

The Phenomenon of “Mocking”:

The Voices and Experiences of Boys in a Single-Sex School

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Abstract

This article describes both the impact of “mocking” behaviours affecting junior boys in a single-sex secondary school and the process adopted by the school to address this concern. Mocking is the term used by the students to describe a set of social practices which provide ways of sharing solidarity by making a joke of others and their differences from the norms of the group. Data was obtained through focus groups, surveys, classroom discussions and interviews with individuals. This initial data collection process enabled the researchers to gain some understanding of the phenomenon of mocking from the boys’ perspectives and experiences. Classroom discussions with boys and workshops with teachers provided relevant quantitative and qualitative questions for a survey to be implemented with all boys in years 7 to 10 (n = 439). Data was analysed by year level and ethnicity, including Samoan, Maori, Cook Island/Maori, Tongan, Niuean, New Zealand European and Other. In this article the experiences reported by boys are discussed in the following areas: (a) their perception and understanding of mocking; (b) their responses to being mocked; (c) their perceptions and experiences of teacher mocking, and (d) their ideas about ways in which the school could address the issue of mocking. Results indicated that mocking had a major impact on the mental health of boys who were victims of this behaviour. A follow-up questionnaire and discussion with boys and staff indicated that there was a decreased incidence of mocking behaviours following the implementation of a process designed to reduce this behaviour.

Introduction

Schools are important sites for the promotion of mental and emotional well-being in young people (Patton et al., 2000). School environments where young people felt they were safe, were treated fairly, were close to others and experienced themselves as part of the school have been identified by Resnick and colleagues (1997) as an important protective factor for young people’s mental health. Pransky (1991) has emphasised the critical importance of the behaviour modelled by teachers and school managers as

a determining factor as to what happens in schools and classrooms. Respectful behaviour among adults and young people has been identified as one of the essential factors that supports effective learning in young people (Bennett & Coggan, 1999; Pransky, 1991). It is readily acknowledged that when young people do not feel safe from physical harm or threats of physical harm, verbal abuse, harassment and racism they are more vulnerable to experiencing a range of physical and mental health concerns (King et al., 1996; Rigby, 1996; Sullivan, 2000).

National and international literature has indicated that providing safety for young people at school is a complex issue (Education Review Office, 2000; Patton et al., 2000; Rigby, 1996; Sullivan, 2000). Physical and psychological violence such as threats, isolation and name-calling take place in school settings from early childhood to adolescence. These forms of violence occur in all schools regardless of the socio-economic status and gender of the students and the geographical location of the school. They are most intense during middle childhood and early adolescence (Adair, 1999; Sullivan, 2000). The Education Review Office (ERO) has identified that when students feel unsafe in their school surroundings their ability to socialise and learn effectively is adversely affected (ERO, 2000). Furthermore, the effects of bullying and victimisation on student mental health include loss of self-esteem, social isolation, depression, somatic complaints, absenteeism, insecurity, feeling afraid, anger, shame, hurt, sadness, disempowerment, ugliness and uselessness (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 1996).

Over the last ten years the ERO has assembled a body of evidence with a range of safety concerns that include bullying, classroom and playground violence, weak complaints policies, students' lack of voice on safety issues, inappropriate adult language and physical demeanour, or attitudes conveying tolerance of rudeness and petty violence (ERO, 2000). Internationally, student safety has also come under scrutiny. In a study involving ten countries the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (1997) concluded that violence occurred at a high rate in developing countries, with serious impact upon education and society.

In a survey of over 4000 Aotearoa/New Zealand secondary school students in the Mental Health Foundation's 'Mentally Healthy Schools' initiative, by far the most common form of self-reported violence was verbal teasing and harassment (Bennett & Coggan, 1999). Adair (1999), in a study of school bullying in Aotearoa/New Zealand carried out with 2066 upper North Island secondary school students, found that 75% of respondents had been bullied and almost half reported that they had bullied others at some time during their schooling. Given the endemic nature of bullying in schools, the ERO has raised concerns relating to school policy and procedures to address this

form of behaviour. During 1999, of the 642 schools reported on by the ERO, almost one in five had failed to develop school policy or guidelines on managing and reporting suspected child abuse; more than one in ten schools had failed to develop policies and procedures for preventing sexual and other forms of harassment, and approximately five percent of schools failed to effectively manage student behaviour regarding bullying or to eliminate the abuse of students by teachers. The ERO also reported that one in ten boards of trustees had not given parents and students the “voice” or “choice” in providing feedback to the school in relation to emotional safety. Therefore these schools were unable to ensure the emotional safety of their students (ERO, 2000). These findings have highlighted the need for schools to address the issue of the safety of students while at school.

