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Understanding Pupil Violence: Bullying Theory as Technoscience in Sweden and Norway

Cecilie Boge & Anna Larsson

Abstract • Around 1970, violence among pupils became conceptualised in a radically new way when the concept of “mobbing” was introduced into the Nordic school debate. The concept was immediately embraced by popular discourse with the result that significant attention and discussion followed. It was also soon picked up by researchers and became further developed within Swedish and Norwegian behavioural science. This article concerns how pupil violence in the form of bullying was understood and theorised in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in Sweden and Norway. It shows how certain political and intellectual conditions, and events, in both national contexts were decisive for the development of bullying theory, eventually leading up to a commercialisation of bullying theory. This development is discussed with the help of the concept “psychology-commercial complex,” derived from Pickstone’s theory of technoscience.

Keywords • mobbing, bullying, Heinemann, Olweus, technoscience

Around 1970, violence among pupils became conceptualised in a radically new way when the concept of “mobbing” was introduced into the Nordic school debate. In an article from 1969, the Swedish physician Peter-Paul Heinemann focused attention on bullying behaviour among school kids as an early expression of an attitude that was a main premise for extremely negative societal phenomena such as apartheid and genocide.¹ The concept of “mobbing” was immediately picked up by news media; it became linked to various aspects of children, school and society, and was spread in the public discourse in Sweden, and soon afterwards also in Norway.

The concept was also embraced by research and became further developed within Swedish and Norwegian behavioural science, much due to the work in psychology by Swedish/Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus, who eventually established a position as pioneer and head of research for a “Scandinavian research tradition.”² Olweus related bullying mainly to aggression as a personality trait, thereby defining it quite differently from how it had been understood by Heinemann and in the public discourse.

In the 1980s, Olweus became engaged in Norwegian state-initiated programmes for measuring and preventing bullying. Based on this, the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* was developed and it became a huge international success in the 1990s,

1 Peter-Paul Heinemann, “Apartheid,” *Liberal Debatt* no. 2 (1969).

2 Erling Roland, “Bullying: The Scandinavian Research Tradition,” in *Bullying in Schools*, ed. Delwyn P. Tattum and David A. Lane (London: Trentham books, 1988).

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as knowledge and use of it spread and became largely used in not only Norwegian but also Swedish and American schools.³ Actually, bullying intervention turned into a kind of industry in which Olweus' understanding of bullying was central and became spread internationally. As numerous researchers around the world investigated the personality traits of bullies, victims and bystanders, and measured the frequency of bullying behaviour in different school environments, Olweus' definition, explanatory model and research methods became the dominating way of understanding bullying behaviour.⁴ This particular development within the bullying research field is what this article will problematise and discuss.

The history of bullying theory has been discussed in previous Scandinavian research, and the peculiar development of the different conceptualisations of bullying has been noticed, as well as the fact that Olweus received a very strong position in many countries.⁵ In contrast to previous studies, this article will combine the Swedish and Norwegian cases. We will show how certain conditions and events in both national contexts in the 1970s and 1980s were decisive for the development of bullying theory, eventually leading up to what we call the "commercialisation of bullying theory" in the 1990s. To discuss this commercialisation, we will make use of the concept of "technoscience." Via this, the aim is to contribute to a deepened understanding of the success of Olweus and his programme. We will analyse the development of bullying theory by relating the reception of Heinemann's and Olweus' ideas to contemporary political and intellectual contexts based on the theoretical assumption that it is necessary to take certain contextual factors into consideration in understanding the conceptual changes. We will also suggest that the eventual establishment of the strong position of Olweus' theory can be fruitfully understood in terms of what we call a "psychology-commercial complex," derived from the British historian of science John Pickstone's theory of technoscience.

Theoretical and analytical starting points

The theoretical inspiration for this article has been found in the field of science studies. In this field, the role of social and cultural factors in the history of science is

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- 3 Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1993); Violence Prevention Works!; "A Brief History of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program," Hazelden Publishing, http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_history_page; "Vurdering av program og tiltak for å redusere problematferd og utvikle sosial kompetanse," Innstilling fra faggruppe oppnevnt av Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet og Barne- og familiedepartementet, juni 2000, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kilde/kuf/rap/2000/0016/ddd/pdfv/111356-problematferd.pdf>; Gunilla Frånberg, *Mobbning i nordiska skolor: Kartläggning av forskning om och nationella åtgärder mot mobbning i Nordiska skolor* (Copenhagen: Nordiska ministerrådet, 2003).
 - 4 Björn Eriksson et al., *Skolan – En arena för mobbning: En forskningsöversikt och diskussion kring mobbning i skolan* (Stockholm: Skolverket 2002); Peter K Smith et al. eds., *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
 - 5 Eriksson et al. (2002); Ola Agevall, *The Career of Mobbing: Emergence, Transformation, and Utilization of a New Concept* (Växjö: Växjö University, 2007); Kenneth Nordgren, "Talet om mobbning: Ett historiskt perspektiv," in *På tal om mobbning – och det som görs* (Stockholm: Skolverket, 2009); Cecilie Boge, *Frå individuell aggresjon til sosiale prosessar: Mobbeforskingas etablering og utvikling i skjeringspunktet mellom vitenskap og politikk* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 2016); Jette Kofod and Dorte Marie Søndergaard, eds., *Mobning: Sociale prosesser på afveje* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2009); Jette Kofod and Dorte Marie Søndergaard, eds., *Mobning gentænkt* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2013).

