys in the case study school. Yet to understand the full extent to which the media has impacted on the boys’ behaviour, there may be a need for a specific empirical study in this area.

As well as family and the media being key institutions that perpetuated the notion of quintessential masculinity among boys, school, particularly boarding school, also emerged as a setting where boys were expected to behave in particular ways based on pre-established, traditional norms. As Kwame explains:

For example, if you do not like watching football, you don’t have to tell anybody because then you will be called names. People think football is for real boys, so boys who don’t like football are sometimes called names. But it is not compulsory that because you are a boy you should like football. (Kwame, boarder, 18, senior)

Whilst the majority of the respondents adhered to the dominant pre-established masculine norms, the study also showed show a small number of the boys had taken a stand and did not behave in accordance with the popular notions of masculinity within the school. Reasons given by these boys for such a stand ranged from religious to humanitarian grounds. Yet they were fully aware of
the consequences they were likely to face as a result of their stand and they seemed to be convinced that they would not back down from their decision.

**6.2.4 Disparities in the generational notions of masculinity**

A dominant theme in the data was that the meanings and understandings of masculinity were embedded within the social structures (Paechter, 2007; Wetherall and Edley, 1999; Cheng, 1999). It follows then that macro societal changes are likely to impact on the dominant masculine norm, and this could be a factor accounting for the differences in the ways the boys demonstrated their masculinity. Other factors such as culture and being infiltrated by other cultures through migration and globalisation could also account for such changes.

The adult respondents spoke of how things had changed in the children’s interactions, and they compared the boys’ experiences to their own childhood days. Male parents who had been in the boarding house during their secondary school days recalled enduring more severe punishments and negative interactions from seniors. In their view, the contemporary interactions amongst the boys had greatly improved because certain extreme forms of punishments were no longer allowed in the school.

One reason for this change was attributed to the fact that secondary school students are much younger in age in contemporary times than they were in the past, and therefore they can be easily controlled by the teachers. Some of the teachers talked about how some behaviour was not tolerated in the school as a means of protecting the good image of the school and promoting an effective learning environment. Some of the parents noted that there were some actions that were considered as purely masculine or purely feminine in their childhood days, which, in recent times, have been diluted or swapped around. For instance, they talked about how certain clothes are now worn by boys and girls and how certain jobs, such as nursing, are done by both men and women. Yet there appeared to be a unanimous notion among the adult respondents that boys are reared, and grow up to be strong and tough. This implies that the respondents were able to draw lines between when the boys were acting in a masculine way (thus when they were being boys) and when they were acting in a feminine way (when they were not living up to the expectations of them as boys or when they were being girlish).
6.2.5 Masculinity across different environments

Some of the boys noted that the home community was more tolerant to boys exhibiting what was assessed as ‘non-boy’ behaviour than the school environment. As Atta notes:

When you are in the house, people will not be bothered about what you are doing but in school ...it’s like in school your friends see everything you do and they will laugh at anything they find not right. (Atta, day, 16, Junior)

Atta’s comment gives an insight into differences between the home community and the school community, in relation to the boys’ expression of the masculine norm. If there is greater pressure on boys in the more formalised environment of the school as compared with the home community, there is a likelihood that these boys will engage in behaviours and activities in school that they would not necessarily exhibit in the home environment. Still, the nature of the home social context of boys’ interactions may affect the kind of response to the boys’ actions.

For instance, a city situation where many of the residents may not know each other would be different to a village situation where everyone knows everyone else and where by comparison there is a strong sense of community spirit. As Kwame explained:

When you are at home, your parents are there and if you misbehave too much they will go and tell them and they will not be happy with you. In school, your parents are not there so you are free to do the things that you want to do and if someone misbehaves, you can also respond in the way you want to. Even when your parents are not there, some adults will tell you to stop if you are doing something bad and you yourself will not do certain things because you know that people are watching. (Kwame, boarder, 18, senior)

When asked what he meant by misbehave, Kwame said:

When you fight with someone or play fight. When you say something bad to your friend, when you take something that belongs to your friend or something, then someone might tell you to stop what you are doing. (Kwame, boarder, 18, senior)
In contrast to what Atta explained earlier about the reaction from others at home, Kwame’s comments give a possible insight into the difference/s between the village and city contexts. Atta’s comments referred to a city context where it was difficult for everyone to know everyone else due to factors such as the size of the place, the number of people and the frequent migration of residents. Kwame’s comments on the other hand were in relation to a small closely knit community. The behaviours that were normalised amongst the boys were not necessarily normalised more widely across Ghanaian society. Some of these behaviours such as teasing and name calling that would be called ‘bullying’ in another environment, were not named or labelled as such in the case study school but were seen as ‘a boys’ thing’ and hence normalised amongst boys and their peers. The extent to which these actions were normalised in the case study school will be discussed further in Chapter 7, supported by qualitative data and relevant peer-reviewed sources, in relation to a Westernised concept of bullying behaviour.

6.2.6 Expressing masculinity through behaviours

This section builds on the earlier discussions which demonstrated how the boys felt the need to express forms of masculine behaviours at all times. They felt under social pressure to show their masculinity, which led them to resort to some extreme forms of masculine norm.

This was regardless of the status and social position of boys and whether the respondent was a senior, junior, boarder or day student, or whether the data were gathered during the mapping activity, focus group or one-to-one interviews. Whilst the dominant form of masculinity seemed to be multifaceted, it was evident that the expression of pain or vulnerability was perceived as a feminine trait.

In some of the accounts, boys who saw it as a social right to express pain or care did it behind closed doors without the knowledge of their peers in order to avoid being mocked. This is illustrated by Mensah, as follows:

> It is weird for a boy to cry. Your friends will laugh at you and call you names so you need to try your hardest to be strong when something happens and someone mistreats you. If your senior mistreats you and you report repeatedly, you might be given a name and others might pick on you, so you just need to live with it and be strong. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)
Mensah’s comment highlights the role of others in shaping people’s behaviour, in that whilst boys may see the need to be vulnerable, their consciousness of whether it is accepted or not influences when and how they express their vulnerability. The literature has demonstrated how empowering unemployed people with paid employment increased self-confidence and happiness and decreased psychological vulnerability (Adelmann, 1987).

The data suggests that the juniors in the boarding house appeared to be the only group who expressed their vulnerability to their fellow juniors. They did this as a means of obtaining and giving support to each other. Otherwise, the majority of the boys reported that they suppressed their natural urge to express vulnerability based on the apprehension that their masculinity would be perceived by others as non-quintessential. For instance, even when juniors knew their rights and knew that they could report seniors who were maltreating them to the school authorities, they chose not to do so as a means of showing that they could handle the situation independently by themselves.

Over time, they said they became used to the system, which then becomes like a ‘rite of passage’ in secondary schools. The respondents implied that the boys managed to resist their instincts to show pain and emotion, and to transcend vulnerability through an expression of strength. For instance, respondent Mensah said that:

> When you face getting punished or you get into trouble, things will be alright so you just go through it. If you cry then it can be worse because the seniors will make sure that you are strong so they will do it all the more. But also if you cry then your friend will laugh at you after the punishment is over so you will try your best to make them see that it’s normal for you. People don’t normally cry unless they are like badly injured or something, then when they are crying a bit everybody will understand and they cannot stop crying even when they want to stop. (Mensah, boarder, senior, 18)

In terms of the extremes to which some boys would go in Ghana to protect or maintain their masculinity, Adinkra (2012) noted that some men would rather be dead than dishonoured. Whilst admitting that there is little empirical evidence of suicidal behaviour in Ghana, there is evidence to suggest that the majority of males who have committed or attempted to commit suicide did so to deal with shame and the dishonour of various sources that infringed on their status as males (Adinkra, 2012). For some men in Ghana, if they think
that they cannot do anything to protect their masculinity from being belittled or undermined, they would rather kill themselves than be dishonoured or mocked (Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Korr & Sites, 2006). Even though issues such as being impotent, being unable to produce children, and having a small body size have been reported to be among the issues perpetuating men’s suicidal behaviour, some of the issues discussed in this chapter have also been shown to drive boys in Ghana to commit suicide. For instance, in February 2014, a first year university student was said to have committed suicide because he reportedly failed in three papers and was about to be dismissed from the school (Joyonline, 2014; Iga, 1986; Leupp, 1996). This will be explored further in Chapter 7. This concurs with earlier discussions in sections 1.4 and 1.6, which spell out the importance of academic excellence for the people of Ghana, and especially boys. This is because of their expected roles within society and because academic excellence is perceived to play a key role in enabling them to achieve their dreams and ambitions as discussed in 5.4. In this way, when boys are pressurised to conform to certain masculine norms based on pre-established social norms, they sometimes go to extreme lengths.

6.3 Defining peer-bullying

6.3.1 Terminology and the word ‘bullying’

This section focuses on how the boys’ perceived the use of the term ‘bullying’. The data from responses to the scenario and mapping exercise contained no instances of the use of the word bullying. The absence of the use of the term ‘bullying’ sharply contrasts with how the same scenario was described during the pilot study in the UK. Yet, none of the boys expressed any sense of surprise or unfamiliarity about the incident in the scenario, within the case study school. However, there were some disparities among student responses. Whilst some saw the incident as a form of welcoming ritual and hence normal, others viewed the acts to be unfair and unjustified. This finding bears some striking equivalence (in terms of actual interactions) with previous empirical studies about maltreatments amongst pupils in Ghanaian secondary schools (Dunne et al, 2010; Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Dunne, 2008). These previous studies, however, do not concentrate on the pupils’ views and perceptions of the interactions. For example, Dunne et al (2010) set the researchers’ own definition for bullying and then used it to label observed interactions without investigating the views of the participants and
how they understood the behaviour. This is a fundamental reason why I chose to conduct baseline research on ‘bullying’ from the point of view of pupils in the institutional context of Ghanaian secondary schools.

