

**Perceptions of violence among learners
at a coeducational secondary school
in Durban**

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Abstract

This study concerns the perceptions of school-based violence amongst grade nine male and female learners in a working class high school in Durban. The school's racial dynamics has seen a change from a largely Coloured population to a majority Black school population. As an educator in the school and as a member of the community in which it is located, I am aware of several instances of violence within the school and the locale. I am also aware of several incidents that have been noted by community members whereby male and female learners have retaliated violently against those male and female educators who remain reliant on physically violent methods of classroom management.

Former school-based policies aimed at curbing violence within this school have proved to be unsuccessful. In drafting these policies, not only have the school's management team failed to consider learner-perceptions regarding their experiences of violence - they have also failed to recognize the gender dimensions of violence. This study attempts to fill this gap.

Research data was gathered by means of a semi-structured questionnaire in the form of essays in which my research sample were requested to reflect on their recent experiences of school-based violence. The data suggests that violence is a common occurrence at the school and impacts negatively on all learners. However, there are differences in the effects of violence on male learners as compared to the female learners. Some of the violence affirmed a violent hegemonic masculinity while girls also committed violence against other girls and boys.

No effective strategies exist to counter the prevalence of violence in the school. This study shows why it is necessary to focus on the gendered nature of violence in schooling.

Declaration of Originality

I, Claire Gaillard-Thurston, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation is my own work. It has not previously been submitted at this or any other tertiary institution. Where use has been made of the work of others, it has been acknowledged and referenced.

Signed in Durban, on the _____ day of _____ 2003.



Claire Gaillard-Thurston (Mrs)

Supervisor's Consent

This mini-dissertation is submitted with my approval.

Professor Robert Morrell

The Study

Introduction

Statistics published by the Crime Information Analysis Centre (2001) indicate that: although the rate of crime-related violence in South Africa has stabilized, the recorded number of reported incidents remain alarmingly high. Violence is a national emergency. Unfortunately, South African schools do not serve as safe-havens for their learners and educators from violence as it exists in society at large. In a recent report compiled by Human Rights Watch (2001) it was expressed that: although quantitative data on violence in South African schools was not available at the time of their research, - based on their own findings - they have labeled South African schools as *spaces for violence*. My study concerns violence within this *space* (i.e. a schooling arena).

Research questions

Based on learner-experiences of incidents of violence that have occurred within their school, my study has primarily aimed at answering the following questions:

What are the learners' perceptions regarding their experiences?

What effect do their experiences have on their schooling?

Motivation for my study

I am a Coloured, female educator of grade nine learners at a coeducational secondary school in Durban. The staffing compliment is reflective of the locale. It is comprised of Coloured and Indian middle-class male and female educators. However, the learner compliment is comprised of approximately 90 percent Black and 10 percent Coloured learners from working class families. In this school, I have observed violent confrontations between the male and female learners and their peers almost on a daily basis. These violent confrontations usually commence with an argument and inevitably escalate to physical violence being used by the opponents against each other. Such incidents are dismissed by most of the educators (male and female), with the excuse that: given the amount of time that learners spend at school, violent confrontations between

them are to be expected. In their study, *Violence in the Schools*, Curcio and First (1993, p. 2) identify that 'educators are reluctant to acknowledge the presence of violence in our environment' and explain that 'there is an unfortunate tendency to accept certain aberrant behaviour as normal for children'. It is further explained that 'fighting, for example, or boys teasing and harassing girls about their bodies is perceived as *just another part of growing up* rather than a prelude to more dangerous and violent behaviour' (Curcio and First, 1993, p. 2). In my opinion, the same can be said about educator-perceptions of violence as it exists within the school at which I teach.

school violence → corporal punishment

Former school-based policies aimed at addressing these incidents of violence have proven to be ineffective. As a result of this, these policies have been abandoned. As a means of maintaining discipline in their classrooms, - despite governmental restrictions on the use of corporal punishment - several of my colleagues (male and female) abuse their authority as educators and often resort physically violent methods (mostly against male learners) of classroom management. In addition, I have witnessed incidents whereby learners (male and female) have retaliated physically against those educators (male and female) who have reprimanded them in this (violent) manner; - often resulting in fistfights between the educator and the learner.

The culmination of these observations - as I have described above - is what prompted my decision to research how learners perceive their experiences of violence as it exist within their school and the effects that their experiences have on their schooling. Their input will be invaluable in drafting future school-based policies pertaining to violence within the school.

Key focus of my study

Violence, is a broad concept. Research on school-based violence - as well as on violence in society at large - indicates that there are many forms and processes of violence and that these (forms and processes) vary in degree of severity. For example, Hearn (1998, p. 207) has identified that forms and processes of violence can include 'physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, emotional, linguistic, cognitive, social, spatial, financial, representational and visual violence'. Varying degrees of these forms and

processes of violence can be arranged on a scale - to which Forcey and Harris (1999, p. 67) refer as 'a continuum' - with serious physical harm at the one end, racial slurs, verbal harassment, emotional and mental violence and sexual harassment at the other, with degrees of violence in between (eg. pushing, shoving and fist-fighting). Studies that focus on violence further suggest that: different perceptions of violence can be formulated even among individuals who experience the same/similar forms and processes of violence within the same arena. Moreover, even within the same arena, an individual may perceive similar experiences of violence differently in different contexts. These differences (in the ways in which an individual perceives a similar experience of violence within the same arena yet differently in different contexts) can be attributed to several social factors (eg. gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, etc) that have worked together from the time of the individual's birth to shape their character, behaviour and how they perceive their experiences. This study is focused on learner-perceptions of violence as it exists in schools as gendered arenas.

Framework of my study

The limited scale and nature of my research project (a 10 000 word, gender education specialist study) necessitated that my study focus on learner-perceptions regarding their experiences of violence within in its gender dimensions among a modest research domain. Research was conducted among forty-five male and female grade nine learners at a coeducational school in Durban. The learners' essays (in which they reflected on their experiences of one or more of the various forms and/ processes of violence that have occurred within the school) were analyzed within the following framework:

- Gender relations of the male and/female opponents identified in the violent confrontation were noted: to identify the forms of violence that are used in such confrontations and the gender relational locations in which these different forms of violence occur (eg. male-male learner relations, male learner-male/female educator relations, female-female learner relations, female learners-male/female educator relations, male-female learner relations).
- The gender identities of the authors of each of the essays was noted: to identify

possible similarities and differences in the perceptions of male and female learners within their distinct gender groups.

➤ Written notes of a group discussion held with this sample were also analyzed from a gender perspective: to identify, compare and contrast the effects of this violence on the schooling of male and female learners.

Locale of my study

I conducted my research among a class of forty-five male and female grade nine learners of the coeducational secondary school at which I teach. This school - like most schools - does not exist in isolation of the community in which it is located or the community which it serves. Violence is a learnt behaviour. Through their character, that which is learnt at school is carried into the greater society by the learners. Similarly, that which is experienced in their communities, is carried into the school through their character and influences their behaviour at school. With this in mind, I find it necessary to provide a brief description of the social background of the community in which the school is located and the communities which the school serves.

The school is located in the suburb of Sydenham, historically comprised of working class and (mostly) middle class Coloured families. The staffing compliment of the school - formerly all Coloured - has since 1994 included 'Indian' educators. Staff members reside in either in the middle-class or upper-class residential areas surrounding the school. Since 1994, following the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa, there has also been a significant change of the learner compliment - formerly being comprised exclusively of Coloured learners - to its current composition of learners belonging predominantly to the 'black' racial group (approximately 90%). Most of these Black learners reside in Chesterville, Umlazi and KwaMashu townships. Most of the Coloured learners commute from Wentworth and Newlands East. The rest of the learners reside in the community in which the school is located. Most of our Coloured learners are from working class families. Black learners are either from middle-class families or working class families. However - due to the 1994 change of the political climate of our country - the lifestyle of many of our Black middle-class learners have only recently began to

evolve from working-class to a middle-class lifestyle. The decline in the numbers of Coloured learners attending this formerly Coloured school can be largely attributed to two factors. Firstly, many of the Coloured learners of this community in which the school is located who are from either middle-class or upper-class families, are enrolled at either private or semi-private schools located in neighbouring suburbs. Secondly, many Coloured families of this community have since 1994 emigrated (mainly to New Zealand and Australia). Tenancy of these residences have been occupied by middle-class Black families who opt to send their children to this school in which my research was conducted.