Current school safety legislation in Aotearoa/New Zealand includes the following Acts and Regulations: (a) The Health and Safety Employment Act 1992, which requires employers to take steps to ensure the safety of staff while at work, and (b) the National Administration Guidelines (NAG) 5, which require school boards of trustees to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students and comply with current legislation to ensure the safety of students and employees (ERO, 2000). Therefore efforts by schools to address the complex issue of bullying and violence need to involve shared awareness and determination by all members of the school community in defining issues and planning interventions.

The issue

Mocking is a form of hurting someone emotionally, saying things that are meant to hurt the other person. (Year 10 boy)

Mocking humour is a form of social interaction in which people align themselves with a social norm by zeroing in on some feature of the target person(s) which unfavourably differs from that norm. This is done in a joking manner, which can range from congenial gentle teasing to humiliating and scornful ridicule. The underlying purposes of mocking humour are to address or correct differences from group norms and to share solidarity with the community of those holding the norms (Wolf, 2002). Such humour could be enacted in ways that are healthy or unhealthy, inclusive or exclusive.

In recent years, the phenomenon of “mocking” has become an issue of concern for the school described in this study. “Mocking” was the common term used by students of all age levels and cultures within the school to refer to the derisory practices adopted by significant numbers of current students. The school is an integrated Catholic boys school with a predominantly Pacific Island population. School management and

the pastoral care team had become increasingly concerned with verbal and physical effects of mocking behaviour. They were also concerned about the negative impact of mocking on the ethos and climate of the school. Considerable time was being spent on disciplinary procedures and anger management programmes.

Given that the majority of students are Samoan, the school consulted pastors and matai to find out their opinion of "mocking" behaviour. Their understanding was that verbal humour and teasing were normal, healthy aspects of traditional Samoan (fa'a Samoa) social interaction. Their advice was not to become overly concerned about robust teasing between Samoan youth as it was an appropriate cultural practice.

But somehow the social practices among the school's students differed significantly from fa'a Samoa practices. Humorous cultural practices used in their own cultural context among adults, with the full richness and cultural capital of tradition, language and social expertise, were turning out to be cruelly harsh imitations when used by Pacific Island students in the different cultural context of a school with few Pacific Island teachers. Without the number of Pacific Island teachers modelling appropriate humorous behaviour and monitoring proper boundaries, teasing among Pacific Island students could become unsafe. This meant that appropriate practices steeped in tradition and internal to a specific culture were affected by other influences in a multi-cultural context.

Old boys of the college who were proud of their school were distressed about the negativity of much of the verbal teasing between current students. This included a Samoan old boy who visited the college weekly as a youth worker and was very aware of the hurt experienced by recipients of this ridiculing teasing. These ex-students were concerned that many current students were adopting behaviours modelled on some American television programmes, in which characters deride each other and their families. The perception of these ex-students was that too many boys were copying the mannerisms of characters in such programmes and adopting such mannerisms among themselves in quite inappropriate ways. For example, jokes about mothers made on these programmes would never be acceptable within students' families.

The school counsellor was concerned at the number of referrals and self-referrals involving emotional distress, anger, symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation as a result of boys being repeatedly mocked. A number of these boys represented minority ethnic groups. In particular, Maori boys appeared to be most at risk.

As a pastoral care response, a professional development workshop for staff was held to raise awareness of mental health concerns for boys. The school counsellor and head of health facilitated the workshop, with input from the Mental Health Foundation. As a result, school management made a commitment to a two-year project to address

mocking. The Ministry of Health provided funding. The school adopted the *Draft Mentally Healthy Schools Guidelines* (Dickinson, 1999) to develop a whole school plan to address mocking. The plan, titled “Improving the mental health of our students”, consisted of the following five key areas.