The absence of the word ‘bullying’, or a direct translation in a Ghanaian dialect, in descriptions of behaviours in the case study school, does not automatically signify the absence of ‘bullying’ behaviour. As noted above, the boys all recognised the behaviour in the scenario, but they didn’t use the word ‘bullying’ to describe it. However, the way in which behaviour is understood goes beyond the vocabulary used to label it.

### 6.3.2 The meaning of behaviours

Words are used as symbols, representing processes and attitudes towards a particular phenomenon such as bullying (Berkowitz, 1973). These processes in turn become the fabric of people’s attitudes and perceptions. Consequently, even if ‘bullying’ was used as a term to describe the behaviours in the scenario, it wouldn’t have guaranteed similarities in the attitudes and processes towards these same acts, as in other places which also use the same term. Thus, how people respond to behaviour such as that represented in the scenario would be inextricably bound to the context of the behaviour, as grounded in the theory of symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1959).

The term ‘bullying’ was not widely understood by the pupils however it had been used in documents written by the Ghanaian government, and the case study school to describe particular forms of behaviours such as teasing and name calling. Thus, whilst the current study does not argue for one perspective on ‘bullying’ the terms usage to describe certain forms of behaviours is evident through government and school policies, regardless of the conundrums surrounding its meanings and interpretations.

Though ‘bullying’ was not a familiar concept amongst the boys, many of these tough actions, some of which were seen as normal by the boys and adults, could be described as bullying or even aggression. It would be an oversimplistic for one to posit that the term bullying was not used in the case study school, and therefore there was no ‘bullying’. The boys’ reactions to some of these behaviours, which were not necessarily seen as normal by themselves or adults, were nevertheless different from how such behaviour is responded to by young people in the developed world, as identified through the review of
literature in Chapter 3. For example, typically systems are in place in schools in Northern Europe to help prevent ‘name calling’. They might report it because they are expected and/or encouraged by adults to do so; and there is help at hand. However the case study school environment was very different in this respect. For example, Isaac described name calling amongst their peers as acceptable social behaviour:

> Well, we often call our classmates names. From Form 1 onward, we had been calling our classmates names. We all accept them. The nicknames have become the particular classmates’ codes. If you take it serious then they will even do it more and that will make you worried but if they see that you don’t even care if you are being teased, then they will stop and go their way. (Isaac, boarder, 16, junior)

Students were expected to defend themselves and some issues, like name calling, were seen by the boys as trivial and/or normal, even if they were reported. In this way, a student experiencing ‘name calling’ in a Ghanaian secondary school may not even see it as an issue and may not be considered a victim (either by the one experiencing it, adults or those who are doing the name-calling). In this way, it is not only the names given to behaviours that are different, but the meanings attributed to them are also different, and this difference in meaning affected the impact the behaviour had on those experiencing it.

From this point of view, the use of language in making sense of behaviour is important. It might be tempting for an outsider researcher to use their own understanding of ‘bullying’ to identify particular interactions as ‘bullying’ and hence attempt to respond or expect people to respond according to their outside interpretation. Still, labelling behaviour as bullying and having systems in place as means of preventing bullying, regardless of the national setting, do not necessarily guarantee its prevention as individuals are entitled to their perceptions.

### 6.3.3 The boys’ definitions of the ‘bullying’ behaviours

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the terminology used by the boys’ in the case study school to describe their interactions was in contrast to that used by boys in the pilot study carried out in the UK. ‘Punishment’, ‘playing’ and ‘welcoming’ were the words used most frequently by the boys in the case
study school to describe the incidents in the scenario. Each of these words gave some insightful clues to understanding ‘peer-bullying’ in the case study school. For example, while those who described ‘bullying’ as punishment did not necessarily see the incident as positive, some viewed it as legitimate and justified. As punishment only happened between seniors and juniors, the juniors tended to experience it as associated with their position as juniors, rather than their individual personalities. Similarly, the seniors who punished juniors associated their ability to punish with their position as seniors within the case study school. In this way, the juniors did not seem to see themselves as victims nor the seniors as perpetrators, as punishment could only happen within the case study school environment. The behaviour therefore was understood as related to the occupation of a particular social group in that school, rather than as a consequence of individual characteristics. On the other hand, those who used ‘welcoming’ and ‘playing’ to describe the behaviour in the scenario seemed to suggest that it was an acceptable behaviour (or ritual) within the school, that was used to prepare newcomers for being fully immersed into the system. Honeycutt (2005) examines the fraternity rituals known as ‘hazing’ (harassment) in the USA and the impact which these, often aggressive, demoralising and male dominated acts, have upon the maintenance of boundaries in communities. In addition to this, Nuwer (2001) closely examined the widely accepted ritual of hazing as a rite of passage in collegiate fraternities, through which one gains acceptance.

6.3.4 Peer-bullying to gain status

In almost all cases, the boys interpreted the behaviours in the scenario as acts of gaining status. They referred to such status as being linked to the expected ways of living as a boy in the case study school. As boys were expected to be the future leaders within the home and community, responsible for protecting and taking care of their family, there appeared to be some sense of pride and prestige associated with being a boy in this context. Consequently, aggressive behaviours were seen to be more of a ‘boys’ thing’ and hence not perceived as a problematic issue amongst them. The boys were of the view that behaviours such as fighting, name-calling and mockery were just part and parcel of their growing up. As Isaac explains:

If something happens to you, you just have to be a man and deal with it. If you can’t fight back instantly, there are many ways of fighting back.
in the future. You might even get hold of someone else that is not as strong as you to also exhibit your strength. (Isaac, boarder, 16, junior)

Isaac’s comments seemed to suggest how ‘bullying-like’ behaviour can be normalised amongst the respondents in the case study school. His comments hint about reproducing and preserving such behaviours. As Isaac saw himself as going to mistreat weaker peers in the future (a fairly typical perception of junior), he did not see himself as a victim.

Being recognised and/or establishing a status is an essential element of school life (Adler and Adler, 1998) and this was identified as a recurring theme in Chapter 5 where legitimation practices were discussed. Regardless of pupils’ economic backgrounds, in Holyrood School, they had to negotiate and maintain their own status through their interactions and positions. Acquiring status was achieved individually and collectively: boys had individual roles to play, but the peer group to which they belonged (ie, being either juniors or seniors) also had a critical impact on their status. The expectations associated with being a senior or a junior in the case study school, impacted on the choices the boys could make in expressing their masculinity within the school, as further presented in the next section.

6.4 Summary

While some responses show how such forms of behaviour were culturally interwoven with the expectations of growing up as a boy in the social culture of boys’ interactions in Ghana, others disassociated themselves from such normalised acts. In this way, while not all the participants celebrated such acts, these ‘bullying’ acts in themselves were neither called ‘bullying’ nor seen as problematic interactions. Consequently, boys reported handling such interactions themselves (as they were expected to) through mechanisms such as humour and faking fearlessness. Overall the chapter highlighted that the term ‘bullying’ was not used to describe scenario behaviours and the response associated with such behaviours in the institutional culture of the case study school differed from other national settings, such as the UK and Northern Europe. In exploring the boys’ understandings of and response to behaviours which were designed to stimulate a discussion of ‘bullying’, the concepts of masculinity and hierarchy were used to explain their responses. In Chapter 7, the findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and in relation to the understanding and construction of bullying.
Chapter 7

Discussion of findings

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the boys’ perceptions of and perspectives on ‘peer-bullying’ and ‘bullying-like’ behaviours in a Ghanaian secondary boys’ school, one of the few elite schools in the region. Data was generated by, and gathered from, a combination of sources, including: observational notes, school mapping exercises and semi-structured interviews. The aim of the study was not to elucidate the entire plethora of implications of the bullying phenomenon in an exhaustive manner, from all the viewpoints possible, or to apply Western conceptions of bullying to a Ghanaian context, but to provide an understanding of the perception of the phenomenon through the lenses of symbolic interactionism.

When facilitating discussions as to the existence of, and attitudes surrounding, peer-bullying in the school to gain an insight into the students’ perspectives on this topic, common patterns emerged which inevitably lead to the understanding of the bullying phenomenon within the larger cultural context. The patterns emerging from the discussions with the students had one common thread: the understanding that the bullying incidents within the school environment are common practice among students, largely ignored, thus inevitably encouraged by the teaching staff and overall – to a certain extent – justified through a general perception of masculinity and its manifestation and the extent to which behaviours fitting within the profile gain acceptability from peers and the other ‘actors’ at play within the larger culture. These patterns indicated that, a larger perspective was needed in order to assess the multiple factors that drive the understanding and perception of bullying in this specific context: culturally and ethically.

It has been accepted in literature that bullying, while mostly a specific tendency within a micro peer/group level, is a manifestation of, and reflects, the complex historical, geographical and cultural ethos of an entire community. As such,
models of bullying behaviour can hardly be identified or analysed without considering the context. As a result, I adopted the idea of culture as an ecological complex of stratified inter-related social constructs, each contributing to the development and sustainability of the other: from the micro to the macro levels and back. Viewed in this larger context, culture shapes, promotes and sustains a set of values and understandings that provide a clear backdrop for evaluation of students’ perception of bullying.