The school serves as a context for violent behaviour to be enacted by many male and female learners against other learners as well as educators. These learners are not only exposed to violent behaviour within their schools but also in other arenas in which they interact outside of the school (eg. sports arenas, community, family, etc). The kind of experiences to which the learner is exposed in these arenas - as a perpetrator, victim, target, witness in acts of violence - are largely influenced not only by the gender of the learner, but also by the race and class of the learner. Disparities between class and race of the learners and educators, is an important point of note. When viewing violence that occurs within the school from a gender perspective, these disparities assist in understanding the social factors that influence the behaviour of the learners, the experiences that the learners have been exposed to not only as males and females but as Black/Coloured working-/middle-class males/females living with working-/middle-class families and taught by middle-class/ upper middle-class Indian/Coloured educators.

Structure

Chapter 1 concerns literature that I have reviewed for this study. This literature focuses on how certain learner (male and female) identities are violently constructed in relation to other male and/ female (learner and educator) identities and the effects of this violence on male and female learners. In Chapter 2, I have provided a detailed account of the process of my research project and have identified factors that have influenced my choice of the research domain, sample and research instruments. In Chapter 2, I have also discussed the process of data handling as well as ethical considerations and limitations

that I experienced during the collection of data for this study. Chapter 3 concerns my analysis of the research data. It has been written in two parts. In the first part I have provided extracts from some of the male and female learners' essays. From these, I have attempted: to identify the kinds of violence that male and female learners experience, to identify the forms and processes this violence and to determine learner-perceptions regarding these acts of violence. In the second part, I have included extracts from my notes of the group discussion that I held with the learners and have attempted to identify the effects of this violence on the schooling of male and female learners. Chapter 4 concerns a discussion of my findings following my analysis of the learners' essays as well as my analysis of the notes of the group discussion that I held with forty grade nine male and female learners. Chapter 4 has also been written in two parts. In the first part, I have discussed my findings concerning male and female learner-perceptions regarding their experiences of violence within their school. In the second part, I have discussed my findings concerning the effects of this violence on their schooling. Chapter 5 concludes this study by briefly reflecting on differences and similarities in the perceptions of violence of male and female learners and also by briefly comparing and contrasting the effects of this violence on the schooling of male and female learners.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

into school violence

Local and international research concerning the experiences of violence of learners has identified that much of the violence that learners experience takes place within their schools (McPartland and McDill, 1997; Elliot et al, 1998; Galbraith, 1998). Although some incidents of school-based violence have been initiated by outsiders who find their way onto the school property (eg. gangs, parents, etc), in many schools educators and learners (male and female) have also been identified among the perpetrators of school-based violence (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Morrell (1998, p. 222) has identified that school violence 'ranges from verbal abuse to physical assault (which can lead to death)'. Schools are violent arenas, but schools are also 'complex, gendered and heterosexual arenas' (Mac an Ghail, 1997, p. 51). Gender relations in schools serve as locations for violence to occur. Morrell (1998, p. 222) has named four specific gender locations for violence. These have been identified as 'male student/male student, male student/female student, adult teacher/child, student/teacher relational locations'. My study has considered violence that occurs within similar locations which I have identified among males and females (learners and educators) of the school. My study concerns male and female learner-perceptions of violence that occurs within these relational locations, and compares and contrasts the effects of this violence on the schooling of male and female learners.

With the above in mind, the literature I have reviewed for my study has focused on how violence occurs in the construction of learner - male and female - identities in relation to other male and/ female (learner and educator) identities. It has also focused on effects of this violence on learners. In this chapter, the format which I have adopted in discussing this literature is as follows: Firstly, I will refer to literature that concerns violence as located in the construction of male identities in relation to other gender identities. Thereafter, I will refer to literature that concerns violence as located in the construction of female identities in relation to other gender identities. Finally, I refer to literature that concerns effects of this violence on male and female learners.

Violence in the construction of masculinities in relation to other gender identities

Studies by Mac an Ghail (1997, p. 51) have recognized that 'new ways of being a student are emerging'. In schools there are different gender regimes and different configuration of masculinity. A wide range of literature concerning the construction of male identities among boys suggests that: although not all boys in schools are violent most will resort to violence when they perceive it as necessary - either individually or in groups. This is largely due to the fact that many boys have been socialized in this way. Xaba's (1997) provides an example of boys who use violence individually in relation to the construction of masculinity. With particular reference to the use of violence among Black South African boys - and in the words of Norman Mailer in *Canabals and Christians* - Xaba (1997, p. 7) explains that 'masculinity is not something given to you, something you're born with, but something you gain...you gain it by winning small battles with honour', - therefore, implying that Black South African boys have been socialized to use violent means in order to earn their masculinity. Morrell (1998, p. 222) - also of boys in a South African context - has provided an explanation of how boys use violence in group in relation to the construction of their masculinities. Morrell (1998, p. 222) has observed that 'among boys ... the quest for dominance is part of a desire for recognition' and explains that 'boys congregate in groups and when these groups become gangs, violence frequently results and there is a competition for dominance between these gangs'. On the other hand, Connell (1995, p. 37) points out that 'to recognize a diversity of masculinities is not enough', but, that they are constructed in relation to each other. Connell (1995, p. 37) has identified these as 'relations of alliance, dominance and subordination are structured through practices that exclude, include, intimidate, exploit'.

Since my study concerns violence, the literature that I have reviewed for my study concerns those modes of masculinity that can be located in schools that are constructed in relation to each other and which are reliant on violence in their construction. In this literature, I have identified two specific (violent) modes of masculinity which are likely to compete for dominance within schools:

- ▶ those that are constructed by males violently challenging each other, other males whom they perceive as inferior and those in positions of authority (e.g. teachers).
- ▶ those in position of authority who use violence to exert their authority over other males whom they perceive as inferior and over females.

The mode of masculinity that is violently constructed by males challenging each other, other males whom they perceive as inferior and those in positions of authority has been identified as a macho-mode of masculinity and has been referred to as machismo (Lancaster, 2002, p. 41-43). Numerous studies (Mac an Ghail, 1997; Skelton, 2001; Lancaster, 2002) have associated this macho modes of masculinity predominantly with working-class males. Lancaster (2002, p. 42) explains that 'machismo is not exclusively or even primarily a means of structuring power relation between' male and females, - rather - among other males by practices likened to 'drinking, gambling, risk taking, asserting one's opinion and fighting'. It is explained that even when fights concern females, two persons are borne in mind during the fight: other males 'to whom one must constantly prove one's masculinity and virility', and 'oneself to whom one must also show all the signs of masculinity' (Lancaster, 2002, p. 42). A significant point of machismo, according to Lancaster (2002, p. 42), is that 'to maintain ones masculinity, one must successfully come out on top of these (violent) changes'.

Schools construct certain masculinities through authority patterns (Skelton, 2001, p. 29). Masculinity that is violently constructed by those in position of authority in relation to other males - whom they perceive as inferior - and over females has been identified as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 76 - 77). Connell (1995, p. 77) has identified that 'hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual'. Although Connell (1995, p. 77) explains that 'hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed type, always and everywhere the same', he identifies authority as the mark of hegemony and links authority to violence by explaining that 'violence underpins or supports authority'. In linking authoritarian type masculinities to macho-modes of masculinity, it has been noted that authority often incites violence among certain

masculinities and that when 'male and female teachers adopt more authoritarian modes of discipline especially among males who are not academically successful, they are helping to create macho modes of masculinity' (Skelton, 2001, p. 30). Skelton (2001, p. 30) explains that 'a violent discipline system invites competition in machismo among boys and sometimes between boys and male teachers'. However in schools boys construct their own identities apart from what the school wants from them. Skelton (2001, p. 116) states that 'boys negotiate their own ways of being a boy in relation to authority patterns of the school' and recognizes that these relations are often violent.

However, it is important to point out that these modes of masculinity to which I have referred above are not the only forms of masculinity that are constructed in schools. Apart from these modes of masculinity, it has been noted that there are those masculinities that are constructed around these specific masculinities. (Skelton, 2001; Connell, 1995).

