

Girls' experience of violence in a single-sex high school in KwaZulu-Natal

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of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree**

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December 2009

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ways in which grade 10 girls experience violence within a single-sex high school setting in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The focus of the study is on their accounts of witnessing violence amongst other girls in the school. The study shows that despite the view that single-sex schools are regarded as a safer option for many girls in South Africa, different forms of violence and aggression are reported by the girls in this study. Violence and aggression are not easily definable but the eye-witness accounts from the grade 10 girls in this study show how - in everyday relations - violence is gendered, raced and classed. Violence and aggression are also related to sexuality and the study shows how girls fight for boys. This study draws upon a qualitative methodological approach to identify the various forms of violence experienced within this setting. Through the process of analysing semi-structured interviews, this study has revealed that the single-sex environment for high school girls is a highly charged site of violence and aggression. Implications for understanding girls' violence, as well as recommendations to address such, conclude the study.

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ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This research explores the ways in which Grade 10 girls in a single-sex school give meaning to violence and aggression in their school. Drawing on interviews conducted with 14 Grade 10 learners, the study will show how violence and aggression manifest and are mobilised by girls in the school. The girls in this study do not claim to be the aggressors but have witnessed it and at times have been victims of it. A focus on violence and aggression amongst girls in a single-sex school is unusual in South Africa particularly when research on gender, education and violence focuses on boys and male teachers as culprits of gender-based violence and sexual harassment (Morrell, 1998; Human Rights Watch, 2001).

This study draws on the voices of 14 girls to explore the forms of violence that are prevalent in Thekwini High School (pseudonym). Thekwini High School was historically a white middle class single-sex school, but its dynamics have changed since 1994. It is made up of almost one thousand African, Indian, Coloured and White learners, with approximately 80% of the school learner population being African. The actual interview sample consisted of 10 African girls, two Indian girls and two Coloured girls.

There is little qualitative research in the South African gender and education literature to support the view that girls do not display violent forms of conduct (see Virasamy, 2004; and Bhana, 2002; 2008 as exceptions). There is even less research on girls who witness and experience the violence and aggression in single-sex schools. By drawing upon interviews conducted with 14 Grade 10 girls at Thekwini High School, this

study explores the meaning that they give to violence and aggression. The concepts violence and aggression are not easily definable (see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). In a later section in this chapter an attempt is made to provide some sense of what constitutes violence, although this is certainly not comprehensive. However, in this study violence and aggression are used interchangeably as violence is a form of aggression and aggression is a form of violence. This study also has implications for the debate about safety for girls in single-sex schools in South Africa. Single-sex schools have been recommended by the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) (See Wolpe et al., 1997), as a way to address the violence particularly in African working class contexts and supported even as a temporary measure by Morrell (2000).

The work around gender violence and schooling in South Africa has rightfully stressed the importance of focusing on the crisis of masculinity which has led to grave reports of school-based violence perpetrated by boys and men and the effects of this on girls (see Human Rights Watch, 2001). Research on boys' violence in South African schools is escalating. Bhana (2005), for example, shows how very young boys commit violent acts. The effects for girls, even at 7 and 8 years-of-age, is evident as her research shows that boys use physical and verbal forms of abuse to assert their power over girls. However, despite the relevance of this work, the focus remains on boys and men as culprits with African boys being the particular focus of attention (see Pattman and Bhana, 2006). In this study, the focus is on girls who witness the violence and aggression amongst other girls at Thekwini High School.

Bhana (2008) argues that violence in schools is often seen in terms of static positioning of gender with boys and men as perpetrators and girls as victims. Bhana

(2008) alerts us to this problem and argues that viewing schoolgirls simply as victims of violence fragments our knowledge about their schooling experiences. Emerging work in the international arena shows that girls too can be perpetrators of violence and aggression (see Alder & Worrall, 2004; Bright, 2005; Burman et al., 2001; Jackson, 2006; Currie et al., 2007; Simmons, 2002). Bhana (2008) goes on to argue that in South Africa the discourse of girls as victims (whilst justifiable) does not provide a comprehensive account of girls' experiences. Girls are not victims of violence alone. They too are complicit with the gender regime and the respective gender positioning within schools. Dunne et al. (2006), suggest that the limited research evidence of girl-on-girl violence in developing contexts tends to present girls as innocent victims without agency.