The micro cultural system includes, in this case, the educational system where the incidences of bullying actually happen and contains all the people and organizations that immediately affect or influence the behaviour: peers, parents and teachers. The micro cultural system does not function in a vacuum and is constantly in flux, conditioned, influenced by and interacting constantly with, the extended cultural system, which, for the purpose of the current analysis, is represented by the ensemble of cultural beliefs, values and perceptions of the Ghanaian culture – viewed as a culture with a patriarchal social order, with gender defined assignations and expectations.

It is at the micro level that the identity and self-identity of the students is formed, in parallel with the understanding of the notions of gender, masculinity, power and symbols through which the concepts are represented. In Chapter 2, I provided the theoretical frame of symbolic interactionism, considered a suitable theory for the exploration and further understanding of human behaviour, both at an individual and a group level (Weber, 1978; Pollard, 1985). This is especially the case when exploring the balance and imbalance of power in a group setting (Dennis & Martin, 2005) as will be discussed in section 7.2.3.

By applying the theory to the case in study, I was able to explain how the boys’ perception of power, influence and domination in the peer group contributed to a specific understanding of the bullying incidents, driven by the subjective meanings associated with the general understanding of the concept of power in the school and peer group setting. Through this lens, students understand and interpret one another’s behaviours and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. However the theory, as noted before, does not have the reach of considering the macro level importance in influencing the boys’ perception of status, power and masculinity that is culturally driven.

The socially constructed notion of masculinity at the micro level has been explained and analysed in Chapter 5, through the Theoretical Structuration
lens and it proved to be a major theoretical tool in the qualitative analysis of the data generated from interviews.

The advantages provided by the Structuration theory went beyond the limited scope of the Symbolic Interaction analysis, as it allowed me to emphasize the relationship between the structure of society/environment and the agents involved in the social interactions, in this case, between the students and the teachers, the students and the parents and between the students themselves.

Situated at the receiving end of cultural and direct environmental stimuli, both implicit (cultural perceptions of masculinity) and explicit (rules of conduct in school), the students are constantly shaped by the impressions and attitudes of others and reflect back into the culture the attitudes received (see the micro and macro levels above), thus contributing to and perpetuating an understanding of the bullying phenomenon that remains specific to the Ghanaian context.

In a larger, macro sense, the present study provides further insights into how culture plays a key role in the creation and understanding of bullying. Given the limited results drawn from a symbolic interactionism perspective that explored peer-bullying or bullying-like behaviours from the students’ perspectives, specific to a Ghanaian educational environment, the findings of this study presented below also draw attention to the larger cultural influences that shape the students’ understanding of bullying.

It then became of great importance for the current study to define bullying by comparing generally accepted contemporary Western definitions with the traditional understanding of what constituted bullying in the past – as a way in which children grew-up and as a ‘normal’ part of childhood interactions – and how the concept is defined and perceived in this particular setting. The concept of bullying and its definition as it is established in scholarly literature, has been explored in Chapter 3, with an emphasis on the aspects of repetition and intent to harm. However, from the students’ perspective, the data demonstrates that behaviour that I, most probably influenced by my experiences of living outside of Ghana, viewed as ‘bullying’ behaviour was not seen in the same negative and harmful way.

Behaviours described by the students were not viewed as negative in the context of the case study school, revealing a different perspective altogether when compared to a Western informed understanding and immediately drawing attention to issues of morally acceptable behaviour and, by extension, whether
we can actually speak of a ‘victimisation’ process or a ‘victim mentality’ within the case in the study. The answer, as derived from the students’ visible level of acceptance of the bullying incidents as described in the paragraphs below, is no, despite my personal disagreement to such interpretations.

Another contribution to extricating a nuanced understanding of the connotations assigned by students to bullying incidents was the methodology I used within the interview process. For example, during the interview I intentionally omitted the word bullying or alluding to negative connotations surrounding a westernised interpretation of bullying behaviour. This allowed the students to trust the interview/discussion process was non-judgemental and encouraged them to provide candid answers that further provided me with valuable clues in interpreting their attitude and perception of bullying.

Further, in this chapter, the key findings will be discussed in relation to the theoretical backdrop established in this introduction, bringing together the links between the previous chapters as the main findings of the current study. In doing so, insights into the understanding of ‘bullying’ in Ghanaian secondary schools emerged, by critically discussing its definitions, constructions and motivations. Furthermore, the concept of masculinity within the study school will be discussed in order to show the peculiarity and complexity of ‘bullying-like’ behaviour in this particular setting and culture. These themes and their inter-relations will be further discussed with their full implications for theory, policy and practice.

7.2 Perceptions of bullying-like behaviours in the Ghanaian context

Although findings confirmed the existence of bullying-like behaviours, in line with the existing literature and in comparison to studies from other national settings, in the case study school, such acts were not negatively perceived by the pupils interviewed. This contributes answering the research questions in the current study regarding the boys’ perceived understandings of bullying-like behaviours.

An important finding was that whilst some of the bullying-like acts such as fighting were not necessarily viewed as bad or negative behaviours by the boys; others were exalted as being part of quintessentially masculine behaviour. I interpreted the findings regarding the participants’ understanding and definition of bullying as meaning that the behaviour represented in the scenario
(Appendix 9) was perceived as a normal part of life in the case study school. As detailed in the preceding chapters I drew from key elements of symbolic interactionism e.g. symbols, mind, self-identity, roles and emotions, to address the reliability and validity issues regarding a data pool based upon subjective representation of experiences, as opposed to objective accounts. It is imperative to postulate that boys’ and the school/community not perceiving behaviour as negative does not necessarily make behaviours not harmful to them. Whilst I do not dismiss the boys’ judgement on behaviour, they may be oblivious to the short and long term effects of such practices. This calls for stakeholders such as policy makers, children, parents, etc to have a continuing dialogue and re-evaluation of normalised traditions, which I perceived as unhelpful and even damaging.

The boys’ perceptions of the existence of bullying-like behaviour within the case study school, supports the discrepancies in the Global North definitions of bullying, as previously highlighted by Sercombe and Donnelly (2013). The complexities surrounding a universally acceptable definition and the general understanding of the term in the institutional culture of Ghanaian secondary schools could be partly explained through Sandergaard’s (2012, p. 357) suggestion of some possible alternative methods of understanding ‘destructive socio-emotional interactions and the negotiating norms of appropriateness.’ Departing from labelling acts as, in our this case, bullying-behaviours, enables a move away from theoretical observations of individual traits, towards an examination of the rationale behind individual acts within a wider frame of reference (Sandergaard, 2012; Sercombe and Donnelly, 2013).

The shortfalls associated with generic definitions of bullying (Bansel et al, 2009; Ellwood and Davies, 2010) make it, arguably, unsuitable for comparison with the bullying-like acts described by the boys in the case study school. For example, the behaviours such as: name calling, teasing and some fighting that could be classified as bullying when referring to the descriptors used in the literature, were masculinised and hence normalised within the culture of the case study school, as presented in Chapter 5. By normalising these bullying-like behaviours as part of an entire school ethos, the students who engaged in such acts were viewed as fulfilling and conforming to their expected roles, especially with regard to gender expectations. This ethos was influenced by the formal and informal culture within the school, which, together, shaped the micro culture in which the boys received their education as both day students and boarders. It
is the processes within this micro culture which provided the background for qualitative data collection, which, in turn, now provides a baseline for future empirical studies on bullying-like behaviours in Ghanaian schools.

Whilst using an umbrella term such as ‘bullying’ may provide a platform for the observation, measure and applicability of the behaviours which fall into this category, using the term in this manner could potentially also create a cultural and relational distraction from the root causes of these behaviours, which might impede the full, ‘unbiased story from being told’ (Sandergaard, 2012). Therefore, definitions that promote the creation of binary figures such as ‘victims’ and ‘aggressors’ could be better placed as a conceptual tool (Sandergaard, 2012). One complexity that surrounds the bullying-like behaviours was related to how boys did not see themselves as victims, enabling them to cope in what could appear to be difficult situations. Structural evidence of such an attitude seemed deeply rooted in a culture which tends to fosters self-defence and survival as pathways through boyhood in the Ghanaian context (Pawluck, 1989; Smith, 2004).

7.2.1 Explanations of ‘bullying’

Bullying-like interactions and events within the context of the Ghanaian school, and the larger school community of teachers and students, all express the idea of a collective understanding, that it takes a whole community to create, sustain or reduce this behaviour (Espelage and Swearer, 2003).

From the perspective of the boys, teachers and parents, this behaviour was seen as a ‘rite of passage’ or a normalised childhood path for boys growing up, and this obscured their bullying-like acts (Askew, 1989; Skeleton, 2001), an opinion which appeared to be heavily influenced by a micro culture of gender bias. As discussed in Chapter 2, the culture in Ghana often categorises people in terms of their gender roles and expectations in which, males are commonly expected to conform to an identity steeped in aggressive, active and dominating behaviours, whereas females are encouraged to be accommodating and intuitive (Dunne et al, 2005). The boys were expected to engage in such bullying-like behaviour, and as such, they did not see themselves as bullies or victims, merely conforming to cultural expectations of masculinity.

Therefore, in answering the three research questions, the data revealed that the boys’ understanding of their behaviours stem from a cultural environment with a hierarchical structure.
With regard to the first research question, I investigated the nature of the boys’ perception and definition of peer-bullying. The manner in which the boys, teachers and parents defined bullying behaviours influenced how they responded to these behaviours. Parents, teachers and students used words like ‘bad’ and ‘unacceptable’ as qualifiers for the respective behaviours which they defined as bullying, while failing to label in negative terms bullying behaviours, in the sense of the term as used in the Global North countries, even though these behaviours were actually carried out within the school. The findings suggested the existence of a collective sense of ‘lightness in attitude’ expressed when talking about responding to ‘bullying’ acts, that clearly depicts how adults tend to normalize such behaviours.