Violence in the construction of female identities in relation to other gender identities

Concerning violence perpetrated by females that is located in male/female relations, it has been explained in Elliot et al (1998, p. 73) that: in the event of young females using violence against young males, the use of violence is perceived by these women as a means of 'establishing their toughness, which in turn can ward off physical attacks by males'. Concerning violence located in young female/female relations, they identify that when fights occur between young of the females, their fights 'reflect deutes involving males' and that 'boyfriends are thought of as emotional possessions and dispute arise over ownership and control: physical violence is used to maintain ownership and control' (Elliot et al, 1998, p. 73). In a similar way in which masculinities are constructed, these two examples indicate that females can also construct their female identities in relation to males and other females. Similarly, from an anthropological perspective, Burbank (1994, p. 97-132) has viewed violence among females - in the form of aggression - as a sociobiological trait, whereby (inherently) females will resort to fighting each other either if they threaten each other's resources or in competition for

scarce resources. These scarce resources have been named in Burbank (1994, p. 103) as 'socially desirable' males.

According to Connell (1987, p. 183) cited in Hatty (2000, p. 117) 'there is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men'. However it is identified that: - according to Connell (1987, p. 183) cited in Hatty (2000, p. 117) - 'there is a version of femininity that is given prominence and that is emphasized. However, recent studies by Halberstam (in Adams and Savran, 2002, p. 355-374) suggest that there is in fact such a thing as female masculinity and provides the explanation that such females who display this kind of masculinity are viewed as being 'butch' or 'tomboys' and that their female masculinity is 'framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing'. However, Halberstam (in Adams and Savran, 2002, p. 355) further explains that female masculinity is not the female version of dominant 'heroic' masculinities 'that rely on the subordination of alternative masculinities', rather, that: women who exhibit this form of masculinity actually possess the dominant forms of (male) 'heroic' masculinity.

The effects of this violence on the schooling of male and female learners

Several studies have indicated that violence (even as a witness of acts of violence) - although sometimes in different ways - can affect both male and female children. Studies have shown that children (male and female) who are exposed to violence can either become violent themselves or - negate their own feelings - and become desensitized to violence. According to Holdstock (in McKendrick and Hoffmann, 1990, p. 354) violence is a behaviour that is learnt by those who are exposed to it (whether as an active participant or as an observer) due to the fact that 'people replicate the behaviour to which they are exposed'. According to Holdstock, (in McKendrick and Hoffmann, 1990, p. 359) 'by merely being a witness to psychological bullying and violent classroom management, children (male and female) learn to negate their inner experiences'. Holdstock (in McKendrick and Hoffmann, 1990) found that the effects of violence being imposed on a child leads to a perception of violence as being

a means of warding off violence. He explains that 'counter-aggression is a logical sequence of being beaten' which 'comes to expression in multiple forms such as resentment and retaliation against persons - teachers, classmates - and property' (p. 355).

Deacon et al (2000), have similarly identified the use of physical violence by female educators on male learners as a disciplinary measure for poor scholastic behaviour, as contradictory to its purpose. Physical violence by a female educator against a male learner could eventually prove to be volatile to the well being of females. This perception that the female teacher instills in her male learner whom she reprimands violently, will eventually desensitize him to violence and could encourage him to behave violently towards females as an adult (eg. rape and battering of females).

Fear of violence affects both male and female children. Another effect of violence on learners (male and female) is poor scholastic achievement. In Elliot et al (1998, p. 36) it is stated that 'both violent incidents and threats of violence at school negatively affect students, school and staff and the educational process' adding that 'in an atmosphere heavy with threat of personal injury, students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach'. Similarly, it has been identified in McPartland and McDill (1997, p. 75) that 'the fear of violence both physical and psychological is reflected in the students inability to concentrate in classroom activities because of apprehension and anxiety about incidents that have taken place in the halls, on the campus and to and from school'.

This volume of literature (which I have reviewed in this chapter), enabled me to identify commonalities between the findings of various researchers - particularly in the field of gender studies - and my own findings (based on the responses provided by the learners in their essays and during the group discussion). As a result, I was able to identify and name different forms of gender identities that exist within the school in which my research was conducted (e.g. macho modes of masculinity, female masculinity, etc). I was also able to detect commonalities between: how the literature describes these gender identities as being (violently) constructed in relation to other gender identities and how the learners (through their essays) suggest a link between violence and the

construction of certain gender identities in relation to others. In addition, I was also able to detect similarities in the effects that violence has on learners as described in the literature as compared to those as described by the learners in the group discussion. Considering the above, I found the literature that I have reviewed for my study to be invaluable in analyzing my research data.

Chapter 2

Methodology

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of the process of my research project. I have described - as well as included the factors that influenced - the choice of the research domain, sample and research instruments. I have also discussed the process of data handling as well as ethical considerations and limitations that I experienced during the collection of data for my research project.

Research domain

Two factors influenced my choice of a school-based research project. The first factor can be attributed to the fact that the limited scale of my research project (10 000 words) necessitated a modest research domain. The second factor can be attributed to the rationale for my research project: to identify the kinds of violence located in the various gender relations that exist within the school in which I conducted my research, and (from a gender perspective) to assess the learners' perceptions of these acts of violence that occur within their school and determine the effect that these acts of violence have on their schooling. Therefore, using a school as a research-site seemed the appropriate choice, since my study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of - as well the effects on - male and female learners of the violence that occurs within their school.

Research Site

I gathered the data for my study within the coeducational secondary school at which I teach. My decision to gather my research data in this particular school was influenced primarily by my observations of male/male, male/female, female/female confrontations that occur within the school between learners and their peers as well as confrontations between male and female learners and some of their male and female educators. I have observed that in all of these locations, confrontation have began with arguments and many have escalated to physical violence (e.g. shoving, fist-fighting, slapping) being used by those who are actively involved in these confrontations - even in confrontations between learners and educators.

A second factor that influenced for choice of the school at which I teach as a research-site for data collection was the easy accessibility of my research sample.

Research Sample

I selected a class of forty-five grade nine learners to constitute my sample from five classes of grade nine learners whom I teach. My choice of this specific class as my research sample - out of five grade nine classes - was not a random decision. The primary reason for my choice of this particular class was influenced by their infamous reputation for their unruly behaviour. This behaviour has earned both male and female learners of this class the reputation among educators and their peers as being *the worst of the bunch* (of learners within the entire school). Their unruly classroom behaviour has resulted in the poor academic achievement of male and female learners of this class. Their poor academic achievement can also be attributed to the educators' frequent complaints against this class during staff meetings that: they are noisy, rowdy and impossible to teach. Although these male and female learners display little interest in their formal schooling - and despite their poor academic achievements -, informal discussions of altercations among themselves or those which they have either initiated or witnessed between their peers are invited. During discussions of this nature, I have witnessed excitement among the learners and full classroom participation from all male and female learners. From my knowledge of this class of learners - as indicated above - , I had deduced that this particular class would be useful in gathering data for my study, since they have experienced many incidents of violence on which they could reflect and also welcome opportunities to share their experiences.

Two other factors also played an influential role in the choice of a class of learners which I teach to constitute my sample. Firstly, because I teach these learners, they were easily accessible for the purpose of gathering data for my research project. Secondly, as an educator, I have access to student-records pertaining to the social background of these learners (eg. race, age, language proficiency, location and types of residence, parents'/ guardians' occupation, etc). I found this information useful in considering the various social influences outside of the schooling arena that play an

influential role in moulding the behaviour and thinking of the individual learner (growing up as a male or female child within their particular social environment). This information was also useful in my choice of the literature that I reviewed for my study - since it (the information) enabled me to gain deeper insight into possible reasons for similarities in many Black and Coloured male and Black and Coloured female learners' perceptions of violence in spite of their racial differences. From these student records, I was able to obtain the following information on my research sample: My sample constituted male and female learners between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years old. They have all been at the school for almost two years (since grade eight). This class of learners is gender-balanced (comprised of an almost equal number of male and female learners). Approximately 90% of the learners are Black and the remaining 10% are Coloured. The majority of the Black male and female learners reside in the Chesterville, Umlazi and KwaMashu townships. The Coloured male and female learners reside either in low-cost housing developments in Sydenham, Merewent or Newlands East. Most of these Black and Coloured learners belong to working-class families - with an insignificant minority of Black learners - in comparison - belonging to middle-class families. Therefore, although most of the Coloured learners reside in different areas to the Black learners, - economically speaking - they experience similar lifestyles (i.e. of working class families).