This study argues that high school girls do violence and aggression and that the idea of girls as innocent victims of violence in South African schools must be re-thought. Girls are actively engaged in violent school cultures which make for more careful consideration of the merit of single-sex schools in South Africa. What this study will show is that the girls talk about the violence in their school and associate it with a variation of feminine identities that does not fit into the typical good-girl ideal (see Bhana, 2008).

In South Africa, the imperative to address violence and gender inequalities in school is evident. GETT (1997) advocated for single-sex schools in light of the scourge of violence and gender inequalities in South African schools:

In recommending support for single-sex schools for girls, this report is advocating that such schools be supported where there is an active policy for developing excellence in girls' education, provision for security for girls from harassment and violence and where such schooling provides affirmative programmes designed to equip girls with a high level of consciousness about women's and girls human rights. (p. 91)

The GETT call was based on a view that the lives of African girls could be improved within a schooling system that was single-sex and thus its recommendation was underpinned by the violent masculine conduct in schools. Since this recommendation many African girls have been entering former white single-sex schools. Many of the girls come from neighbouring township contexts surrounding the school whilst others live in the former white areas that serviced the single-sex schools.

Morrell (2000) argues that in the major gender challenge in South Africa is not getting African girls into schools:

...one of the major obstacles is the violence that girls face and the effect that this has on their ability to act autonomously... The violence in schools is a major reason why single-sex schools for girls should be considered (p. 223-230).

Writing in 2000, Morrell argues that whilst single-sex schools are not *the* answer, they may however make an important contribution to addressing gender inequalities and might assist to avoid the violent and repressive conditions which often exist in South

African co-educational schools. Against a climate of continuing violence and sexual harassment, South African schools are not safe for girls (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Research has illustrated the ways in which violent forms of masculinity are perpetuated in schools leading to unsafe experiences for girls (see Morrell, 1998; Bhana, 2005). South Africa has one of the worst figures for gender and sexual violence in the world.

Pernicious forms of gender violence have been recognised by the Human Rights Watch (2001). The violence includes physical and sexual assault, rape and harassment perpetrated by male classmates and teachers. In township schools violence is endemic and researchers note that violent boys enact a version of masculinity which is toxic and where girls are usually the victims of male violence (Wolpe et al., 1997; Bhana, 2005). The social context of violence and the emasculating experiences of African boys living in poverty and social deprivation in the township are often rendered important reasons for understanding violence. Within this context, single-sex schools could provide a reprieve from everyday violent practices that inhere in township schools. However, Morrell cautions that whilst advocating for single-sex schools much more research is needed to clarify who and how they will benefit from single-sex schools. Morrell argues for detailed context specific knowledge in this debate.

This study focuses on the accounts of girls' experiences of violence and aggression in a single-sex school. When the girls spoke of violence, they did so in ways that connected femininities with race, culture, class and sexuality. In the mobilisation of violence in single-sex schools like Thekwini, girls show that such violence is deeply connected to social processes that inhere within and outside of the school.

In this study I focus on girls in a single-sex former white school who have witnessed girls' violence and at times been victims of it. This study will not concern itself with the wider debates about single-sex schools. Its specific aim is to provide context specific knowledge of girls' experiences of violence in a single-sex Durban school. Bhana (2008), argues that because of the grim picture of gender violence in South African schools and effects of such violence on girls, the inclination of many researchers is to see girls as victims. Like Bhana, this study makes a case for addressing the missing face of girls' violence in South African schools. This study seeks to explore the face of girls' violence in single-sex schools. As Bhana (2008) notes:

Viewing African schoolgirls simply as victims of violence not only fragments our knowledge about their schooling experiences... but also creates an analytically unhelpful dichotomy which reduces girls to homogenous stereotypes and ignores the possibility of multiple forms of femininities, just as there are multiple forms of masculinities. (p. 3)

High school girls, in single-sex South African schools, are particularly absent in research, as most of the research surrounds girls as victims in co-educational primary and high school settings. African girls, in particular, have been positioned as victims of such violence. Only in recent years has some research been conducted on aggressive femininities. These studies include those of Virasamy (2004) and Bhana (2008). All the studies are, however, situated in co-educational school settings.