In response to, or rather in order to address, the second research question, I had to attempt to understand the nature of the coping strategies used by boys within the context of bullying in the Ghanaian schools. It has been illustrated that when the boys have adopted such aggressive strategies, in reality, they justified the behaviour as a means of avoiding being perceived as weak or feminine within their school community and society at large.

Findings revealed that the boys’ understanding of their behaviour was steeped in a hierarchical cultural environment where senior students were allowed to punish junior students. Behaviours which the school, including fellow students, deemed acceptable punishment included physical punishment, eg, hitting. Whilst it was stated in the school’s code of conducted that no student had the right to physically abuse their fellow students, the teachers did not claim to be ignorant of the physical abuse and punishments enacted amongst students. They accepted the existence of such behaviours but highlighted the boundaries and extreme forms of physical abuse and behaviours that were strictly prohibited in the school. As a collective, the teachers and parents who were interviewed gave an impression of a culture in which the adults trusted their children to manage their own affairs and independently resolve inevitable conflicts that may emerge by whatever means they felt were necessary. Consequently, my observations showed that the children had few adult interventions during their play time and other interactions outside of the classroom. This independence seemed to equip the boys with the ability to deal with seemingly difficult issues that arose from their interactions without complaining, reporting to an adult or requiring adult intervention (Adinkra, 2012). As the boys’ interactions were marked by what I perceived as bullying,
having some adult guidance could lead to more healthy interactions. This is contingent on adults viewing the boys’ interactions as needing interventions.

**7.2.1.1 School rules and their enforcement**

Moreover, the overall impact of the school environment upon behaviour, was discussed in Chapter 5, where the rules and boundaries within the school and the extent to which these were adhered to and enforced by the seniors and teachers was addressed. It was clear that there was a degree of informed flexibility in these rules, which were influenced by the situation, the setting or the perceptions of the junior’s behaviour by the senior students. For example, Atta reported that: ‘sometimes when you are in the dormitory there are things you are not allowed to do, not because they are wrong, but maybe just because a senior feels like not allowing you to do it’. Overall, the interviews revealed an understanding throughout the hierarchies within the school that the rules were arbitrary, something which was influenced by the teachers inconsistent approach to rule enforcement and punishment.

In the absence of strict and enforceable rules to control and/or prevent the behaviours that were perceived as unacceptable, victims who had experienced these actions first hand were left to deal with the consequences and the aftermath themselves, largely without the help and support of their guardians, except in times of extreme forms of physical violence or the overstepping of boundaries set by the school.

Amidst the hierarchies and competition which Bronson and Merryman (2009) describes as not necessarily a negative influence upon the behaviour of boys schools, such as the case study school, during the data collection stage, I observed a school that tended towards adopting what Rigby (1996, p. 195) defined as a ‘moralistic’ discipline. This form of discipline places emphasis upon the culturally defined moral values that elders in a community believe that children should conform to, in order to compensate for what is, in actuality, a non-existent comprehensive and enforceable behaviour policy.

**7.2.1.2 Labelling and victimisation**

Acts which were assessed by me as bullying-like acts may not have been named or labelled as such by the respondents because the descriptions occurred in a friendly and cohesive relational atmosphere, where the boys related to
each other as members of a community. In this respect, avoidance of the use of ‘bullying’ as a label might have some advantages. Both the students and teachers dealt with issues similarly to the way Sercombe and Donnelly (2012) proposed. They looked at each individual behaviour on its own merit, seeking to help the person in distress without labelling them as a victim. This approach is important because labelling a child’s behaviour can be counter-productive, as a label like ‘bully’ or ‘victim’ can become a lasting judgement (Becker 1963, Spivak and Prothrow-Stith, 2001). This is particularly problematic within environments where masculinity is held in high esteem. While highlighting individual acts or scenarios as falling under the category of bullying might help in quantifying behaviours, it may not necessarily assist in its intervention. Rather, the discourse of the bullying-like behaviours described may be viewed in a negative regard (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). On the other hand, not identifying problematic behaviours may impede the boys’ conceptualisation of harm, which would in turn influence their response to being victims or perpetrators of harm.

7.2.1.3 Adult responses and parental attitudes

With regards to the third research question, I explored the nature of the way in which the boys interpret significant adults’ response to peer-bullying in school. Adult influence was further revealed in Atta’s description of the procedure involved in a parental incident report. If a parent was informed that their son had been fighting, it was rare that the parent would respond or intervene. However, in the case of a daughter involved in an altercation, an immediate retaliation would be elicited from their father. This is a further indication of the gender expectations which exist within the societal context of the school, and in some way explain the actions and perceptions of the boys towards bullying-like behaviour.

The role of the family and society upon the development of bullying-like behaviour can be further explored from a social interactionist perspective; this can enable an explanation of the social construction of bullying behaviour by exploring how the classification of individuals under the labels of ‘bully’ or ‘victim’ only occurs in the context of group responses to this form of behaviour. This finding is supported by Lemert’s (1972) assertion that, as a generality, behaviour is only labelled as negative or positive by the society in which it occurs, therefore, it fits well with the descriptions of the perceptions of bullying by the boys in the case study school. By following this interpretation,
one can assume that within the unique social culture of the case study school, by failing to perceive certain patterns of behaviour as ‘bullying’, the micro society within the school also fails to identify individuals as ‘bullies’ or ‘victims’. This theoretical interpretation of bullying defends the perceptions of the boys attending the case study school, that in some sense, bullying does not exist in the school environment, because if bullying is not labelled as such and understood as a natural phenomenon, it follows logically that it does not exist. The same logic applies to the existence of ‘bullies’ and ‘victims’.

7.2.1.4 Intentionality and perception

A key finding was that the students who engaged in bullying-like acts did not do so with the intention of doing harm to those with whom they had such an interaction. Whilst the boys’ reported acts that were perceived by me as unambiguously acts of bullying, and in some cases violent, the students did not perceive them the same way. These actions in many ways seemed ethical and legitimized in their view, similar to what Horton (2011) describes as ‘justified bullying actions’. The actions that I perceived as bullying were in actuality, sometimes considered playful behaviour, whereby these actions encapsulated the students’ means of fulfilling the expected masculine roles as discussed earlier in this chapter. In this way, the boys’ acts could be conceptualized under the umbrella of what Rigby (2002, p. 49) defines as ‘non-malign’ bullying.

Considering Sercombe and Donnelly’s division by degree and extrapolating from that concept, what would be consider ‘first-degree’ bullying is a premeditated act performed with the intention to harm. Using the same division, ‘second-degree’ bullying would be assigned to actions that are performed by people who did not have the intention to harm, but who had the realisation that the action was likely to cause harm. Third-degree bullying, in continuing with this assignment by degree, would be likened to acts performed by people with no intention to cause harm and who were ignorant of the consequences of their actions. How actions are interpreted, or to which degree they may be assigned to, are not inherent in these actions, but are assigned by agents in the community (Goffman. 1959; Sercombe and Donnelly, 2010). In this respect, the actions of the pupils involved in this study fell under the category of ‘third degree’ bullying if defined using Sercombe and Donnelly’s (2010) model.

As discussed in Chapter 5, most social behaviours, including their meaning,
are contextually bound (Lemert, 1972; Welford, 1975). The ways in which meaning is attributed to behaviours is defined by both the macro and micro influencing factors at play in the individual or group environment, whereby the same actions can have different interpretations across a wide range of social and cultural settings.

As discussed in the Introduction, in the context of the case study school, a multi-level combined Symbolic Interactionist and Structuration approach, placed within a strong understanding of its cultural context is required to develop a holistic, unbiased understanding of the boys perceptions of peer bullying.

7.2.2 Imbalance of power

In this examination of the role the concept of power plays in the current study I will begin by reiterating that for the purposes of this study, the concepts of power and gender were a lens through which to examine the wider issues of interactions and behaviours in the case study school. From my observations, and from the reports of students, teachers and parents, the majority of the bullying-like acts were thought to have occurred between juniors and seniors. Observations that could be seen as representing a form of power imbalance through the age gap between the participants of bullying acts in the the case study school.

Hearn’s (2012) conceptualisation of power as defined in Chapter 2, maps on to the power relations between the teachers and students, students and their parents and the interactions between students in the case study school. Power is encapsulated in social relationships and, in this respect, it influences every aspect of social interaction. The findings of this study demonstrate that all aspects of power, ie domination, authority and legitimacy, are key social concepts within the case study school, including power relations between teacher and students, juniors and seniors and at an individual level.

The power imbalance which exists between the victim and the perpetrator has been identified as a key component of bullying (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2012). The peculiar situation in the school as discussed in section 1.5.1 means that juniors’ mistreatment by seniors based on the idea that the former category is younger and physically weaker than the latter, has been normalized and seen as part of their everyday interactions.
This form of power imbalance, therefore, may transcend disparities in age (Cowie, 2011) or physical strength (Sullivan, 2000; Rigby, 1996; Sullivan, 2000). This has implications on the conditions associated with power, which are closely linked with legitimacy (Hearn, 2012). This argument is pursued in the following paragraphs.

