Georgiou (2008a), in a study of 252 Greek Cypriot children and their mothers, concluded that maternal responsiveness was negatively related to bullying, while overprotective mothering was associated with a high degree of victimisation. In a study with 377 Greek Cypriot children (mean age 11.6 years), Georgiou (2008b) reported that permissive mothers had children with the highest mean scores on victimisation, compared with neglectful, authoritarian or authoritative mothers. In a sample of Swedish boys aged 13 and 16, Olweus (1993b) found that a child's weak temperament predicted overprotectiveness in mothers, which in turn predicted victimisation. He also found that the father's negativism predicted a lack of identification with the father, which in turn predicted victimisation. Overall, Olweus (1993b) argued that a sensitive boy who was overprotected by his mother or who had a critical and distant father was most likely to become a victim of bullying.

Other family factors that have been related to bullying include large family size, parental maltreatment and parental depression. Ma (2001) found that children from larger families were more likely to become bullies than victims. Georgiou (2008a) reported that maternal depressiveness was positively related to both bullying and victimisation. Curtner-Smith (2000) discovered that maternal anger and maternal depression were positively related to bullying (for boys only). In a study comparing maltreated with non-maltreated children, Shields and Cicchetti (2001) showed that children who were maltreated by caregivers were more likely to bully others and to experience victimisation by peers. They also found that gender did not moderate these findings, in that maltreated boys and girls appeared to be at similar risk for bullying and victimisation.

Theories of bullying

Several theoretical perspectives have been proposed – and, more rarely, tested – in order to explain bullying (in particular) and victimisation (more rarely); see Monks *et al.* (2009). Previous theoretical frameworks have placed emphasis both on cognitive processes (e.g. social information processing theory, theory of mind) and social mechanisms (e.g. social dominance theory, family systems theory). These will be presented next. Wherever possible, brief references to existing research supporting these perspectives will be made. It should be noted that there is currently no *general theory of bullying or victimisation* that has been specifically developed. Instead, the theories so far are based on transferring the framework of existing theoretical models (of aggression, delinquency and, even, crime) to the context of school bullying.

The social information processing theory (SIP), originally developed by Dodge (1986) and redefined by Crick and Dodge (1994), suggests that aggressive individuals select a negative behavioural response in social situations (e.g. responding aggressively, fighting back, etc.) because of their poor ability to process social information accurately. In line with the general concept of the social skills deficit model, aggressive children suffer from hostile attributional biases. They tend to interpret ambiguous situations in an aggressive way (e.g. attributing hostile intent to other individuals) more

than their non-aggressive counterparts because of social cognition deficits in sequential stages of processing social information. Previous research on aggressive behaviour has provided support for this model (e.g. Dodge *et al.* 1990).

An attempt was made to transfer the social skills deficit model to the context of school bullying (e.g. Boulton and Smith 1994; Slee 1993), and this was supported by several studies (e.g. Camodeca *et al.* 2003; Losel *et al.* 2007). Existing research within this framework suggests that social cognitive deficits are the outcome of environmental influences (e.g. McKeough *et al.* 1994), whereby children who are exposed to neglect within the family are likely to develop cognitive models of human relationships that are not healthy and are conducive to bullying.

In agreement with the postulates of SIP theory, Perry *et al.* (2001) have proposed the 'Family-Relational Schema Model' in order to explain victimisation by peers. Based on their theoretical schema, children represent family experiences in the form of 'relational schemas' (or 'cognitive structures') that they carry with them into peer interactions and that contribute to their victimisation by peers. Under certain circumstances, 'these cognitive structures and associated scripts are activated and serve to guide social perception and behaviour' (Perry *et al.* 2001: 87).

The view of the bully as an 'oaf' child has been challenged by the 'theory of mind' approach. Theory of mind (ToM), the biggest rival to the social skills deficit model, is a theoretical perspective that has changed 'the toddler from a literal observer of human behaviour to a folk psychologist, capable of making complex mental-state attributions, engaging in elaborate social and communicative games, and even deception' (Slaughter and Repacholi 2003: 1). 'Theory of mind' refers to the ability of an individual to predict and explain the behaviour and feelings of others by reference to mental states like beliefs, desires and perceptions (Astington 1993).

Social information processing theory and theory of mind could be seen as two ends of the same continuum. Whereas SIP attributes aggressive behaviour to the absence of adequate cognitive skills, ToM ascribes aggressive behaviour to the presence of advanced cognitive skills. ToM argues that aggressive individuals behave in this way not because they are intellectually simple but because they possess a 'superior theory of mind'. They are socially skilled individuals who take advantage of their advanced cognitive competence (e.g. their mind-reading abilities) to achieve personal benefits, such as leadership within a group, in an aggressive way.