Internationally the scope of work around girls' violence and schooling has grown (Alder & Worall, 2004; Bright, 2005; Ringrose, 2008). Ringrose, in her study of girls in the UK, notes that there are conceptual limitations within the study of bullying discourses that ground UK anti-bullying policies, frameworks and literatures. She argues that bullying discourses largely ignore gender, (hetero)sexuality and the social, cultural and subjective dynamics of conflict and aggression among teen-aged girls. Drawing on an interview-based study of girls' experiences of aggression and bullying, Ringrose goes on to show how friendships and conflicts among the girls are thoroughly heterosexualised, en-cultured and classed. This complex relationship is important in informing how, why and when bullying discourses are mobilised.

There has been an obvious shift in the perception that school violence excludes girls although much less work is being done in South Africa. More studies are now being conducted worldwide to include aggressive girls as an important component of school violence. Girls often express violent and aggressive tendencies in ways different from boys.

Teenage girls are becoming more violent, with rising crime figures shattering the image of females as the gentler sex. Experts say it is the ugly side of the greater freedom and equality enjoyed by girls and young women today. Boys and girls are becoming similar. (Alder & Worrall, 2004, p. 1)

According to Vail (2002),

Adolescent and pre-adolescent girls wield enormous power over their peers. Their weapons – gossiping, name-calling and excluding - may not give other

girls black eyes or bloody lips, but they can be as harmful as physical intimidation, violence and racial slurs. These frequently covert acts of aggression also affect the school climate and culture, as well as the girls' academic performance and sense of self-worth.

A study in Finland (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), has contributed significantly to understanding girls' aggression within a broader definition. This study suggests that violence not only reflects an act, but an intention as well. Often the focus on physical aggression may be seen as a male perspective only, while female aggression reflects indirect aggressive tendencies focused on disruption of relationships. In this context, girls can be seen as acting in aggressive ways when they make use of social structures (such as manipulating others to attack victims) to harm others.

Internationally, the literature is showing that incidents involving adolescents as perpetrators of bullying are on the increase (Simmons, 2002; Bright, 2005). The research shows how girls bully close friends and how this goes unnoticed because of the façade of friendship. The assumptions that teachers make about girls and non-violence, in particular can only be undone when attention is given to the hidden and secret ways that aggressive girls enact their violence and bullying. As the aggression of boys is more visible than girls, we often assume that boys are more aggressive than girls. As a result, society's attention on aggression in children has focused on the more overt physical types of aggression that tend to be associated with masculinity and male characteristics. According to Leschied (2004), boys generally harm others with physical or verbal aggression because this behavior is consistent with the social peer group and physical dominance goals of boys. Girls, on the other hand, are more

apt to focus their aggression on relational issues with their peers. This behavior is consistent with the social peer group and intimacy goals of girls. This kind of aggression, is more characteristic of girls, though not exclusive to girls, and is done with the intention of damaging another child's friendship or feelings of inclusion within a social group.

1.2 Conceptual use of Violence and Aggression

The terms violence and aggression are often used interchangeably because many violent acts are aggressive in nature and vice versa. Several researchers have advocated that violence and aggression be disaggregated as this will provide a more heterogenous account of violence and lead to more effective and detailed account of steps at prevention. In this study both violence and aggression are used interchangeably.

Aggression can basically be categorised in the following three ways. Physical Aggression involves direct physical attacks such as punching, kicking, pushing, shoving, hitting or any other form of physical violence.