As addressed in Chapter 6, gender and power were central to my understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the boys, where gender is viewed as a social rather than a biological construction (Butler, 2004; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). The literature draws parallels between symbolic interactionism and Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory which encapsulates how the society in which the child develops shapes their behaviour in terms of gender assignment (Colley, 1998) and their societal roles. Bandura refers to the effect of ‘agencies of socialisation’ upon the social development of the child In this respect, the ‘agents’ refer to ‘the family, the media, the peer group and the school’ (Connell, 1987, p. 191), as examined in detail in Chapter 2. The literature on symbolic interactionism, examines how gender and power are interlinked and dependent upon cultural and societal expectations (Goffman, 1959). The data revealed that this was certainly the case for the boys in the Ghanaian case study school, where the concept of masculinity was a common emerging theme.

7.3 Masculinity: a socially pre-established representation of ‘bullying’

This thesis argues that the dominant masculine norms illustrate socially accepted representations of everyday life. In a broader sense, such influences are deemed to contribute to the construction and reconstruction of socially established perceptions of reality. Overall, the boys’, teachers’ and parents’ accounts did not necessarily imply that the boys’ reported behaviour in the school was solely determined by the dominant masculine norm. Rather, within different contexts and scenarios, boys felt under pressure and were at times obliged to conform to the norm of the micro culture of the case study school.

In this way, the social and environmental support available to individual agents influences their social practices within a group, which, in turn influence how they choose to, and are able to, respond to any given situation and context (Goffman, 1959; Murnen et al, 2002). This paradigm can be used to explain the different ‘bullying’ practices performed by seniors and juniors as presented in Chapter 5. Boys with different social resources, such as the status of being a senior, prefect
or a junior might demonstrate different patterns of behaviour whilst continuing to being influenced by a common representation of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Connell and explored in Chapter 2, is the emergent dominance of groups and/or individuals under the influence of cultural norms and institutions, such as schools. This theory allows for the interpretation of the data to further advance the understanding of the interactions between the boys in the case study school. Gender order patterns which emerged from the data demonstrate how the case study school’s conceptualisation of masculinity and the importance it places upon this, allows for dominant individuals and groups to increase in power, resulting in a normalised power inequality within the school.

With reference to the cultural idiosyncrasies of Ghana, the perception of masculinity, which is perceived as a highly important concept of self-identity, is equated to aggression and physical strengths (Buchbinder, 1994). Furthermore, in Ghana males are generally perceived as being of a higher social status than females and as a result, boys who were observed to be conforming to female stereotypes, such as fulfilling pre-defined female roles in society were viewed negatively (Colclough et al, 2000). This perception of what defines masculinity was apparent in the boys’ responses and open discussions. For example, Essien described how, although the boys would complete the chores assigned to them by the teachers, they feared being caught doing them as ‘his friends would laugh at him’. Linked to Bandura’s learning theory, the boys learned what it meant to be ‘masculine’ (aggression, strength) through observations of the behaviour of others, with the interwoven power imbalance merging with masculinity as previously addressed, this results in the boys developing perceptions of power and masculinity; a positive attribute in their community, which parallels with a Global North version of bullying behaviour; a negative attribute in outside societies.

7.4 The transcendence of vulnerability; the boys’ coping strategies

The dominant masculine norm within the case study school revolved around what I defined as the transcendence of vulnerability which is captioned ‘berma nsu’, translated as ‘boys do not cry’. In addition to this, the interviews revealed the use of insults such as ‘Obaaba’ and ‘kodjo basia’ (weak man) used throughout the school to describe culturally perceived ‘feminine’
actions. The respondents’ accounts revealed that the students identified those who encapsulate masculinity by the way they successfully concealed ‘vulnerability’. A term which they used to describe actions that depict physical and/or emotional weakness (Connell, 2008). The boys appeared to actively discourage displaying any signs that may be perceived of as vulnerable in order to protect their masculine status. In this way, boys who were thought to exhibit their ‘vulnerability’ were perceived by their fellow pupils, and to a lesser extent, teachers, as performing or displaying ‘feminine’ attitudes and sometimes nicknamed ‘Kodjo Basia’ or ‘Obaaba’

It was apparent that the boys behaved in an aggressive manner as a form of coping with societal perception of gender roles placed upon them, as discussed in Chapter 5. These coping strategies were embedded within their everyday lives, reflected in their actions and self-reported experiences. Following the data analysis, the underlying factors relating to boys’ expressions of masculinity were found to be associated with micro social relations amongst students and the patriarchal structuring of the wider school environment (Connell, 1995; 2008). This could be interpreted as bearing a parallel equivalence with the imbalance of power of men over women within some societies (Pearce, 2003).

From the evidence obtained through the qualitative data collection, the nature of the respondents’ micro social relations across differing social networks existing within the case study school, appeared to motivate them to avoid being subordinated by their peers. Boys who did not conform to the expected masculine norm risked being maltreated and excluded by their peers. This could relate with Plummer (2006) and Pascoe’s (2011) assertion that, in order to avoid being treated negatively, males align themselves towards what are perceived as successful masculinities. Yet such maltreatments under these circumstances seem to be expected and normalised in the school. Whilst some of the extreme forms of abuse inflicted upon the victims of such actions may be perceived as inappropriate, within the realms of the research, there was no formalised way of identifying and naming such behaviours.

I found that there was not one singular form of dominant masculinity. This finding is in line with what has been noted in the existing literature, that individual boys demonstrate multiple forms of masculinity that are both temporally and contextually influenced (Wetherell and Edley, 2003; Allen, 2005; Paechter, 2006). Whilst physical strength with aggression were reported as a dominant form of expressing masculinity, they are not inextricably bound together.
Proponents of the multiple masculinities approach tend to regard boys’ diverse behaviours in social settings as being different constructions of masculinity (Skelton, 2002; Phoenix et al, 2003; Wetherell and Edley, 2003). For example, a boy who is influenced by a situation to conceal or reveal his vulnerability, may be conceptualised as constructing contrasting masculinities (Connell, 2008). Consequently, the notion of multiple masculinities may sometimes be perceived as inextricably linking boys and masculinity to each other (see Adler and Adler, 1998; Morrel 2002; Wetherell and Edley, 2003; Swain, 2006). However, the respondents in the school perceived the demonstration of physical and emotional strength as a demonstration of masculinity.

7.5 Summary

In conclusion, boys’ perceptions of bullying in the case study Ghanaian school were approached from both a Symbolic Interactionist and Structuration theoretical basis. The three research questions asked which explored i) the boys’ perceptions of bullying in terms of how they define bullying, ii) how they cope with bullying and iii) the nature of boys’ interpretations of adult responses, when investigated from a dual theoretical perspective suggested that the parents’ responses to behaviours played a significant role in these behaviours. Paramount to these responses was the propensity of the care givers to encourage the boys to deal with negative encounters and situations independently, which, more often than not, involved a power struggle resulting in bullying-like behaviours. The research also revealed that these behaviours were often developed in response to societal gender pressures and hierarchies at both macro and micro societal levels and the coping mechanisms the boys employed in order to conform to these.
Chapter 8

Summary, conclusions, contributions, limitations, recommendations

8.1 Background of the study

Bullying has increasingly been recognized as a problem of national and international concern, generating multi-disciplinary studies worldwide, casting a spotlight on the phenomenon of bullying and victimization within schools and the emergence of a ‘culture of bullying’ among peers.

The current baseline study explored boys’ perceived understandings of peer-bullying in one Ghanaian secondary school. The research aim was to understand the boys’ perspectives of peer-bullying and to explore the boys’ own understanding of bullying in the case study school. It uses a qualitative case study design to investigate their awareness and experiences of ‘bullying-like’ behaviours in the case study school.

8.2 Research questions

The first research question was related to the boy’s perception, definition and identification of bullying and ‘bullying-like’ behaviours.

The boys identified various instances of ‘bullying-like’ behaviours without necessarily attaching a negative connotation to such events. The role of masculinity in the development of normalizing ‘bullying-like’ behaviours in the school environment has been highlighted as being of exceptional importance to self-identity and subsequent perceptions of behaviour. The main themes that emerged lead to the understanding that ‘bullying-like’ behaviours take the form of verbal abuse (such as name calling) and physical abuse (such as hitting and fighting). Boarders experienced more of such acts, under the umbrella of ‘punishments’ which occurred between seniors and juniors, than day students. The situations in which these ‘bullying-like’ acts happened tended to be interactions outside normal school hours; mainly in the dormitories and play grounds where there were no adult intervention or supervision.
The second question was related to uncovering the coping strategies boys used in dealing with bullying and “bullying-like” behaviours.

The boys coped by using humour to dismiss their pain and fear. Juniors especially, shared their pain as a way of coping with punishment and maltreatment from seniors. However, some boys confronted the situation and the perpetrators. I noted a certain acceptance by the students in this regard as well. There was a resignation to the power and dominance of their aggressive peers, thus contributing to the perpetuation of the behaviours as a ‘necessary evil’ that will only make them stronger. The repeated behaviour over time, also contributed to a sense of resignation to the fact, and further acceptance of the events, leading to a normalization of the practice and, in some respects interestingly, even a glorification of the sense of dominance.

The third research question sought to investigate how the boys interpreted significant adults’ response to peer-bullying in school.

The boys perceived and interpreted the significant adults’ response to bullying and ‘bullying-like’ behaviours in the case study school as ineffectual. For example, juniors reported that teachers would not take any action if they reported experiencing aggressiveness from peers or noticing bullying happening to others. Therefore juniors did not bother to complain about it and tried to cope as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The subliminal message that the boys received from the adults in their immediate environment, if not directly encouraging of the behaviour, reinforced the particular general perception that some degree of aggressiveness is a mere sign of age or a gender show of power and reinforced masculinity.

