Gendered Perspectives of Aggression
A Q Methodological Approach

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Honours in Bachelor of Arts (Criminology) 2016.
Declaration

I declare this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

________________________________________

Greig Clark
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Abstract

Previously thought to primarily be a male trait, more recent research efforts into aggression have found that females are just as likely to aggress as males. Rather, gender differences exist in the preferred aggressive styles of males and females. Whilst males tend to be more physically aggressive, female aggression is often less direct, more covert, and tends to target social relationships. However, social forms of aggression are frequently rated as less harmful than direct forms, such as physical or verbal, despite evidence that indirect aggression may be just as harmful as direct aggression. This has implications for the way in which aggressive behaviours, including bullying, are dealt with in several social contexts, including schools, workplaces, and universities.

Perceptions of the gendered nature of aggression, and the severity of aggression were investigated using 15 undergraduate students. Using a Q methodological approach, participants underwent two sorting tasks, ranking 25 bullying scenarios according to their own perceptions. Results indicated that there is universal agreement about male and female behaviours. Physical behaviours were most associated with males, and social behaviours were most associated with females. One emergent perspective strongly rated physical behaviours as the most severe form of aggression, while several social scenarios were ranked among the least severe. It was theorised that the ‘visibility’ of physical behaviours perhaps influenced perceptions. The other perspective appeared to rank based on perceived harm to the victim as the ranking order in this perspective was far more diverse. Overall, designated ‘female’ behaviours were perceived to be less severe than designated ‘male’ behaviours. Implications of the findings and directions for future research are addressed.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Aggression in humans has been the subject of research efforts for decades (Lorenz, 1966). In that time, it has generally been established that aggression is the act of behaving negatively towards another person with the intent to harm or injure that person (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 1988). But this general definition was not always reflected in academic research efforts. Indeed, despite the broad criteria, earlier studies of aggression maintained a rather specific focus on physical forms of aggression, ignoring perhaps less direct aggressive styles (Underwood et al., 1988). More recent research has established that there is far more to aggression than just physical violence - there are, in fact, a variety of ways in which an individual can engage in aggressive behaviours (Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006; Underwood et al., 1988). These alternative styles of aggression are purportedly a subject of developmental change throughout the human life course (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994). Unlike many animals, humans develop verbal and social skills that can be used both for furthering their social development, and, as Björkqvist et al. (1994) point out, for aggressive displays.

Archer and Coyne (2005) purport that, much like animals, very young children, with little verbal or social skills, resort to direct, physical forms of aggression such as hitting or kicking. As their verbal skills continue to develop, children begin to use more sophisticated, subtle, and direct verbal forms of aggression. At these young ages, however, children lack the social skills (known as social intelligence) to engage in more indirect forms of aggression (i.e. social aggression). Social intelligence, while defined in a variety of ways, is the ability to
analyse the social behaviour of others, whilst engaging in behaviours adequate to achieve one’s goals (Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 2000). Indeed, social intelligence has been found to be a strong correlate of social forms of aggression. Kaukiainen, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Österman, Salmivalli, Rothberg, and Ahlbom (1999) concluded that the more an individual uses indirect forms of aggression, the higher their level of social intelligence. In contrast, both physical and verbal aggression were not linked with social intelligence. They argue that these types of aggression require only physical strength and verbal skills, whereas indirect aggression relies on an understanding of human relations. Hence, social aggression appears to be less evident at younger ages (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992).

1.2 The Gendered Nature of Aggression

Further investigation into aggression has uncovered associations between distinct aggression styles and the gender of the aggressor (e.g. Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). It was previously assumed that female aggression was so seldom, that studying such a niche topic was unwarranted (Buss, 1961, as cited in Björkqvist, 1994). Female aggression continued to be ignored within academic domains until relatively recently, when researchers recognised the need to systematically explore what was labelled ‘indirect aggression’ (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988). While physical and verbal behaviours involve direct conflict between the aggressor and the victim, indirect is described as a covert behaviour, in that the identity of the aggressor is hidden, or the aggressive intent is concealed (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Lagerspetz et al. (1988) also note an element of
social manipulation in such behaviours. But the term ‘indirect’ aggression has come under some scrutiny in the years since, and other terms, with slight definitional alterations, have been offered. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) use ‘relational’ aggression as an alternative given that the behaviours are seemingly intended to damage relationships or hinder feelings of inclusion. Archer and Coyne (2005) note that while ‘relational’ places emphasis on the intent to harm relationships, ‘indirect’ focuses on the acts themselves. Otherwise, these two terms are rather indistinct. Galen and Underwood (2001), on the other hand, argue that both terms are problematic and instead adopt the term ‘social’ aggression which describes the intent to damage another’s self-esteem, whether directly or indirectly. Because ‘social’ aggression covers a wider range of behaviours than the alternatives, including negative gestures and dirty looks (Archer & Coyne, 2005), this is the term that the current study adopts, other than when discussing studies which have explicitly used alternative terms.

The acknowledgement of a ‘new’ form of aggression broadened opportunities for further investigation into female aggression. Earlier studies that only focused on physical forms of aggression had, not surprisingly, concluded that aggression was a characteristically male trait, not often exhibited by females (Björkqvist, 1994). However, more recent research has concluded that males and females both exhibit aggression, and often at equal frequencies (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Rather, gender differences appear to lie in the way aggression is exhibited.

Similar to earlier studies of aggression, later findings, such as those in Crick and Grotpeter’s (1995) study of children from 3rd through 6th grades, have shown a
higher propensity for males to engage in physical forms of aggression. Additionally, the authors found that females were more likely to engage in relational aggression than physical aggression, and at a higher rate than the male children. Scheithauer et al. (2006) similarly found that 5th through 10th grade boys were overrepresented as physically aggressive in their study on bullying among German students. However, incidences of relational aggression were less gendered in this study – these behaviours were more equally represented among male and female bullies. Nonetheless, female bullies were still far more likely to engage in relational aggression than physical aggression. Burton, Hafetz, and Henninger (2007) also garnered no significant gender differences in relational aggression but did note a similarly high propensity for males to aggress physically. Additionally, Scheithauer et al. (2006) found that victimisation trends followed a similar pattern. While males and females were almost equally as likely to be relationally victimised, males were far more likely to be victims of physical aggression than females. Studies in the UK (Whitney & Smith, 1993) and Denmark (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005), however, have found a stronger gendering effect in victimised children; that is, boys were more likely to be physically bullied, while girls more often faced relationally aggressive situations. In older cohorts, physical aggression appears to reduce, while higher frequencies of social aggression are often reported, especially in contexts where there is an increased risk for such overt behaviours (e.g. Sinkkonnen, Puhakka, & Merilainen, 2014). Gender differences did not altogether disappear in Björkqvist and colleagues’ (1994) study of adult aggression. While covert behaviours became more common in both males and females at this age,
males were still more likely to use direct strategies to express their aggression, while females continued to use indirect forms.

1.2.1 Relational theory

Underwood et al. (2001) argue that children usually exhibit aggression in line with the developmental goals of their gender. Relational theory distinguishes between these goals, and can perhaps explain the differences in aggression styles between males and females. Covington (2007) discusses the theory extensively in terms of its implications for gender-responsive services in correctional settings. She argues that because males and females differ in the way they develop psychologically, there is a need for gender-responsive strategies when treating female offenders in prisons. Indeed, the basis of relational theory stems from early assumptions that males and females both strive for independence as an end goal in their development. However, Miller (1976 as cited in Covington, 2007) challenges this unitary pathway to maturity, determining that the inclination towards independence and self-sufficiency is primarily a male experience. Female experiences, she posits, are quite the opposite, in that they are primarily motivated by building a sense of connection with others. While this goal is a fundamental human need, Bylinton (1997 as cited in Covington, 2007) argues that females are more attuned to this need due to their perceived similarity to their mothers. Block (1983), in her review, noted that the parent-daughter relationship is characterised by greater warmth, more physical closeness, and higher levels of trustworthiness. Issues connecting with others (otherwise known as disconnections) are likely to lead to psychological problems, including diminished self-worth, confusion, and disempowerment (Miller 1990 as cited in Covington, 2007). But females’ stronger
need for connections may also precede higher levels of social intelligence, which is linked with higher levels of social aggression (Kaukiainen et al., 1999). Lagerspetz and colleagues (1988) purport that the social structure of female friendship groups is likely to be important in predicting aggressive behaviour. They argue that female friendships are ‘tight’ structures, meaning that the emotional closeness with others increases opportunities for indirect styles of aggression. Manipulations are perhaps a more forceful sanction against victims than they are in ‘looser’ social structures (Lagerspetz et al., 1988).