focused. Disciplinary change is understood not as a naturally given cumulative development but as a social process, where cultural influences of a different kind must be taken into consideration.⁶ John Pickstone has formulated the concept of “technoscience,” which we will make use of in the discussion in this article. Pickstone uses the term technoscience for “technological projects which are heavily dependent on science (or vice versa)” within the area of science, technology and medicine.⁷ Technoscience is a specific way of knowing, Pickstone argues, characterised by an intimate connection between scientific knowledge, commodities or products and political interest. The term was originally adopted from the French anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour, however Pickstone gives it “a specific historical meaning for fields where knowledge and practice and the economy were intimately related, where knowledge was saleable.”⁸ Pickstone exemplifies technoscience with the military-industrial complex and the medico-industrial complex, in which new weapons and pharmaceuticals are invented, developed, produced and commercialised closely tied to the scientific development in the fields. In analogy to this, based on the case of the bullying theory development, we will extend the scope of the relevance of technoscience into the social science arena and suggest that it is reasonable to talk about a “psychology-commercial complex.” In our case, political interest, bullying intervention programmes and bullying theory are closely tied to and presuppose each other in a manner that resembles and reflects Pickstone’s concept.

This article is based on our previous studies on the discussions about bullying in the media and research in Sweden and Norway. Via these studies, it has become apparent how the bullying research field developed into a situation, especially in Norway, where knowledge, practice and politics were intimately related.⁹ These studies are, in turn, based on extensive reading of source material consisting of published texts in scientific and professional books, journals and newspapers. The empirical material was found and collected in a number of different ways, for example through library and database scanning and through analysing journal contents over many years. For details about this, we refer to our previous publications.¹⁰

Heinemann’s concept of “mobbing”

”Mobbing” was introduced in the Scandinavian school debate in late 1969 when Peter-Paul Heinemann published his article entitled “Apartheid” in the Swedish

6 Edward J. Hackett et al., eds., *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

7 John Pickstone, *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology and Medicine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3.

8 John Pickstone, “Ways of Knowing: Towards a Historical Sociology of Science, Technology and Medicine,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 26, no. 4 (1993), 438.

9 Most clearly presented in Boge (2016).

10 Boge (2016); Anna Larsson, “The Discovery of the Social Life of Swedish Schoolchildren,” *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 1 (2012), 121–35; Anna Larsson, “Mobbningsfrågan i förändring: Efterkrigstidens synsätt på skolbarns kamratliv,” *Historisk tidskrift* 130, no. 2 (2010a), 241–64; Anna Larsson, “Mobbing: Ett tidsbundet socialt problem?” *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift* 17, no. 2 (2010b), 137–51; Anna Larsson, “Mobbningsbegreppets uppkomst och förhistoria: En begreppshistorisk analys,” *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige* 13, no. 1 (2008a), 19–36; Anna Larsson, “Fåglar i klassrummet: Mobbing och hackordning som gränsöverskridande metaforer,” in *Mångsysslare och gränsöverskridare: 13 uppsatser i idéhistoria*, ed. Maria Göransdotter and Bosse Sundin (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2008b).

journal *Liberal debatt* [Liberal Debate].¹¹ Here he wrote critically about the Swedish society and culture, which had not taken children's habit to isolate others from the peer group seriously. He called this phenomenon "mobbing," a term he had picked up from ethology, the scientific study of animal behaviour. In ethological studies of behaviour among birds and animals, "mobbing" denoted when a flock attacks a single threatening predator. Heinemann observed how children in a school playground harassed individual children who had a deviating skin colour or a physical disability.

In 1970, the behaviour Heinemann referred to as "mobbing," was understood as a natural part of growing up and a way to harden up for the demanding life as an adult. The behaviour was in no way new; the new part of it was Heinemann's reaction in itself and the problematisation of the phenomenon. Did perhaps Heinemann react to this behaviour due to his personal experiences as a so-called "deviant"? During World War II, he and his Jewish family fled Germany to Sweden, and as a grown-up he was the father of an adopted black son. However Heinemann's problematisation may also be an expression of new scientific and social movements around 1970 that crystallised in an increased interest in children's relations, deviancy and sociological explanatory models. Heinemann regarded "mobbing" as an expression of a society fallen into decay, due to, among other explanations, people being too occupied with themselves and thereby having little or no concern for others: "I see 'mobbing,' isolation, apartheid, genocide as a logic sequence along the same coordinate," Heinemann proclaimed.¹²

Thus, Heinemann described "mobbing" as a phenomenon where a group attacks a single individual. He explained this from both a biological and a critical social perspective. His ideas of "mobbing" were inspired by the book *Aggression* by Konrad Lorenz, which had been published in Swedish in 1967.¹³ Konrad Lorenz, an Austrian zoologist and physician, was a pioneer in ethology and received the Nobel Prize in physiology/medicine for his discoveries in animal behaviour. With his emphasis on biological, inherent dispositions, he represented one extreme in the nature-nurture debate, a view in stark contrast to the widely spread behaviouristic approach, where human behaviour was seen as fully formed by the environment.¹⁴

In his book on aggression, Lorenz discusses birds, however he also presents reflections on human behaviour and human societies. He argues that humans should also be analysed as natural creatures with biologically based instincts.¹⁵ Aggression, according to Lorenz, is an instinct with the function of preserving the species. However, it can appear in different ways. For example, he claims that motivation and enthusiasm are forms of group aggression, an idea that Heinemann picked up.¹⁶

11 Heinemann (1969).

12 Heinemann (1969), 13.

13 Konrad Lorenz, *Aggression: Dess bakgrund och natur* (Stockholm: PA Norstedt and Söners förlag, 1967). It was first published in German in 1963, while an English translation came in 1966.