8.3 Contribution to literature

8.3.1 Local, regional, national

Although there is a large body of literature on bullying in the developed countries of the global North, similar literature in Africa is lacking or varies from region to region, with, for instance, more – albeit still not in significant numbers – studies available for South Africa compared to, for instance, Ghana and Nigeria (Liang at al, 2007).

The present study is one of the few existing research studies focused on
‘bullying-like’ behaviours within the Ghanaian educational environment. It is also the first study to offer a sociological perspective of the phenomenon, using sociological frameworks and theoretical assumptions developed within the global North literature, and applying them to a Ghanaian case study in order to reveal and emphasize the particularity of this context. As a stand-alone study, it is meant as a starting point to encourage national research within Ghana and to contribute to further policy making on the subject of identifying and preventing the bullying phenomenon in Ghanaian schools, as expanded in section 8.6 below.

The study aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature on the understanding, definition and the subsequent consequences of peer-bullying specific to Ghanaian secondary schools. To date, research in the field has tended to focus on a global North concept of ‘bullying-like’ behaviour, categorising these behaviours in terms of the cultural expectations and values of global North societies. As the current study meant to emphasized, the understanding of bullying attitudes and events being culturally justified through the concept of masculinity, do not necessarily conform with the value judgements reinforced in the global North literature. This is not dismissing the importance of identifying and preventing the perpetuation of aggressive behaviour among the students in an educational environment. It, however, raises questions on the feasibility of implementing, for example, strict prevention policies that do not reflect the cultural attitudes towards the phenomenon of bullying.

The current study also invites further research in multiple related disciplines, opening new areas of investigation of the manifestations and consequences of the bullying phenomenon in Ghanaian schools. A suggested way forward then, is to put measures in place that respects the cultural heritage of Ghana which also promotes the basic rights of children as presented in the UNCRC.

From a methodological and pedagogical perspective, through the school mapping exercise, the study has additionally contributed to creative methods of conducting research with children, especially on sensitive issues, thus being a starting point for bringing about awareness on the necessity of new methods and practices that will further the understanding of childhood education.

8.3.2 Scholarly literature worldwide

Due to the lack of relevant studies on the bullying phenomenon within a
Ghanaian context, the same contributions that have been outlined above at the local, national level apply as contributions to the development of the existing worldwide literature by adding a new country and cultural view to the larger picture.

The present study confirmed the premises advanced by Global North studies in the sociology of education that:

- Bullying is a cultural phenomenon and its manifestations are culturally perceived through the way a culture views and understands masculinity and its attributes and, in this sense, masculinities and therefore, bullying, are culturally defined as previously emphasized in literature in different national settings (Bocharev and Khlomov, 2013; Maunder and Crafter, 2012)

- There is a ‘culture of bullying’ in schools amongst students (peer-bullying) as suggested in the existing literature (Bradshaw, Evian and Wassdorf, 2009) however, this study added that at least in this school, these behaviours are not perceived as ‘wrong’, but are viewed as a way of expressing masculinity. Further, they do not create a victimisation process.

- The perception of bullying among students is coloured by cultural values and attitudes promoted by the educational environment, institutions, family and immediate environment and society. (see above cited) The students are at the receiving end of an overwhelming culturally ingrained attitude towards ‘being a boy’ based on an entire culture’s values and perceptions.

Below I discuss some of the issues I uncovered and emphasized throughout the study.

In a school community such as the case study school, the discrepancies in academic and gender expectations shape the behaviour of the students at both a macro and micro level. Responses were often gender-defined as a reflection of the general cultural attitudes. Importantly, the thesis demonstrates that there was an attitude of superiority amongst the boys in the school which, in diverse ways, influenced their interactions and how they perceived themselves and others. It has been demonstrated that in the context of this study, multiple masculinities, as discussed in Chapter 7, imply powerfulness and rationality, which is the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity in this context.

The hierarchical and gendered nature of the family and social structures within the school community led to the expectation that boys, especially
seniors, would be strong and in control. To meet these expectations, and to be accepted and recognised as ‘real boys’, the boys engaged in many behaviours and interactions that would be seen as bullying, or even aggression, in other contexts. Teasing, some forms of fighting, punishments and other forms of abuse which meet the definitional criteria for bullying used throughout the literature, were both expected and normalised. For boys to obtain and display quintessential masculinity, they felt the need to follow some ‘norms and rules’. Although these rules were not formalised, they powerfully influenced the behaviours because they were imprinted on the language and traditions of the people within the school. As discussed, a typical rule for boys was ‘berma nsu’ or ‘boys don’t cry’.

Expressing pain was perceived to be a feminine behaviour and boys did not express their discomfort or pain during their interactions, which in turn contributed to normalising aggressive behaviours. Rather, they would express it differently, in a manner that was ritualised and/or received cultural support. For example, certain seniors said that they mistreated juniors as a way of avenging what they had experienced as juniors.

Parents discussed the similarities between their own childhood experiences and those of their children, and they also talked about the similarities between their child-rearing practices and those of their parents. These included the importance of patriarchy (male dominance) and the use of corporal punishment as a means of correcting children’s behaviour. Patriarchy can generally be described as men taking prime responsibility for the home and domestic relations, while filial piety is largely understood as being respectful and submissive to the elderly. It was important for my interpretation of the data to reveal and consider this mentality when discussing bullying behaviours.

Further to the use of corporal punishment by parents/adults on their children and amongst the children, some of the parents who participated in the study often said ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’, in response to my questions about discipline and corporal punishment. At the same time, other parents believed that physically disciplining or punishing their children was unacceptable and inhumane, especially during puberty and adolescence, a sensitive period crucial for a child’s identity and self-identity formation and feelings. Arguably this reflects a more contemporary approach to parenting by some parents.

In Chapter 2, the agency and actions of boys growing up in Ghana were discussed through the theory of symbolic interactionism, with agency being
understood as individuals having the capacity to act, interact, influence and shape their lives and the lives of others (Neale, 2002).

The boys in the study had a certain degree of power, influence and agency within their school and home lives. This was exemplified by some of their behaviours, duties and actions within the school, such as in the negotiation and management of school chores, resolving conflicts (especially between seniors and juniors) and, for those living in the boarding house, managing the school compound. As reported in section 1.6 the general perception among students was that they do not have enough agency and autonomy to act and influence their own lives. Although the children who boarded were given responsibilities such as chores within the school environment, their autonomy did not tend to include important decision-making, which remained an adult prerogative.

An understanding of the children’s behaviour within the Ghanaian secondary schools and their implications, could influence policy and practice in educational and social organisations in Ghana. At the same time, it could provide crucial context to other welfare organisations within the global North, which are faced with issues of cultural sensitivity to people from different cultural backgrounds (Henricson et al, 2001).

The research findings lead to the understanding that the use of psychological or sociological theories to explain and investigate children’s behaviour may not be sufficient to clarify all the aspects of the bullying phenomenon. Also, it suggests that the use of terminologies such as ‘bullying’ to label or describe such behaviours may not necessarily be understood the same way, simply because of the culturally specific setting and how its participants use language.

In summary, this thesis has contributed to the literature on childhood and bullying in Ghana through the lens of Ghanaian traditions and culture. In the Ghanaian context, childhood is seen as a preparation for adulthood and some behaviours – such as bullying – that might negatively affect their development, are perceived as normal behaviour within the process of establishing their masculinity, and justified as being to their benefit in the long run for developing strength and endurance and coping skills with facts of life.

It is hoped that this thesis has helped raise awareness of the complex issues related to the sociology of interaction and the factors that influence it, the bullying phenomenon, by providing an independent, impartial viewpoint.
8.4 Researcher reflexivity

As a researcher and author of this study, I have been in a unique and privileged position throughout this work by being both a Ghanaian national, a ‘boy who grew-up in Ghana’ and a student and scholar in the United Kingdom. This double perspective of both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ allowed me a greater understanding of the local cultural values, norms and perceptions I identified with due to my background and nationality.

It is important to note that the findings of the analysis are my interpretations of the data, which is aimed at providing a further contribution to current thinking within the focus of the study. Throughout the fieldwork, I sought to maintain a balance of power between me, as a researcher, and the respondents, in the same spirit as expressed by Neill (2006). The theory that men are more likely to demonstrate more openly their masculinity during interactions with other men (Nayak, 2006; Phillips, 2007; Sabo, 2011) leads me to believe that being a male researcher was beneficial to this investigation. My gender, and also my nationality, and the fact that I too have been raised in a Ghanaian school, was perceived by the boys as reassuring and they perceived me as someone who could understand their issues and mentality. Therefore they expressed themselves in more openly masculine ways than they would have done had I had been from outside Ghana and/or, a woman.

Methodologically, I was also in a privileged position to probe and guide the interview in such a way as to obtain their uncensored opinion. As indicated in literature (Holmes and Smyth, 2005) the manner in which semi-structured interviews are conducted can greatly influence the data obtained. In this case, a researcher from a different background may have probed differently, thus obtaining different results. Even with this advantage, by living outside Ghana for a while and developing different mannerisms and outlooks, the respondents may have still perceived me as different from them, which may have somewhat impacted their responses.

One of the issues I have been confronted with while doing this study was the lack of any empirical research on bullying in Ghana at the time of the research, upon which the current study could be built. This affected not only the format of this study but also prompted me to find specific ways, adapted to the context of the study school, in which the research interviews could be conducted. For example, I needed to find an ethical way to talk with the respondents about
bullying behaviours without mentioning the word ‘bullying’ so as to avoid influencing their responses by triggering their self-defences.

