

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN CHILDREN'S STORYBOOKS AND THEIR IMPLICATION IN BULLYING BEHAVIOURS

JAMES LOVELL AND DAMIEN W. RIGGS*

Introduction

Australian media reports in the past two years have raised considerable concern over serious incidents of bullying amongst school children. For example, Carr-Gregg (2007) reports on the case of Benjamin Cox, an 18-year old who was awarded one million dollars compensation for the "pain and suffering he endured as a result of years of harassment at school" (1). In another bullying case that received considerable media attention, a mobile phone video of a student being beaten and dragged along the ground by other students was distributed over the internet (Martin 2007). The footage clearly showed a group of students making no effort to intervene, and merely looking on as the victim was being attacked. In a similar incident, a student was filmed being forced upside down into a wheelie bin while a large number of onlooking students jeered and yelled abuse (Martin 2007). Incidents such as these have raised concerns as to the nature and extent of bullying in Australian schools, leading to calls for action directed at curbing such behaviour (Morrison 2006; Patrick et al. 2005). In response to these incidents, then Prime Minister John Howard suggested that schools themselves should be more accountable for bullying behaviour (Carr-Gregg 2007).

In a 2000 publication, Rigby suggested that one in seven Australian school children have experienced bullying at least once a week and suffered psychologically as a result. More recently, Healey (2005) suggested a higher incidence rate of one in five children, and that the experience of victimisation in schools can produce psychological sequelae

comparable to those endured by victims of child abuse. Rigby usefully defines bullying not simply as the repeated oppression (either physical or psychological) of one individual by at least one other individual, but that such oppression functions through power differentials between those who experience and those who enact bullying. Understood in this way, bullying is not simply a case of children “not getting along”, but rather is a practice of social exclusion whereby particular individuals as members of (typically dominant) social groups utilise their capacity as dominant group members to oppress others or deny their right to full participation in social spaces. Research findings would certainly suggest that differences between social groups in relation to gender, sexuality, race, class and religion underpin the bullying that some socially marginalised school children experience at the hands of dominant group children (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). Differences between individual children (and the social value accorded to these differences) are thus at the heart of bullying as a form of social exclusion.

Importantly, it is not only adults who have raised concern about the prevalence of bullying in schools. Children themselves continue to express concern over experiences of bullying in schools. For example, the Australian Kids Helpline reports that bullying is one of the top three concerns that children aged between five and fourteen speak of when calling the helpline for support. Rigby (1997) also reports on findings from surveys conducted with 26,000 Australian school children, in which they spoke of their experiences of bullying. In his findings on bullying in schools, Ribgy highlights not only the individual implications for those who are subjected to bullying (such as absenteeism, suicidal ideation, and general feelings of unwellness), but also the active role that children believe they can play in combating bullying.

Addressing issues of bullying within schools requires a range of approaches that focus on the reasons why children engage in bullying behaviours, the power differentials between differing groups of children, and also the ways in which school environments can challenge cultures of bullying. All of these approaches require asking the question: from where might children develop the idea that bullying behaviour is acceptable? One way to answer this question, as will be the focus of this chapter, is to look at particular sites within schools where peer interactions are represented to children in ways that render bullying intelligible as a potential means of engaging with individual differences. It will be argued that one of these particular sites is the children’s storybook.

A social constructionist approach to understanding children’s experiences suggests that culturally specific ideas are made available to

children in the many forms of information they are exposed to, and that these directly affect how children structure and understand their experience (Burr 2003). From such a perspective, the enactment of bullying as exclusionary behaviour amongst children could be considered the product of ideas that have become available to them through both the broader Australian culture and through Australian school cultures more specifically. Children's storybooks are of particular significance in this process, not only because they are fundamental to the learning of language, but also because they work within particular ideological systems and thus help to maintain particular dominant cultural values and positions (Bradford 2001).

In relation to dominant constructions of difference within Australia, difference is typically represented as that which diverges from the norm of the white, heterosexual, able-bodied (or physically fit), middle-class male who subscribes to either a secular or Christian view of the world. As a result, when reference is made to "diverse cultures", this is typically taken as referring to non-white, or non-heterosexual, or non-secular/non-Christian cultures. When these types of assumptions about what constitutes "difference" or "diversity" constitute the dominant accounts made available to children, they learn to see the world through this normative lens (Riggs and Augoustinos 2007). This has negative implications not only for those children located outside of the normative categories listed above (in that it perpetuates the construction of their lived experiences as justifiably marginalised), but for the ways in which it limits the capacity of dominant group children to understand both their own location within a diverse range of cultural groups and the ways in which they benefit from their privileged position (Howarth 2007). Whilst it is sometimes assumed that talking to children about discrimination, privilege, and categories of difference will lead to an increased disposition toward engaging in anti-social behaviour, research findings would suggest otherwise (Aboud and Doyle 1996). As such, examining the spaces in schools in which group differences are talked about—such as school books—and the potential failure of such spaces to actively challenge particular constructions of difference, may represent one avenue through which schools can challenge how dominant constructions of difference may be seen to legitimate bullying behaviour.