Research Instrument

I adopted a qualitative research approach for data collection. I chose this approach because I wanted to gain insight into the different learner-perceptions of acts of violence that they have experienced within the school by learners (of the distinct male and female gender groups) - more so in cases where male and female learners described the similar experiences of violence. I made use of two open-ended questions: I gathered data by means of a semi-structured questionnaire (viz. essays) and a group discussion. In my semi-structured questionnaire (Annexure A), I asked that the male and female learners write an essay entitled: *My experiences of violence in our school*. During the group discussion (Annexure B), I asked male and female learners to discuss: *The effects that violence that occurs within the school has on my [the learners'] schooling* within their distinct gender groups. I will now explain how I used these two research instruments

(viz. essays and group discussion) and the limitations that I experienced in using these research instruments for data collection .

Data Collection

The Essays:

In *Disruptive Children - Disruptive Schools* it appears that Lawrence et al (1984) found the use of children's writings as a research instrument as an invaluable resource. According to Lawrence et al (1984, p. 123), '...the child can literally move in and out of the account he is giving, at one moment using writer's licence in the pursuit of his imagination, at another integrating his own perceptions and experiences'. They explain that 'children's writings speak for themselves'. It is further stated that although 'the picture which emerges is varied, diverse and often contradictory, other features are recurrent and persistent and it is these which in general give interest to their accounts' (Lawrence et al 1984, p. 123). With this in mind, my choice of children's writings (i.e. essays) as means of data collection was largely influenced by my expectation that the essays would allow learners to reflect freely on their own perceptions of the violence that they have experienced within the school. The use of essay writing in discussing their experiences of violence within the school also afforded those learners who wished to conceal their identities the opportunity to do so.

Although I had informed the learners that they were not compelled to include their names in their essays, I did request - in their accounts concerning experiences of violence - that they specify their gender as well as that of the person(s) involved in the descriptions of their experiences of violence. For example, instead of simply writing of 'a learner', I asked that they state whether they were referring to a male or female learner. This was necessary for the analysis of the research data; - in order not only to identify the forms in which violence occurs within the school but also the forms of violence which are located in the various gender relations. This was also necessary in my analysis of the research data to determine how male and female learners (within these two distinct gender categories) perceive their experiences.

During my time with the learners at this point of the research project (i.e. data collection by means of essays), I detected scepticism, a lack trust and fear among some of the participants. Although they were informed that they were not compelled to participate in the essay writing and those who did were not compelled to include their names on their responses, there was evidence that some learners consciously attempted to disguise their handwriting. However, as a researcher this did not affect my project, since my focus was not on neatness as it might have been in my capacity as an educator. Rather, in my capacity as a researcher, I found all of the accounts (even the untidy ones) to be informative.

The Group Discussion:

Gathering of data for my research project as an educator at the school was not an easy task especially during the group discussion. The rationale for the use of a group discussion as a means of data collection was to determine the effects that the acts of violence that have occurred within the school have had on the schooling of the male in comparison to the female learners. During the group discussion, I had decided to adopt a *fly on the wall* approach. By this I mean that: I had chosen to be an observer of the discussions among the learners after I had explained to them the purpose of the activity, the process that the activity would take, facilitated dividing the learners into smaller groups as well as assisting each group in choosing a scribe and group leader/spokesperson - to lead the discussions within their specific groups and report back to the class on behalf of their group. I chose this approach because I was afraid of taking an active role in the group discussion for two reasons. Firstly, I felt that - as an educator of the school - it might have been difficult for me to adopt an objective approach. Secondly, the language barrier between myself and the majority of my Zulu speaking learners discouraged me from actively participating in the discussions within the groups. Zulu is the mother-tongue of most of these learners. However, although the Coloured learners in this class have poor Zulu verbal and written communication skills, they have a good understanding of Zulu. Similarly, the Zulu-speaking learners have poor written and verbal English communication skills but a good understanding of English. From my experience as an educator, I have found that learners express themselves better

in their mother-tongue, I allowed the learners to discuss (within their groups) the effects that their experiences of violence have had on them in their mother-tongue. I have a limited knowledge of Zulu and, therefore, felt intimidated by the fact that I did not understand fully the discussions that were taking place in the groups. I relied largely on the English translations of the pertinent points noted by the scribes of each group and the reports in English of the spokesperson of each group. I felt that if I had insisted that the learners communicate in English, some Zulu-speaking learners might have been limited from verbally communicating valuable points that they had wished to convey to their peers during their discussions within their groups. As a result valuable input from some of the male and female learners might have been lost. This would have been unfair to these learners. However, I requested that the spokespersons' verbal reports be in English. This enabled me to understand and transcribe these accounts (in English).

My choice of a group discussion was influenced by my expectation that the learners would communicate freely with each other on the effects that their experiences of violence within the school has on their schooling (as a male or female learner). I held a group discussion with the same class of grade nine learners whom I had chosen to complete the essays. However, only forty learners participated in the group discussion. The other five learners were absent. Of these five learners three were males. One of these three was *Ivan* (whom some of the learners had identified in their essays as one of the bullies). *Ivan* had been suspended from lessons for repeatedly disruptive classroom behaviour (refusing to participate in lessons and disturbing some of his peers (male and female) during lessons by sending written and verbal threats to them. The other two males who were absent were two of *Ivan's* victims who had described in their essays the violent measures to which they had resorted in order to ward off further attacks from *Ivan*. These two male learners had absconded from school - which is a frequent occurrence from these two learners. The absence of all three male learners had an effect on my research project since - especially during the group discussion - I had hoped to determine how the *Ivan's* experiences of violence had affected his schooling as well as how the schooling of *Ivan's* victims was affected by his attacks on them. Due to the absence of all three, I could not determine this. I did, however, attempt to secure a

separate group discussion with these learners days later when they had returned to school. Unfortunately, they had refused to do so stating that I was going to 'spy on (them) in the principle's office'. Of the other two female learners who were absent, one is Coloured. She had also frequently absconded from school. Her absence affected my project in the sense that: I had hoped to determine how the experiences of violence within the school as a Coloured female had affected her schooling - perhaps the reason for her frequent abscondment. Unfortunately, I was unable to do so. I later discovered that she had left school and had relocated to another province.

Because of the reputation of this class of learners (for their unruly classroom behaviour and their tendency to become loud during class discussions of a similar nature), I chose to conduct the group discussion in an informal setting in which the learners would not feel limited in expressing themselves. I conducted the group discussion on the sports field. Another influential factor was fear: These discussions usually turn into arguments and threats of violence between learners. Sometimes classroom furniture is thrown by some learners at others. I was afraid that the classroom would serve as a dangerous setting for a discussion of this nature not only for the learners, but especially for myself - being pregnant at the time of data collection.

Once we had reached the sports field, the class of forty learners had spontaneously divided into those groups to which they belong within the formal classroom setting (two groups of male learners and two groups of female learners). Since there is not an exactly equal number of male and female learners within the class - and due to the absence of five learners - the groups were not comprised of exactly ten learners per group (some groups had fewer learners than others). I requested that each group select a group leader and a scribe. The group leader was to also act as a spokesperson for the group. The role of the scribe was to consolidate the responses of the members within the group and formulate points (in English) that the spokesperson would report to the rest of the class on behalf of the group.

Some of the male learners objected to my request that I tape record the discussion. These learners expressed their concerns that the cassette might *land up in the wrong*

hands (eg. other learners would recognize their voices or that I would use the information against them by letting the other educators and the principal listen to the discussion and *get them into trouble*). This affected my data collection in the sense that I was compelled to record the large-group discussion (i.e. verbal reports of the spokespersons of each of the groups) in writing. It became difficult to record the accounts in verbatim. Therefore, the notes of the scribes of the various (smaller) groups became useful (incase I had overlooked a pertinent point during the large-group discussion in my personal notes of the large-group discussion/report-back). I also observed that although those few learners who had objected to being tape recorded chose to remain within the group discussion, they did not contribute to the discussion with the small groups.

Data Handling

While I might have been able to quantify the information provided in the male and female learners essays of the kinds of violence most prevalent in the school, using this approach would have not have done justice to the opinions of the learners that were reflected in their essays. Therefore, I used a qualitative approach to data handling. It has also been noted by Cohen et al (2000, p. 255) that 'opinions cannot be converted into numbers' and that 'even if one attempts to use rating scales for the purpose of quantifying response from open-ended questions, rating scales fail to truly represent the opinions of the respondents'. It is further explained that if one attempts this, the 'authenticity, richness, depth, honesty and candour which are hallmarks of qualitative research' would be lost.