This lack of previously existing guiding literature also offered insightful opportunities for me to be creative with the methodological approach taken in this thesis. As a result of not necessarily finding any accounts of bullying from the data, as it has been empirically known in contexts such the UK (regardless of whether psychologically or sociologically constructed), I had to use an indirect approach to understand the boys’ behaviour from their point of view. This indirect approach led me to gather a large amount of data which, sometimes, proved complex to manage and present in a manner which would reflect this complexity without losing its meaning.

I sought to apply established methods of analysis which have been assessed as valid and reliable in literature, in order to both encapsulate the complexity of the data and, in doing so, make the meaning of the rich data gathered clear to the readers.

Also, my ethnic background as a Ghanaian who has experienced secondary school life in Ghana, influenced my responsibilities towards the participants. In as much as I did not lose sight of the academic nature the fieldwork, I felt I shared much common ground with the boys I interviewed. In this way, even though I was not expecting to be surprised with what I found, I was overwhelmed with some of the boys’ accounts and experiences of what seemed normal to them. It was then paramount that I, as an impartial researcher, managed and presented the data in such a way that it aligned with the meaning they attributed to it.

8.5 Study limitations

The circumstances under which the current study was conducted presents some limitations.

This thesis represents fieldwork conducted in a specific secondary school, at a specific place and time, with a specific sample of participants under specific circumstances. The aim of the study was not to investigate cause-effect correlations in order to arrive at generalizable findings, but to describe, explain and evaluate young men’s perspectives in their institutional context and in an interactive manner (Cohen et al, 2000).

Yet, while the contribution to establishing a work frame and methods as a
starting point for future research, it is worth noting that the constraints mentioned above – especially relative to the size of the sample data – make it possibly difficult to apply the findings of this study to different contexts and circumstances. This calls for future studies on bullying in Ghana to expand the sample size and also scope of the research – by including more participants and in more schools (for example, primary and junior high schools). As the current study involved boys in a single gender school, other studies might focus on interactions amongst girls, boys and girls or participants from a mixed gender school. The limited generalizability associated with the present study bears resemblance with what Guba and Lincoln (2000) advocate, that it is not possible to claim statistical generalization in qualitative studies.

It is however important to posit the relationship between understandings of ‘bullying-like’ behaviours within the specific institutional context of the case study school and that of the Ghanaian national setting. The relationship between the characteristics of the boys’ interactions in the case study school and that of what is seen as general characteristics of being a child in Ghana, is evident through the thick description of the case (Verma and Mallick, 1999; Stake, 1995). The thick description and analysis of the case study school town as presented in Chapters 5 and 6, which was embedded within a broader Ghanaian culture, presented a link between the general and the specific socio-cultural frames of reference. In this way, whilst generalizable causal explanations could not be claimed for the current study, the findings could be said to be generalizable to some extent.

The hypothetical scenario used during the one-to-one semi-structured interviews may have distorted the meanings that children associate with ‘bullying-like’ behaviours in the real world situations. Whilst the boys could relate to the incidences in the scenario, there are many aspects of real world cases (such as contextual cues and feelings) that were not present in the scenario. Furthermore, the scenario may have presented a narrow form of ‘bullying-like’ behaviour, leaving out other possible forms of ‘bullying-like’ behaviours.

Though I made efforts to distance myself from the data and maintain an objective perspective, the familiarity I had with the Ghanaian culture, coupled with my past experience of attending an all-boys secondary school in Ghana, may have affected my interpretations. As discussed in section 1.1, I may have assumed the meanings assigned to ‘bullying-like’ behaviours prior to the
fieldwork. Consequently, I acknowledge that the voices of the participants and that of the researcher in the current study are inextricably bound, and in my case, possibly coloured by personal assumptions, biases and inclinations.

8.6 Implications for research, policy and practice

As many of the ‘bullying-like’ behaviours reported by the boys were experienced as a product of a society and culture enshrined in social identities and the many understandings of masculinities, there is an imperative need for schools to re-define and re-construct notions of ideal forms of behaviour within the education environment, to contribute in restructuring the existing mentality on child rearing and parental guidance in Ghana and raise awareness at every level on the bullying phenomenon as a psycho-sociologically damaging occurrence.

By discouraging what is perceived of as negative and rewarding positive behaviour, children might avoid ‘bullying-like’ behaviours. Through moral and citizenship education, children might be able to negotiate their understanding and be made open to alternative forms of masculinities and social identities.

Teachers and school staff, as direct participants in the education process, need to be trained about best ways of promoting healthy interactions amongst students at school. Such training needs to involve finding appropriate ways of identifying bullying, identify the students who participate in these acts or those who may be suffering in silence; and also create and implement well planned procedures and policies to prevent, monitor or intervene in bullying cases.

One of the immediate consequences of the study is expected to be a raising awareness of the imperative necessity of creating and implementing clear standards and guidelines to inform students, parents, teachers and schools regarding what is acceptable behaviour in schools and what is not, while, at the same time remaining considerate of, respecting and celebrating the forms of cultural traditions that create the moral and ethical fabric of the modern Ghanaian society.

Future research should extend the study to other schools and other participants in the Ghanaian national education system and enlarge the scope of research across a multi-disciplinary investigative frame. In addition to limited sample
size, it has been argued that findings of qualitative research have limited
generalizability (Davies, 2008). Whilst the findings of the current research are
from one case study school in Ghana under specific circumstances as explained
in section 8.4, by broadening the scope of future research, it is hoped that these
findings will be generalizable outside of the boundaries of this research (Cuba
and Lincoln, 2000).

Future research in behavioural sciences could deepen the understanding of
the influence of background, culture and individual experiences on people’s
behaviours. To understand the real impact of children’s behaviour and their
perception of such behaviours on themselves and their community, further
research taking a holistic approach could be useful. This could involve
expanding upon the themes and key issues arising from the current study,
recruiting more boys from the same school or from different schools to provide
a larger expanse and variation of responses.

8.7 Conclusion

This study enabled a picture to be painted of boys’ perceptions of bullying in a
single case study school in Ghana, which illustrated that bullying in this context
is defined in a different manner to that which is described in global North
literature. It offers insights into the mechanisms by which these perceptions
are formed, as an immediate consequence of socially and culturally defined
notions of masculinity within the Ghanaian context; it also reveals the role of
the immediate environment and the authority figures (parents, teachers) that
shape this perception and their role in the perpetuation of bullying. The study
opens up new avenues for future research by initiating the dialogue on a topic
of immediate importance for education and child development studies.
Participant Information Sheet for Adults

I am a research student from The University of Edinburgh. The purpose for contacting you is for you to help me to obtain information for my research.

Project title: Boys’ perspectives on peer relations and peer interactions in Ghanaian secondary schools

Focus of the study and why it is important

The focus of this study is boys’ understanding and experiences of peer relations and peer interactions in a Ghanaian secondary school. I want to understand the range of behaviours that are exhibited during peer interactions, especially those relating to disputes and disagreements between students. Little is currently known about this aspect of behaviour in schools in Ghana and in the long-run findings from the study could be used for programmes that could help to promote positive behaviour in Ghana.

What taking part will involve

Students will be asked to participate in a group mapping activity which will encourage them to list the kinds of behaviours they have witnessed or experienced in various places around the school. A small number of students will be asked to take part in interviews regarding their experiences. In interviews, students may be asked about issues such as name calling or teasing and other behaviours mentioned by students. I am also interested in the types of social situations where such forms of behaviours occur and how boys cope with such behaviour.

Who can participate?

Participants would need to be enrolled at “INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL secondary school” and be willing to share their experiences and/or understanding of peer-interactions in their school. It will be made clear to all students that they can withdraw from the study at any time.
Potential risks

If at any point in time during their participation they feel distressed about any issues, I shall work with them to seek help from a local officer in your school or local area.

Confidentiality

Information gathered in this research is strictly confidential. No individual student/teacher or the school will be revealed to any third party.

Duration

It is hoped that this study will be conducted over 3 or 4 months, between February and May 2012.

Contacts

For further information on this project, please contact me on 00447753256330 or on georgeabakah@yahoo.com

Thank you!

George Abakah
Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet for Young People

I am a student from The University of Edinburgh. The purpose for contacting you is for you to help gain access to your school (students) in order to obtain information for my research.

Project title: Boys’ perspectives on peer relations and peer interactions in Ghanaian secondary schools

Focus of the study and why it is important

The focus of this study is boys’ understanding and experiences of peer relations and peer interactions in a Ghanaian secondary school. I want to understand the range of behaviours that are exhibited during peer interactions, especially those relating to disputes and disagreements between students. Little is currently known about this aspect of behaviour in schools in Ghana and in the long-run findings from the study could be used for programmes that could help to promote positive behaviour in Ghana.

What taking part will involve

Students will be asked to participate in a group mapping activity which will encourage them to list the kinds of behaviours they have witnessed or experienced in various places around the school. A small number of students will be asked to take part in interviews regarding their experiences. In interviews, students may be asked about issues such as name calling or teasing and other behaviours mentioned by students. I am also interested in the types of social situations where such forms of behaviours occur and how boys cope with such behaviour.

Who can participate?

Participants would need to be enrolled at “INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL secondary school” and be willing to share their experiences and/or understanding of peer-interactions in their school. It will be made clear to all students that they can withdraw from the study at any time.
Potential risks

If at any point in time during their participation they feel distressed about any issues, I shall work with them to seek help from a local officer in your school or local area.

Confidentiality

Information gathered in this research is strictly confidential. No individual student/teacher or the school will be revealed to any third party.

Duration

It is hoped that this study will be conducted over 3 or 4 months, between February and May 2012.

Contacts

For further information on this project, please contact me on 00447753256330 or on georgeabakah@yahoo.com

Thank you!