In the remainder of this chapter we first outline some of the current research that seeks to understand the role that children's literature plays in providing particular world views to children, and we then apply this to examine a sample of children's storybooks that we suggest may be seen as complicit in the construction of what are deemed "normal" and

“abnormal” forms of identity. Such constructions, we suggest, may be drawn on by children not only in their developing ideas about “self” and “other”, but may also serve as an imperative to bullying as a form of exclusionary behaviour. It will be suggested that bullying may well be seen as acceptable to some children because such behaviours have been discursively presented as a natural consequence of the “difference” of those people who experience socially marginalisation. In doing so, we suggest that the depiction of bullying contained within these books presents marginalised group members as responsible for resisting their excluded status by proving their value or usefulness according to norms specified by the dominant group.

Previous research on children’s literature

As social constructionist analyses of identities continue to highlight, language is central to the ways in which we understand, and indeed construct, our selves. While the learning of language is integral to participation in the social world, it is also central to the transmission of cultural knowledge about social relations. Although much research has been directed towards the promotion of children’s language learning (for example, Kuo et al. 2004; Tomopoulos et al. 2007), the issues concerning what else children learn through language have received considerably less attention. This is a matter of concern given that, as Burman (1994) suggests: “the very forms and variety of the language children learn to talk encode structural meanings about the world they inhabit” (134).

Bradford (2001) suggests that books written for children work within particular ideological systems, and that they thus can support or resist dominant cultural values. She explains that the ideological nature of children’s books often goes unrecognised by child and adult readers alike as they “embody ideas and concepts [that are] naturalized within a culture” (Bradford 2001, 3). Bradford goes on to suggest that dominant ideologies are evident in children’s books in the ways they: 1) address child readers; 2) position children to have a preference for one character over another; and 3) condition children to approve of certain behaviours but not others. In addition to the particular forms of language used in children’s storybooks, those containing pictures invite children to construct meaning from both the text and the visual context (Parkes 1998). This combination of text and illustrations creates highly detailed and powerful images of characters in particular roles. These images may then lead to particular views of individuals, as well as groups of people, being adopted by the child reader (Mendoza and Reese 2002).

Burman (1994) argues that children's storybooks are fundamental to the process of identity construction. Whilst it may be widely believed that the narratives provided in children's storybooks reflect children's "natural" development, Burman contends that they actually function to organise it. She voices her support for analyses of the type presented in this chapter by asserting that "the process of delineating and commenting on [the discourses present in children's storybooks] is part of the process of dismantling the power of this apparatus for the construction of subjects by which we are disciplined and constituted" (1994, 188). Importantly, Burman suggests that while children are active agents in the construction of their identities and the world of meaning that surrounds their identities, they are also very much influenced by the discourses present in the social spaces in which they move, such as in the educational environment.

Finally, Dockett and her colleagues (2007) assert that if we are to take children's concerns about the nature and extent of bullying and exclusionary behaviour in Australian schools seriously, and to respond to these in ways that facilitate positive experiences at school, we would do well to consider the potential of children's picture storybooks as tools through which to challenge negative stereotypical images and interactions. Indeed, this consideration is made more compelling if we are to acknowledge that the education system itself actively encourages children to engage in the process of identity construction through their early reading practices that develop within and around children's picture storybooks.

Data and method

The analysis that follows employs thematic analysis in order to examine the presentation of realities and meanings, experiences and understandings, and to consider these as effects of the range of discourses operating within society more broadly. Thematic analysis is a method typically used for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79) within the data set. It involves minimal organisation, focusing instead on the task of describing the topical aspects of the data set in rich detail. In this way, thematic analysis looks beyond the semantic content of the data to "examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun and Clarke, 84). This process of thematic analysis is used to analyse the potentially problematic representations of exclusionary behaviour, and the potentially problematic representations of marginalised group member's subjectivities that are

commonly utilised in children's picture storybooks. Importantly, such an analysis does not seek to deconstruct the truth claims these children's picture storybooks make in order to then posit more accurate truths in their place. Rather, this analysis will identify broad themes across the corpus of data, and provide specific examples in order to connect these themes to the political and social implications of particular representations of difference.

Through thematic analysis, three broad themes and two sub-themes were identified across a corpus of children's picture storybooks (n=20), and which are exemplified here by ten particular books (see Table 8-1 for a summary of the data set). The three broad themes are: 1) the "natural exclusion of difference" (n=20) which focuses on the common depiction of exclusion as a natural consequence of what is constructed as "difference"; 2) the "locus of difference" (n=18) which focuses on the common depiction of the marginalised group member as the only site of "difference"; and 3) the "benefits of difference" (n=19) which focuses on the benefits that "difference" is depicted as bringing. Within this third theme there were two sub-themes identified, which emphasised 1) difference as only accidentally valuable (n=5), and 2) difference as being intentionally valuable (n=14). For each theme and sub-theme, examples are presented from two particular children's picture storybooks, with information provided as to the broad contours of the book itself (such as the narrative and the imagery used). It is important to note that these themes are not mutually exclusive to individual books and that some children's picture storybooks include a number of these themes within their narrative.