1. Staff, which comprised the whole staff, and specifically the leadership team, and the harassment committee. A range of strategies were developed, including on-going staff awareness, professional development and procedures for reporting mocking behaviour.
2. Students, which comprised school leaders who were trained in ways in which they could be active in supporting students who were experiencing mocking, peer support, support for Maori students and pastoral care work with individual students.
3. Curriculum, which included the development of modules in Religious Education and Health Education that focused on knowledge and understanding of the issue, respectful communication, and helping and help-seeking.
4. Parents/caregivers, which comprised raising awareness about the project, consultation with parent representatives and regular communication through newsletters on progress and strategies.
5. Other agencies, which included regular contact with local youth services and involvement of the school’s regular youth worker to support small groups of boys and individuals who were either mocking and/or being mocked.

The whole school plan clearly defined timeframes for implementation of the various strategies over a two-year period.

In the following sections of this article the key findings from the survey conducted at the beginning of the first year of the project, and the follow-up survey conducted one year later to determine the impact of the school-wide approach, are presented. As well, the process undertaken by the school and the development of on-going strategies to address mocking behaviour are discussed.

Method

In order to gain more understanding of the “mocking phenomenon” the researchers conducted two focus groups with 12 senior boys who were invited by the school counsellor on the premise that they could provide “expert” accounts of their perceptions and personal experiences of mocking behaviours. The researchers had little knowledge of this issue and adopted the stance of “not knowing” (Reichelt & Sveass, 1994) whereby the researchers avoid the role of the expert and acknowledge that they do not

necessarily have knowledge of the issue. Individual in-depth interviews were also conducted with three boys accessed via the school counsellor. These boys provided richly descriptive accounts of their personal experiences of being mocked.

The findings from the focus groups and interviews informed the development of a draft questionnaire. The boys involved in the focus groups and the interviews also assisted with the development of the questionnaire. Five senior health education classes were randomly selected to provide feedback on the draft questionnaire to ensure that questions on all aspects of the topic had been included and that the questions could clearly be seen to provide the information required. This process, according to McLeod (1994), aims to ensure that a questionnaire possesses face and content validity. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions and covered the areas of demographics; the nature and context of mocking, and the impact of mocking. Results of the survey were fed back to students and staff, and over a two-year period a programme of change was implemented.

Results

All boys from four year levels (years 7 to 10) completed the questionnaire during an allocated period of class time. Parents/caregivers and students were provided with information about the project and given the opportunity to withdraw their consent. There were no withdrawals, and all students who attended school on the day it was administered completed the questionnaire. Those absent were followed up so that all boys ($n = 439$) from the four year levels were able to complete the questionnaire.

Ethnic groups involved were Samoan (65%), Tongan (9%), New Zealand European (8%), Maori (7%), Cook Island/Maori (3%), Niuean (2%) and Other (6%). The findings presented reflect the understandings, perceptions, experiences and responses of junior boys towards mocking. Quantitative data were tabulated, summarised and graphed using Excel. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted utilising the stages of analysis recommended by McCleod (1994). This involved reading the material to assimilate meaning; systematically working through the data and assigning coding categories; deciding which categories were recurring, and making sense of the data.

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that mocking had a significant impact on the mental and emotional well-being of those young people who were recipients of this kind of behaviour. Nearly all boys (95%) reported that they had been mocked in the previous three months and 60% defined themselves as being emotionally hurt as a result of being frequently mocked.

Key themes

A number of key themes emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data.

Personal meanings of mocking

Boys were asked to describe their understanding of mocking. Across all year levels, boys described mocking as verbal fight which had an extremely powerful effect on their emotions. Their comments included:

A type of fighting but not with your fists, it is with your mouth. (Year 7)

A dark side of my life. I use mocking as my protector. Mocking puts other people down. It's when you say mean things to others. (Year 8)

Bad, it is the worst verbal argument between people in my opinion. They involve parents, family members, teachers, anything that will hurt the other person. (Year 10)

The nature of mocking

Across all year levels, boys described the mocking of parents and other family members as worse than any other subject to be mocked. Their comments included:

I think a physical disadvantage your mother or father has really hurts. (Year 10)

Your mother's looks and your father's job. (Year 10)

A recurring and somewhat disturbing theme was mocking that referred to a dead family member:

They mocked my sister who died at the age of seven. (Year 9)

My uncle, because he is dead. (Year 10)