Social aggression specifically targets the relationships of victims through spreading rumours about the individual, or excluding the individual from friendship groups (Scheithauer et al., 2006). Clearly, these behaviours are aimed at creating the disconnections described above that can lead to negative psychological outcomes. This is perhaps the basis for females’ inclination to engage in socially aggressive tactics when they set out to harm other females, knowing the impact that broken connections can have for female victims. Furthermore, it is possible that social aggression may be used as a strategy to maintain, or even heighten, one’s own social standing, and thus, strengthening one’s connection with others (Underwood et al., 2001).

1.2.2 Social role theory

Unlike relational theory which places emphasis on developmental goals, social role theory focuses on the *expectations*, or gender roles, of males and females. Eagly and Wood (1988) describe two dimensions that outline the social differences in gender roles. Communal roles, involving friendliness and empathic attitudes, are primarily expected of females. Agentic roles, involving independence and
competence, are primarily expected of males. These dimensions somewhat align with the developmental goals of males and females described above. Indeed, per social role theory, it is quite possible that when females engage in aggression, they do so in a way to maintain this expected appearance; that is, they may attempt to hide their behaviours from the view of others. As for males, the expectation of competence and autonomy may best be expressed through dominance behaviours, showcasing competence through physical, overt forms of aggression. Of course, social learning theory further dictates that these socially constructed expectancies are passed down from parents to children through socialisation, further cementing these social roles in individuals (Archer, 2004). While physical violence is often discouraged among children, whether male or female, males are taught the value of ‘toughness’, and receive less restraints about fighting than girls do (Archer, 2004). In this way, it is less acceptable for girls to engage in physical aggression than it is for boys.

Social role and social learning theories may therefore explain Björkqvist and colleagues’ (1994) effect-to-danger ratio (EDR) with regards to aggression. The concept of EDR specifically attempts to understand why variations in aggression styles exist. The authors suggest that an aggressor will assess the cost/benefit ratio before engaging in aggression, weighing up the intended effect with the risk associated with the aggressive act (Björkqvist et al., 1994). Comparing EDR with social role and social learning theories, the risk for females engaging in physically aggressive acts may be a form of double jeopardy. That is, they have transcended both social and gender norms.
1.2.3 Perceptions of gendered aggression

Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996) examined how 9-12 year old children viewed aggression in relation to gender. Surprisingly, this was the only study found in the literature search that investigated perceived gender norms in aggression. Their findings demonstrated similar patterns to actual gender norms in aggression. That is, it was found that children tended to perceive girls to more commonly engage in relational behaviours when angry, and boys in more physical behaviours. Interestingly, boys tended to view girls as more physically aggressive than girls viewed other girls, perhaps owing to the visibility of physical behaviours. Crick et al. (1996) posit that physical behaviours are easy to observe and remember, whereas relational aggression (most common to girls) is more subtle and less amenable to observation. Thus, it is perhaps the case that the boys in the sample could only report on observed physical aggression, while girls reported on their own experience. The study would suggest that children’s perceptions of aggression are generally accurate with previous findings on actual gender differences (e.g. Burton et al., 2007).

1.3 Impact of Aggressive Behaviours

The impact of aggressive behaviours is widely recognised in the literature, particularly in studies of children and adolescents (e.g. Lagerspetz et al., 1988). As such, much of the impact literature focuses on bullying behaviours in high school settings. Such behaviours not only impact those who are victimised, however; aggressors are also vulnerable to long-term negative outcomes as a result of their own aggression (Craig, 1998). This section will begin with a discussion of the impact that aggressive behaviours have on victims and aggressors of both direct
(physical/verbal) and indirect (social) forms of aggression. Following this, comparisons will be made with perceptions of the severity of aggressive behaviours.

1.3.1 Physical and verbal aggression

Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, and Brick (2010), in their longitudinal study exploring the correlates and consequences of direct and indirect victimisation, found that both male and female victims of physical or verbal aggression were more likely than non-victims to engage in future delinquent behaviour. Similarly, Sourander et al. (2007) reported one-quarter of frequent victims of bullying subsequently committed at least one crime within a four-year period. Overt forms of victimisation can also predict depressive symptoms in males, but not in females (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

For aggressors of direct behaviours, there exists a strong association with emotional dysregulation, conduct problems, low peer acceptance, and peer rejection, but there appears to be no association with any internalising problems, such as depression (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, and Little, 2008). Like victims of direct aggression, childhood aggressors are also at higher risk of future criminality, but only where there are psychiatric symptoms in conjunction with the aggressive behaviour (Sourander et al., 2007).

1.3.2 Social aggression

Relational victimisation is particularly salient in the prediction of depressive symptoms, loneliness, and low self-esteem for adolescent girls (Prinstein et al., 2001). Similar results for social aggressors were collected by Card et al. (2008) in their meta-analysis exploring children and adolescents. Exhibiting social aggression
had a strong and unique association with internalising problems, including depression and anxiety. As with direct victimisation, indirect victimisation was also associated with future delinquent behaviour (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010).

Moreover, this effect was larger for female victims than male victims. Girls were more likely to become involved with gangs after repeated indirect victimisation. The authors theorised that this was perhaps a way to seek protection from the bullies. They also noted a significantly higher likelihood for girls to use drugs if they had been victimised using indirect means. Somewhat surprisingly, relational victimisation seemed to be associated with a decrease in drug use for the males in this study.

Xie, Swift, Cairns, and Cairns (2002) did not find social aggression to be related to developmental maladjustment in aggressors, despite their conclusions that direct aggression was associated with poor outcomes, including school dropouts and criminal arrests. In contrast, Werner and Crick’s (1999) study, using a university sample, found that males who engage in relational aggression are more likely to experience peer rejection and egocentrism. These social-psychological factors were also evident in females, alongside several other adjustment issues including antisocial behaviour, identity problems, negative relationships, affective features of depression, and bulimic symptoms. Moreover, relational aggression exhibited by females was associated a decrease in life satisfaction (Werner & Crick, 1999).

Other studies have concluded that female victims tend to have poorer health outcomes than males on measures of self-esteem, mental, and physical health, and
trauma (Due et al., 2005; Gruber & Fineran, 2008). However, these specific articles do not distinguish between the different forms of aggression. Nonetheless, these conclusions may be indicative of the impact of gendered aggressive behaviours. It has been demonstrated that girls are more likely to engage in, and be victims of, social forms of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Fekkes et al., 2005), and the notion that victimisation has a stronger impact on females may be associated with the type of aggression they tend to experience. This can, however, only be suggested rather than assumed. But while Galen and Underwood (1997) suggest that females may generally feel more vulnerable than males to any type of aggressive behaviour, overt forms of victimisation have been found to predict depressive symptoms in males, but not females (Prinstein et al., 2001).

1.3.3 Perceptions of severity

Perceptions of the severity of different aggressive styles seems to differ quite substantially from the actual impact of aggression. Maunder, Harrop, and Tattersall (2010) gathered perceptions of the seriousness of bullying behaviours from high school students, teachers, and support staff. Indirect behaviours were rated as less serious than direct behaviours. This was a general finding from all three groups; however, school staff were more likely to provide higher severity ratings than pupils for both direct and indirect behaviours and females tended to rate any form of aggression as more severe than did males. Indirect aggression was also less likely to be defined as bullying by each group, but staff considered it bullying more than pupils. Nonetheless, Boulton’s (1997) findings revealed that roughly one-quarter of teachers did not consider behaviours such as spreading nasty stories, and excluding others to be bullying behaviours. Furthermore, a later study found that only 20% of
students aged 11 to 15 believed that social exclusion was a form of bullying (Boulton, Trueman, & Flemington, 2002). Although no gender differences were apparent in this study, Galen and Underwood (1997) reported that girls tended to perceive social aggression as more hurtful than did boys, and equally as hurtful as physical behaviours. Boys were more likely to rate physical aggression as more hurtful.

Perceptions that physical forms of aggression are more severe than social forms may stem from the saliency of harm. Maunder et al. (2010) theorise that because the harm caused by aggressive behaviours is less visible in indirect behaviours (e.g. spreading rumours, or social exclusion), then it is possible that these behaviours appear to be less severe. In contrast, the harm caused by physical aggression is immediate and visible, perhaps heightening its perceived severity. Actual versus perceived impacts of aggression are, thus, rather divergent.

1.4 Bullying at University

Notably, much of the research on aggression (at least in children and adolescents) has focused on high school bullying. Research exploring the phenomenon of bullying at university, with a much older cohort, is relatively scarce. Sinkonnen et al. (2014) suggest that the hierarchical dynamics of university are much less clear than in high school. Given that bullying involves a power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim (Olweus, 1993), this may explain why previous university studies have returned relatively small frequencies of bullying.