The corpus of books was sourced through an online search of the Reception to Year Two reading list provided by the South Australian Premier's Reading Challenge for 2006. The website <http://www.premiersreadingchallenge.sa.edu.au> was used to develop a list of children's picture storybooks potentially focusing on difference and exclusion. The 10 books analysed below were chosen for their representativeness of each particular theme. However, it should be noted that almost all of the books (n=17) across the entire corpus were representative of the three broad themes, in addition to at least one of the two sub-themes. It is important to note that whilst the list of storybooks included as part of the Premier's Reading Challenge does include books that are specifically targeted at challenging bullying behaviour, these are not included in this analysis as the focus is upon generalist books and the ways in which they construct categories of difference.

It is important to note that whilst the purpose of a thematic analysis is not to claim that the themes identified are exhaustive, the books represented

here are nonetheless indicative of broader trends within a significant proportion of children's picture storybooks on the Premier's Reading Challenge list for this age group. This is evidenced by the fact that some of the books analysed here are reported as being in the top 10 books read by children as part of the Challenge for the years 2005 and 2006 (again, see Table 8-1). That these books are popular amongst children would suggest not only the ubiquitous nature of the particular narratives found within these books, but also their intelligibility to both children and educators alike. Finally, it should also be noted that two deviant cases were identified, which contained alternative themes that also pertained to the research topic of representations of difference. These alternative themes provide us with examples of how particular understandings of difference and exclusionary behaviour, and the possible identity categories that are presented as being available to marginalised and dominant group members, may be represented in potentially less problematic ways.

Analysis

The following analysis expands on the main points made thus far—that while children are active agents in the construction of their identities and the world of meaning that surrounds their identities, their experiences are nonetheless very much shaped by the forms of intelligibility available to them, forms that we may see present in children's picture storybooks. More specifically, such books circulate in and through a range of discourses that render exclusionary and bullying behaviour intelligible to children as an acceptable means of engaging in peer relations. This analysis will examine specific examples of how difference is represented, and how exclusionary and bullying behaviour is accounted for within children's picture storybooks. This analysis thus asks two primary questions: 1) how do the discourses present in these books function to warrant certain understandings of difference; and 2) what may be the implications of these discourses for how children understand both themselves and the world around them.

Theme 1: "Natural exclusion of difference"

The first theme identified presents exclusionary behaviour as a natural reaction of dominant group members to what is constructed as the marginalised group member's "difference". The "natural exclusion of difference" theme insinuates that excluding someone on the basis of what is deemed to be "their" difference is not only acceptable, but that it is

normal, and that therefore it is a common and reasonable way for dominant group members to engage in peer relations. In this light, marginalised group members are thus presented as undeserving of any empathy or sympathy for their excluded status.

The first book in which this theme appeared—*Baby Boomsticks*—provides the tale of a baby boy (Baby Boomsticks) whose size is depicted as making him different to the other people in his village: Baby Boomsticks is the only character in the book who is very large—larger than adults, even larger than houses. All of the other characters are depicted as “naturally” reacting with fear to Baby Boomsticks’ size. As a result, Baby Boomsticks is depicted as unhappy: “Baby Boomsticks had no friends. The teeny-tiny villagers were afraid to let their teeny-tiny babies play with such a big baby” (Wilde and Legge 2003, 11). Here the text is supplemented with an illustration of Baby Boomsticks appearing alone and sad as he watches the dominant group characters playing together happily. He is not included or consoled by any of the dominant group characters; rather the dominant group children are kept away from Baby Boomsticks because of their parents’ fear of his difference. Furthermore, at no stage do any of the dominant group characters appear to feel sorry for the psychological suffering Baby Boomsticks experiences as a result of his excluded status. Here, the idea that Baby Boomsticks would be excluded on the basis of his difference is presented as normal. Thus, the exclusionary behaviour that the dominant group characters engage in is presented as a natural consequence of Baby Boomsticks’ difference. Furthermore, as Baby Boomsticks is presented as deserving of his excluded status, he is by implication presented as undeserving of any empathy or sympathy for his position.

The second example of the “natural exclusion of difference” theme appears in the book *Silverskin*. This book follows the growth of Liasis, a young snake who is depicted as different to her brothers and sisters on the basis of the colour of her scales. Liasis is the only snake in the book that is depicted as different. All of her brothers and sisters are coloured and patterned whereas Liasis is albino and therefore pale in appearance. The story begins with the hatching of a nest of snake eggs. Liasis’ siblings immediately band together as a dominant group and exclude her on the basis of her difference: “‘Look at her!’ sneered the twelve patterned little pythons. ‘She is so very, very pale! Is she really one of us?’”(Kuchling 2002, 4) Here the text is supplemented with an illustration of Liasis slithering away from her brothers and sisters. Liasis is not consoled or included by any of her dominant group family members. In this case, as well, the idea that Liasis would be excluded on the basis of her difference

is presented as normal. Thus exclusion is again presented as a natural consequence of the marginalised group member's difference. In addition, Liasis is again presented as deserving of her position and thus she is, by implication, presented as undeserving of any empathy or sympathy for her excluded status.