Across all year levels the issue of how people look, particularly if it was considered to be different in any way from what boys perceived to be the “norm”, was subject to hurtful mocking:

They sometimes mock your face, like if you are Chinese, they will mock you for that. (Year 7)

They mock me because I have big lips, they mock my brother because he has eczema. (Year 7)

If you have black skin, they will call you the shadow man. (Year 9)

The way you talk, especially if you are low in English. (Year 7)

My language speaking, the food I bring, my culture. (Year 8)

Impact of mocking on different ethnic groups

Maori, Tongan and Pakeha/European boys were most affected by being mocked. In particular they were more likely than the majority Samoan population to report that others disliked them most of the time (Figure 1). Maori and Pakeha/European boys were more likely than other ethnic groups to report that they felt not cared for most of the time (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Percentage of boys by ethnicity who felt disliked most of the time

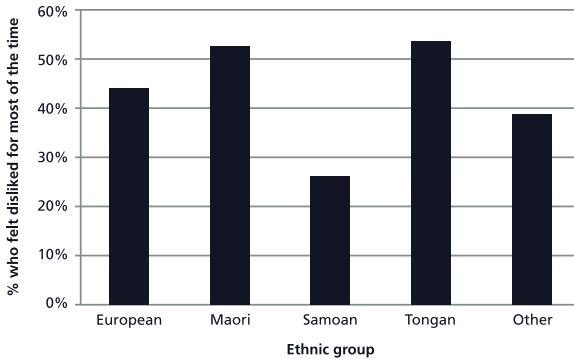
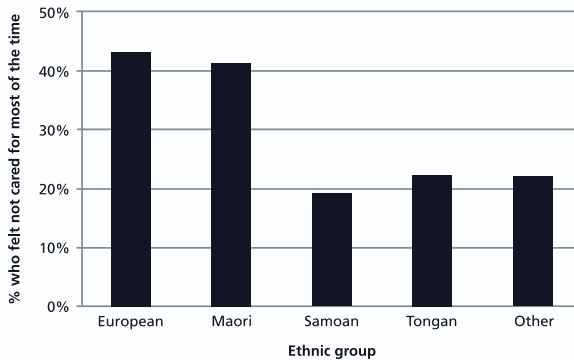


Figure 2: Percentage of boys by ethnicity who felt not cared for



Feelings experienced by boys who were frequently mocked

Table I indicates that boys who were mocked most or all of the time (95%) experienced a range of feelings. The feelings scale itemised 21 responses which the boys rated on a scale of 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (most of the time) or 4 (always). The percen-

tages represent the responses of those boys who experienced a specific feeling most of the time or always (Table 1). The boys could indicate more than one item on the feelings scale.

Table 1: Impact on the feelings of boys who were frequently mocked

54%	Get easily annoyed
50%	Get mad and feel like they might lose control
49%	Wished they had more respect for themselves
41%	Could handle personal problems
40%	Felt sad
33%	Felt like people dislike them
31%	Felt stressed out
28%	Felt depressed
25%	Felt useless
25%	Felt lonely
23%	Felt like nobody cares about them
22%	Get bothered by bad or frightening thoughts
21%	Get really worried most of the time
18%	Felt hopeless about their lives

Across all year levels the most common responses the boys used to describe their feelings included: sadness, anger, heartbroken, depressed, lonely, nervous, useless, low in self-esteem, shamed and left out. The following comments represent the intensity of feelings experienced:

The pain will go down your heart and you think you can get it away but you can't. (Year 7)

I felt angry, hurt, like smashing them, crying, putdown, and like committing suicide. (Year 10)

I always hurt and my heart is always in two. (Year 8)

I lose my self-esteem dramatically. I feel sad, hurt, and emotionally scarred. (Year 10)

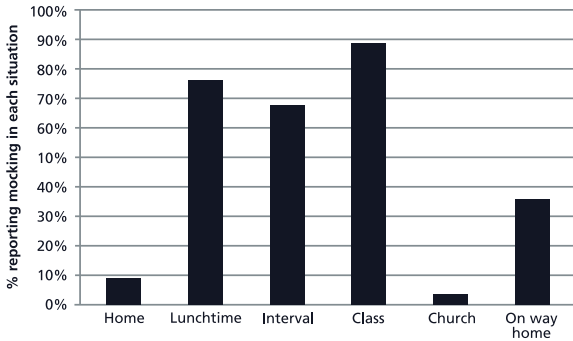
Feel utterly full of despair and a lack to cope with civilisation. (Year 10)

Agonising pain inside. (Year 10)

Situations where mocking happens

Mocking emerged as primarily a school-based activity that was most prevalent in the classroom and during interval and lunchtime (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Mocking situations – all boys



What boys do when they are mocked

There were three themes relating to what boys do when they are mocked.