George Abakah
Participant Consent Form for School Gate Keepers

Project title: Boys' perspectives on peer-bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools.

Investigator: George Abakah; 
Supervisors: Dr. Jane Brown and Dr. Gale Macleod

I have read and understand the project information sheet.
I understand that the school has the right to withdraw at any time.
I am aware that the information gathered will be confidential.
I am aware of the procedures involved in the research.
I have the right to act on behalf of the school as a gatekeeper.

__________________________
School official’s name

__________________________
School official’s position

__________________________
School official’s signature

__________________________
Date
Appendix 4

Participant Consent Form for Adults

Project title: Boys’ perspectives on peer-interaction in Ghanaian secondary schools.

Investigator: George Abakah;
Supervisors: Dr. Jane Brown and Dr. Gale Macleod

I have read and understand the project information sheet.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

I am aware that the information gathered will be confidential.

I am aware of the procedures involved in the research.

Participant’s name

Participant’s signature

Date
Appendix 5

Participant Consent Form for Young People

Project title: Boys' perspectives on peer-bullying in Ghanaian secondary schools.

Investigator: George Abakah;
Supervisors: Dr. Jane Brown and Dr. Gale Macleod

I have read and understand the project information sheet.
I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time.
I am aware that the information gathered will be confidential.
I am aware of the procedures involved in the research.

Participant’s name

_____________________________________________________

Participant’s signature

_____________________________________________________

Date

_____________________________________________________
Appendix 6

Observation Schedule

Aims

The aim of observations is to illuminate or help clarify any related issues connected with or arising from peer-interactions; enabling me to form a “realistic” impression of what actually happens amongst boys. Information from observations will provide useful contextual details to help us understand the contextual factors which might influence the way boys interact and relate with each other and to also help me to discuss events, and/or critical incidents that might provide a backdrop for this study. The observation schedule is not intended to act as a checklist, but as guidelines or a reminder to be alert and on the lookout for certain events/scenes.

Recording information

Some of the factual information will be recorded immediately. On the other hand others will be in the form of impressions, based upon what is seen. It might be useful for me to make brief notes at the time, which could then be recorded in my research journal.

Guide for observation

Background

Number of students present

Their profile/age/physical strength

Are there any disparities in age/physical strengths etc?

Where are they located?

What is the lay out of the place?

Are there any resources available to them?

How are these resources being utilised?
Are there any adults?

What is the role of the adult?

How easily do students seem to be getting on?

What activities/games are they involved in?

Evidence that students are enjoying what they are doing?

Evidence of any disagreements between (which) students?

What happened prior to this disagreement?

What happened during this disagreement?

What happened after this disagreement?

What is the language being used?

Any evidence of behaviours similar to those described in the interview scenario document?

Any evidence about how students appear to be feeling about a particular incidence?

Unexpected problems encountered by researcher?
Appendix 7

Information Sheet for School Gate Keepers and Participants

I am a student from The University of Edinburgh. The purpose for contacting you is for you to help gain access to your school (students) in order to obtain information for my research.

Project title: Boys’ perspectives on peer relations and peer interactions in Ghanaian secondary schools

Focus of the study and why it is important

The focus of this study is boys’ understanding and experiences of peer relations and peer interactions in a Ghanaian secondary school. I want to understand the range of behaviours that are exhibited during peer interactions, especially those relating to disputes and disagreements between students. Little is currently known about this aspect of behaviour in schools in Ghana and in the long-run findings from the study could be used for programmes that could help to promote positive behaviour in Ghana.

What taking part will involve

Students will be asked to participate in a group mapping activity which will encourage them to list the kinds of behaviours they have witnessed or experienced in various places around the school. A small number of students will be asked to take part in interviews regarding their experiences. In interviews, students may be asked about issues such as name calling or teasing and other behaviours mentioned by students. I am also interested in the types of social situations where such forms of behaviours occur and how boys cope with such behaviour.

Who can participate?

Participants would need to be enrolled at “I WILL INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL HERE” and be willing to share their experiences and/or understanding of peer-interactions in their school. It will be made clear to all students that they can withdraw from the study at any time.
Potential risks

If at any point in time during their participation they feel distressed about any issues, I shall work with them to seek help from a local officer in your school or local area.

Confidentiality

Information gathered in this research is strictly confidential. No individual student/teacher or the school will be revealed to any third party.

Duration

It is hoped that this study will be conducted over 3 or 4 months, between February and May 2012.

Contacts

For further information on this project, please contact me on 00447753256330 or on georgeabakah@yahoo.com

Thank you!

George Abakah
Appendix 8

Information Sheet for School Gate Keepers

I am a student from The University of Edinburgh. The purpose for contacting you is for you to help gain access to your school (students) in order to obtain information for my research.

Project title: Boys’ perspectives on peer-interaction in Ghanaian secondary schools

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to look into boys’ understanding, experiences and perspectives of peer-interactions in Ghanaian secondary schools. I want to understand the various forms of behaviours that are exhibited during peer interactions.

Activities/Focus

Examples of some of the behaviours I shall be focusing on are name calling or teasing; having ones possessions taken or messed up with; spreading rumours about someone; kicking or hitting; intimidating someone etc. I shall be investigating the context within which such forms of behaviours occur and how boys cope with such behaviour. They will participate in a group mapping activity which aims at encouraging them to list the various behaviours that they may have witnessed or experienced at school on their school map. Also they will be observed or interviewed regarding such experiences.

Who can participate?

Participants would need to be enrolled at Moray House secondary school and be willing to share their experiences and / or understanding of peer-interactions in secondary schools. They can withdraw from participation at any point in time during the project.
Potential risks

If at any point in time during their participation they feel distressed about any issues, I shall work with them to seek help from a local officer in your school or local area.

Why is this study important?

In the long-run the outcome of the study could be used for programmes that could help to promote positive peer-interactions in Ghana. In addition, the research includes the opportunity for pupils to actively participate in the research process and provides them with a framework within which they are able to express their views and opinions.

Confidentiality

Information gathered in this research is strictly confidential. No names or identities of participants and the school will be revealed to any third party.

Duration

The field work is expected to last for 3 or 4 months, between February and May 2012.

Contacts

For further information on this project, please contact me on 00447753256330 or on georgeabakah@yahoo.com

Thank you!

George Abakah
Appendix 9

Interview Schedule

Introduction
Hello my name is George Abakah and I’m a research student from The University of Edinburgh. As part of my studies I am interested in how boys get on with each other at school; how they relate or treat each other and the issues that makes them fall out. I’m interested in what you think and how you feel, so there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Under normal circumstances anything you tell me will be confidential and no one else will know what you have said. However if the information you provide to me leads me to think that you, or another person, is likely to be in danger, then I shall stop the interview and arrange with you as to the most appropriate person we could refer the issue to. The interview will last for about 30 minutes and you are free to leave the research at any point in time without giving a reason, it is normal. Also if you don’t feel like answering any particular question, just don’t answer it. Do you mind if I tape record the interview so that I can remember what you said later on for the purpose of my writing?

How old are you? _______

Gender? ______________

Are you a day student or a boarding student? ____________________

Scenario
I’m going to create a scenario or tell a fictional story about what happened to a boy of your age (I might use images to demonstrate this scenario).

1. It is Kofi’s first day at a secondary school in Takoradi.

2. He is 13 years old and a boarding student, as he comes from the northern region of Ghana.

3. During play time, he sees other children playing football and wishes he could join them but he doesn’t know how to get involved.
4. Kofi’s school uniform is not yet ready so he is wearing a different uniform and the other children start teasing him.

5. As he stands watching the football game, other children get together and grab his schoolbag and start scribbling in his books and on his bag.

6. On his way to the classroom a student deliberately pushes him over.

7. As he leaves the classroom after school time is over, he gets blocked by a classmate.

8. Some other children look on, giggling and laughing.

9. Others tell him to sing a song and threaten to harm him if he doesn’t give them money.

**Themes for interview**

1. Interview conversation and questions based on scenario (Interpretations/definitions with causes of behaviour).

2. Coping strategy and masculinity in the Ghanaian context.

3. Schools/society’s response to such behaviour.

4. Being a child in Ghana.

5. How about the expectations of being a boy in Ghana (Masculinity).

6. What is accepted behaviour and non-accepted behaviour and their implications.

7. They way forward/what needs to be done.
Interview Schedule for Parents/Teachers/Girls

Introduction
Hello my name is George Abakah and I’m a research student from The University of Edinburgh. As part of my studies I am interested in how boys get on with each other at school; how they relate or treat each other and the issues that makes them fall out. I’m interested in what you think and how you feel, so there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. In order for me to understand this, I need to also comprehend how people understand childhood in this community.

Under normal circumstances anything you tell me will be confidential and no one else will know what you have said. However if the information you provide to me leads me to think that you, or another person, is likely to be in danger, then I shall stop the interview and arrange with you as to the most appropriate person we could refer the issue to. The interview will last for about 30 minutes and you are free to leave the research at any point in time without giving a reason, it is normal. Also if you don’t feel like answering any particular question, just don’t answer it. Do you mind if I tape record the interview so that I can remember what you said later on for the purpose of my writing?

Questions schedule

General questions about participant and their community

General questions about childhood and children (in Ghana and referencing their community)

Children’s interactions and behaviour

Adults’ (society’s) response and attitude to children and their behaviour

Accepted and non-accepted behaviour with their implications

The way forward/what needs to be done
Certificate of Participation

This Award is Presented to

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

for Participation in

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

by

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

On the _______ Day of __________________ In the Year ______

Signed

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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