Theme 2: "Locus of difference"

The second theme identified presents marginalised group members as the only site of what is constructed as "difference". Such a construction ignores diversity across and within groups in its focus solely on marginalised group members as being "different"—dominant group members are not presented as being equally diverse, or as being a part of a diverse range of all beings.

This theme is well illustrated by the book *The Rainbow Fish*, which follows the life of "Rainbow Fish", a fingerling whose scales are depicted as being different from those of the dominant group, in that he is the only fish with unique or "special scales" (Pfister 1992, 8). This focus on Rainbow Fish's "special scales" does not encourage young readers to recognise a range of characters that have many different scales types—all of the dominant group fish have scales that differ from one another (in colour and size for example), but these differences are not remarked upon. Only Rainbow Fish has what are deemed to be "special scales". Thus, Rainbow Fish is depicted as the only site of difference.

Another example of the "locus of difference" theme appears in the book *Bad Buster*. This book follows the life of Buster, a child whose behaviour is depicted as different to his dominant group peers. Buster is the only child whose behaviour is deemed to be "bad" (Laguna and Hobbs 2003, 1). Readers are not presented with a range of child characters that engage in varying levels of good and bad behaviour. None of the dominant group characters are shown to engage in "bad" behaviour and thus they are all deemed to be, and are depicted as, "good" in the context of the narrative. Thus, in this case (as in *The Rainbow Fish*) the marginalised group member is depicted as the only site of difference.

Theme 3: "Benefits of difference"

The third theme identified presents "difference" as something to be respected and appreciated if and when it proves useful to dominant group members. This theme suggests that the inclusion of an out-group member is determined on the basis of their value or usefulness to the in-group.

Thus, it is presented as normal that dominant group members would exclude people because of their supposed lack of value or utility. This theme was further informed by the constructions of those who are excluded as responsible for proving themselves valuable according to the norms specified by the excluders.

The quintessential example of this theme can be found in the book *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. This well known narrative follows the exclusion and eventual inclusion of Rudolph, a young reindeer whose bright red nose makes him different from his dominant group peers. For most of the story Rudolph's difference is not useful to the dominant group reindeer, therefore his difference is not valuable to them and so he is excluded and even directly ridiculed by them. "The other reindeer laughed at Rudolph and called him names. 'Ha-ha! Look at Red Nose!' they said. When the other reindeer played snow slide, they never asked Rudolph to play with them" (Daly and Jancar 1972, 4-5). However, as the night becomes darker the dominant group reindeer and Santa need the light from Rudolph's nose to show them the way while they deliver Christmas presents. Rudolph's difference becomes useful to his dominant group peers as it helps to solve the problem posed to all by the darkness. Rudolph's difference thus becomes valuable to the dominant group, and so he is accepted and included by them. "Rudolph held his head high. The other reindeer helped put on his harness and bells" (Daly and Jancar 1972, 24). Here the text is supplemented by an illustration of Rudolph smiling brightly as the majority group reindeer help him with his sleigh harness. It is interesting to note that Rudolph is presented as grateful for the inclusion he is offered on these terms. In this way it is presented as better to be included on any terms than to not be included at all or to risk challenging the terms on which the inclusion is premised.

Another example of the "benefits of difference" theme appears in the book *The Trouble with Mum*. This book follows the home and school life of the protagonist, a young boy whose Mum is depicted as different in the ways that she appears to be, and behaves as, a witch. Initially what is constructed as Mum's "difference" is not useful to the dominant group adult characters, therefore her difference is not valuable to them, and so she is excluded by them. This exclusionary behaviour on the part of the dominant group adult characters is then extended to the protagonist, as they forbid their children from spending time with him or his Mum. Thus, the dominant group child characters are encouraged to exclude the protagonist and his Mum on the basis of their parent's disdain for what is presented as Mum's difference. However, when a fire threatens to burn down the school, what is depicted as Mum's difference allows her to save

the dominant group children's lives by harnessing rain clouds to her broomstick and flying them over the school. Thus Mum's "difference" becomes useful to the dominant group adults, and so her difference is valued by them, and so she and her son are accepted and included by them—as the protagonist remarks at the end of the book: "They couldn't thank her enough. Now we all go wild at my house" (Cole 1985, 27-28).

Whilst the two examples discussed above demonstrate the typical ways in which difference was constructed as potentially beneficial, the following two sections focus on two distinct sub-themes in relation to the "benefits of difference", in which difference is depicted as either "accidentally" beneficial (which attributes little agency to the marginalised individual in the story), or intentionally beneficial, which accords at least some degree of agency to the marginalised individual.