Nonetheless, bullying does appear to exist at the higher education level, as the Student Experience Report (2008; SER) observes. A substantial minority (7%) of
3135 university students in the UK claimed to have experienced bullying during their university career, with females more likely to have been victimised than males. Unfortunately, 61% of reported bullying incidents either received inadequate or no support from the university to resolve bullying issues. University authorities may be less inclined to take bullying situations seriously, perhaps considering incidents to be harmless pranks (Myers & Cowie, 2016). In their Finnish study, Sinkonnen et al. (2014) found a similar proportion (5%) of university students who had experienced bullying. Like the findings of the SER, most victims were female. Interestingly, social and verbal forms of aggression were most prevalent, while physical forms, defined in this study as intimidation or sexual harassment, were the least prevalent forms of aggression in bullying incidents. Furthermore, most of the bullying incidents occurred in teaching or study environments on campus. Worryingly, most victims were likely to resort to ‘emotion-orientated’ destructive strategies, leading to negative internalising outcomes including depression, anxiety, and a lack of motivation (Sinkonnen et al., 2014). Other strategies included changing universities or dropping out completely, delaying studies, or resorting to active behavioural adjustments to prevent further bullying.

1.5 Measuring Perceptions

Previous studies focusing on the participant perceptions of aggression have primarily been measured using traditional methods. Indeed, most studies garnering attitudes and perceptions have relied on the use of self-report surveys and questionnaires (Boulton et al., 2002; Maunder et al., 2010; Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, & Kift, 2012; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan, 2007; Hughes,
Middleton, & Marshall, 2009). However, self-report measures are vulnerable to social desirability influences, which can skew the true perceptions of participants (Cross, 2005). Furthermore, Watts and Stenner (2005) argue that data from conventional attitude scales is interpreted only in relation to the subjective definitions and meanings researchers have placed on the measures. Boulton (1997) also outlines a limitation of his study, which implemented a standardised questionnaire to collect teachers’ attitudes on bullying. He stated that due to the quantitative methodological approach of the study, teachers’ views lacked detail. Paired with the limited psychometric properties of the scales used in the questionnaire, only tentative conclusions could be drawn from the study.

Q methodology, on the other hand, offers a different approach to measuring subjectivity. Q is specifically designed for collecting perceptions on almost any topic or situation (Brown, 1996). Participants of a Q study are required to sort statements relating to the topic on to a Q matrix in a ranked order in a process called Q sorting (Brown, 1993). A complete Q matrix represents a ‘snap shot’ of the participant’s subjective viewpoint of the subject matter (Watts & Stenner, 2005). This methodology provides some advantages over more traditional methods. Firstly, since a Q matrix can be designed in such a way as to ‘force’ participants into a structured representation of their perceptions, participants are ranking their beliefs relative to one another (Rimm-Kauffman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, and LaParo, 2006). Perceptions and attitudes of the subject matter must, therefore, also be considered more carefully by participants, given that they must rank their beliefs in a prioritized manner (Prasad, 2001 as cited in Cross, 2005). Furthermore, unlike traditional single-method approaches, Q methodology combines the strengths of
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both qualitative methods, in the Q sorting process, and quantitative methods, in the Q technique of factor analysis, which groups participants who share similar perspectives on the topic under investigation (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Due to its more robust technique for measuring perceptions (Cross, 2005), Q methodology is the primary method used in the current investigation.

1.6 The Current Study

The current study investigated perspectives of aggression on issues of gender normativity and severity. Examination of aggressive behaviour reveals that females tend to engage in social forms of aggression, whereas males are more likely to be physically aggressive (e.g. Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Gendered perspectives of aggression have been investigated less, but tentative findings suggest that perceptions are consistent with actual aggressive tendencies (Crick et al., 1996). It was, therefore, hypothesised that perceptions of the gendered nature of aggression would be consistent with gender norms.

Past studies have revealed disparities in actual versus perceived impacts of different forms of aggression. More specifically, social forms of aggression tend to be perceived as less serious than physical forms (e.g. Maunder et al., 2010), despite evidence indicating that social forms can be just as harmful, or more so, than physical aggression (e.g. Werner & Crick, 1999). Based on this, it was expected that social aggression would be perceived as less severe than physical aggression.

A final aim for the present study was to integrate the findings of the previous two hypotheses. Given that social aggression tends to be associated with females,
and physical aggression with males, it was hypothesised that designated ‘female’ behaviours would be perceived as less severe than designated ‘male’ behaviours.
2. Method

2.1 Q Methodology

The present study aimed to investigate subjective opinion on different forms of aggression using Q methodology. Two Q sorts were designed to gather perceptions of aggressive (bullying) behaviours. One aimed to garner subjective viewpoints on the ‘gendered’ nature of aggression, while the other required participants to rank the behaviours based on severity.

![Q Matrix](image)

**Figure 2.1 The Q matrix for the current study contains 25 spaces for sorting. Anchors for the ‘severity’ task are positioned at the top of the matrix.**

2.1.1 Concourse

The concourse of a Q methodological study involves a comprehensive review of the literature in order to obtain sufficient information to effectively generate appropriate scenarios for sorting (Orchard, Fullwood, Morris, & Galbraith, 2015). The present investigation primarily sourced its information from past literature, focusing on studies that observed aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents, including a wide array of school bullying literature. The concourse revealed consistent themes in this area. Specifically, three distinct forms of aggression (and bullying) were identified: physical, verbal, and social (also described as indirect, or relational). More recent research also describes cyberbullying, a form of aggression...
that takes place online over social media, or through texting, and can be both verbal or relational in nature (Campbell et al., 2012).

The scenarios themselves were primarily constructed to fit the criteria of physical, verbal, or social aggression. Some scenarios also included cyber elements. However, inspiration was also drawn from actual bullying experiences. Sources such as Day1, NoPlace4Hate, and Pure Sight provide platforms upon which victims of bullying (or their families) could share their experiences. These sites create awareness of the different forms that bullying could take, and the impact these experiences had on victims’ lives. In order to maintain credible and believable scenarios, a number of statements were adapted from the real-life stories found on these websites.

The final Q set consisted of 25 statements. These were carefully worded to ensure that implications of gender within the scenarios were avoided, which was particularly important for the ‘gender’ Q sort. As such, initials, rather than names, were used and the singular ‘they’ pronoun was used in place of ‘he’ or ‘she’ – the ‘characters’ would therefore still be identifiable, without having assigned genders. The bully and victim were always assigned ‘JZ’ and ‘GC’ respectively to promote consistency, and to ensure sorting was primarily based on the behaviours in the scenarios and not the ‘characters’.

2.1.2 Q matrices

The inverted pyramidal shape of the Q matrix ‘forced’ subjects to sort the Q set into a quasi-normal distribution (Brown, 1996; see figure 2.1). Given that there

1 http://tylerclementi.org/day1/
2 http://www.noplace4hate.org/
3 http://www.puresight.com/
were as many spaces as there were scenarios, participants needed to consider the statements carefully and decide which bullying scenarios they perceived to be the most extreme on each sort. While ‘forcing’ an equal distribution is not necessary for conducting Q studies (Watts & Stenner, 2005), it was determined that a normal distribution would offer a better indication of ‘extreme’ behaviours during analysis. Importantly, this does not present a detriment to the analysis process (Watts & Stenner, 2005). In fact, previous studies have designed Q matrices in a variety of formats. For example, Rimm-Kauffman et al. (2006) designated equal spaces for each score (column) on the Q matrix, whereas Orchard et al. (2014) offered a forced distribution but provided multiple spaces at the extreme ends.

2.1.3 Anchors

The anchors served as guides for the participants during Q sorting, and for the researcher during analysis. Presentation of the sorts was randomised for each participant to ensure that presentation order was not an influencing factor. The anchors for the ‘gender’ sorting task were simply labelled ‘male’ and ‘female’. Scenarios perceived to be particularly male or female behaviours were to be placed further towards the ‘male’ (-4) or ‘female’ (+4) anchors on the matrix. Statements ranked in the centre columns of the matrix were not necessarily considered to be gender-neutral, but rather less gender-specific in relation to the other scenarios. It is also worthy to note that the ‘gender’ anchors were deliberately positioned in a counterintuitive fashion. That is, the ‘male’ anchor was positioned at -4, while the ‘female’ anchor was placed at +4. This would ensure that those participants receiving the ‘gender’ Q second would not be influenced by their prior positioning of the ‘severity’ Q.
The anchors for the ‘severity’ task were originally labelled ‘mild’ and ‘severe’. However, it was determined that these labels were too concrete. Placing a statement lower on the Q sort should not necessarily mean that participants negate its importance. Indeed, Q sorts are a prioritisation task where statements are ranked relative to one another (Rimm-Kauffman et al., 2006). For example, ranking a scenario lower than another does not imply that the former is not severe – rather, the participant perceives the former to be less severe than those placed at higher scores. Thus, the anchors used were ‘less severe’ and ‘more severe’.