14 About Konrad Lorenz' role in the history of biology and psychology, see for example, Richard W. Burkhardt jr., *Patterns of Behavior: Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and the Founding of Ethology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

15 Lorenz (1967), 32.

16 Larsson (2008a); Larsson (2008b)

The bullying debate in the 1970s

The term “mobbing” quickly got a reception in the Swedish public debate and the discussions were very animated in the first half of the 1970s.¹⁷ In the debate, bullying was depicted in many ways and there were different kinds of explanations. A widely spread comprehension was that bullying was caused by some sort of deviancy. This is noticeable in the headlines of the early debate in media, for example “Children assaulting a deviant child,” “‘Mobbing’ is when a group of people assault a lonely person who is different,” “Similar children against a deviant child,” “Deviant children are the school class’ punchballs” [translations from Swedish].¹⁸ The editor-in-chief for the largest children’s magazine, Margareta Toss, acknowledged that many children had sent letters to the magazine telling about terrifying experiences of being victims to bullying, “immigrant children, harelipped children and children suffering from being too tall.”¹⁹ The journal for the school-parents organisation also focused on the deviation of the victims. Victimised children are “somewhat fat, cross-eyed or red-haired,” they might have a strange accent or belong to some minority. “They are victims of ‘mobbing’ as the new word is.”²⁰

In 1971, psychologist Gunnar Vilson defined bullying in relation to deviancy but pointed to the fact that a deviant person is not a real threat to the group, “he is just *different*.”²¹ However, Vilson also linked bullying to Heinemann’s idea of group aggression in saying that deviancy is not enough to create a bullying situation, there must also be aggression in the group. Aggression can stem from circumstances or from a single group member and can be caused by boredom or setbacks, Vilson argues. One way of reacting to boredom is to provoke excitement for example by harassing someone, something that also heightens the feeling of coherence in the group. Some kids are “chronically aggressive” and might be leading bullies.

Sociologist Kerstin Elmhorn agreed with the theory of group aggression while claiming “the biological explanation is also sociologically correct.”²² On the contrary, professor in educational psychology Ingvar Johannesson, opposed this thesis claiming that children obtain their attitudes and behaviour not from instincts but rather from learning from parents and older children.²³

Many in the early Swedish debate were, in similarity with Heinemann, critical of local school environments as well as the general social developments in the society. One common opinion was that big school classes and big schools in the modern-day big city suburbs counter-acted well-being and promoted aggression and bullying.²⁴ In one example it was claimed that “Bullying increases quadratically in proportion

17 Larsson (2010a).

18 “Mobbing: En artikelserie om gruppvåld mot avvikande barn,” by Anna-Maria Hagerfors and Birgitta Nyblom, article series published in *Dagens Nyheter*, November–December, 1969.

19 Toss quoted in Anna-Maria Hagerfors and Birgitta Nyblom, “Forska mer om mobbing: Samlevnad är skolämne,” *Dagens Nyheter*, November 23, 1969, 52.

20 “Skolan måste träna i tolerans,” *Barn*, no. 9, 1969, 6.

21 Gunnar Vilson, “Vad mobbing är för något,” *Barn*, no. 6, 1971, 25.

22 Elmhorn quoted in Anna-Maria Hagerfors and Birgitta Nyblom, “Forska mer om mobbing: Samlevnad är skolämne,” *Dagens Nyheter*, November 23, 1969, 52.

23 Johannesson quoted in Arne Pall, “Mobbing,” *Psykisk hälsa*, no. 2, 1970, 182.

24 “Mitt barn blev mobbat,” *Barn* 1971, no. 2, 9–13; “Stress hos barn,” *Barn*, no. 6, 1971, 37; “Stoppa storskolor!” *Barn*, no. 3, 1972, 40.

to the size of the school and its area of asphalt.²⁵ However, some stressed that the schoolyards' hidden crannies rather than the open areas, were risky areas for bullying.²⁶ Many highlighted children's fear of other children during the school days.²⁷ In response to the early Swedish debate, Heinemann further developed his theory about bullying in a book in 1972, *Mobbning: Gruppvåld bland barn och vuxna* [Mobbing: Group violence among children and adults].²⁸ The publishing company also released a tutorial to the book for study circles.²⁹

Around this time, the Norwegian public came to know bullying public through a series of articles in the largest national newspapers in 1972 and 1973. In these articles, bullying was mainly described as a new Swedish concept describing a fairly common phenomenon of group aggression among children. This meant bullying was understood as group violence carried out towards a single child that stood out from the crowd for some reason. In some of these articles, the bully would often be older than the victim, and the victim was singled out because of the way he or she spoke, dressed or behaved. Further, bullying was related to contemporary problems such as changes in the modern society, urbanisation and the growth of suburbs, alienation, stress and frustration.³⁰ This understanding of bullying was derived from the Swedish public debate and from Heinemann's book, published in Norwegian in 1973.

Many of the contemporary problems connected to the Swedish understanding of bullying, was not as striking in the Norwegian context. In average, Norwegian schools were much smaller in size compared to the Swedish schools, and the challenges of large suburban settlements were smaller in Norway compared to Sweden. In May 1974, when Dan Olweus' Swedish book *Hackkycklingar och översittare: Forskning om skolmobbing* [Bullies and whipping boys: Research on school bullying] was published in Norwegian, Olweus commented the differences between the two countries in an interview with a Norwegian newspaper:

Norwegians seems to be more child-friendly compared to the Swedish. They show more consideration for the youngest members of the society, which may have something to do with the fact that Norwegians have a less materialistic attitude than other

25 "Antimobbingkommitté i Täby," *Barn* 1972, no. 5, 44.