In my analysis all of the essays that were submitted by the respondents, extracts from the essays that I chose to include in my research paper were chosen in the following way:-

Firstly, I divided the essay responses into three categories: incidents among males (including peers and educators), incidents among females (including peers and educators) and incidents between males and females (including peers and educators). Thereafter, I further divided the essays within these categories according to the kinds of violence that were described within the essays (eg. physical assault, intimidation, etc). Finally, once the essays had been sorted into these subcategories, I analyzed the data for possible

similarities or difference between male and female perceptions regarding their descriptions of acts of violence that they had experienced.

In determining the effects that the violence within the school has on the schooling of the male and female learners, I had compared notes of the discussion of each of the (smaller) groups which I had collected from the scribes within the various groups to my own notes. This was to ensure that any significant point might have not been overlooked in my transcription of the large-group discussion.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Data and Findings

I have divided this chapter into two parts. Within the framework of the various gender relational locations for violence that exist within the school - which I have identified from the learners' essays - the first part of this chapter attempts to identify the kinds of violence that learners experience, to identify the forms and processes of violence and to determine learner-perceptions regarding these acts of violence. I have provided extracts from some of the learners' essays and will use these extracts to indicate how these forms and processes of violence are experienced and perceived by male and female learners.

The purpose of the second part of this chapter is to identify the effects that the violence which the learners experience within the school has on their schooling. In order to achieve this, I have included extracts from my transcript of the group discussion that I held with the learners. I have used this information to determine the effects that the violence that occurs within the school has on their schooling.

There is an obvious limitation with this approach as I am reliant on the stated views of learners and my own perceptions. I made no attempt to triangulate my findings and so it will be necessary to read these accounts of violence with caution.

Part I: The Essays

Male and female learners' experiences and perceptions regarding acts of violence among male learners

Based on the some of the male and female learners' accounts of their experiences of violence that have occurred among male learners, bullying (verbal and physical as well as group-bullying and individual), physical assault (fist-fighting) and intimidation (with the aid of weapons such as guns and knives) appear to be the forms of violence that are

prevalent among the male learners.

In their essays, male and female learners who had described their experiences of bullying and intimidation by groups of male learners indicated that bullying took place mainly to rob victims for money. Although the accounts of bullying are similar to the accounts of intimidation, it differs from intimidation in the sense that it has been noted from the accounts that bullies / groups of bullies targeted the same learners whereas in the accounts of groups of male learners who intimidated other male learners, it was noted that these groups chose their victims randomly.

From the accounts it was indicated that the group of male learners who bullied other male learners were not physically well built. According to Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p. 187) 'it is a myth that big, strong boys naturally become bullies'. However, this was the profile of some of the male bullies who were identified in the essays. They were described by some learners as being 'fat', 'tough' and 'strong'. It was also noted that the smaller built male learners were targets of these groups of bullies.

Five learners were identified to constitute the group of bullies. From grade nine, were *Ivan, Norman* and *Tyrone* (not their real names). I teach these learners and know that these three learners are Coloured learners from working class families living in Sydenham. They are in separate grade nine classes. They are frequently absent from school and show little interest in their school work and when they are at school they are constantly disruptive of lessons. The other two 'bullies' were not named but it was indicated that they were male learners from grade ten.

However, what was significant from these accounts was that the same three individual bullies (*Ivan, Norman* and *Tyrone*) - who were accused of individually bullying learners in separate incidents - had joined forces with two other grade ten male learners identified as bullies. It was indicated that they often bully learners during breaks as a gang.

The following extracts from some of the learners' essay describe experiences of bullying (verbal and physical), intimidation and fist-fighting. I have numbered the accounts to indicate that all of the following extracts were taken from different essays.

Bullying

Group bullying:

Male witness 1:

My experience was there was a whole gang in the school who like to bully young boys everyday who are in grade eight and nine and are short...The bully gang is 'Ivan', 'Norman' and 'Tyrone' from grade nine and the other two are from grade ten. I don't know their names. There were four of us friends who had seen what was going on everyday with this gang. One of the boys suggested we report the boys to the principal. I was the one who refused because I was going to get myself in trouble by showing my face in public and those boys were going to come after me.

Individual bullying

Male victim 1:

The first day I got to school I met a bully by the name of 'Ivan' a big, fat boy. Every time he says to me: "Hey boy! Give me a five rand." So I say: "I do not have." So he says: "You better bring for me tomorrow", not knowing that I have family and friends in the school.... so one-day my cousin and my friends took a rope and tied his legs together and dragged him around the school grounds. He was crying. I laughed because he acts like a big deal. After that the big, fat boy never bullied me again.

Male victim 2:

People ... think they are a big deals. They hang with their crew and threaten us to give them money. 'Tyrone' is the main one. He is stupid so he fails. He is in the same class as me. He hits me and 'Sizwe' and he kicks 'Sizwe' off his feet. He hits me with a broomstick and makes me cry. I called my brother. My brother sorted him out and he stopped bullying me.

Male victim 3 gave a similar account of a separate incident involving *Norman*:

I met a boy at school. His name is 'Norman'. He was a bully because he was bigger and stronger than us. Everyday he worries me. One day all my friends were at school and he came to worry people on the school grounds for money and there was a rope on the school grounds and the biggest friend of mine put him on the floor and we tied it around his legs. About seven of us friends started running while holding the ropes and I was one of them. They pulled for long around the grounds and everyone in the school was laughing they knew the type of person he was. While they were pulling he had a blackout.

Intimidation

In some of their essays, male and female learners indicated that most learners (both male and female) carry weapons to school (especially knives) for their protection against attacks from other learners. They also indicated that learners (mostly male) usually use weapons during fights. However, some did indicate that some male learners use weapons to intimidate other male learners and rob them of their money.

Female victim 1:

There is a lot of corruption like smoking in school, coming with alcohol and bringing guns and knives but the teachers and the department and we as learners know that there is violence in our school. I'm talking from experience. Last year I was gun pointed in school by a boy in my class. I reported him and nothing was done about the matter. So for me I don't know whether the school is safe enough for us to learn.

Male witness 2:

This group of boys who are known for their smoking habits at school got caught by a grade 8 pupil. The learner decided to tell the teacher on duty. The teacher ... gave them warning letter. The second break, the smokers decided they are going to go after the boy who told on them. They tied their ties on both his legs and dragged him across the grounds in front of the whole school and his fellow peers were cheering them on. Another incident was this year when new grade 8 learners came into our school. The boys were being interfered with by this group who got caught. For instance, being put in green bins and pushed around the school. A lot of violence goes on in the boys toilet, some we haven't heard of, but one in particular is when you are urinated on by bigger pupils.

Another incident was when a new [male] learner in grade 10 was harassed by his "friends" in grade 10. They took him to the middle of the grounds and pulled down his pants and did not give it [his pants] back til the end of break.

Fist-fighting

Female witness 1:

My experience of school violence was when I witnessed two boys fighting on the school grounds. The thing that caused them to fight was gambling. They sit and gamble every break and when one of them loses it's a big fight. First they argued with very bad vulgar language coming from their mouths and started pushing each other around which led to them fighting, kicking, punching and slapping each other. They were rolling on the floor they were getting cheered on by the school to hit each other and fight.

From these above accounts, it is evident that bullying, intimidation, physical assault and robbery are perceived as a means of physically bigger learners affirming their masculinity by victimizing physically smaller learners. Gangs of male learners tying the hands and feet with ropes (of those individual male learners who worry them) and dragging them around the school grounds, appears to be a particularly common practice. However, violence is also perceived by younger and physically smaller learners as a means of self-defense as well as a means of defending their masculinity - as a group. They join forces and - as a gang - physically smaller male learners target individual bullies and (in a similar manner to which they are victimized) they tie the hands and feet of those male learners who frequently victimize them and drag them around the school grounds. These accounts also indicate the normalization of violence among boys. The accounts also indicate two derivations of a (violently) macho-mode of masculinity competing for dominance within this arena - one constituted of physically bigger male learners (e.g. *Ivan, Norman and Tyrone*) and the other of older male learners ('smokers'). However, dominance is not obtained by contesting each other, but rather by both of these competing for dominance over younger, physically smaller males. An alternative form of masculinity is that which is displayed by the group of physically smaller younger males who - as a group - are violently oppositional against intimidation from those males who are bearers of these macho-modes of masculinity.