2.2 Pilot Study

2.2.1 Participants

A small convenience group of 10 people volunteered to participate in a pilot study (see Table 2.1). Sixty percent of the sample were undergraduate students at the time, 20% had graduated university, and the other 20% had never attended university. Six of the participants were male, and four were female.

| Table 2.1 Demographics of the pilot participants including year group, sex, and experience with bullying |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Male | Never attended | 1st yr. | 2nd yr. | 3rd yr. | Graduated | Total |
| Bully | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Victim | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Female | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Bully | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Victim | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
2.2.2 Materials

A 1200 x 915mm Q sort board was constructed for the study. The Q matrix was painted on with 27 boxes (including anchors) and Velcro dots were placed in each box. Hinges and handles were added to the board for improved portability.

Each of the 25 scenarios and the four anchors were printed on paper, cut into 110 x 90mm sized rectangles, and laminated. Velcro dots were also placed on the back of these, so that participants could ‘stick’ the statements on to the Velcro in the boxes. Each scenario was assigned a number between 1 and 25 by shuffling and mixing the cards, and recording the order in which they were picked out of the pile. All 25 scenarios were coded accordingly in a document (Appendix A).

Recording sheets (Appendix B) were used to record demographic information, and participants’ configurations in each sorting task. Their assigned participant number was also recorded to maintain confidentiality. These sheets were bound in a booklet to keep all participant data together.

A master list was also created for the pilot study, which included the participant’s name and number, and the duration of their participation. This was used to estimate the time taken for participants to complete the tasks.

2.2.3 Procedure

Participants were gathered at the same location over the course of one night. Individually, they were called up by the researcher and taken through to the room where the interview would take place. A stopwatch was set for each participant and stopped at the conclusion of their participation for duration estimates. Participants could not see the stopwatch. Each participant was given a brief, verbal summary of the procedure, and instruction on how to sort the scenarios.
Demographic information was recorded on the recording sheet and the scenarios then handed to them in a random order. The first set of anchors was placed on the board – these were randomly assigned but not recorded. Participants were then left to sort the scenarios, basing the order on their own perceptions, and were informed that they could ask any questions they had about the study or the scenarios, at any time. After completing the first sorting task, the researcher recorded the configuration on the recording sheet using the scenario coding sheet. The scenarios and anchors were then removed from the board, and the alternate anchors were placed on the board, before the participant was asked to again sort the scenarios. After completing both tasks, all scenarios and anchors were removed from the board, before participants were asked to answer two questions on their own experiences with bullying i.e. whether they had been a victim of bullying within the last 12 months, and whether they engaged in bullying behaviour within the last 12 months. It was emphasised that they did not have to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. When all responses were recorded on the recording sheet, the stopwatch was stopped and the time recorded on the master list.

Throughout the course of participation, feedback on the method and materials used was actively encouraged. After completion, participants were asked to comment on the difficulty of sorting, their understanding of the scenarios, this method of response versus other methods (e.g. surveys, or traditional interviews), and any aspect they think could be improved. These were noted and considered for the main study.
2.2.4 Methodological alterations

The pilot study provided the opportunity to refine and improve certain aspects of the methodological process before primary data collection commenced. Feedback from participants revealed that the strategy for recording Q sort configurations was time-consuming and inconvenient. Furthermore, during analysis of the data, a number of errors were found in the recorded configurations that would compromise the integrity of the data had they been found in the primary investigation. This prompted an alternative strategy to photograph each Q sort immediately after sorting. The photographs could then be used to enter the configurations on to the recording sheet after the interview, and participants would not have to wait for each sort to be recorded.

Further feedback indicated that the sorting process itself was simple and more interactive than other methods. It was also noted that the scenarios within the Q set were easy to understand, short and succinct, and realistic as examples of bullying behaviours.

The average time for participation was 30 minutes. However, given the change in recording strategy for the Q sorts, it was estimated that interviews would be significantly less time-consuming at around 20 minutes per participant.

2.3 Main Study

2.3.1 Participants

Undergraduate students from a metropolitan university in Perth, Western Australia responded to various announcements within the university intranet, and through social media postings advertising the study (Appendix C). Eleven females
and four males, ranging from 1st to 3rd year subsequently consented to participation (see Table 2.2). One male and one female participant had experienced bullying at university, while one male admitted to engaging in bullying behaviour at university.

**Table 2.2 Demographics of 15 Undergraduate Participants Including Year Group, Sex, and Experience with Bullying at University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr.</th>
<th>2nd yr.</th>
<th>3rd yr.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ideally, a Q study will have a 3:1 statement to participant ratio (Webler, Danielson, & Tuler, 2009). Given that the present study had a Q set of 25 statements, only nine participants were required according to this ratio. Therefore, the participant sample size was larger than it needed to be. Orchard, Fullwood, Morris, and Galbraith (2014) add that, due to the qualitative nature of Q, the sample size is not particularly important. What is important is that the sample size allows for a certain amount of redundancy to the extent that emergent perspectives (i.e. the factors) are defined by a sufficient grouping of Q sorts (Webler et al., 2009). Thus, the sample size was sufficient for the current study.

**2.3.2 Materials**

The Q sort board, Q set, and recording sheet template used in the pilot study were also used for the main study. The randomised numbers assigned to the
scenarios during pilot testing continued to be used for recording and analysis in the main study. A similar master list was also used, with the exclusion of the duration of participation.

Some alterations were made in light of feedback and discoveries in the pilot study. Given the difficulty experienced recording configurations in the pilot study, a phone camera was used for the purpose of photographing configurations directly after sorting. Photographs were immediately backed up to prevent data loss. In addition, using a randomised assignment sheet generated by SPSS, the researcher developed a simple coding system that indicated the order in which each participant would perform the sorting tasks.

2.3.3 Procedure

Participants contacted the researcher via email and were sent an information letter (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E). At the individual interviews, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form. Participants were then informed of the procedure of the interview, and were encouraged to ask any questions they had regarding their participation. A brief definition of bullying was also provided, based on Olweus’ (1993) interpretation. It was explained that all statements fit the criteria of bullying and that they were required only to sort the statements based on the tasks. Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw from participation at any time and the participant’s name was recorded on the master list. This list matched their participant number to their name to ensure their data could be identified and subsequently removed from the dataset if they chose to withdraw post-participation. Importantly, the list was stored separately from the recording sheets.
Using the recording sheet, the researcher recorded some demographic information of each participant as well as their assigned participant number. The first of the two sets of anchors was positioned on the Q matrix in front of them along with the 25 scenarios in the Q set, arranged in no particular order. The presentation order of each Q matrix was, again, randomised for each participant, per the randomised assignment sheet. The ‘severity’ sort required participants to sort the set of scenarios from a ranking of ‘less severe’ to ‘more severe’. A similar process was required for the ‘gendered aggression’ sort – scenarios were to be ranked based on whether they were perceived to be mostly ‘male’ behaviours or mostly ‘female’ behaviours. Each participant’s unique configuration was photographed using the phone camera (with a display of the participant number next to the Q matrix) immediately after each Q sort, and subsequently recorded on their individual recording sheets after participation.

After completing the two sorting tasks, the scenarios and anchors were removed from the board and each participant was asked about their own experiences with bullying at university. They were asked if they had been a victim of bullying within the past 12 months and if they had engaged in bullying within the past 12 months. Their responses were recorded on the recording sheets. All participants were offered information about on-campus counselling services to use at their discretion.
3. Results

3.1 Analysis Software

Analysis was performed using *PQMethod* software (Schmolck & Atkinson, 2002), a program designed specifically for the input and analysis of Q sorts. All tools required for the analysis of the data in this investigation were readily available within the program. *PQMethod* calculates intercorrelations between Q sorts and loads sorts that share similar configurations onto factors. All Q sorts from the ‘gender’ and ‘severity’ tasks were entered into the program within separate file saves (one file for each task). A principal components factor analysis was then performed on the Q sorts, extracting up to eight factors and displaying their corresponding eigenvalues. As is the standard in factor selection, only factors with eigenvalues of one or above were retained for final analysis (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Additionally, any factors consisting of only one loading Q sort were excluded from interpretation – each factor requires at least two loading participants to be interpreted as a meaningful social perspective (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

After the appropriate factors had been selected, a Varimax rotation of these factors was performed. *PQMethod* prompted an option to automatically flag each participant to easily identify which sorts loaded onto which factors. Final analysis was then performed and a comprehensive summary of the output provided, allowing for detailed interpretation of the perspectives.

3.2 ‘Extremes’ Criteria

A threshold was established to determine the ‘extremes’ within the factors. For example, at what point was a scenario strongly associated with males or
females, or considered more or less severe. Extreme ratings were determined to have a Z-score of less than -0.5 or greater than 0.5.