Sub-theme 1: "Difference valuable by accident"

In the first sub-themes of the "benefits of difference" theme, we see that one of the ways in which those who are marginalised are represented as having some utility is by accident—that the marginalised character accidentally does something of value to or for the dominant group. In cases such as these the marginalised group member is therefore represented more as a victim of fate than as an agentic individual.

This first sub-theme is well illustrated by the book *Willy the Champ*, which follows the exclusion and eventual inclusion of Willy, a young gorilla whose size and (what is depicted as his) athletic inability makes him different from the majority group gorillas. Willy is excluded by his majority group peers until he accidentally defeats "Buster Nose"—the local bully—in a fight: when Buster physically threatens Willy, Willy instinctively ducks the punch that Buster throws. Upon standing back up again Willy accidentally head butts Buster in the chin, causing him to retreat. In so doing, Willy proves himself, by accident, as valuable to his dominant group peers. Willy is thus presented as more of an accidental hero, or a victim of fate, rather than an agentic individual.

Another example of the "difference valuable by accident" sub-theme appears in the book *Derek the Dinosaur*. This book follows the life of Derek, an isolated dinosaur whose mild behaviour makes him different from the more aggressive dominant group dinosaurs. Derek is excluded, or not included, by the dominant group dinosaurs because while they are "savagely" and "frightening" like "real dinosaurs", Derek is meek and mild and prefers "sitting and knitting" (Blackwood and Argent 1987, 3-5). Derek's exclusion continues until the weather turns colder and all the

garments Derek has knitted in his years of exile are of use to his dominant group peers. Thus, as in the case of *Willy the Champ*, the victim of exclusion unintentionally or accidentally proves himself valuable to the dominant group members. Derek's behaviour allows him to unintentionally help his dominant group peers to weather the cold, and thus his difference is presented as useful only when he accidentally helps his fellow dinosaurs. Like Willy above, Derek is presented as more of an accidental hero, or a casualty of fate, rather than an agentic individual.

Sub-theme 2: "Difference valuable by intention"

The second sub-theme also extends the notion that the marginalised group member must prove themselves valuable to those who exclude them in order to alter their excluded status. As opposed to the previous sub-theme, this theme was expressed through the common presentation of the marginalised group member as someone who intentionally proves themselves valuable to the excluders. In cases such as these, the marginalised group member is therefore depicted as a somewhat more agentic individual.

This sub-theme is well illustrated by the book *Giraffes Can't Dance*, which follows the experiences of Gerald, a giraffe whose inability to dance positions him as different from the jungle animals that are presented as his dominant group peers. After Gerald has been excluded by his majority group peers, he perseveres in his attempts to learn how to dance. Eventually he is successful in his attempts. Via the direction of a cricket, Gerald learns how to dance and is considered valuable according to the norms specified by his dominant group peers. Gerald is thus represented as a victim of exclusion who intentionally proves himself valuable to his excluders. It is important to note that Gerald's acceptance is nonetheless gained only because of his ability to prove his "non-difference", not because his difference is acceptable in its own right. In addition, while Gerald is represented as an agentic individual, it is important to note that he is also depicted as requiring the guidance of another who knows better.

Another example of the "difference valuable by intention" sub-theme appears in the book *The Lazy Beaver*. This book focuses on a young beaver by the name of Bertram whose work ethic, which is presented as being less active than his peers, is seen as different from the other beavers in the narrative. Bertram is threatened with exclusion by the dominant group beavers because of what is deemed his laziness: "There's no room in a beaver colony for a lazy good-for-nothing. You will have to choose—work like the rest of us or leave Beaver Bay for good" (Gallo and Samsa

1983, 21). After Bertram is threatened with exclusion he intentionally makes an effort to work long and hard like his dominant group peers. He achieves this goal via the direction of "Uncle Frederick", another beaver in the colony, and comes to be considered valuable according to the norms specified by the dominant group beavers. In the case of this book we thus see the marginalised individual depicted as one who intentionally proves himself valuable to the dominant group members. Again, it is important to note that Bertram's acceptance is gained only by virtue of his willingness to prove his "non-difference", and not because his difference is acceptable in its own right. Like Gerald above, although Bertram is depicted as an agentic individual, it is important to note that he is also presented as requiring the guidance of another who knows better.

Deviant cases

In the context of this analysis, "deviant cases" were identified by virtue of the *positive* ways they managed to account for differences amongst groups of people or animals (in the sense that they deviated from the norm of *negative* representations of what was constructed as difference). The deviant case books provide us with examples of how particular understandings of difference, and the potential identity categories that are made available to children, may be presented in less problematic ways. These alternative themes may be more likely to encourage children to engage not only with the diverse experiences of those other than themselves, but also to consider themselves as diverse, and to consider this diversity as inherently valuable.