*Male and female learners' experiences and perceptions regarding acts of violence
among female learners*

In the following accounts male and female learners have described their experiences of violence among females. I have included the accounts of a victim, a number of perpetrators, and a witness of such acts of violence.

Female victim 2:

The first month I got here a group of girls were making my life a living hell. They would chase me around the field and wet my school skirt and shirt. When I came with my hair blow-dried, they'd wet my hair. At home time they would walk behind me and call me names. My friends were too shy and too scared to stand up to them. I told my mother and she phoned the school. They said they'd do something about it but they did not. Weeks passed and I felt scared and lonely. No-one to turn to.

Female perpetrator 1:

I know for a fact we have a very violent school. I have experienced where girls have approached me and accused me of certain things. There are girls who need to have violence inflicted on them because of their dirty ways and dirty mouths. There are also from what I noticed lots of arguments about boys. The most recent victim is 'Lisa'. Lots of girls, almost all the girls in school, want to hit her because she purposefully throws herself at their boyfriends and kisses them...I was verbally violent towards her because she was talking behind my back.

Female witness 2:

I have been in a situation where the girl came up to me and asked me if I had kissed her boyfriend. She wanted to get violent with me and I didn't even know who the boy was. There was a time when a girl swore at me I tried to keep my cool but that's not easy when you have a temper like mine.

Male witness 3:

I've experienced many fights in this school, so many that I can't even remember. Between school hours and after school. There's nothing more enjoyable for boys than a girls'

fight. I remember when a group of about seven girls were fighting, it was one hell of a scene. Panties and shorts showing here and there and all the different size of cellulite...

From the above accounts we can deduce that acts of violence that occurs between female learners are perceived as a viable means of females competing for boyfriends. However, when acts of violence between females involve fist-fighting, it is perceived as 'enjoyable' and a form of entertainment by boys. It also seems as though fist-fighting between female learners seldom occurs. Although disagreements between females begin with an argument, it does not often escalate to fist-fighting as identified in disagreements between members of the male gender group.

Male and female learners' experiences and perceptions of acts of violence between male and female learners

Although several male and female learners wrote about an act of violence that has occurred between a male and female learner within the school, all of their experiences that they described refer to a particular grade nine female learner (to whom I shall refer as *Nomsa* in order to conceal her true identity). I teach *Nomsa*. She is physically bigger than the other females and most of the males in her class and appears to be physically stronger than all of the learners (male and female) in her class. In some of the learners' essays it appears that although *Nomsa* initiates fistfights, it is in retaliation to verbal insults from males. The following accounts describe three separate incidents between *Nomsa* and three different male learners.

Female witness 3:

There's one girl in our class who regularly starts fights with girls as well as boys. Her name is Nomsa. There are many fights she's started. In one fight she swore a boy first and said he swore her in Zulu and started hitting him. But him, not being a gentleman hit her back until she started crying.

Male witness 4:

Nomsa, a girl in our class, she is so raw, she is like a man, she hit anything that comes in her way. It was after school when I heard screams coming from the toilets. I saw

Nomsa choking this boy from Grade 10 who swore her. She held him with one hand and punched him with the other.

Male witness 5:

The girl and boy fight is the worst fight ever. Like a girl in my class, Nomsa. She thinks she can hit the boys when she gets bashed and smashed by the boys its not very nice.

Based on the above accounts, I have deduced that *Nomsa* does not appear to represent the female version of the one of the modes of masculinity competing for dominance over younger smaller boys - i.e. the group of bullies. She does not target her victims nor does she attack the same male learners repeatedly and can therefore not be labeled as 'a female bully'. However, it does appear that - like *Ivan, Norman and Tyrone*, *Nomsa* takes advantage of her big and strong physical attributes in a physically violent manner. For *Nomsa*, it appears that the use of physical violence is perceived as a means of establishing an image of herself among the males as being tough by proving her strength in physical attacks against males who threaten her image. From the accounts it appears that violence between male and female learners is met with disgust from male and female learners alike. From the male descriptions of *Nomsa* being 'manly' and 'raw' a perception seems to exist among males of physical violence that it is a male prerogative. From this I have deduced that: on the one hand while it is recognized by female learners that it is unfeminine to physically attack male learners, on the other hand it is described as 'ungentlemanly' for any male learners to retaliate with physical violence against a female learner.

Learners' experiences and perceptions of acts of violence between male and/ female learners and male and/female educators

The following accounts identify different incidents of violence that have occurred between their peers and educators. In the cases where the learners have referred to the educators by name, I have altered the names of the educators to conceal the true identities.

Male witness 6:

I saw a [male] teacher hit one of my [male] classmates. The [male] teacher called one of the [male] pupils to his table and when the [male] pupil took his time to get to the table, the [male] teacher slapped the boy hard across the face... In another experience the same teacher one [male] pupils would not stop talking and he grabbed the boy by the neck and threw him out of the class.

Female witness 4:

There was a serious scene which involved a [male] teacher...when an older boy in my class was wearing a walkman, listening to music (we had a free period) and this [male] teacher asked him to take them off, but now exactly how was he supposed to know when he had his earphones on? So he asked the boy again to take them off, but the boy still did not hear. So the [male] teacher grabbed the earphones off the boy and nearly broke them. The boy became angry and the boy did not notice the [male] teacher's hand flying across his face and the next thing he knew, he was lying on the floor. So the boy got up and hit the [male] teacher back and the [male] teacher started bleeding. Luckily for the boy, another pupil ran down for another [male] teacher and he [the male teacher] stopped them in time. If this teacher had not I think it would have been a bloodbath in there.

Male witness 7:

My first time of experiencing violence in this school was when I first came to this school on the second day of school when I saw a [male] teacher hitting two boys from my class because he saw them whispering and he called them up to the board and told them to face the board slapped them on their back so hard that I felt as if it landed on me...

The following accounts document two separate experiences of physical violence between a female teacher and her female learner:

Female witness 5:

I remember one day last term when one of the grade eight girls, 'Lolita', was fighting with Miss 'Adams'. They started arguing and they ended up fighting. Miss 'Adams' hit 'Lolita' like she was hitting an adult. She forgot it was a school child and the fight went on.

Female witness 6:

Violence in our school is very popular... There was a situation where a girl got so violent and couldn't get control which she ended up hitting the [female] teacher. The [female] teacher couldn't resist but protect herself and got so violent too. In that situation I find them both guilty, because she [the female learner] was not supposed to lay a hand on an adult. It was worse because it was a teacher and the teacher was not supposed to hit back. She should have tried to protect herself in other ways. She is an adult and her work is to set an example to the pupils. They both did not have respect for each other. The [female] teacher could have done something like punishment (in detention or something), but no. She thought that the better idea was to hit back.

In one of these accounts, on the one hand, the female witness indicates that a learner (male and female) hitting a teacher (male and female) is perceived as a sign of disrespect for the authority of that teacher. On the other hand, although the use of physical force by the educator against the learner was perceived as necessary for self-protection of the female teacher against the attack from her female learner, it can be detected that even the use of physical violence by a female teacher in self-defense is not accepted, since it is indicated that she could have resorted to other non-violent means of reprimand.

Part II: Group Discussion

The rationale for the group discussion was to determine: *What effects do the learner's experiences of violence within the school have on their schooling?* In this part of this chapter, I have provided the reports of the learners. However, a more in-depth discussion can be found in Chapter 5.

I requested that the learners first jot down the impact that violence within the school has on their schooling. Thereafter, I requested that they discuss their responses within their groups. As points of reference for the spokesperson for each group - who was to present (the effects that violence within the school had on the schooling of members

within the group) on behalf of their group - I requested that the scribe for each group jot down key points of what their spokesperson was to say in the report-back. I felt that collecting the scribes' notes and comparing them to my own notes of the large-group discussion was necessary to ensure that I had not been biased in my transcription of the reports. In order to avoid repetition, I asked the first group to identify what the learners found to be the most serious impact of violence on their schooling.

The spokesperson for the first group reported of the following:

Female Group 1:

Violence has affected my class because of the things that go on. We as students don't get a lot of learning in class because people fight and swear and because teachers don't give us a chance to express our view and feelings.. When we start fighting the lesson is disturbed then all the teachers gang up on one class and don't give them any chance.

Children fight every day and nothing has been done. Maybe they could give you warning letters and that's where it ends. I personally think the teachers are not using the warning letters according to the law. They are using it against us and the power to suspend.