3.3 Gendered Perceptions of Aggression

One individual’s Q sort configuration was excluded from interpretation. This configuration loaded heavily on to a factor of its own, which indicated that the factor did not define a social perspective (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Analysis of the ‘gender’ Q sorts was, therefore, based on 14 participants and returned two meaningful factors. Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 8.38 and explained 36% of the variance. Nine participants loaded on to this factor. Factor 2 had an eigenvalue of 1.07 and explained 27% of the variance. Five participants loaded on to this factor.
### Table 3.1 Descending order of scenarios for 'gender' factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR 1</th>
<th>FACTOR 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Type of behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[8] A rumour circulates...**</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3] Without explanation...</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[11] GC receives anonymous...</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[24] JZ, who was once GC's...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[18] GC discovers that JZ...**</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[12] JZ, who was once GC's...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[24] JZ, who was once GC's...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1] GC walks past JZ...</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[22] GC finds out...</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[17] On their school's Facebook...</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[14] GC is called a teacher's pet...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[20] JZ constantly calls GC...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[25] On the way home...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2] JZ sends GC a text...</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[6] JZ calls GC an ugly bushpig...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[20] JZ constantly calls GC...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4] After GC comes out...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[9] In class, JZ...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7] While walking up...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[13] GC receives prank calls...**</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5] GC is having lunch...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[23] GC gets kicked...**</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[12] JZ begins taunting...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[21] JZ tells a classmate...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[10] JZ tells GC...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scenarios in pink indicate strong female associations ($z > 0.5$), and scenarios in blue indicate strong male associations ($z < -0.5$).

**Scenarios in bold are distinguishing statements between factors significant at $p < .01$.**
3.3.1 Differences between factors

Factor 2 appeared to return stronger gendered viewpoints than Factor 1. All but six of the scenarios were rated as strong ‘male’ or ‘female’ behaviours in Factor 2, whereas Factor 1 rated nine scenarios as relatively neutral behaviours (see Table 3.1). Significant differences were found in the strongest ranked ‘female’ behaviours. Factor 1 participants tended to rate scenario 8 (“A rumour circulates...”) as the behaviour most associated with females (z=1.745). Factor 2 gave this scenario a lower score (z=0.692), albeit still within the ‘female’ extreme. On the other hand, scenario 18 (“GC discovers that JZ...”) was ranked as the strongest ‘female’ behaviour in Factor 2 (z=2.080), but as slightly weaker in Factor 1 (z=1.116).

The most polarising behaviour between the factors was scenario 13 (“GC receives prank calls...”). This was perceived to be a ‘male’ behaviour in Factor 1 (z=-0.720) and a strong ‘female’ behaviour in Factor 2 (z=0.908).

3.3.2 Consensus between factors

Other than the differences described above and the exact ranking scores, the ‘gender’ factors shared broad similarities in their configurations. Table 3.1 demonstrates similar patterns in the ‘female’ and ‘male’ extremes of each factor.

3.3.2.1 ‘Female’ behaviours

Both factors strongly agreed that social scenarios were primarily ‘female’ types of behaviour. In both cases, roughly two-thirds of the nine social scenarios in the Q set were rated above the Z-score threshold (z > 0.5). Scenarios 11 and 24 (“GC receives anonymous...”; “JZ, who was once GC’s...”), both cyberbullying behaviours, were also universally perceived as ‘female’. Furthermore, although
scenarios 8 and 18 were considered to be distinguishing scenarios, both fell well within the ‘female’ boundary. No physical scenarios were ranked as ‘female’ on either factor.

### 3.3.2.2 ‘Male’ behaviours

With the exception of scenario 25 ("On the way home...") in Factor 1, all of the physical scenarios were perceived to be characteristic of males. Scenario 4 ("After GC comes out...") was also ranked universally as a ‘male’ behaviour. In fact, this was the only social scenario, within both factors, to be rated as a ‘male’ behaviour, sharing the same Z-score across both factors (z=0.595). Scenario 23 ("GC gets kicked...") was considered to be a distinguishing scenario, but remained within the ‘male’ boundary in both factors.

### 3.3.3 Perspective summary

The broad similarities and the few differences between the factors suggest that there is an overarching perspective regarding gendered behaviours. Both factors revealed relatively concrete patterns that indicate a view of females engaging in indirect social, and verbal behaviours. Moreover, many of the ‘female’ scenarios included elements of anonymity (scenarios 11 and 8) and subtlety (scenarios 1, 3, and 24), suggesting a tendency for females to favour covert behaviours. Conversely, almost all of the physical behaviours were ranked as ‘male’. Additionally, one social scenario (4) was also rated as characteristically male, involving the creation of a social media page targeting the victim’s sexual orientation. These common configurations indicate a tendency to associate males with behaviours that are direct and salient – in other words, behaviours that are ‘visible’ to the victim and bystanders.
3.4 Perceptions of Severity

Two factors were extracted in the final analysis of the ‘severity’ Q sorts. Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 8.34 and explained 41% of the variance. Nine participants loaded on to this factor. Factor 2 had an eigenvalue of 1.61 and explained 25% of the variance. Six participants loaded on to this factor. As there were clear distinctions between the factors, each will be discussed separately.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR 1</th>
<th>FACTOR 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 3.2 Descending order of scenarios for ’severity’ factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Type of behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[23] GC gets kicked...**</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[12] JZ begins taunting...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[21] JZ tells a classmate...**</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[5] GC is having lunch...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[25] On the way home...</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[9] In class, JZ...**</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7] While walking up...**</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2] JZ sends GC a text...**</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[6] JZ calls GC an ugly bushpig...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[8] A rumour circulates...**</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[19] GC spots a picture...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4] After GC comes out...**</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[15] JZ is able to hack...**</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[13] GC receives prank calls...**</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[17] On their school’s Facebook...**</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[24] JZ, who was once GC’s...</td>
<td>Social (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[16] JZ teases GC...**</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3] Without explanation...**</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[18] GC discovers that JZ...</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[11] GC receives anonymous...</td>
<td>Verbal (cyber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[22] GC finds out...**</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[20] JZ constantly calls GC...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1] GC walks past JZ...</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[14] GC is called a teacher’s pet...</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scenarios in dark red indicate higher severity ratings ($z > 0.5$); scenarios in dark pink indicate medium severity ratings; and scenarios in light pink indicate lower severity ratings ($z < -0.5$).

**Scenarios in bold are distinguishing statements between factors significant at p < .01.
3.4.1 Factor 1

3.4.1.1 Most severe behaviours

The emergent pattern in the configuration of Factor 1 (see Table 3.2) clearly indicates the perceived importance of the type of behaviour at the ‘most severe’ extreme. At the top end, all eight physical scenarios were ranked consecutively. Scenario 10 (“JZ tells GC...”) was rated the most extreme ($z=1.895$). Scenarios 2 (“JZ sends GC a text...”; $z=0.504$) and 6 (“JZ calls GC an ugly bushpig...”; $z=0.343$) were ranked immediately below the physical behaviours. Notably, these behaviours, while verbal in nature, included elements of physical threat upon the victim.

3.4.1.2 Least severe behaviours

Scenarios perceived to be the least severe were a mix of verbal and social behaviours. Name-calling (scenario 14) was rated as the mildest behaviour ($z=-2.113$). Social exclusion (scenarios 3 and 22; $z=-0.842$ and $z=-1.049$), bad-mouthing (scenario 18; $z=-0.940$), and giving dirty looks (scenario 1; $z=-1.539$) were also ranked at the ‘least severe’ extreme. Because of the clustering of physical behaviours at the ‘most severe’ extreme, no physical scenarios were ranked within the ‘less severe’ range.

3.4.2 Factor 2

3.4.2.1 Most severe behaviours

The pattern emerging for Factor 2 is less clear. The most extreme behaviours were perceived to be scenario 8 (“A rumour circulates...”; $z=2.001$) and 4 (“After GC comes out...”; $z=1.523$). These scenarios present some major distinctions, given that they were rated in the mid-severe range in Factor 1. Four physical scenarios were ranked at the ‘most severe’ extreme including scenarios 10 (“JZ tells GC...”;
z=1.284) and 12 (“JZ begins taunting...”; z=0.985), sharing this view with Factor 1. However, unlike Factor 1, this factor ranked social media hacking (scenario 15; z=0.901) and negative social media posts (scenario 17; z=0.567) among the most severe scenarios.

3.4.2.2 Least severe behaviours

Factor 2 shares a similar view with Factor 1 on some of the ‘less severe’ scenarios. Scenarios 1 (“GC walks past...”; z=-1.849) and 14 (“GC is called a teacher’s pet...”; z=-2.057) were ranked the least severe of the behaviours. Scenarios 20 (“JZ constantly calls GC...”; z=-1.064) and 11 (“GC receives anonymous...”; z=-0.556) were also ranked at the ‘least severe’ extreme, similar to Factor 1. However, scenarios 23 (“GC gets kicked...”) and 2 (“JZ sends a text...”), rated as two of the most severe behaviours in Factor 1, were ranked as two of the least severe behaviours in Factor 2 (z=-0.577 and z=-0.536, respectively).