1. Ignore and walk away.

Just walk away from them. (Year 7)

I avoid them and try and control my anger. (Year 8)

I am a small person so I usually walk away and I laugh it off. (Year 9)

2. Engage in physical fighting.

I get angry and punch them. (Year 7)

I stand and hook them or hit them in rugby or just don't be their friend and beat him after school. (Year 8)

Smash their face. (Year 9)

3. Mock back.

Mock them until they cry. (Year 9)

Say something about their appearance. (Year 8)

Across all year levels, reporting mocking to a teacher was rarely mentioned and was only likely to occur if other strategies had not worked.

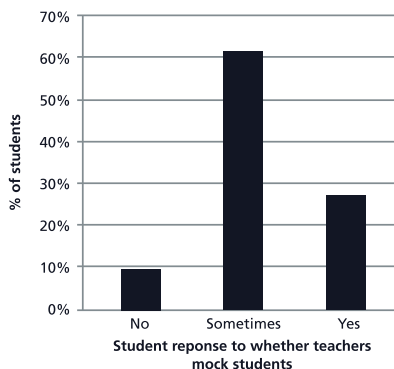
I would mock them back and then I might tell a teacher. (Year 10)

Fight them and then tell the principal or a teacher. (Year 10)

Teacher mocking of boys

The majority of boys (90%) reported that teachers do mock students (Figure 4.) This was stated as sometimes (60%) or a definitive “yes” (28%) that teachers do mock students. Ten percent of students had not experienced teacher mocking.

Figure 4: Percentage of boys who reported teacher mocking



This survey revealed clear evidence that mocking is a behaviour engaged in not only by students, but also by teachers. Boys who reported that teachers mock described the nature of the mocking behaviour and how they felt about being mocked by a teacher. Generally, teachers’ comments tended to be sarcastic and focused on singling out particular physical features, or were put-downs about school performance.

Go outside, you come from the dog pound. (Year 9)

They talk about your weight and they say how could you have not heard with ears like that. (Year 8)

Picking on me, ignoring me when I need help and making me feel dumb. (Year 9)

Boys who had been mocked by a teacher reported that they felt angry, hurt, ashamed, stressed and helpless.

I feel hurt because I thought they are meant to teach us and care for us. (Year 8)

I feel like I am going to burst with swearing at them and mocking them back. (Year 9)

Ashamed because the whole class or school laughs. (Year 8)

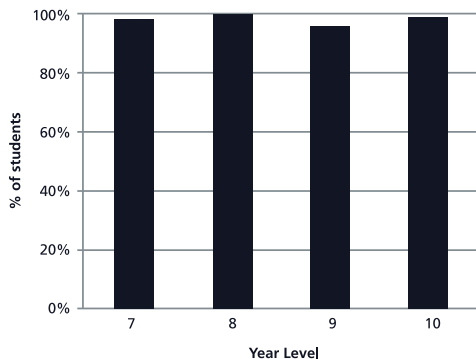
I feel helpless. No one is on my side. If the students mock and teachers mock, then who have you got? (Year 9)

Impact of the whole-school approach to addressing the issue of mocking

The purpose of the follow-up questionnaire, implemented one year later with all 389 students from years 7 to 10, was to evaluate the impact of the whole-school approach. This approach included professional development for staff, the development of a system of reporting mocking behaviour, involvement of senior students in leadership roles, and the development of an anti-mocking teaching module that focused on interpersonal relationships and social skills within the Religious Education curriculum. Of particular significance for this whole-school approach were timetabled class discussions about mocking, which resulted in boys developing posters and key messages. These mental health promotion resources generated by the boys were displayed in every classroom and in other prominent places around the school. To further promote help-seeking, all boys were provided with individual bookmarks with information on how to cope with mocking behaviours. Suggested coping strategies focused on ways of helping themselves and others. Boys were also acknowledged in school assemblies for helping others.