26 "Ny rast risk för hackkyckling: 'Pausledare behövs,'" *Dagens Nyheter*, November 19, 1969. Hans Åberg, "Mindre klasser möjliga," *Barn*, no. 5, 1973, 14–16; "Skolgårdens hårda värld," *Dagens Nyheter*, November 16, 1969; Gunnar Vilson, "Vad mobbing är för något," *Barn*, no. 6, 1971, 25–27, "Vuxna på skolgården," *Barn*, no. 4, 1972, 42, Inga-Lill Johansson, "Lyckliga barn, glada föräldrar, nöjda lärare på skolgården," *Barn*, no. 7, 1973, 9–11.

27 "Lärarvakt hejdar mobbing på rasten," *Dagens Nyheter*, November 29, 1969; Helfrid Fundelius, "Gabriella eller fallet med flickan som vägrade gå till skolan," *Barn* 1973, no. 1, 24–27; Louise Ricklander, "En stor kamrat att hålla i handen," *Barn*, no. 2, 1976, 15–18.

28 Peter-Paul Heinemann, *Mobbning: Gruppvåld bland barn och vuxna* (Stockholm: Natur and kultur, 1972a). The book was also translated to both Danish: *Mobning: Gruppevold blandt børn og voksne* (Copenhagen: Forum, 1972b) and Norwegian: *Mobbing: Gruppevold mot barn og voksne* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1973).

29 Peter Paul Heinemann and Kjell Thorén, *Mobbning: Gruppvåld bland barn och vuxna, studiehandledning* (Stockholm: Natur & kultur, 1972).

30 "Pisket med piggråd," *VG*, October 10, 1972; "Når skoledagen blir et helvete," *VG*, December 14, 1973; "Barneterror øker i de nye bydeler," *Aftenposten*, March 14, 1973; "Skolegårdene skreddersydd for slagsmål," *Aftenposten*, March 14, 1974; "Mobbing: Det angår skolen," *Norsk skoleblad*, no. 36, 1973, 1493.

Western Europeans? I don't think the school bullying-problem is as widespread in Norway compared to Sweden [...].³¹

In the editorial of the leading teacher journal in Norway, bullying was presented as a contagious epidemic that could be stopped or at least reduced using the correct preventive treatment.³² Others articulated scepticism towards the new concept per se. In the same journal, several pedagogues and psychologists were concerned whether the new concept would further stigmatise and increase incidents of bullying. Bullying was an old established phenomenon among children and by naming it different, they were afraid it would become a too popular collective term used to describe all kinds of different school problems and thereby water down its original meaning.³³ If a new school-related problem appeared, it would often be attached to the concept of bullying.

Olweus' book from 1973 (revised version published in English in 1978), presented results from a recently conducted study on boys aged 12–16 in Sweden.³⁴ Olweus had received a PhD in 1969 for his dissertation *Prediction of Aggression*, where he had investigated connections between aggression and different personality factors among schoolboys.³⁵ In the 1973-study, Olweus used theory and methods from his dissertation to analyse the roles in bullying relationships and investigated how personality factors and factors in the school environment correlated to bullying. This meant that some parts of Heinemann's theory concerning "mobbing" needed revision. The idea of bullying as spontaneously released group aggression, triggered by modern-day big, anonymous schools was rejected by Olweus. Instead, he saw bullying as an expression of a combination of individuals with aggressive or submissive personality, in its turn caused by the treatment of the child by the parents. Based on his study, Olweus asserted that neither the size of the school and the particular city nor the outer characteristics of the victim had any influence.

Olweus thus took an opposite position to many of the common opinions in the public debate. The size of the group, the class or the school did not seem to be important. The victims were not especially deviant, and immigrant or adopted children were not victimised more than other children. Bullies had a more aggressive personality, while victims were somewhat, but not much, physically weaker and insecure.

This theory on bullying did not regard bullying as a group against one-aggression, but rather a one against one-, or two against one-aggression. It is also clear that bullying in Olweus' view was not as closely linked to societal problems such as urbanisation, as Heinemann argued it was. What is particularly interesting is how clearly individualised the model was, as it put all weight on dispositions in the involved individuals, and close to nothing on any social or structural level. Swedish social-

31 "Voksne må stanse 'Gatens skrekk,'" *Aftenposten*, May 21, 1974.

32 "Handling og konsekvens," *Norsk skoleblad*, no. 14/15, 1974, 646.

33 "Øker vi mobbingen ved å gi den navn?," *Norsk skoleblad*, no. 36, 1973, 1494–95; "Den plagede KAN hjelpes, men da må skolen erkjenne problemet!," *Norsk skoleblad*, no. 14/15, 1974, 666.

34 Dan Olweus, *Hakkekyllingar och översittare: Forskning om skolmobbing* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1973); *Hakkekyllinger og skolebøller: Forskning om skolmobbing* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1974b); *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (Washington: Hemisphere Publ., 1978).

35 Dan Olweus, *Prediction of Aggression: On the Basis of a Projective Test* (Stockholm: Scandinavian Test Corporation, 1969).

ogist Ola Agevall argues that Olweus reformed the concept of bullying to make it compatible with his own understanding of aggression, which implied both widening the concept by including one against one-situations, and narrowing the concept by excluding Heinemann's aggression-theory which linked bullying to contemporary social problems of urbanisation.³⁶

One of the first Norwegian professionals to embrace the new concept of bullying, criminologist Ragnar Hauge, reacted harshly to Olweus' revision of the concept. Hauge had linked bullying to research conducted by himself and by the Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie and pointed to three factors that could lead to bullying, or group violence: objectification of the victim, individual anonymity within the group and hence denial of liability, and lastly, group pressure.³⁷ In a book review of Olweus' book in Norwegian, Hauge was furious due to the fact that Olweus had changed the content of the concept, which was to "jump to conclusions far beyond the allowable."³⁸

With his research-based book, Olweus received great attention in both Sweden and Norway, and in the public debate many referred to Olweus' findings.³⁹ However, both Swedish and Norwegian newspapers and teacher journals continued to explain bullying more in line with Heinemann's understanding as group violence closely related to suburban problems throughout the 1970s.⁴⁰

In the end of the 1970s, the public debate on bullying faded away for a period most clearly noticed in Swedish media, maybe as a reaction of saturation to the "moral panic" that had characterised the debate in the first half of the 1970s.⁴¹ In the early 1980s, the discussions concerning bullying received new impetus and were revived. In contrast to the 1970s debate, which had been initiated and was most energetic in Swedish media, the new wave of debate in the 1980s had its centre in Norway.