Verbal Aggression involves the attempted humiliation of individuals through overt and covert verbal abuse, including name-calling, put-downs, threats, sighing and other audible expressions. Relational Aggression aims to manipulate the web of third-party relationships in order to hurt a particular individual. Spreading rumours, gossip, lies, telling secrets, eye-rolling, exclusion and 'the silent treatment' all aim to promote cruelty through the social networks. This is a form of emotional and psychological violence which usually leaves its victims in a no-win situation. This form of

aggression is difficult to detect as the tormenting escalates when the victim attempts to defend herself. (Bjorkqvst, 2005). Even though all three forms of aggression were described by the participants in my study, most agreed that verbal and relational forms of aggression were more damaging than the physical aggression.

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argue that violence is a slippery concept. These scholars note that violence must be seen as a continuum and can never be understood only in terms of physical force. Violence includes the assault on dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural aspects of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning. One of the difficulties in conceptualising violence is that we cannot always identify all aspects of incidences as they occur (see Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004, p. 2). Violence cannot be readily quantified in a way that would make it easy to develop a checklist.

Violence, itself however defies easy categorisation. It can be everything and nothing, legitimate or illegitimate, necessary, useless, senseless and gratuitous or utterly rational and strategic. Violence is in the eye of the beholder. What constitutes violence is always mediated by an expressed or implicit dichotomy between legitimate/illegitimate, permissible or sanctioned acts. Violence is present (as a capability) in each of us, as is its opposite-the rejection of violence.

The objective and focus of this study is to examine how a group of girls in Grade 10 understand the violence and aggression in their school. Some questions that this study attempts to explore are:

- What are the gendered relations between girls in Grade 10, at Thekwini High School?
- How is violence and aggression evident in these relations?
- How do girls construct this violence and aggression?
- What steps can be taken by the school to reduce or eliminate violence and aggression?

In 2004, I was appointed as a school teacher at Thekwini High School. Prior to that, I had spent two years teaching at a girls' high school in central Durban. During those two years, I had observed the interaction of girls' within this single-sex setting. I noted that the girls at this school tended to display forms of aggression towards one another, that I had rarely observed in the co-educational high school in which I had taught for the previous ten years. My fascination with girls' aggression increased when I began teaching at Thekwini High School. I became increasingly aware of similar aggressive attitudes of girls at this girls' school. My first experience was that of physical aggression, when I had to separate two Grade 10 girls who suddenly got up in the middle of a lesson and began hitting each other. This was followed by, amongst others, various fights on the field during breaks and numerous complaints by learners that they were being teased or threatened. It was becoming more and more evident that the aggressiveness of girls at this school was indeed a growing problem.

After taking an interest in the area of gender and violence, I began to pay particular attention to violence and aggression in the school. I witnessed various forms of violence and aggression, from direct physical fights to more indirect forms such as name-calling and exclusions. The aggressive attitudes of girls in the classroom were

also evident through their disruptive behaviour during lessons as well as the blatant lack of respect towards educators and peers. I also became aware of the way language was used as an aggressive tool. I was certain that the problem of aggressive girls' at this school needed investigation. This further prompted my research on this topic.

1.3 The Context of the Study

1.3.1 Thekwini Girls High: Context and Change.

Thekwini High School is 40 years old. It began as a single-sex, whites only, school and continued in that tradition until the end of 1994 when the school after the end of apartheid had a growing number of black girls (Indian, African and Coloured). Under apartheid, the education for girls was split. White girls in KwaZulu-Natal entered single-sex schools (state or private) or co-educational schools. The history of single-sex schools reaches back to colonial times and was influenced by the British schooling system. single-sex schools were associated with elite forms of education. As a colony South Africa developed this model and was racially segregated.

Thekwini High was, during the years of apartheid, an elite girls' high school for Whites only. The staff was also entirely White. With the emergence of Democracy, girls of other race groups (Blacks, Indians and Coloureds) were admitted to this school. This resulted in a mass exodus of White girls from this school (with families either emigrating or moving their daughters to schools in the more elite "White" areas), as well as resignations and transfers of teachers and eventually to the temporary closure of the school.