In this second questionnaire there was a high level of awareness of the school-wide approach to reduce mocking. The boys were asked to state "Yes" or "No" to the question, "Have you seen a poster about mocking around the school?" If their response was "Yes", they were asked to write down the message on the poster. Most of the boys reported that they had seen the poster and the key messages displayed throughout the school (Figure 5). Furthermore, 27% of boys perceived that there was a decrease in mocking within the school environment.

Figure 5: Percentage of boys who had seen the mocking poster



Boys were also invited through class discussions to provide additional ideas about what needed to happen in the school to reduce mocking. Their ideas included:

Teachers need to walk out into the playground and really notice what is going on.

If someone mocks we should tell a teacher.

More posters, more slogans, talks and assemblies.

All of us need to stop.

Elders should be an example, but they mock as well.

Stop mocking by being friendly.

Changes in mocking behaviour after two years

The success of the whole-school approach to reducing the incidence of mocking was reflected in evidence that general awareness-raising had reached the boys, and that help-seeking in relation to mocking behaviour had increased. Over one-quarter (27%) of the boys reported a perceived decrease in mocking behaviours within the school. There was little variation between year levels.

As a result of this two-year project significant progress has been made in reducing the negative impact of mocking behaviour within the culture of the school. In contrast to the results of the initial questionnaire, the qualitative responses to the question “What would you do if you were being mocked?” indicated that seeking help from adults in the school was a help-seeking option that had increased significantly. In the first questionnaire there were only six responses to qualitative questions that stated that students would seek help from a teacher. In the second questionnaire, approximately one-third of the students stated in their responses to qualitative questions that they would talk to a teacher, dean, counsellor or senior school leader.

Walk away and tell a teacher. (Year 8)

Told a leader. (Year 9)

While in the first questionnaire many boys reported that they would use physical responses if they were experiencing mocking, overall this emphasis on a physical form of retaliation appeared to have diminished. In the second questionnaire they were more likely to help others and to tell a teacher if someone else was experiencing mocking.

Tell your teacher or talk to someone. (Year 8)

Go with them and report it to the nearest teacher. (Year 9)

Discussions with teaching staff, the school counsellor and senior managers indicated that reported and recorded incidents related to mocking had reduced.

We are not dealing with so many fights over mocking as we used to.

Mocking behaviour has definitely reduced.

We have clearer processes for dealing with mocking now.

While mocking by teachers was perceived by students to be a significant issue in the initial questionnaire, with over two-thirds of students indicating that teachers mocked, in the second questionnaire half of the students surveyed perceived that there was less mocking by teachers.

The teachers seem to notice when people are mocking. (Year 10)

Talking about mocking has been good – the teacher doesn’t mock us in a bad way anymore. (Year 9)

Boys have also accessed some staff members to report incidents of mocking on the part of the teachers.

I went and told the teacher about Mr [teacher] ... something was said and the teacher stopped mocking me. (Year 9)

The boys have responded positively in terms of active helping and help-seeking. From data collected and recorded by the school counsellor there was an increase in self-referrals from boys experiencing mocking. The school counsellor also referred to the value of having a visual resource to give the boys.

The book mark is excellent. When I see students who have been mocking others I talk through the information on the bookmark with them.

Deans and other staff have also stated that the bookmark was “a useful resource for everyone. We have the information at our fingertips.” Having highlighted the issue of mocking and the impact of this behaviour on mental health, the school counsellor commented that the resources developed would be an integral part of on-going practice and that the school would continue to “work on promoting a climate of respect and care for others”.

Discussion

The key findings of the present study are that mocking was a significant issue for students in this school, and that ethnic minorities were particularly vulnerable to being mocked. Mocking on the part of teachers, not just fellow students, was of

concern to the boys. The school-wide approach implemented as a result of the findings of the initial survey generated a decrease in reported mocking behaviour and alternative ways for boys to access support if they or their peers were experiencing mocking behaviour.

The impact of mocking on the mental health status of boys in the current study supports similar research findings related to bullying and violence in schools (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 1996). While most boys in the current study experienced some degree of mental health distress as a result of being mocked, by far the most affected were minority groups. Maori and Pakeha/European boys experienced higher levels of distress than the majority Pacific Island ethnic groupings. These findings are similar to international studies regarding the impact of racism on minority groups (Mellor, 1990; Rigby & Slee, 1993). It could be inferred that minority groups in the school setting feel less safe than members of the majority groups and are therefore in need of more focused and culturally appropriate approaches in support of their mental and emotional well-being.