Bullying research, media and politics in the 1980s

At the end of 1982, Norwegian newspapers published a story about three young boys aged 10-13 who had committed suicide after being subjected to bullying. The heart-breaking story shocked both the public and politicians, and a few weeks into the new year, action was taken by the local authorities in the city of Tromsø where the three boys had lived. A few weeks later there were reactions also on the central Governmental level as the Ministry of Church Affairs and Education in February 1983 initiated a working group to look into the bullying problem in Norwegian schools. Dan Olweus took a leading role in this group, together with Erling Roland, a special educationalist at Stavanger University College who had just published his first book

36 Agevall (2007), 31–32.

37 "Både barn og voksne er med på å forfølge andre," *Aftenposten*, January 31, 1973; Ragnar Hauge, "Mobbing," *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*, no. 9/10 (1973), 316; "Boteråd mot mobbing," *Norsk skoleblad*, nr. 14/15, 1974, 668.

38 Ragnar Hauge, "Skolebøllen: En realitet eller myte?" *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*, no. 6 (1975), 197.

39 "Aggresjonsforsker om mobbing i skolen," *Aftenposten*, July 14, 1973; "Tyrannisering av medelever I," *Aftenposten*, October 29, 1973; "Tyrannisering av medelever II," *Aftenposten*, October 30, 1973; "Pøbelvelde skoleproblem," *Aftenposten*, November 15, 1973; "Voksne må stanse 'Gatens skrekk,'" *Aftenposten*, May 21, 1974; "Skolebøllen ofte populær," *VG*, December 21, 1973.

40 Boge (2016), 72–74.

41 Larsson (2012); Larsson (2010a).

on bullying. The working group and the Minister agreed on the need to learn more about how widespread the problem of bullying was in Norwegian schools, and the answer to this was a nationwide survey and a national campaign against bullying in primary and secondary schools.

As an aggression researcher, Olweus' primary research interest was on predicting aggression by the use of projective tests and multifaceted aggression inventories (self reports).⁴² As it happened, Olweus was already running a research project in 42 primary and secondary schools in Bergen the spring of 1983, and as a part of this project, he had developed a self-report questionnaire. It was decided to use the very same questionnaire in the nationwide survey run by Olweus. This survey was carried through in September 1983, and a few weeks later, the national campaign on bullying was launched.

Using the questionnaire from Olweus' Bergen project was a win-win-situation for both the Ministry and Olweus, as it enabled the survey to be carried out early in the autumn of 1983 and thereby showing off the Minister's vigorous response, as some 140,000 pupils participated in the survey. Olweus, on the other hand, was responsible for the national survey and made an agreement with the Ministry about research funding for the Bergen project, which in turn enabled him to compare data from Bergen with the national study. In addition, Olweus planned a follow-up study on the effects of the national campaign on bullying in the 42 schools in Bergen, as they had completed the very same survey about four months *before* the national campaign. The participating schools in the Bergen project carried out the national survey and the national campaign against bullying along with the rest of the Norwegian primary and secondary schools in the autumn of 1983. During the winter of 1984, Olweus and his research team offered meetings with the Bergen-schools giving feedback on the results from both the local Bergen-survey in 1983 and the nationwide survey in September 1983. Then, in May 1984 and May 1985, the participating Bergen-schools conducted the survey two more times.⁴³

Even though the Minister of Church Affairs and Education launched a nationwide campaign against bullying 1 October 1983, the campaign in itself was rather vague and confusing regarding responsibility for action.⁴⁴ This is also mirrored in the fact that the most important item in the campaign was a booklet for teachers, *Mobbing—bakgrunn og tiltak* [Bullying—background and action], by Olweus and Roland.⁴⁵ Here, a definition of bullying and research based knowledge on bullying was

42 Dan Olweus, "Personality and aggression" in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 1972, ed. J. K. Cole and D. D. Jensen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972); Dan Olweus, "Personality Factors and Aggression: With Special Reference to Violence Within the Peer Group," in *Determinants and Origins of Aggressive Behavior*, ed. Jan deWit and Willard W. Hartrup (The Hague: Mouton, 1974a); Dan Olweus, "Development of a multi-faceted aggression inventory for boys," in *Reports from the Institute of Psychology, University of Bergen, Norway*, no. 6 (1975). In 1976, Olweus was given the "Outstanding aggression research award" from the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA).

43 "Mobbeopprosjekt i Bergen: Tilbakemelding frå skulane," *Norsk skoleblad*, no. 35, 1985, 20–22. An important notice is that the survey did not follow the same individuals, but the same year/grade in each of the surveys.

44 Erling Roland, *Tre år senere: Langtidsvirkninger i Rogaland av KUD's landsomfattende aksjon mot mobbing* (Stavanger: Stavanger Lærarhøgskole, Senter for atferdsforskning, 1989).