ToM has been transferred to the framework of school bullying with promising results (e.g. Sutton 2003; Sutton *et al.* 1999a, 1999b). The application of ToM has uncovered interesting age differences (e.g. Rivers and Smith 1994; Sutton *et al.* 1999a, 1999b) and gender differences (e.g. Bjorkqvist *et al.* 1992), with females and older children performing better than males and younger children respectively on mind-reading abilities. These are abilities that they use while engaging in indirect rather than direct methods of bullying. Within the ToM perspective, differences in theory of mind skills have been attributed to family variables such as parenting styles (e.g. Ruffman *et al.* 1999; Vinden 1997), maternal education (e.g. Cutting and Dunn 1999) and attachment

security (e.g. Symons and Clark 2000). The debate between SIP and ToM is ongoing.

The ToM perspective has been challenged by Arsenio and Lemerise (2001), who argued that advanced cognitive skills can lead to engagement not only in antisocial behaviour but also in highly prosocial behaviour. Having a superior theory of mind says nothing about how this cognitive competence will be utilised. Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) have also attempted to bridge the gap between SIP and ToM by shedding light on the impact of moral emotions on bullying. Irrespective of whether bullies are 'social inadequates' – as suggested by SIP – or 'Machiavellian schemers' – as proposed by ToM – a promising alternative approach is to pay attention to the kinds of values that guide bullies' conduct rather than their higher or lower ability in social information processing. Using an 'Integrated Model of Emotion Processes and Cognition' (Arsenio and Lemerise 2004; Lemerise and Arsenio 2000) an attempt was made to show how individual differences in emotionality and emotion regulation can explain differences in social information processing and, subsequently, in behaviour.

Transferring this concept to the framework of bullying research, the argument would be that variations in bullying are concordant with individual differences in emotion regulation. This hypothesis has been supported by research. As mentioned earlier, several studies have indicated a link between moral emotions such as low empathy and school bullying (e.g. Gini *et al.* 2004; Jolliffe and Farrington 2006; Olweus and Endresen 1998) as well as a link between maladaptive forms of emotional regulation – e.g. unacknowledged shame – and bullying (Ahmed 2006; Ahmed and Braithwaite 2006; Ttofi and Farrington 2008b). Research has also shown that bullies utilise moral disengagement mechanisms more and show higher levels of egocentric reasoning than non-involved peers (Hymmel *et al.* 2005; Menesini *et al.* 2003a, 2003b).

Social dominance theory (Sidanius 1993; Sidanius and Pratto 1999) is another theoretical perspective that has been used to explain bullying. According to some researchers (e.g. Espelage and Swearer 2003; Nishina 2004), this theory can help to explain the increase in bullying during the transition to middle school. According to social dominance theory, human beings are predisposed to create social dominance hierarchies and this can be ascribed to evolutionary processes. Historically, clearly defined hierarchies within the group would encourage the cohesion, stability and, subsequently, the survival of the group. Within the social group, some individuals are more dominant while others are more submissive and/or withdrawn. This is tolerated because, rather than threatening group cohesion, it actually promotes a clear hierarchical organisation within the group.

Transferring this concept to the framework of bullying, the argument is that some bullying might be seen as a method of establishing the social hierarchy and status within the peer group. Findings of previous surveys on bullying could be interpreted within the framework of this theory (Pellegrini and Bartini 2001; Pellegrini and Long 2002). For instance, Pellegrini (2002) argued that the transition to middle school entails renegotiating dominance relationships and hierarchy within the peer group and that bullying is a 'tool' that some students use in order to attain dominance in newly formed

peer groups. Conversely, dominance hierarchies, when they are established, serve the important function of reducing in-group aggression (Pelegrini and Long 2004: 110; Vaughn 1999). Using data from a Canadian study, Bukowski and Sippola (2001: 362) discussed the functional role of harassment for the group. The researchers argued that individuals who are perceived to impede or hinder the achievement of the group's goals are more likely to become victims because they do not contribute to the welfare of the group. These individuals are 'forced out' by more dominant members of the group and this is tolerated because it facilitates the survival of the group.

Within the field of criminology, two theories of crime – Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming theory (RST) and Sherman's defiance theory— have been most notably used to explain bullying.