In contrast to Mellor's (1990) research, the present study found that mocking more frequently occurred in the classroom than in the playground. One possible explanation for this difference is that teacher mocking in classrooms implicitly models this behaviour which is then adopted by the boys. This issue requires further exploration. The reported experiences of mocking by teachers were similar to evidence provided by the Education Review Office (2000) that inappropriate adult language and attitudes reinforce a school-wide climate of tolerance for rudeness and petty violence. The stories told by the boys in the current study clearly indicated their need for positive and respectful adult role models. As signalled by Pransky (1991), students' behaviours seem to rise and fall in accordance with the behaviour modelled by school managers and teachers. Data from the Mentally Healthy Schools evaluation has indicated that having respectful teachers is an important factor for students in schools (Bennett & Coggan, 1999).

The school-wide approach adopted in the current project reflects recommendations in the literature that the provision of safety for young people in schools requires multi-layered strategies that involve all members of the school community (Patton et al., 2000; Rigby, 1996; Sullivan, 2000; Wyn et al., 2000). In particular, the involvement of young people in the development of programmes has been identified by Pransky (1991) as a key factor in motivating young people to create positive change. The data collection process in the current project, which involved individual interviews, focus groups and whole-class discussions, was empowering for the boys from the onset. This consultative process continued throughout the duration of the project and provided

the boys with opportunities to be actively involved in the development of strategies and resources to reduce mocking.

In particular, it is important to highlight the coping strategies employed by the boys who experienced mocking prior to the implementation of the whole-school approach and the changes that occurred as a result of this approach. Initially, the boys were encouraged to "ignore mocking and walk away", rather than engage in physical forms of retaliation. Clearly, the data from the initial survey indicated that boys who experienced mocking had to a large extent internalised their anger and hurt, and/or had retaliated physically and verbally. The strategy of "ignoring and walking away" had not facilitated the boys to access support from adults in the school. Frydenberg has suggested that young people need help to focus on what they can do and the resources they have that will enable them to become better able to deal with life circumstances that will facilitate physical, mental and emotional well-being, rather than be debilitated by such circumstances (Frydenberg, 1997; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1999). As part of the whole-school approach, the students were able to learn a wider range of positive coping skills that enabled them to actively seek help for themselves and their peers.

Conclusion

The major limitation of this project was that it was located within one school in which the school population was predominantly Pacific Island boys, therefore the findings cannot be assumed to represent the general population of young people in secondary schools throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. Further research is needed before broad generalisations can be drawn. However, this is an example of research that can be usefully undertaken to address issues arising in a particular school and community context.

It is important to acknowledge the strengths of the whole-school approach adopted by this school to address mocking. Key strategies developed were: (1) professional development for all staff to raise their awareness of classroom-based mocking and the part that students and teachers play in this, and addressing the need for teachers to be positive role models for young people; (2) promoting a school climate of "telling" so that boys who are mocked or observe others being mocked feel safe to tell; (3) developing policy and procedures that provide clear and consistent messages and actions that boys and their teachers perceive to be fair and just in addressing mocking behaviour; (4) involving all boys in the school in learning about the negative impact of mocking on mental and emotional well-being, and (5) enabling the boys to participate in the development of mental health promotion strategies to address and reduce mocking. These efforts support current school safety legislation in Aotearoa/New

Zealand that requires school employers to provide a safe physical and emotional environment (ERO, 2000).

It is the intention of the managers and counsellor at this school to continue to promote a climate of respect and care for others, and they are hopeful that the word “mocking” and the use of this as a way of hurting others will eventually be a rarely used term and behaviour. They did not view this as a one-off project but as an on-going commitment to providing a safe school environment. As part of a whole-school approach, the role of the school counsellor has been pivotal to the success of this project. The counsellor took a proactive and leading role in staff development, speaking at assemblies, and clearly indicating that support was available for students and staff. The consultative model which fully involved the boys in the process has been empowering for the students in this school, and has enabled them to begin to cast aside a form of behaviour that was detrimental to their mental and emotional well-being.

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