I asked if learners within the other groups wished to expand on this. Two learners added the following:

Female Learner A:

Every term there are always people fighting in and out of class...the teachers do not teach us depending on what happened, the teacher won't teach us for quite some time. Whenever there's a fight we miss a lot of work. Fights add to our problems because whenever there's a fight, people are cheering and having a good time so when the teacher sees all of this - all the people cheering and laughing - he punishes the whole class.... Two weeks we sat and did nothing we should have been doing a lot of work. We are now behind on a lot of work and the teachers are not interested in teaching a disruptive class.

Female learner B:

It has affected me a lot because since we are in this class, every teacher thinks that we are violent and now some teachers won't teach us. Sometimes there would be fights in the class and the teacher would say that its all of our fault and wont teach us. Even pupils outside of the school say that we are violent. Last term my whole class had to sit in room 23... [the detention room]. I fell behind with my work and because the principal said our teachers must not give us marks for the assignment we were supposed to do while we were in room 23. He said they must give us nought for our projects. All this affected my learning. I had to find out from my friends about my classwork.

To avoid repetition, I requested that the second group of females identify a most common effect of violence that the other group of females had not reported of. I requested similar of the groups of males.

The following report was given by the spokesperson of the second group of females:

Female group 2:

Violence has affected us in a way that we end up not doing any work and learning. Seeing the violence, it makes us lazy not to want to work but to listen when they are talking about violence and when you look at them you can see that they are enjoying themselves while someone is saying: "You done a good job by hitting him/her." and they laugh about it while the other one is saying: " you should hit him/her after school." ...Pupils are enjoying themselves and they support the fight. People are looking at us like we not civilized...like we are animals.

Male group 1:

The other thing that makes it continue is that learners do not want to get rid of the class clown. They take them as the fame or better pupil in the class and they continue to encourage them with their attitude must be a good fighter to have respect and if you are not a good fighter they laugh at you and don't want to be your friend. They force you to fight and make jokes to the teacher. They have no respect for the teacher And in some instances children fought with teachers. They get warning letters sometimes they get suspended...

Male group 2:

The experiences and stories we are hearing so much are starting to scare us because not we can't concentrate on my school work because we are afraid of what might happen. Most stories that scare us about violence is when students keep on telling that every time the school closes some of the pupils bully the little ones outside of the school gate. We try to ignore that fact and keep planning on what we will do if they come to us. Everyday, we try to ignore it, my other friends tell us that there is no escaping them cause they have tried and failed. If they catch you they sometimes take your money, you school shoes and watches.

It affects me like when I want to go to the toilet...two boys in the school started asking me questions. And the other boy wanted to put my face in the toilet because I was a new comer in the school. They said to me I must pay inhlalakahle that means I must pay for being in this school.

From the above response fear is an obvious effect of violence on male learners in particular. In this response, it is indicated that it is impossible to ignore the violence that occurs within the school. Therefore, some learners have accepted it as a part of their everyday school life.

I invited other responses from learners whose accounts were not identified within the groups. Three of the male learners indicated that violence does not affect their schooling and one of these three male learners reported the following:

There is no violence affecting my learning. I make sure I stay away from violence and concentrate on my school work. I don't care if people fight as long as they don't put me into fighting. They don't respect the teachers. Some of the children swear the teacher in Zulu so that they won't understand.

From the above responses, it is clear that male and female learners routinely witness incidents of violence as well as intimidation against the female educators and perceive this as a sign of disrespect by towards the educators by those male learners who are not in support of maintaining the violent order among the learner group of the school.

What also becomes evident from the learner's essays as well as the group discussion is that: even although violence is recognized to have a disruptive effect on the functioning of the school and results in poor scholastic achievement among male and female learners, the frequency of physical violence (especially among males learners) and verbal violence (particularly among female learners) has led to these kinds of violence becoming normalized - and in some cases - legitimized among male and female learners (even in cases where violence is used against male and female educators).

Chapter 4

Discussion of Findings

The following conclusions are based on my findings following the analysis of the essays written by the learners (of their perception regarding their experience of violence within the school), as well as from the group discussion that I held with the learners (to determine the effects of this violence on their schooling). I will discuss these findings in two parts. The first part concerns male and female learner-perceptions regarding the experiences of violence within the school. The second part concerns the effects of this violence on their schooling.

Male and female learner-perceptions regarding the experiences of violence within the school

Based on the findings from the learner's essays, I have concluded that violence occurs frequently and much of it is accepted by many male and female learners. The processes of violence were identified to be verbal and physical. Violence was identified to be constituted of bullying, intimidation, fist fighting, verbal abuse. (It was noted that violence - verbal and physical - is used by male and female learners.) However, physical violence appears to be a much more significant phenomenon in terms of its disruptive capacity. The school functions reasonably well when violence remains at a verbal level. However, when violence escalates to a level at which physical violence is used, things go out of order.

From the essays, I have identified five (gender) relational locations for violence. These are: male learner/male learner, male learner/male educator, female learner/female learner, female learner/female educator, female learner/male learner gender relations. The research data suggests that although the use of violence is prevalent among both male and female learners of the school, it is used in different forms and is perceived differently. When male learners use violence it is mainly used against other male learners and other male educators. When female learners use violence it is not only used mainly against

other female learners and female educators, but also - although not often - against male learners.

It appears that male learners perceive physical violence as being a male prerogative, and verbal violence as a female prerogative. Female learners perceive, verbal violence (eg. swearing, etc) as well as physical violence as being a female prerogative. However, from the research data, it is evident that even among male/male relations, although the use of physical violence is prevalent and is perceived as a male prerogative, violence in this gender relational location is used for different reasons. Some male learners use physical violence to individually affirm their masculinity (e.g. the bullies) and to compete for dominance (eg. the group of bullies; gang of smoking, weapon-carrying gamblers) by victimizing males who are physically smaller and who are perceived as weaker. For other male learners, physical violence is perceived as an effective means defending their masculinity. This can be either individually or as a group. For example, individually - when two male members of the same gang fist-fight to settle a (eg. gambling) dispute, and, as group - when physically smaller boys join forces and resort to physically violent tactics to (violently) oppose individual members of gangs (of bullies and smokers and gamblers) who compete for dominance through continuously victimizing them. Ironically, these physically smaller learners use the same violent methods (tying their male victim and dragging him across the sports field) to avenge individual members from the group of male bullies and from the gang of male smokers and gamblers. Therefore, judging from the way in which physical violence is used in this male learner/male learners (gender) relational location - with the victims often becoming the perpetrator - it is evident that relations among boys are power relations with physical violence being perceived as a suitable and effective means of both competing for domination as well as struggling against domination.

What was also significant in my findings was that this the perception of violence by male learners - as viable means of affirming their masculinity when threatened and struggling against domination - is not displayed exclusively in male-learner relations with other male learners, but also in male learners/male educator relations. It has been noted that: when male educators resort to physically violent methods to maintain their authority

within the classroom (eg. shoving, slapping), certain male individuals retaliate violently to defend their male image. Often resulting in fist-fight between their educators and themselves.

It was also noted that the use physical violence against female learners is not perceived by male learners as a means of affirming their masculinity. Rather, this is done in relation to other males (male learners and male educators). However, it has been indicated that when a male learner is attacked by a female learner, then the use of physical violence is legitimated among male learners since - in this case - violence is perceived as a means of self-defense. However, it has also been indicated that female learners perceive violence by a male learner against a female learner as unacceptable (ungentlemanly).

In comparison, accounts of incidents involving violence - verbal and physical - among females were not as many as those of accounts of experiences of violence among males. However what was significant was that in female learner/female learner gender relations, violence usually remains at a verbal level between two female learners. However, when violence is used by a female learner against a male learner and a female educator, and by groups of females learners against a female learner, then physical violence is perceived as being more effective than verbal violence.

Violence by both male and female learners is perceived as a means of attaining a goal although the goals are different for males than for females. For male learners, violence is necessary in competing for dominance, in struggles against victimization and in defending their male image when threatened by those in authority (educators) and in self-defense against female learners. Between female learners, individually or in a group, it appears that violence is perceived as an effective means of competing against each other for boyfriends.

Incidents whereby female learners have physically attacked female educators have been recalled by male and other female learners with disgust. However, on the one hand female learners perceive the use of violence in these incidents as 'unmannerly', 'rude'

and 'disrespectful'. They have also expressed the perception that retaliation by female educators against female learners in such incidents in a physically violent manner is necessary (by the female educator) for self-protection.