45 Dan Olweus and Erling Roland, *Mobbing: Bakgrunn og tiltak* (Oslo: Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet, 1983).

presented along with general advice on preventive actions against bullying, such as defining school rules against bullying, organising helpmates for the youngest pupils, how to discuss bullying in classes and with the parents, roleplay, etc. Every Norwegian school received one copy of the booklet together with a leaflet for parents with information about bullying and a videotape showing everyday scenes of children being bullied. The latter was meant to function as start help for class discussions on bullying. In Sweden, the contents of this booklet was included in a book published in 1986, *Mobbning: Vad vi vet och vad vi kan göra* [Bullying: What we know and what we can do], where also the results from Olweus nationwide Norwegian survey and an additional study of about 17000 pupils in Sweden was reported.⁴⁶ This book was further revised in 1991 into his bestselling book *Mobbning i skolan: Vad vi vet och vad vi kan göra* (Norwegian edition was published in 1992 and the English edition *Bullying at School: What we know and what we can do* was published in 1993).⁴⁷

Olweus' findings from the surveys in Norway and Sweden were rather depressing. More than 83,000 children, or approx. 15 percent of all Norwegian pupils, were involved in bullying, either as victims or as bullies.⁴⁸ A similar frequency was reported from the Swedish study. However, Olweus compared his results from Norway and Sweden, and claimed that the problem was slightly larger and more serious in Swedish schools than in Norwegian. The number of pupils in Sweden that reported themselves as being a victim of bullying was higher (18 percent in Sweden compared to 13 percent in Norway), bullying situations occurred slightly more often and the numbers of pupils bullying teachers were somewhat higher in Sweden.⁴⁹

In 1988, Dan Olweus had finished his research study on the effects of the national campaign in 42 schools in Bergen, and this time he could present some good news. However vague the recommendations for action of the national campaign had been, Olweus' research showed around 50 percent reduction in reports of bullying, which was said to be an effect of the national campaign in 1983.⁵⁰ This astonishing result turned out to be an excellent starting point for further developing Olweus' ideas on preventive actions on bullying into a professional bullying prevention programme that requires expenses for its' users. Through the 1990s, the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, which Olweus developed together with the American psychologist Susan P. Limber, became evaluated and implemented in American schools.⁵¹ In Sweden, the programme was presented in the mid 1990s and became one of the most

46 Dan Olweus, *Mobbning: Vad vi vet och vad vi kan göra* (Stockholm: Liber Utbildningsförlaget, 1986).

47 Dan Olweus, *Mobbning i skolan: Vad vi vet och vad vi kan göra* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991a); Dan Olweus, *Mobbning i skolen: Hva vi vet og hva vi kan gjøre* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1992); Olweus (1993).

48 "Sjokkrapport," VG, December 15, 1984; "Oppsiktsvekkende rapport: En av syv elever i grunnskolen mobbes eller mobber," *Aftenposten*, December 17, 1984.

49 Olweus (1986), 21–22.

50 "Mobbing i skolen kan reduseres med enkle midler," *NTB Tekst*, April 13, 1988; "Mobbing i skolen sterkt redusert," *Aftenposten*, April 14, 1988; Dan Olweus, "Bully/Victim Problems Among Schoolchildren: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program," in *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, ed. D. J. Pepler and K. H. Rubin (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991b), 438.

51 Violence Prevention Works!

commonly used bullying prevention programmes.⁵² In Norwegian primary and secondary schools, the programme became implemented on an even larger scale, as all Norwegian schools since 2002 got a standing offer to use a prevention programme and the costs were split between the central government and the municipalities.⁵³ Even though the Norwegian government also supported another bullying prevention programme, *ZERO*, launched by Erling Roland (member of the national working group of 1983), there is no doubt that the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* was most successful internationally.⁵⁴

Bullying theory and the changing political and intellectual contexts

The described discussion in the 1970s and 1980s shows how the understanding of “mobbing” changed quite dramatically as the Olweus theorisation gained a hegemonic position in Sweden and Norway. Some features in the interpretations dominating the early debate by Heinemann as well as others—such as bullying understood as a group phenomenon, bullying as caused by the downsides of the modern industrial society or bullying as occurring in relation to a deviation in a person—were almost completely dismissed in Olweus’ scientific theory. Olweus instead explains bullying as mainly a matter of a combination of bullies and whipping boys with certain aggressive personality traits, traits that were formed by permissive caretakers and lack of love and care during upbringing. Olweus’ definition and interpretation of bullying was the one that became appreciated, used and transferred in scientific areas around the world, although it later would be modified to also include more social explanations, such as group pressure.

Now, how can we understand this process that ended up in a hegemonic position for Olweus’ interpretation of bullying primarily as a personality matter about aggression? We will now highlight a number of conditions that influenced the development.

In the 1980s, Olweus had received a solid academic base from which to claim authority. He had made comprehensive empirical studies on school children reported in widely read books. In addition, he published a huge number of articles and book chapters on the topic from the late 1970s and was incredibly active in the scientific community. He had a Swedish PhD, a Norwegian Chair at the University of Bergen and also academic merits from the United States. When the Norwegian government prepared to initiate the large anti-mobbing campaign in 1983, it was natural to engage Olweus in order to secure the campaign scientific credibility. Olweus had crit-

52 Skolverket, *Att förebygga, upptäcka och åtgärda mobbning* (Stockholm: Skolverket, 1994); Myndigheten för skolutveckling, *Olika lika värde: Om arbetet mot mobbning och kränkande behandling* (Stockholm: Myndigheten för skolutveckling 2003); Skolverket, *Utvärdering av metoder mot mobbning* (Stockholm: Skolverket 2011). These official evaluations all came to the conclusion that no single program was functional in every case. Olweus’ program, however, continued to be the most commonly used. Critique against bullying prevention programs in general has been quite loud in Sweden, see for example Gunilla Zackari and Fredrik Modigh, *Värdegrundsboken: Om samtal för demokrati i skolan* (Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 2000); Skolverket, *På tal om mobbning – och det som görs* (Stockholm: Skolverket, 2009).