The school learner population rose to just over 900, with the majority of learners being Black (approximately 80% Black; 9% Indian; 7% Coloured and 4% White). The White girls at this school were from the remaining families in the area. Many of them came from single parent homes where the mothers were the sole bread-winners. Some of these girls even worked after school to supplement the family income. The annual school fees, were, at the time of this study, approximately R5500.

The Black girls came from either the nearby townships (lower socio-economic families) or from the suburbs (middle-class families). The Indian girls were mainly from nearby suburbs. The Coloured girls were mainly from the surrounding Coloured townships.

There was a staff complement of approximately 50. At the time of this study, the majority of the 50 staff members was female. Senior Management was entirely female. There was only one recently promoted Indian Head of Department and one Black Head of Department – the rest of management were White females. Approximately 40% of the teaching staff was White. Approximately 40% was Indian and the remaining 20%, was Black. There were only three male members on the teaching staff. Two were Indians, one was White.

1.4 The Research Site

Thekwini High School is located in the south of Durban. The ethos of the school is based on the motto: “Knowledge with Understanding”. This school has Grades 8 to 12 and at present the number of learners enrolled at Thekwini High School is 940

students, made up of approximately 850 African, 20 White, 40 Coloured and 30 Indian learners.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described my motivation for exploring girls violence and aggression from the view of girls who claim not to do violence. Their observations and conversations of such violence will indicate that girls do in fact take part in various forms of violence and that single-sex schools are not safe either. This chapter provided a brief focus on the literature on gender, girls and school violence and provided a conceptual understanding of the concept of violence and aggression. I presented a description of the research site and concluded by providing my research questions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research explores the manifestation of violence and aggression in a single-sex school in Durban. 14 girls were interviewed to assess the nature and extent of violence. The girls in the sample did not claim to be violent and aggressive but their accounts of violence in the school and its effects has important contributions to make to the notion of innocent girls and the notion that single-sex schools are safe for girls. According to Bhana (2008), “hardly any attempt has been made to investigate the ways in which girls navigate the context of violence in schools” (p. 2). She argues further that “notions of gender are static, and girls are given the status of victims with narrow (and polarised) conceptions of gender, assuming that the changing South African context has not altered or modified patriarchal dynamics.” (Bhana, 2008, p. 3)

The main focus of this chapter, is to provide a literature survey of the violence and aggression amongst high school girls within the single-sex school environment. This area remains largely unexplored. There is a dearth of information on violent and aggressive girls within the South African context. This implies that in attempting to establish a theoretical and conceptual framework for my study, I had to gain insights from international research, work done in primary schools in South Africa, and developments made in masculinity and gender studies. In addressing the issue of girls’ violence, studies located in primary schools will be drawn on, to demonstrate the growing problem of violence at schools in South Africa. Finally, I shall draw on more recent studies focusing on girls’ violence, which support the results of this study.

2.2 Girls' Aggressiveness and Violence

Owens (2008, p. 1), defines indirect aggression as “a kind of social manipulation: the aggressor manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in the attack.” Owens (2000a) and his team of researchers in a study conducted in Australia, found that teenage girls tended to exhibit more indirectly aggressive behaviours than teenage boys. After conducting an in-depth qualitative study into the nature of teenage girls' indirect aggression, they were able to describe the following types of indirect aggression that were commonly exhibited by girls:

- Talking nastily about others – what girls described as “bitching” about others; spreading rumours; betraying confidences and using code names to talk about other girls.
- Exclusionary behaviours – from minor incidents of ignoring other girls, to exclusions from friendship groups.
- A range of other indirect harassments – passing of nasty notes about victims;
- leaving hurtful messages on desks; making prank telephone calls and hiding personal property.
- Non-verbal behaviours – the use of “daggers” or death stares to intimidate others and huddling together to exclude victims.

Direct aggression, which is more commonly exhibited by boys, is also evident amongst girls. The latter usually involves behaviour such as kicking, shoving, punching, hitting, or any other form of direct physical attacks against others.

This area remains largely unexplored. In addressing the issue of girls' violence, studies located in primary schools will be drawn on, to demonstrate the growing problem of violence at schools in South Africa. Finally, I shall draw on more recent studies focusing on girl-enacted violence in international settings to support the results of this study.