The first deviant case identified appears in the book *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale* which follows the relationship between a group of fish and a whale. In this book all of the fish characters are depicted as possessing some difference or uniqueness. Each of the fish has a unique or "special scale"—"except for one little striped fish, but he belonged to the group anyway" (Pfister 2005, 1). This particular understanding of difference as something that is common to all, by implication, suggests that excluding or bullying someone on the basis of their difference is not normal or acceptable. In this way, differences are constructed as features that are common to all people, and thus differences of any type are depicted as not necessarily warranting exclusion.

The most beneficial aspect of this particular understanding of difference is that it supports the idea that diversity is something common to all human beings. The focus on each fish's scales as being different encourages all people to consider their own points of difference, thus

discouraging them from considering anyone different to themselves as deviant, perverse or immoral. In this way, the alternative understanding of difference presented in *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale* affirms diversity amongst all people whilst not overburdening diversity with a signficatory value that ascribes categories of normality or deviance. This alternative conception of difference encourages dominant group members to consider themselves as diverse, but also as capable of excluding others. Drawing attention to the roles dominant group members (and dominant group values and beliefs) play in exclusion is an important element in the task of challenging unequal power relations, and one that is important to address in childhood education. At the end of *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale* the privileged in-group members (the fish) are made aware of how their misguided beliefs led to the unnecessary exclusion of an out-group member (the whale—who they eventually befriend). In this way the fish are able to see themselves as members of a dominant group and understand the power and privileges this membership affords them. This is a necessary realisation for dominant group members to come to before they can actually be accountable for privilege and attempt to engage with its consequences.

The second deviant case identified appears in the book *My Gran's Different*. In this book, as in *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale*, all of the characters are presented as different or unique. The narrative itself is comprised of a series of descriptions as to the individual differences the protagonist recognises within a range of grandparent characters. Throughout the narrative the protagonist remarks upon a point of difference about each grandparent character. Indeed, the entire narrative adheres to the pattern presented by the following example: “Jonty’s granny catches the train to footy every week ... But my gran’s different. Raffie’s nonna drives a florist van ... But my gran’s different ... Alex’s nanna knits all weekend ... But my gran’s different” (Lawson and Magerl 2003, 5-12). At the conclusion of this book the protagonist explains how his gran is different, while simultaneously affirming his unconditional acceptance of, and love for, her. “Because my gran is different. She can’t remember who she is. But that’s all right, because I remember who she is” (22-25). Most importantly, the protagonist does not ascribe any value or significance to the differences he remarks upon. Indeed, all his descriptions of the differences between the grandparent characters are bereft of any superlative adjectives. As a result, the protagonist’s descriptions are not presented as the basis for any sort of comparison, and thus the differences he recognises are not subject to any sort of judgement or evaluation—none of the differences are deemed to be better or worse.

Rather, all of them are simply deemed to exist. Thus, in this book differences are constructed as features that are common to all human beings. This alternative understanding of diversity is beneficial in that it confirms the existence of differences in all people.

These deviant cases are included here by virtue of the fact that they account for difference in less problematic ways than those described by the previous themes. These alternative understandings of diversity may encourage children to consider themselves (and all human beings) as not only diverse, but also as valuable because of the potential that is inherent in the many different possible combinations of qualities they may possess. In this way, the alternative understandings of diversity presented in the deviant cases may encourage a sense of respect and appreciation for difference in its own right; indeed, they may in turn support a perspective which holds every individual as equally important and valuable in their own unique way. In affirming respect for diversity amongst all people, these understandings of difference, by implication, support the idea that excluding or bullying people on the basis of any perceived differences is wrong. Those who may exclude are thus encouraged to ask themselves how they would feel if they were excluded, by virtue of the idea that they must consider themselves as similar to those who may experience exclusion. Importantly, however, the understandings of diversity included in both *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale* and *My Gran's Different* do not deny the existence of differences, nor do they reify categories of difference as signifying hierarchical differences: rather they locate all differences between individuals on a continuum where having 'more' or 'less' of a particular attribute does not locate an individual as 'better' or 'worse'. Rather, differences between individuals are respected as constitutive of what makes them unique as human beings in a relational context.

Discussion

The preceding analysis identified six potentially problematic ways in which representations of difference appeared within children's picture storybooks. These were: 1) "difference" as a category was used to refer primarily to people that were depicted as being outside the norm—the dominant group is thus constructed as the norm from which minority group member's deviate; 2) "difference" was only welcomed if and when it proved to be of value or utility to the dominant group—marginalised group members are thus only included if they have something deemed of worth to offer dominant group members; 3) this presentation of exclusionary

behaviour as acceptable operates in conjunction with broader societal power imbalances to normalise the idea that marginalised group members are responsible for proving themselves valuable according to the norms specified by dominant group members; 4) engaging in exclusionary and bullying behaviours was presented, to dominant group members in particular, as a normal way of being in the world—in this way it is “taken for granted that people will discriminate against people from groups different to their own” (Riggs and Augoustinos 2007, 9); 5) the dichotomy of normality and abnormality worked in conjunction with the presentation of exclusionary and bullying behaviours to express and legitimate the idea that dominant group members can engage in such behaviours without moving outside the limits of “normality”; and 6) the potential identity categories that are presented as being available do not generate opportunities for children who experience marginalisation to challenge the terms on which inclusion is offered—marginalised group members are presented with intelligible forms of identity that offer minimal agency, or identity categories that possess little agency outside of the direction they are provided by those who are deemed to know better.