3.4.3 Perspective summaries

3.4.3.1 Factor 1

It is apparent that participants in this factor perceive particularly direct behaviours as most severe. Behaviours that are physical, or include an element of threat fall into this category. At the other end of the spectrum, verbal teasing or name-calling, and indirect bullying are viewed as less severe. The overall configuration would suggest that participants sorted the scenarios based on the saliency of the behaviour. Behaviours that are far more salient are perhaps more readily identifiable as aggression, and less so with behaviours that are less ‘visible’.
3.4.3.2 Factor 2

This perspective seems to take the view that the most severe behaviours are those likely to cause the most perceived harm to the victim. Indeed, three of the most severely rated scenarios (8, 4, and 15) all pose threats to reputation by targeting issues personal to the victim. Furthermore, the physical behaviours rated at the ‘most severe’ extreme are also particularly confronting (scenarios 10, 12, 25), given that these behaviours are likely to cause relatively severe physical harm to the victim. Behaviours perceived as least harmful to the victim are ranked at the ‘least severe’ extreme, for example scenarios 1 and 14, which involve relatively mild behaviours.
Table 3.3 A comparison of the average severity ratings of universally perceived ‘male’ and ‘female’ behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALE (avg. Z-score)</th>
<th>Avg. severity rating (Z-score)</th>
<th>FEMALE (avg. Z-score)</th>
<th>Avg. severity rating (Z-score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[10] JZ tells GC...</td>
<td>1.589</td>
<td>[18] GC discovers that JZ...</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[21] JZ tells a classmate...</td>
<td>0.591</td>
<td>(1.663)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[23] GC gets kicked...</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>[11] GC receives anonymous...</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[21] In class, JZ...</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>(1.598)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[22] GC is having lunch...</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>[8] A rumour circulates...</td>
<td>1.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[25] JZ begins taunting...</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>(1.235)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[26] GC gets kicked...</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>[24] JZ, who was once GC's...</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[27] GC receives anonymous...</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>(1.219)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[28] JZ walks past JZ...</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>[9] In class, JZ...</td>
<td>-1.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[30] Without explanation...</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.209)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[31] GC walks past JZ...</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.706)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[32] JZ, who was once GC's...</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.648)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[33] Without explanation...</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.595)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average severity Z score for 'male' behaviours</td>
<td><strong>0.707</strong></td>
<td>Average severity Z score for 'female' behaviours</td>
<td><strong>-0.299</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 An Integrated Look at Perceptions

Within the participant sample, there are a significant number of behaviours that are universally perceived to be male or female. Table 4 displays the scenarios both ‘gender’ factors rated within the gendered extremes, and their corresponding average Z-scores from the ‘severity’ factors.

Eight scenarios were found to be universally perceived as ‘male’ behaviours, all but one of which were physical. Scenario 10 (“JZ tells GC...”) had the highest average severity rating \((z=1.589)\), while scenario 7 (“While walking up...”) had the lowest \((z=0.075)\). The average severity Z-score for the ‘male’ behaviours was 0.707.

Only six scenarios were perceived, by both factors, as ‘female’ behaviours. The most severe of these scenarios was perceived to be scenario 8 (“A rumour circulates...”; \(z=1.167\)), while the least severe was perceived to be scenario 1 (“GC
walks past JZ...”; z=-1.694). Averaging the ‘female’ behaviours severity ratings gave a Z-score of -0.299. This is a Z-score difference of 1.006 between perceived severity of ‘male’ behaviours and ‘female’ behaviours.
4. Discussion

The primary focus of the present study was to assess perspectives of aggression, both in terms of its gendered nature, and of its severity. While aggression can be exhibited physically, verbally, or socially, studies on gender differences in aggression have uncovered a tendency for males and females to engage in different aggressive styles (e.g. Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Unfortunately, little research has examined perceptions of gendered aggression. Tentative findings indicate that perceptions seem to accurately reflect the aggressive tendencies of males and females (Crick et al., 1996). One aim for the current study was to further examine perceptions of gendered aggression.

Conversely, studies of the severity of aggression point to some discrepancies between actual and perceived impact of behaviours. Specifically, despite impact research suggesting that direct and indirect forms of aggression are similarly harmful (e.g. Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010), direct aggression is often perceived to be more severe (e.g. Maunder et al., 2010). The current study, therefore, also set out to investigate perceptions of severity of different aggression styles.

The remainder of this chapter will outline key details of the results and compare and contrast with previous literature. Implications of the findings will also be addressed.

4.1 A Gendering Effect of Aggression

Males are consistently found to be more physically aggressive than females, while females tend to engage in social forms of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995;
Fekkes et al., 2005; Scheithauer et al., 2006). It was hypothesised that perceptions of aggression would align with these findings, and the results confirmed this prediction. Despite two perspectives being extracted from the data, close inspection revealed a common perspective. As expected, the emergent perspective demonstrated a strong gendering effect, characterising social forms of aggression as ‘female’, and physical forms as primarily ‘male’. The finding is consistent with Crick and colleagues (1996) study which observed children’s beliefs that relational aggression was normative to females, whereas physical aggression was normative to males. Additionally, the overarching perspective in the current sample was congruent with studies observing actual gender differences in aggression. Particularly at younger ages, females are more likely to engage in covert, social forms of aggression, such as spreading rumours (scenario 8) and bad-mouthing others (18), while males tend to be more physically and directly aggressive (10, 21, and 9) (Fekkes et al., 2005; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Scheithauer et al., 2006). Furthermore, although the limited research examining gendered aggression at older ages demonstrates a considerable reduction in gender differences of indirect aggression, males are still far more likely to engage in physical aggression at a later developmental stage than females (Archer, 2004).

The emergent gendered perspective also related to, and was consistent with, theories relating to gender differences in behaviour. The behaviours designated as ‘female’ in the present study appear to target the goal of connectedness that females develop towards, according to relational theory (Covington, 2007). For example, scenarios 8 (“A rumour circulates…”), 3 (“Without explanation…”), and 18 (“GC discovers that JZ…”) are all social behaviours that were universally designated
as ‘female’. Social aggression is defined by the harm towards the self-concept and social standing of the victim, and these types of behaviours, such as spreading rumours, bad-mouthing, public humiliation, and shaming are common themes throughout the ‘female’ scenarios. The gendered perspective also suggests that females are perceived to act in accordance with their social roles (Eagly & Wood, 1988). When females engage in aggression, social role theory would suggest that they do so in a covert way, so as not to impact upon their ‘communal’ appearance (Eagly & Wood, 1988). The major difference between these theories is that relational theory implies that differences in human behaviour drive perceptions of those behaviours. On the other hand, social role theory implies that it is the perception that males and females are expected to act in a certain way that generates behaviours. Regardless of which theory reflects reality, the perceived gendering of aggressive behaviours was accurate.

An interesting exception to the primarily physical nature of ‘male’ behaviours also emerged. One social behaviour was universally rated as ‘male’ (“After GC comes out as gay, JZ, a classmate, makes an anti-gay Facebook page and invites the rest of their classmates to join”) and was the only social behaviour to be associated with males in both factors. It is perhaps the homophobic implications of the behaviour that so strongly categorises it as male aggression. Indeed, homophobia is more strongly prevalent among males than it is among females, according to a study by Nagoshi, Adams, Terrell, Hill, Brzuzy, and Nagoshi (2008). The authors hypothesised that males are more likely to feel that their sexuality and masculinity is threatened when faced with issues of homosexuality, and thus resort to anxiety-induced homophobic attacks. This result appears to add an extra dimension to the
emergent gendered perspective, to the extent that the perceived ‘gender’ of a behaviour may not only be defined by the type of aggression, but also by the targeted issues. Had the element of homophobia been excluded from this specific behaviour, participants may have approached it quite differently.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of gendered aggression. Not only do behaviours show that a gendering effect exists in terms of preferred aggressive styles, but the perceptions established in the current study reveal that people recognise this effect. Thus, a platform is established upon which to investigate the link between perceptions and behaviour, drawing from relational and social role theories as described above. That is, are perceptions of aggression formed by aggressive behaviours, as relational theory suggests? Or are aggressive behaviours a product of perceptions of aggression, as social role theory suggests?

4.2 Perceptions of Severity

Comparing impact research and studies investigating the perceived severity of aggression demonstrates some discrepancies. While evidence suggests that both direct and indirect forms of aggression can have equally harmful effects on victims and aggressors (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010), perceptions frequently consider physical behaviours as more severe than social aggression (e.g. Maunder et al., 2010). It was proposed that perceptions in this study would demonstrate similar patterns. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Unlike the ‘gender’ task, analysis of the ‘severity’ task revealed two distinct and meaningful perspectives.
4.2.1 Perspective one

There is a coherent pattern evident within the first perspective (Factor 1) to the extent that physical behaviours are overrepresented at the ‘more severe’ pole. As such, this perspective appears to perceive any physical form of aggression as more serious than other forms (e.g. 10, 23, and 12). Interestingly, the two consecutive scenarios, while primarily verbal behaviours, both include elements of physical threat (2 and 6). At the other end of the severity spectrum, social and verbal forms of aggression are perceived to be least severe including behaviours such as social exclusion (3), name-calling (14, 16, and 20), and bad-mouthing (18).