As the definition of what constitutes violence is broadened, a different picture begins to emerge of the representation of girls in categories of violence.

2.3 Relational Aggression

According to Burman et al. (2001), relational aggression refers to the covertly inflicted damage that compromises the victims' relationships with peers. Information about girls' pathways into violence and aggression is scarce. This presents a challenge to researchers as there is a lack of informed theoretical and analytical vocabulary to investigate or conceptualise girls' violence that is not grounded in male behaviour. According to Owens (2002), indirect aggression in girls may be linked to a feeling of weakness and direct aggression may be linked to a feeling of strength.

In her book, *Odd Girl Out* (2002), Rachel Simmons writes: "The middle school years are what many call the epicenter of the crisis of female adolescence" (p. 268). Incidents involving adolescents as the perpetrators of bullying are on the increase. "Female bullying relies on psychological methods which are relational, indirect and socially motivated." (Bright, 2005, p. 93)

In trying to define my topic, I began to research aggression amongst teenage high school girls and discovered the Canadian documentary film, *Rats and Bullies: The Dawn-Marie Wesley Story* (MacMillian & Buffer, 2004). The documentary explores the dark side of female bullying as told through the tragic true-story involving real mean girls. At the age of 14, Dawn-Marie Wesley took her own life by hanging herself with a dog leash after experiencing a cycle of psychological abuse and verbal threats from three of her closest friends. In her suicide note she wrote:

Mom, if I had tried to get help, it would have gotten worse. They are always looking for a new girl to beat up, and these are the toughest girls. If I ratted, I would get them kicked out of school, and then there is nothing stopping them.

(MacMillian & Buffer, 2004)

In her suicide note, Dawn-Marie also named the three girls, which sparked a police investigation ending in a court case where the three bullies were made to stand trial for their actions. In the film, distinctions are made between the better-known types of aggression that males engage in, and the subtler and psychologically damaging ways in which females bully. These form crucial aspects of my own study.

The shocking suicide of this 14-year old girl grabbed my attention. I questioned the possibility of this serious problem existing in South African girls' schools as well. In searching for similar situations in South Africa, I realised that no studies had been conducted in this specific field of girls' aggression within the single-sex high school setting. Upon closer investigation, I discovered that this field has been extensively researched in other countries, especially in Canada and the United States of America.

Bright (2005) deals specifically with my field of study. The Canadian writer describes the experiences of her 13-year old daughter as a victim of bullying by female peers. She distinguishes between relational aggression, indirect aggression and social aggression as typical forms of female bullying. By observing her daughter's change from a confident, out-going child, to one that was fearful, withdrawn, insecure and filled with sadness, the writer investigated the problem of female aggression in schools. Some of the aggressive tactics she describes are teasing, name-calling, using degrading language, making fun of, ignoring, alienating, belittling, intimidating and encouraging the participation of others in bullying. Her investigation revealed that bullying usually occurred in unsupervised places where bullies dominated by controlling personalities and making unsuspecting adolescents the targets. It was easy for these aggressive acts to escape detection, as these bullies hide under the cover of girls' sweetness. The results of this investigation supports the results of my study, as a parallel could be drawn regarding all the forms of aggression highlighted. Sadly, however, it seems that for many teenage girls, few recognise the symptoms of female aggression and its effects on victims until they are faced with the tragic consequences.

Simmons (2002), Vail (2002), and, Karres (2004), all agree that the problem of aggression amongst girls is a serious and increasing problem that needs to be addressed. All these studies were conducted by means of qualitative individual and group interviewing. All these researchers listened as the girls spoke about their experiences of aggression.