53 Stortinget, skriftlige spørsmål og svar: “Skriftlig spørsmål fra Karita Bekkemellem (A) til utdannings- og forskningsministeren,” 27/11 2002, <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjon-er/Sporsmal/Skriftlige-sporsmal-og-svar/Skriftlig-sporsmal/?qid=25731>.

54 Boge (2016), 201–12.

icised the Norwegian government several times for not doing enough to combat fight bullying.⁵⁵ The serious events at the end of 1982 caused the politicians to form a united front with Olweus to fight bullying in Norwegian schools. Thus, Olweus' academic record was important, together with the traumatic events with the suicides of three young boys.

However, we also need to take the intellectual and political contexts of the period into consideration. When pupil violence became conceptualised as "mobbing," both Sweden (1962) and Norway (1969) had recently introduced a nine-year comprehensive school for all children. The number of years of schooling thus had increased, and every child, regardless of social class, scholastic aptitude or living conditions, was seen in school.

When "mobbing" was introduced as a problem and became discussed in the news media in the early 1970s, the Scandinavian intellectual climate was marked by radical political thinking and critical social science theories like critical sociology and group dynamics. In the school arena, where comprehensive schooling recently had become a reality, this was expressed as a focus on "soft skills" like cooperation, equality of rights and inclusion of pupils from minority groups or with disabilities. A related discourse based on John Bowlby's theory on maternal deprivation had been strong in Western Europe since the 1950s. This included Norway, but not Sweden who had not participated directly in the war. This discourse emphasised the vulnerability of children.⁵⁶ Heinemann's idea of "mobbing"—and even more the public debate it rendered—resembled this way of thinking. When Olweus introduced his idea about bullying in 1973, it did not fit in very well into the intellectual climate. Although he got a great deal of attention, his voice was only one among many, especially in the public debate, where Heinemann's lay theory seemed to gain much more support than Olweus' scientific theory.

Beginning in the 1970s, the discourse on "the vulnerable child" was gradually replaced by a new one focusing on children's competence and resilience, "the participating child."⁵⁷ It has been suggested that bullying became problematised in the intersection between these two discourses.⁵⁸ As public institutions embraced more children, public debate increasingly concerned children's public space and began asking for children's own voices.⁵⁹ At the end of the 1970s, there was also another noticeable shift in the public discussion concerning the school environment, as a new and broader critical debate concerning childhood and education politics arose in the wake of the political shift towards the right.⁶⁰ The radical progressive pedagogy

55 "Vi må få en lov mot mobbing," *Dagbladet*, August 30, 1980, "KUD og tiltak mot mobbing," *Dagbladet*, September 29, 1980.

56 Harald Thuen, *Om barnet: Oppdragelse, opplæring og omsorg gjennom historien* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2008), ch. 4; Karin Zetterqvist Nelson, "Når Bowlby kom till Sverige: Från motstånd till erkännande – anknytningsteori i Sverige 1950–2000," in *Barn, barndom och föräldraskap*, ed. Ann-Marie Markström, Maria Simonsson, Ingrid Söderlind and Eva Änggård (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2009).

57 Thuen (2008), 213–14.

58 Boge (2016), 38.

59 Jan Eivind Myhre, *Barndom i storbyen: Oppvekst i Oslo i velferdsstatens epoke* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1994); Larsson (2012).

60 Jan Morawski, *Mellan frihet och kontroll: Om läroplanskonstruktioner i svensk skola* (Örebro: Örebro universitet, 2010), 196–199; Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980).

that had dominated both Norwegian and Swedish school politics during the 1970s was challenged by more conservative educators who wanted a much stronger focus on knowledge, culture, tradition and raising standards of behaviour and discipline.⁶¹ This was in line with the international movement based on the American “Back to Basics,” emphasising the three R’s: reading, writing and (a)rithmetic.⁶² Both in Sweden and Norway, leading conservative politicians embraced this shift.⁶³ In Sweden, an organisation called “Kunskapsrörelsen” [The Knowledge Movement] was created as a protest against a school ideology that was perceived to target personality development more than knowledge.⁶⁴ In Norwegian media, there was a debate around an alleged “moral recession” in the upbringing and education of children.

In this intellectual and political climate of the 1980s, Olweus’ theory fit in much better. He also took an active part in the above-mentioned debate as one of the contributors to the anthology *Normkrise og oppdragelse* [Norm crisis and upbringing] from 1981, where the educators Alfred Oftedal Telhaug and Svein Egil Vestre analyse why Norway experienced a moral recession in the upbringing and education of children in the late 1970s.⁶⁵ In his article, Olweus discusses what causes an aggressive boy and why the number of aggressive boys had increased in the period from the 1960s to 1980.⁶⁶ As one of the factors explaining this increase, Olweus emphasises that parents were busier in 1980 compared to 1960, due to the entry of women into the labour market. Therefore more children spent their days in kindergartens or at day minders where the caretakers might be more indulgent towards aggressive behaviour compared to how their parents might be, as there are more children per adult in institutions compared to at home.⁶⁷ A final factor to explain the increase in aggressive boys was found in the anti-authoritarian attitude that had dominated Norwegian education since the 1970s, where focus had been on “soft skills.” To make up for this, Olweus speaks up for clearer limits for children, adults that deal with aggression and bullying, and negative sanctions in schools for unwanted behaviour. This article reveals that Olweus’ perspective on bullying easily corresponded to the ideology of the 1980s.⁶⁸ However, it also shows that also Olweus began to assign some influence to societal factors.