RST places great emphasis on the feeling of shame and the impact of shame on offending at both the micro (individual) and macro (community) levels of analysis. Shame can be triggered through shaming, the social process of expressing disapproval for wrongdoing (Braithwaite 1989: 100). Shaming –which is the pivotal concept of the theory – has a 'conscience building effect' (Braithwaite 1989: 73) and can be used as a powerful regulatory practice. From an early age, through either being the recipient of shaming or disapproving of other people's wrongdoing, the individual learns what is considered right and wrong in society and, hence, internalises social norms. The impact of shaming on offending depends not only on the cultural commitment of each society to shaming (Braithwaite 1989: 55), but also on the way in which shaming is delivered. Shaming must be offered in a reintegrative way (Braithwaite 1989: 101), in a way that communicates disapproval of the wrongdoing rather than the wrongdoer, combined with respect. Despite the strong potential of reintegrative shaming to control offending, an important condition for its success is the existence of strong social bonds between individuals (Braithwaite 1989: 81).

The applicability of RST to crime in general (e.g. Hay 1998, 2001; Zhang and Zhang 2004) and to bullying in particular is promising, with studies showing how strong social bonds, different types of shaming and different types of shame management are related to bullying (e.g. Ahmed 2001; Ahmed and Braithwaite 2005; Ttofi and Farrington 2008b). Morrison (2006) incorporated three theories (i.e. Scheff's theory of unacknowledged shame, Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming theory, and Tyler's procedural justice theory) in a restorative justice framework to explain the role of respect, pride and shame in predicting bullying. The study found significant differences in the mean level of shame management (acknowledged vs. unacknowledged shame) among bullies, victims, bully-victims and non-involved children.

Ttofi and Farrington (2008a) tested the applicability of Sherman's (1993) defiance theory to sibling and peer bullying. In line with the postulates of the theory, they found that bonding to the sanctioning agent (i.e. the parents), perceptions of fairness regarding parental sanctions, unacknowledged shame over the sanctions imposed and stigmatised sanctioning were related to defiant or compliant reactions. Defiance was the mediating theoretical construct explaining the link between family factors and sibling-targeted bullying. Similar results were obtained in a further test of the theory, aiming

to explain teacher-targeted bullying by students (Ttofi and Farrington 2009a). In the study, approximately 1,000 students were randomly allocated to four experimental conditions. The type of sanctioning offered by the teacher (respectful versus disrespectful) and the intentionality of wrongdoing by the perpetrator (intentional versus unintentional) were systematically manipulated in a vignette (a 2 × 2 factorial design) in order to encourage different perceptions regarding the fairness of the sanctions imposed and the legitimacy of the authority figure (i.e. the teacher). The study findings confirm that defiance theory is a useful analytical tool for the explanation of bullying. The data fitted the theoretical model.

This overview of existing theoretical perspectives on bullying clearly indicates the contribution of both individual and social factors to the occurrence of bullying. This is acknowledged by Swearer and Doll (2001), who emphasise the necessity of an 'ecological framework' for the explanation and prevention of bullying. The 'ecological model of bullying' (Swearer and Doll 2001: 9; Swearer and Espelage 2004: 4) borrows heavily from the ecological systems perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979). This is based on the general idea that multiple environments influence individuals and that these environments should be taken into account in explaining human development. When the ecological perspective is applied to bullying, 'a bullying interaction occurs not only because of individual characteristics of the child who is bullying, but also because of actions of peers, actions of teachers and other adult caretakers at school, physical characteristics of the school grounds, family factors, cultural characteristics and even community factors' (Swearer and Doll 2001: 10). Swearer and Espelage (2004) argue that this social ecology theory should be taken into account in devising methods of bullying prevention.

Effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes

Given the serious short-term and long-term effects of bullying on children's physical and mental health (Ttofi and Farrington 2008a), it is understandable why school bullying has increasingly become a topic of both public concern and research efforts. Research on school bullying has expanded worldwide (Smith *et al.* 1999b) with a variety of intervention programmes being implemented (Smith *et al.* 2004) and with some countries legally requiring schools to have an anti-bullying policy (Ananiadou and Smith 2002).

Many school-based intervention programmes have been devised and implemented in an attempt to reduce bullying. These have been targeted on bullies, victims, peers, teachers or on the school in general. Many programmes seem to have been based on common-sense ideas about what might reduce bullying rather than on empirically validated theories of why children bully, why children become victims or why bullying events occur.

The first large-scale anti-bullying programme was implemented nationally in Norway in 1983, following three well-publicised suicides of Norwegian boys that were attributed to bullying. A more intensive version of the national programme was evaluated in Bergen by Olweus (1991). This evaluation showed a dramatic decrease in victimisation (being bullied) of roughly half after the