In addition to these highly problematic modes of representation, there were other topical aspects of the data set that were found to be remarkable. Foremost amongst these was the presentation of inclusion as desirable regardless of the terms on which it was premised. In some cases it was presented as best to be included on any terms, rather than to be not included at all, or to risk challenging the premises of inclusion that are specified by the dominant group. In many cases inclusion was actually gained via the marginalised group member’s capacity to establish their “non-difference”, rather than through the dominant group member’s recognition of the value inherent in diversity. Indeed, this chapter supports any alternative understanding of difference that might encourage all children to consider themselves as part of the diverse range of all human beings. At the same time, however, we are mindful of the fact that it would be disingenuous to propose that we are all the same simply because we are all human. In actuality, one’s subjectivity and experiences are very much constructed as mattering according to one’s relationship to certain social and cultural norms. Moreover, it is important to recognise that “difference” is at times a desirable attribute for particular groups of people—living in ways that challenge social norms or which refute the negative values accorded to particular groups has often constituted the core values of minority groups that are in some way critical of dominant social groups. Given the diverse ways in which “difference” is lived, used

and celebrated, it is therefore important that representations of difference reflect this diversity in children's picture storybooks.

In contrast to the normative ways in which difference was presented across the majority of books, the analysis of deviant cases revealed an alternative conception of difference, one which affirms diversity amongst all people without overburdening diversity with a signficatory value that proscribes categories of normality or deviance. This supports Hepburn's (1997) suggestion that "if we want to raise educational standards, rather than produce a docile population who feel it is inappropriate to express criticism, then we need to challenge the discourses and strategies which organise the current status quo in our schools" (30). In this regard, the deviant cases highlight an understanding of difference that encourages those who engage in acts of exclusion to consider themselves as not only diverse, but also capable (as dominant groups members) of excluding other people. Exploring ways in which to draw dominant group children's attention to their own role in exclusion, whilst refraining from doing so in ways that evoke guilt or blame, is an important task for educators attempting to challenge unequal power relations: as previously mentioned, dominant group members must be able to see themselves as members of a dominant group (with its attendant privileges) before they can actually be accountable for privilege and attempt to engage with its consequences.

Following on from the findings presented in relation to the deviant cases, we would argue for a renegotiation of how children's experiences are understood, and how their practices of sociality are conceptualised and interpreted; we would propose that such a renegotiation is a fundamental aspect of any inquiry that seeks to rethink and represent categories of difference in less problematic ways. It thus would appear vital to propose that the categories of normality and difference presented in the majority of the books comprising the data set are grossly insufficient for the purpose of describing and affirming the very diverse range of forms human beings may take. These categories present an understanding of difference in which only marginalised group members are seen as "different". As explained previously, such constructions of difference contain within them a construction of "normality", which is most often concealed while it provides structure to the narrative around notions of sameness and differences. However, any adequate critique of normative binaries must entail an examination not only of the problematic status of the normal/different dichotomy, but also of the wider range of binary constructions that influence how children are researched and understood.

It is important to note in regard to normative binaries and the construction of difference within the books that particular aspects of

individuals are drawn attention to within the books that are deemed worthy of bullying or social exclusion. Whilst the books analysed were aimed at young children, and often evoked fantastical images of people or fish doing things they would not typically do (that is, dinosaurs knitting, or babies being bigger than houses), they nonetheless reference aspects of difference that may be mapped over onto the bodies of “real people”. As such, the storybooks direct children’s attention towards aspects of interpersonal difference that are constructed as noteworthy. These include the abilities of individuals (for example, *Giraffes Can’t Dance*), the colour of their skin (for example, *Silverskin*, *The Rainbow Fish*), their size (for example, *Baby Boomsticks*), their beliefs or spiritual practices (for example, *The Trouble with Mum*), and their general appearance (for example, *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*). Thus it would be a misreading to state that because these are “simply” children’s storybooks that do not generally reference “real people”, they are unlikely to shape how children view differences between people. Rather, we would suggest that books such as these are central to the ways in which children are schooled to see difference, and to see it as mattering.