Accordingly, Olweus was a suitable choice for the Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs and Education when the crisis in 1983 arose, both because he had a strong academic position and because his ideas were in line with the prevalent way of thinking and political interest. Ultimately, in the early 1980s Olweus was probably the

61 Kim Gunnar Helsvik. “Norsk reformpedagogikk i historisk perspektiv,” *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, no. 2 (2004), 180; Henry Egidius. *Skola och utbildning i historiskt och internationellt perspektiv* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2001).

62 Margaret T. Morgan and Norman Robinson, “The Back to Basics Movement in Education,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 1, no. 2 (1976), 1.

63 Tore Austad, *En skole for alle* (Oslo: J. W. Cappelens Forlag, 1981), 52.

64 See for example *Äpplet: Tidsskrift för Kunskapsrörelsen*, which was published 1981–1991; Arne Hellén, *Skola på villovägar: 30 års skolpolitik* (Linköping: Förlaget Futurum, 2002).

65 Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, “Trenger skolen moralsk opprustning?,” in *Normkrise og oppdragelse*, ed. Alfred O. Telhaug and Svein Egil Vestre (Oslo: Didakta Forlag, 1981), 48–49.

66 Dan Olweus “Vad skapar aggressiva barn?” in *Normkrise og oppdragelse*, ed. Alfred O. Telhaug and Svein Egil Vestre (Oslo: Didakta Forlag, 1981), 68–69.

67 Olweus (1981), 70–72.

68 Nordgren (2009), 60.

world's leading researcher on bullying. However, we would like to highlight yet another circumstance, one that became clear in the 1990s and contributed to consolidate a strong national and international position for Olweus and his theories.

Bullying theory as technoscience

Beside the general suitability of Olweus' ideas on upbringing and education, his bullying theory showed—using the term of Pickstone—a certain technoscientific capacity as it became integrated in a prevention programme approved by the authorities. Olweus presented a plan for action that seemed feasible, quantitatively as well as economically. The preventive actions suggested in the booklet from 1983 were mostly based on common sense and stricter framework for unwanted behaviour, easy for the Norwegian politicians to agree on, all across the political landscape. In addition, it did not cost very much to implement, as it was an unpaid additional task put on the school leaders and teachers.

This became a win-win situation for the government and Dan Olweus. The campaign was reasonable and demonstrated political vigour, while Olweus was able to try out a preliminary version of both his questionnaire and programme on a large scale via the national campaign. The first professional version was developed for sale in 1986. As Olweus soon could report astonishingly high reduction in reported bullying behaviour due to the campaign, the willingness to use the programme increased and the American version was developed. As a key element of the programme, the *Olweus Bullying Questionnaire* is used before and during the programme period to reveal the prevalence and frequency of bullying. The results are reported back to Olweus and his partners, who thus get a base for further improving both the questionnaire and the intervention programme, and to do extensive evaluation research on both.⁶⁹ In sum, the spreading of the programme and the scientific development was highly intertwined processes and that led to huge benefits for both.

It is clear that Olweus' ideas and work through the governmental campaign and commercialisation process of the programme created a kind of industry around bullying prevention. Science, politics and commerce (including state-funded research institutes) were involved in this bullying industry and were highly dependent on each other in order to receive success in their respective fields. The researchers needed the data that the use of the programme generated to produce new scientific results, the politicians needed the credibility that cooperation with researchers offered and the schools needed the positive effects promised by the programme but also the symbolic gains that joining the programmes might give. We suggest terming this a “psychology-commercial complex,” in many ways similar to the military-industrial complex and the medico-industrial complex that Pickstone discusses.⁷⁰ The product of the “psychology-commercial complex” is in this case an intervention programme

69 See for example: Mona Solberg and Dan Olweus, “Prevalence Estimation of School Bullying With the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire,” *Aggressive Behavior* 29, no. 3 (2003); Olweus (1991b); Dan Olweus, “A Useful Evaluation Design, and Effects of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program,” *Psychology, Crime & Law* 11, no. 11 (2005); Dan Olweus and Susan P. Limber, *Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Bullying Prevention Program* (Boulder: Program Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 1999); Jan Helge Kallestad and Dan Olweus, “Predicting Teachers' and Schools' Implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: A Multilevel Study,” *Prevention and Treatment* 6, no. 1 (2003).

70 Pickstone (2001), 31.

for sale to schools in need. It seems likely that other cases within the “psychology-commercial complex” can be identified, for example IQ tests, personality tests, intervention programmes for addressing and/or changing workplace problems or more general behaviour problems, therapy programme or consulting or therapy services. As a result of our analysis, we mean that bullying theory represents a distinct way of knowing, characterised by the intimate ties between the bullying intervention programmes, the bullying research and politics. The success of bullying theory was built on this close connection.

Conclusion

In this article we have shown how violence among pupils became conceptualised as “mobbing” and how the term was coined, spread and redefined through a process in Swedish and Norwegian media and research. We have shown how bullying theory was developed and formed in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to contemporary political and intellectual movements and contextual factors. Based on analyses of both the Swedish and Norwegian contexts, we have highlighted that the initial problematisation of bullying created an intense media interest, that the suicide of the three young Norwegian boys in 1982 triggered preventive actions against bullying by the public authorities, that Olweus had academically qualifications in both countries (plus internationally) and his rivals were few and had less academically qualifications, that the intellectual climate changed in favour of the scientific ideology that Olweus embraced and that Olweus’ surveys showed alarming results and that his prevention programme seemed to be having positive impacts. We argue that these events and conditions were decisive for the way that bullying theory in the 1980s and 1990s developed towards applicability, usefulness and reliability. With its bearing on everyday bullying prevention work in schools, bullying theory became increasingly interwoven with political and commercial interests. Based on this we have argued that the result of this development of bullying theory with its connections to prevention programmes, political actions and commercialisation can be characterised and understood as a “psychology-commercial complex.”

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