Simmons (2002) aptly includes the “hidden culture of aggression” in the title of her book on girls’ aggression, exposing the truth about what really goes on within the girls’ high school environment. She relates real life stories and highlights some of the most urgent social issues facing girls today. She describes, amongst other things, the subtle ways in which girls express anger, how cliques work, bullying across racial and socio-economic lines, hidden jealousies, competition, emotional abuse among close friends and school attitudes towards girl bullying. This psychological warfare included dirty looks, taunting notes and exclusion from social groups. The writer spoke to eight groups of high school girls, enquiring about the differences between the way boys and girls were mean. The responses were similar, indicating that indirect forms of aggression, such as being secretive and glaring at others, were commonly displayed. In these ways, girls’ aggression can be seen as a “hidden culture”. These are some of the reasons why this problem is so difficult to identify as most of girls’ aggression is so covert, as opposed to the more overt displays of boys’ aggression. However, my study also points to the fact that girls can also be aggressive in more overt ways as well.

The damaging effects of covert aggression are highlighted by Vail (2002), who describes adolescent girls as having the ability to wield enormous power over their peers. This researcher emphasises that the weapons girls use, such as gossiping, name-calling and excluding, may not give other girls black eyes or bloody lips, but they can be as harmful as physical intimidation, violence and racial slurs. Furthermore, these frequently covert acts of aggression also affect the school climate and culture, as well as the girls’ academic performance and feelings of self-worth. Most of the girls in my study indicated that they found these covert acts of aggression

more damaging than direct physical assaults, as they left long-term scars and affected their daily functioning as learners.

The various ways in which girls are aggressive towards one another was further explored by Karres (2004), in the US. The aggressive girls are identified through their sneaky ways. In an attempt to understand what made mean girls behave the way they did, the writer spoke to more than 1000 teenage girls. The study described numerous accounts of girls fighting back against teasing and bullying, indicating that the problem of girls' aggression is indeed a common problem at girls' schools. Insights gained from this investigation were crucial to my study. I was able to verify, through my study, that girls' aggressive styles in South Africa are very similar to those employed internationally. These results are also widely supported by other international researchers such as Simmons (2002), and, Alder & Worrall (2004).

In, *Girls Violence: Myths and Realities*, Alder & Worrall (2004) compiled a collection of contemporary research on the perceived increase in girls' violence, offering perspectives from the US, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. The contributors engage in in-depth discussions on whether violence by girls has actually increased, the kinds of behaviour by girls that can be classified as "violent", and on how attitudes towards girls' behaviour have changed. The context of girls' violence is also explored through social constructions of adolescent femininities. Labeling girls as "violent" necessitates the examination and understanding of the social context in which violence emerges as a strategy for girls. As human beings are social beings, high school girls can be seen as social beings within the social context of the school. As these girls spend several hours of each day interacting with other girls, the

dynamics of these social interactions would offer clear insights into why violence is employed as a strategy by girls. This could mean that they have limited access to alternative ways of dealing with their negative emotions. It is becoming clear, internationally, that girls are more openly expressing their aggression.

2.4 South African Primary School Perspectives

Considering that there is a dearth of information on aggressive adolescent girls in South Africa, I reviewed studies on girls' violence conducted in South African primary schools as well. To get a clearer picture of aggression among girls in secondary schools, one must first trace the trends in primary schools. One such study was conducted by Bhana (2005), in which she distinguishes between gladiator girls and soft girls. Through this discussion, Bhana demonstrates that violence is not just a means of power for only boys, but that violent femininity is also displayed by girls. She refers to these girls as gladiator girls as they use their bodies to bring harm to others. The girls with soft femininities become the victims of these stronger girls who hit them. She goes on to explain that girls become leaders through enacting violence as foot soldiers. According to Bhana, poverty and the resulting fighting for lunches, played a key role in the display of aggressive femininities. In this research, I found valuable clues to conducting my own research. I therefore drew on the methodology and the findings of this paper when I conducted my own study on girl-enacted violence. Even though Bhana's study was situated in the primary school, within a co-educational environment, there were obvious indicators of such aggressiveness by girls. These then extend into the single-sex high school setting wherein I based my study.