This point about how we understand the “learning of difference” holds important implications for how we research both dominant and marginalised groups of people. In regards to the former, the problematic assumption that dominant groups are internally homogenous may represent a lack of understanding as to the multiple ways in which people identify themselves as members of a range of groups. With regards to the latter, the assumption that marginalised group members are internally homogenous and always victims of oppression is also problematic. Certainly it has always been the case that marginalised group members intentionally resist dominant group values and beliefs; and it is also the case that many marginalised group members will refuse to identify themselves as victims. Any analysis of identities and difference must therefore attempt to explore the unique and complex configurations of difference that exist amongst all people. Indeed, as Walkerdine (1999) proposes, an interrogation of the discourses affecting development in the formative years may enable us to approach the complexities of explanation and intervention in childhood in a way which avoids the potential pitfalls inherent to the comfortable certainties of categories of normality and pathology.

In critiquing normative understandings of difference, this chapter has provided an account of how constructions of difference and normative binaries can influence our understandings of particular groups of people. In the process it has been suggested that there is a need to shift the focus of

research in the areas of constructions of difference and bullying. By adopting a theorisation of difference that is critical rather than normative, this chapter has explored how power imbalances function to marginalise and discipline those who do not conform to dominant group values. It has been argued that representativeness in this type of research may only be achieved through “a rethinking of how we conduct [such] research, and the questions that we ask of ourselves and the communities we engage with” (Riggs and Augoustinos 2007, 92). As such, this chapter has highlighted the need to address the issues that potentially limit research on difference and bullying with its focus primarily upon the actions of children or adults, and its accompanying failure to provide a sustained examination of other sites where children may learn ways of conducting themselves within the world. Whilst the answers to these limitations are not simple, it is important to recognise that accurate and meaningful answers are less likely while we adhere to research agendas that maintain a focus upon minority groups without equally focusing on the role dominant groups play in perpetuating the power imbalances that function to marginalise and discipline those who do not conform to dominant group values.

Table 8-1 Summary of corpus of children's picture storybooks examined in analysis

Title	Author	Publication Details	Broad Themes	Sub-theme	No. of readers in 2005 & 2006
<i>Baby Boomsticks</i>	Wilde & Legg	Sydney: ABC Books 2003	1, 2 & 3	2	68
<i>Silverskin</i>	Kuchling	Crawley: U of Western Australia 2002	1, 2 & 3	2	65
<i>The Rainbow Fish</i>	Pfister	New York: North-South Books 1992	1, 2 & 3	2	247 (top 10 books for 2005 and 2006)
<i>Bad Buster</i>	Laguna & Hobbs	Camberwell: Penguin Books 2003	1, 2 & 3	2	<30
<i>Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer</i>	Daly & Jancar	New York: Western 1972	1, 2 & 3	2	<25
<i>The Trouble with Mum</i>	Cole	London: Heinemann 1985	1, 2 & 3	2	74
<i>Willy the Champ</i>	Browne	London: Heinemann 1985	1, 2 & 3	1	147 (top 10 books for 2005)
<i>Willy the Wizard</i>	Browne	London: Julie MacRae Books 1995	1, 2 & 3	2	21
<i>Derek the Dinosaur</i>	Blackwood & Argent	Adelaide: Omnibus Books 1987	1, 2 & 3	1	<25
<i>Giraffes Can't Dance</i>	Andreae & Parker-Rees	London: Orchard Books 2002	1, 2 & 3	2	173 (top 10 books for 2005 & 2006)
<i>The Lazy Beaver</i>	Gallo & Samsa	Italy: William Collins 1983.	1, 2 & 3	2	<25

Table 8-1 (continued)
Summary of corpus of children's picture storybooks examined in analysis

Title	Author	Publication Details	Broad Themes	Sub-theme	No. of readers in 2005 & 2006
<i>India the Showstopper</i>	Argent	Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin 2005	1, 2 & 3	2	<11
<i>What a Goat!</i>	Oliver & Cox	Norwood: Omnibus 2003	1, 2 & 3	1	<25
<i>Bill's Best Day</i>	Laguna & McLean	Norwood: Omnibus 2002	1, 2 & 3	2	<25
<i>Fit for a Prince</i>	Kroll & Hatcher	Norwood: Omnibus 2001	1, 2 & 3	1	<25
<i>Michael</i>	Bradman & Ross	New York: Anderson Press 1990	1, 2 & 3	2	<25
<i>The Emperor and the Kite</i>	Yolen & Young	New York: Paperstar 1998	1, 2 & 3	2	<25
<i>Little Pierre</i>	San Souci & Cutrow	New York: Harcourt 2003	1 & 3	2	<25
<i>Marty and Mei-Ling</i>	Cummings	Milsons Point: Random 1995	1 & 3	1	37
<i>Horrible Harriet</i>	Hobbs	Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin 2001	1 & 2	None	<25
<i>My Gran's Different</i>	Lawson	New Jersey: Simply Read Books 2005	Deviant Case		55
<i>Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale</i>	Marcus Pfister	New York: North-South Books 1998	Deviant Case		125

*—Data refers to a study involving a representative sample of 30 South Australian schools, which were surveyed by the Premier's Reading Challenge. Assuming that this sample is representative of the wider population of 718 schools that actually participated in the Challenge, the numbers presented here can be taken to represent approximately 4% of the actual number of students that read each book.