While this study used Q methodology to assess perceptions, this outcome echoes the findings of past studies of severity perceptions – in particular, school bullying studies - which use more traditional methods. According to Bradshaw et al. (2007), direct behaviours, including physical aggression are more likely to be labelled as bullying behaviours than indirect forms of aggression. Because indirect forms are often not considered to be bullying behaviours by teachers and students alike, social forms of bullying are repeatedly neglected during bullying interventions within school systems (Maunder et al., 2010; Nicolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2002; Boulton, 1997). Furthermore, Maunder and colleagues found that verbal threats were perceived to be among the most severe forms of bullying, which, somewhat, aligns with the configuration, given that threatening behaviour was rated as the most severe behaviour after physical aggression.

While this perspective supported the second hypothesis, the findings are contrary to the literature examining the actual harm caused to victims and aggressors. Direct forms of victimisation have demonstrated associations with
future delinquent behaviour (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010), depressive symptoms in males (Prinstein et al., 2001), and anxiety issues (Craig, 1998). Similar negative outcomes are often present in the aggressors of direct behaviours, albeit at lower levels. While this does demonstrate the severity of physical and verbal aggression, in terms of harm, the outcomes of social aggression victimisation are equally worrisome. Prinstein and colleagues’ (2001) revealed that, particularly for girls, relational aggression predicts symptoms of depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Furthermore, like direct victimisation, indirect forms predict future delinquent behaviour, and future involvement with gangs (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010). Although both physical and social forms of aggression seem to be equally harmful, the current perspective takes a strong view that physical behaviours are more severe. It may be possible that participants sharing this perspective rate the severity of aggressive behaviours based on their saliency. That is, where the behaviour is easily identified as aggression, and where the potential harm to the victim is obvious, the perceived severity of the behaviour is much higher than those that are less ‘visible’. Conversely, where there is a lack of visible harm in a behaviour, such as social exclusion or spreading rumours, which are more covert in nature, this diminishes the perceived impact on victims (Maunder et al., 2010).

4.2.2 Perspective two

Perspective two offers a more diverse ranking of aggressive behaviours. Unlike the first perspective, a number of social behaviours are rated among the most severe, while half of the physical scenarios are rated in the mid to low range of severity. This, somewhat, contrasts past perceptions research which often finds perceptions similar to perspective one (e.g. Boulton, 1997). However, this
perspective does align more closely with prior studies examining actual harm. In section one, it was determined that social aggression was just as harmful (or even more so) as more direct forms (including physical and verbal), and the current perspective appears to recognise this. Contrasting the first perspective, which appears to configure severe behaviours based on how ‘visible’ the harm seems to be, this perspective perhaps considers the long-term impact aggressive behaviours have on the victim. Indeed, social behaviours that target sensitive issues (e.g. sexual orientation), and physical behaviours that are largely confronting (e.g. attacks to the head), are particularly severely rated.

Overall, the findings only partially support the second hypothesis, given that the two perspectives offer vastly unique viewpoints. This implies that perceptions of the seriousness of certain types of aggression may be skewed and, in turn, people may underestimate the effect of their own, or others’, aggressive tendencies. Perceptions of less severe behaviours may also lead to neglect of certain situations, and an unwillingness to intervene.

4.3 A Universal Look at Perspectives

Across the entire sample, consistent with the third hypothesis, it was found that ‘female’ behaviours tended to be rated less severely than ‘male’ behaviours. Notably, the vast majority of behaviours perceived to be associated with ‘female’ aggression were social behaviours, while most ‘male’ aggressive behaviours were physical. Previous research has shown that females do tend to be more covert in their aggression in line with their gendered roles (Archer, 2004), and in accordance with social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 1988). Furthermore, the covert nature of
‘female’ aggression may also account for its perceived lesser severity than ‘male’ aggression. It was theorised above that less ‘visible’ behaviours are less identifiable as aggression because the subsequent harm is not immediately obvious. Physical aggression is much more visible, and the harm caused is salient to a bystander. Although this may explain why ‘female’ behaviours are perceived to be less severe, it demonstrates a concerning lack of understanding about the actual impact of social behaviours. Indeed, aggression has been found to cause more harm to females than it does to males which further aggravates this disparity between actual and perceived harm (Due et al., 2005; Gruber & Fineran, 2008).

Social victimisation tends to affect females more than males, often leading to far poorer long-term health outcomes (Due et al., 2005; Gruber & Fineran, 2008). Furthermore, girls who engage in social aggression are also likely to face issues with antisocial behaviour, depressive symptoms, identity problems, and a decrease in overall life satisfaction (Werner & Crick, 1999). These outcomes are less common in males who are victims of, or who engage in, socially aggressive behaviours. The notion that males and females have different goals in their development, as outlined in relational theory (Covington, 2007), may account for these consequential discrepancies. Clearly, the discrepancies in severity perceptions between gendered behaviours is problematic. This is especially true for females, who are most often victimised through social means of aggression, and are likely to be just as negatively affected, or more so than males who are physically victimised. Potentially, this could mean that females may face more neglect than males in their reports of aggression in several arenas, including schools, workplaces, and universities, as is often found in bullying studies.
4.4 A Note on Bullying at University

The current study briefly examined whether bullying occurred at the university level. While this aspect of the study did not undergo analysis due to the small sample size, preliminary findings suggest that bullying does indeed occur at university. Twenty-percent of the participants claimed to have either bullied or been bullied at university within the 12 months prior to data collection. Given the small sample, however, it is perhaps likely that this figure is skewed. Advertisements for the study were framed to highlight the collection of bullying perspectives which may have attracted participants who had been victimised in the past. Nonetheless, as previous studies have also found, a substantial minority of university students are likely to experience bullying during their university career (Sinkonen et al., 2014; SER, 2008).

4.5 Limitations of the Study

While the implementation of the Q methodological approach was successful in gathering perspectives of aggressive behaviour, the current study was limited in several ways. Firstly, the participant sample was restricted to undergraduate students at one university. Not only did this mean that the sample was not necessarily representative of the general university population, but it also created a complex demographic. Given that some undergraduate students may have already completed a degree, and were pursuing another, the ‘undergraduate’ criterion was perhaps too broad. The criterion should, perhaps, have been better defined, or more information should have been recorded.
Secondly, because Q methodology is more interested in emergent perspectives, and less about the participants themselves few demographic variables were recorded. While the undergraduate year of the participants was recorded, the complexity described above meant that this variable may have faced confounding variables that were not recorded. Exact age of the participants, for example, may have provided a better demographic variable. Alternative methodologies are more appropriate for examining several variables.

Thirdly, a custom of Q methodological studies, although not crucial, is to give a short interview after each Q sort, gathering participants’ reasoning behind the way they configured the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Their responses would usually be recorded alongside their Q sorts for a deeper understanding of their perspectives. This was, however, beyond the scope of the current study, due to time and analysis constraints. Nonetheless, including this as an additional aspect may, again, have aided in final interpretation of the results.

Finally, the scenarios themselves were based on, and described as, school bullying behaviours. While this was intentional both for contextual consistency between the scenarios, and for the credibility of the behaviours, it is possible this may have had some influence on the way they were sorted. Indeed, there are likely to be differences in perceptions of the severity of one-off aggressive encounters, compared to bullying incidents which are, per Olweus’ (1993) definition, frequent patterns of behaviour between a relatively powerful aggressor and a vulnerable victim. However, the bullying scenarios were effective in addressing all three types
of aggression within a consistent context and for clearly distinguishing between the aggressor and the victim.
5. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

The current study was the first to utilise Q methodology to measure perceptions of aggression. Specifically, results uncovered perspectives of the gendered nature and severity of three forms of aggression: physical, verbal, and social. The undergraduate students in the current study demonstrated a universal, and fairly stereotypical, view of the aggressive tendencies of males and females. That is, males were perceived to aggress in primarily physical ways, while females were perceived to aggress in primarily social ways. Although this is consistent with past studies on actual tendencies of males and females, future research using alternative methodologies should determine whether perceptions of gendered behaviours are a product of past experiences/observations, or whether cultural influences in perceptions play a part. Investigations into the influence of one’s gender, experiences with certain types of aggression or bullying (perhaps in primary school or high school, as well as university), and the configuration of their perceptions could perhaps examine this question.