Violence is normalized by male and female learners even though it is widely understood as having a negative impact on their learning.

Effects of experiences of violence on the schooling of male and female learners

Based on my group discussion with male and female learners, it appears that incidents of violence incite not only emotions of fear, but also tension and excitement among male and female learners.

Fear affects both male and female learners. However, fear of violence appears to have more of a direct effect on male learners (especially physically smaller male learners) in the sense that they are the targets of physical violence from other males. The fear of not knowing when they will be the targets of victimization from gangs who randomly intimidate physically smaller learners was also indicated by a group of male learners. The fear going to the toilet was also indicated by a male learner. Here it was indicated that they are often harassed for money and urinated on by physically bigger and older learners. Despite these fears, and in spite of their implication in the essays - that it is inappropriate for female learners to use physical violence - male learners indicated that fist-fights often cause excitement - especially fights among female learners.

Violence affects the academic progress of both male learners and female learners, but this effect appears to gain the concern of the female learners rather than male learners. Female learners blame the frequency of fist-fighting and rudeness against male and female educators for their poor academic progress. Another female group blamed poor academic progress on the educators. It was expressed that following incidents of violence educators (male and female) 'gang up' against this class of learners and use their power of authority to suspend rather than deal directly with incidents of (physical)

violence that occur within their classrooms. Male learners, on the other hand, blame their lazy attitude towards their school work on the frequency of incidents of violence. This is ironic since it was indicated that physical violence appears to be a male prerogative.

Another effect of violence that was expressed by a group of males was the pressure on males to use violence. It was indicated by male learners that they gain respect among other males by fighting and undermining the authority of teachers. They indicated that if they chose not fight, they may be ostracized by other males. The male learners also indicated that there is not only pressure on them to fight but also to 'to be good fighter' and 'fight to win'.

It is evident that the disparity in class among learners and educators (especially male learners and male educators) has contributed to a violent contest for dominance between two modes of masculinity. The first of these is the educators' (male and female) middle-class ideal of masculinity (i.e. hegemonic masculinity of the school - underpinned by the authority of the educators and enforced in physically violent classroom practices when their authority is challenged). The other is the macho-mode of masculinity (found to be prominent among working class males) that gangs of physically bigger working class learners are attempting to establish in a position of dominance within the school by both challenging the agents of the hegemonic masculinity (i.e. male educators) of the school and by intimidating physically smaller learners.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

From my study, it appears that violence has become normalized among learners - particularly physical violence among male learners and verbal violence among female learners. However, what is also evident from my study is that many male and female learners are aware of the negative impact of the violence that occurs within their school on their academic progress and are not in support of this violence. One might then ask: why do they continue to contribute to violence within the school? Despite the realization of the negative impact of this violence on their schooling, and the fact that male learners expressed that they are pressurized in using violence, the merits of violence - quite disturbingly physical violence - are recognized by male and female, learners and educators alike.

For physically bigger male learners: physical violence is perceived as a survival mechanism: To survive in an environment in which violence - especially physical violence - is so rife, physical violence becomes necessary in gaining acceptance, earning recognition, and commanding respect among their peers. However, for male learners who perceive violence as a mean of affirming their male identities, it is not necessary to go beyond the gender boundaries. Nor does it appear necessary for male educators to exert their authority over female learners. Rather - within the boundaries of male/male gender relations - marks are set by physically bigger male learners against which they affirm their male identities: - individually - against each other and against male authority figures (teachers) and - in groups - against physically smaller male learners. For physically smaller male learners, violence is also perceived also as a survival mechanism: they violently resist oppression by physically bigger male learners. Therefore, the merits of (physical) violence as perceived by male learners allow for the cycle of violence to continue in male learner/male learner and/male educator gender relations.

Similarly, for female learners, physical violence is perceived as a survival mechanism when verbal violence becomes ineffective as means of protection. However, when the use of physical violence is perceived as necessary, then female learners are willing to extend beyond the boundaries of gender and authority: as a means of self-protection - individually - against female educators who are physically violent toward them and against those male learners who are regarded as a threat, and, - in groups when verbal violence has proved ineffective - to protect their 'possessions' (i.e. boyfriends). Similarly, female educators extend beyond the gender boundaries by joining forces with male educators when the authority of a male educator is challenged by a male learner. Therefore, the merits of violence (verbal and physical) as perceived by female learners allow for the cycle of violence not to continue within female learner/female learner and female learner/female educator gender relations. However, by physically attacking male learners, female learners are actively establishing female learner/male learner gender relational location for violence to occur, therefore, further contributing to the violent ethos of the school.

For the first time in this school, through my study male and female learners had been given a voice: to express how they perceive the violence that occurs within the school and the effects that it has on their schooling. From this I realized - not only as a researcher but more so as an educator of the school - that learners (male and female) do not 'just fight given the amount of time that they spend at school'. Not only are male and female learners very much aware of the effects of violence and how they contribute to this violence, but they are also very much aware of reasons why certain forms of violence are used and the gender demarcations for certain forms of violence to be used. In the absence of alternative (non-violent) methods of establishing themselves, male and female learners will continue to set new limits for themselves and (violently) affirm their gender identities against each other and their educators - and so cycle of violence will not only continue, but forms of physical violence might extend beyond the boundaries of physical assault.

Recommendations

My study has identified the gender relational locations for violence that exist within the school in which my research was conducted. It has identified the forms and processes in which violence occurs within these locations. It has also identified that: despite the realization of the male and female learners of the negative effects that their experiences of violence has on their schooling, in the absence of non-violent methods of establishing their gender identities, learners (male and female) perceive the use of violence against each other - as well as against their educators (male and female) - as an effective means in constructing, affirming and/ defending their gender identities. Bearing this in mind, I recommend the following:

To the school's policymakers (viz. the management team), I recommend that these gender relational locations - as well as the forms and processes in which violence occurs in these locations - be considered prior to drafting new policies aimed at dealing with incidents of violence within the school. Once this has been identified, I further recommend that - for each gender relational location for violence - non-violent procedures be drafted and implemented for both learners as well as educators to follow when a confrontation within these locations poses as an opportunity for violence to occur/be used (by both male and female learners as well as educators).

To the national educational policymakers, I recommend that policies be implemented in schools that encourage among male and female learners non-violent means of addressing gender related issues within schools as well as conflict management in the various gender relational locations for violence that exist within schools. I further recommend that these policies are incorporated into to formal curricular as well as informal and extracurricular activities of the school - therefore providing non-violent opportunities for learners (male and female) to establish their gender identities.

I am confident that opportunities for violence to occur within schools will decrease considerably if educational policymakers are to consider this study, recognize

the gendered nature of violence within schools and take the aforementioned recommendations into account in the drafting of future educational policies aimed at addressing violence within our nations' schools.

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Appendices

Annexure A - Semi-structured questionnaire

Dear Learner,

Thank you for participating in this research project. Your responses are important.

You are required to write a short essay. The attached response sheet has been provided for this purpose. In your essay, you are required to describe your experience(s) of violence within your school. However, before you begin, here are a few important points for you to take note of:

- **You do not need to indicate your name or surname on the response sheet.**
- **It is important that you state whether you are a male or female and indicate your age.**
- **Your essays must not be fictitious. In other words, it is important that you describe events that you have truly experienced.**
- **In your essays, instead of simply using the words learner, pupil, student, teacher, educator, etc, it is important that you state whether you are referring to a male/female learner and a male/female educator.**

Annexure B - Instructions for the group discussion.

Thank you once again to you all for participating in this research project.

Aim:

To determine (through this group discussion) the effects that your experiences of violence have on your schooling.

This activity has been divided into two parts: small group discussions (20 minutes) and a whole-class discussion (45 minutes).

Instructions for your small-group discussion:

In your groups you are to discuss the effects that your experiences of violence within your school have on you schooling.

Before you begin:-

- Each group is to elect a group leader. The role of the group leader is to lead the discussion within the group and report-back on behalf of the group in the whole-class discussion.
- Each group is to elect a scribe. The role of the scribe is to jot down important points that are mentioned by members within your group. This information will be used as a reference by the spokesperson/group leader in his/her report-back in the whole-class discussion.
- Your discussions within your groups may be either in English or Zulu - or both - (whatever your group members agree upon), but the notes taken by the scribe will need to be in English because the reports-back of the spokespersons as well as the whole-class discussion will be held in English.