Differences arose in the way in which students perceived the severity of aggressive behaviours. One group of students strongly perceived physical forms of aggression to be more severe than any other form. In turn, this group rated verbal and social behaviours as least severe. While this perspective replicates results from past studies on perceptions of severity, it presents a discrepant view of the actual impact of these forms of behaviours. Although it is understood that physical behaviours may display harm to the victim in a more visible way, social behaviours can be just as harmful in the long-term. Conversely, the other group of students
shared a more varied configuration of behaviours. Particularly confronting social behaviours that targeted sensitive issues were rated the most severe behaviours. Confronting physical behaviours were also rated among the most severe forms of aggression, while primarily verbal behaviours were rated least severe. This viewpoint appears to recognise that less direct forms of aggression can cause severe harm to the victim, even if that harm is less salient than physical or verbal aggression. Future studies could add to these findings by determining how participants interpret the term ‘severity’. It would be particularly useful to uncover whether perceptions of severity are driven by this salience of direct behaviours, or if there are other factors at play. By gaining a clearer understanding about what ‘severity’ means to participants, perspectives can be more easily distinguished, and interpreted.

Integrating the findings from both tasks demonstrated a general universal viewpoint that ‘male’ behaviours (primarily physical) were more severe than ‘female’ behaviours (primarily social). Unfortunately, given that females tend to experience more negative outcomes from victimisation than males, further neglect of ‘female’ forms of victimisation are likely to prevent appropriate interventions for this population. Perceptions that negate the severity of social aggression may also lead to neutralisations of this kind of behaviour. For example, aggressors may deny that the victim has been victimised. In turn, there may be an increased propensity to engage in these forms of aggression without realising the impact they may have on victims. Thus, the current investigation demonstrates a need for implementing training and educational programs within a wide array of arenas that addresses the impact that all types of aggression or harassment, but particularly indirect forms,
can have upon individuals. This is especially important in environments where bullying tends to take place, including schools, workplaces, and, as tentative findings demonstrate, university.
References


aggression. *Social Behaviour and Personality, 35*(1), 41-50.


doi:10.1111/1467-9507.00195
## Appendix A

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GC walks past JZ in the corridor. JZ gives GC a dirty look.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>JZ sends GC a text threatening “We’re gonna get you after school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Without explanation, GC’s group of friends no longer include GC in any of their activities. When GC suggests an activity, the group pretend they are busy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>After GC comes out as gay, JZ, a classmate, makes an anti-gay Facebook page, and invites the rest of their classmates to join.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GC is having lunch in the cafeteria. JZ walks in and spits in GC’s food for no reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>JZ calls GC an ugly bushpig and threatens to punch them in the face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>While walking up to the teacher to hand in their work, GC is tripped up by JZ. JZ tells the teacher that GC tripped over the table leg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A rumour circulates around the school that GC has a sexually transmitted disease. The rumour is not true but GC is upset that people believe it and are avoiding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In class, JZ takes their hard plastic ruler and hits the edge into GC’s shoulder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>JZ tells GC to hand over their money. GC explains that they need the money to get home from school. JZ hits GC repeatedly on the head until GC gives in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>GC receives anonymous texts from the same number making fun of their clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>JZ begins taunting and shoving GC in the hallway on the way to class. Trying to ignore this, GC is slammed into the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>GC receives prank calls from JZ, trying to terrify them by using scary voices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>GC is called a teacher’s pet by JZ because of their good grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>JZ is able to hack into GC’s Facebook account. JZ posts nasty statuses under GC’s name to ruin their reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>JZ teases GC by calling them names. When GC tells JZ to stop, they say that GC is a loser for not being able to take a joke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>On their school’s Facebook “confessions” page, a chain of posts target GC, sending threats anonymously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>GC discovers that JZ has been bad-mouthing them to others despite believing that they were good friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>GC spots a picture on Facebook with their face photoshopped onto a pig. The picture has been shared by many of their classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>JZ constantly calls GC names like “Ranga” and “Copper Top” just because of their red hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>JZ tells a classmate to “watch this” and then pushes their chair back into GC’s table. The table hits GC in the stomach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>GC finds out about a party that all of his/her friends attended. The host, JZ, purposefully brags about how good the party was in front of GC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>GC gets kicked in the back of the knees by JZ while everyone else watches and laughs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>JZ, who was once GC’s best friend, posts an embarrassing video of GC singing up on Youtube, even though they said they would never show anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>On the way home from school, GC’s bag is ripped off their back. A group of three spill GC’s books and pencils onto the ground and tear a hole in the bottom of the bag so it can no longer be used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Q-Sort Data Recording Sheet

Gender: Male Female

Year group: 1st Year 2nd Year 3rd Year

Have you been a victim of bullying in the past 12 months? Yes No

Have you engaged in bullying behaviour in the past 12 months? Yes No

GENDER

Male

Female

SEVERITY

Less severe

More severe
Appendix C

Perceptions of bullying in a university context

My name is Greig Clark and I am currently studying my Honours degree in Criminology, supervised by Dr Jaimie Zander. We are looking for participants to volunteer around 15-20 minutes of their time to take part in our research project. Specifically, we are targeting undergraduate students (years 1-3) from a variety of disciplines to answer some simple questions and perform a couple of sorting tasks in relation to bullying behaviours and aggression at university.

We are investigating how university students perceive the nature of aggression in its different forms, while at the same time, garnering some initial estimates of the frequency of bullying within the university environment. This is a vastly under researched area, so your contribution to this study will help shape our understanding of university bullying culture.

If you are interested in participating in our study, please feel free to contact me via email at murdochbullyingstudy@gmail.com to express your interest, book a time to participate, or ask any questions you might have.

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2016/072). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix D

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Greig Clark and I would like to invite you to consider your participation in a research study looking at students’ perspectives of bullying and aggression. This study is part of my Honours Degree in Criminology, supervised by Dr Jaimie Zander at Murdoch University.

Nature and Purpose of the Study

While, in recent decades, bullying within schools and workplaces has been systematically explored, there has been relatively little research conducted at the tertiary level, despite evidence that demonstrates that bullying does occur at university. It is widely known that bullying is a serious issue in Australia and across the world in schools and workplaces and it has been found in previous studies that males and females may experience and engage in different forms of bullying. Understanding these differences has implications for bullying policy and aggression research within criminological domains.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of university students on different aspects of bullying. From this, we can identify if any discrepancies between particular populations exist, as previous school bullying literature has demonstrated.

If you consent to take part in this study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the research and the tasks you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

What the Study Will Involve

If you decide to consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete 2 sorting tasks that gather information about your own perceptions about particular types of bullying. Following this, you will be asked about your own experiences with bullying on campus.

It is estimated that the entire participation session will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. All information is treated as confidential and no names or other details that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be destroyed.

Privacy

Your privacy is very important. Whether you elect to participate or not will be kept entirely confidential. Any members of the research team who may be associated with you in other roles will not know whether you have elected to participate and will view only anonymous data. It will thus
not be possible to identify you, neither will you be identified in any publication arising out of this study.

**Benefits of the Study**

The study aims to provide an accurate perception of how university students feel about particular types of bullying. Exploring perceptual differences about bullying not only informs anti-bullying policy, but it is also important for research into aggression. Specifically, the study has implications for the notion that males and females may demonstrate aggression in very different ways, which is important to understand when we consider crime and anti-social behaviour patterns.

**Possible Risks**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. However, if you feel distressed at any point during participation, you are free to withdraw from participation. If required, appropriate services provided by the university will be offered.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Greig Clark via the study’s email address, murdochbullyingstudy@gmail.com, or my supervisor, Dr Jaimie Zander, at j.zander@murdoch.edu.au or by phone 9360 2900. My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

Once we have analysed the information from this study we will provide a number of avenues to access a summary of our findings including a link to an online version via email. You can expect to receive this feedback in late 2016 or early 2017.

If you are willing to consent to your participation in this study, please complete the Consent Form.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely

Greig Clark

Murdoch University

BA(Hons) in Criminology

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2016/072). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix E

Consent Form

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’

PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

1. I have read the Information Letter provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this study, the procedures involved and of what is expected of my participation.
2. I understand that I will be asked to complete two sorting tasks relating to my own perceptions of bullying behavior.
3. I understand that some demographic information will be recorded in writing (i.e. gender, undergraduate year).
4. I understand that I will be asked about my own experiences with bullying at university.
5. I understand that I can choose not to discuss anything that makes me feel uncomfortable.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to give any reason.
7. I understand that I will not be identified in any publication arising out of this study.
8. The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained possible problems that may arise as a result of my participation in this study.
9. I understand that my name and identity will be stored separately from the data, and these are accessible only to the investigators. All data provided by me will be analysed anonymously using code numbers.
10. I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Name of participant: ________________________________

Signature of participant: ___________________________ Date: ....../....../......

Would you like to receive information pertaining to the outcome of this study? If so, please provide an email address:

________________________________________________________

I confirm that I have provided the Information Letter concerning this study to the above student; I have explained the study and have answered all questions asked of me.

Signature of researcher: _____________________________ Date: ....../....../......