Most researchers tend to dwell mainly on the ways in which girls are victims of male violence. However, hardly any attempt has been made to examine the ways in which girls navigate the context of violence within the single-sex school setting. In a more recent study, Bhana (2008, p. 13) acknowledges the absence, in South Africa, of research which focuses on the violent expressions of femininity. She argues that South African society is marked by persistent social and economic inequalities, within which girl-on-girl violence is used as an important means to secure resources and claims to power. South African girls have often been depicted as victims rather than perpetrators of violence, dwelling mainly on the ways in which girls, as victims of male violence, can be protected from violent boys and men. It is that perception that Bhana contradicts, arguing that boy against girl violence is only one form of violence; and, that girls are not simply passive recipients of male violence – “they engage in it, use it, and resist it.” She emphasises that alternative expressions of femininity in the study of girls’ violence in single-sex schools is indeed absent in South Africa.

Dunne et al. (2006), suggests that the limited research evidence of girl-on-girl violence in developing contexts tends to present girls as innocent victims without agency. It is further argued that it is imperative to challenge any static representation of girls as simply victims of violence – rather than complicit with the gender regime and the respective gender positioning within schools. Vettan (2000), argues that the emphasis on women as victims reinforces stereotypes of women as passive and living on terms dictated by men. This was one of the main challenges that I faced in researching girls violence in South Africa, as so little attention has been paid to girls as perpetrators of violence. With the changing social context of all schools after democracy, and with the resultant racial mingling in South African schools, it may

become apparent that where race, class and gender intersect, violence increases (Bhana, 2008). In my particular research site, boys were absent; however, the numerous incidents of girls' violence can be traced to the intersection of gender, race and class.

Zulu et al. (2004), also explored school violence in South Africa. Violence in schools in the apartheid years was a serious problem. However, the problem persisted even after a decade of democracy. As school violence impacts negatively on the culture of teaching and learning, the nature and extent of violence in schools, among a sample of learners, was investigated. It was found that violence is still a serious problem and that teaching and learning suffers in the process. "Schools have become highly volatile and unpredictable places." This trend can be traced to most schools, including single-sex schools in South Africa. By explaining the results found in the study, upon which this article was based, I drew comparisons with the various forms of violence observed. The writers listed various reasons why learners exhibited aggressive behaviours. These included over-crowded conditions at home and domestic violence which spilled over into the school. The study was conducted in 16 high schools in the KwaMashu area, in KwaZulu-Natal. 2% of the schools' population was drawn as the random sample. The findings were detailed and informed my research extensively, even though the focus was on boys as the perpetrators of violence. There were obvious links to my own study on girls' violence within the single-sex high school environment, as the vast range of girls' aggression became evident.

2.5 Aggressive Women

In exploring the aggressiveness of women, I became aware of the extension of girls' aggression into womanhood. Giddish (2005), highlights the violence exhibited by a South African woman towards her male spouse. The woman was extremely aggressive and physically violent. However, it is clear that many of these attacks on men by women is concealed from the public gaze, as men are usually silent about their abuse. They are embarrassed and ashamed to admit to other males that a woman has that kind of power over them. Even though they feel powerless, they continue to pretend that they feel in control over women, therefore leaving such incidents unreported. Giddish also reveals some of the factors that led to the excessive acts of aggression. The abusive wife consumed alcohol and used her larger body size to intimidate and control her husband. She used an excessively violent method (she hit him on the head with a sjambok). If these problems are resolved before children become adults, this very serious problem could be prevented from affecting women in their adult lives. Exposing violence in women may help to identify this growing problem in girls.

2.6 Race, Class and Gender

This study investigates concepts of race, class and gender and explains how these are navigated and manipulated by high school girls to define their femininities and relationships with other girls. Often, acts of aggression among girls are dismissed as minor episodes as they are not within the expectations of others, and, by their very nature, are easily concealed from the adult gaze. Boys are expected to be aggressive and it is to them that most aggression is attributed. Based on studies conducted in Scotland, Burman et al. (2001), conclude that it is an uncommon phenomenon for

violence to be perpetuated by females. However, these writers aptly state that female violence is easily dismissed as inconsequential as it is numerically and statistically insignificant, compared to the problem of male violence. It is, however, still not clear as to the exact extent of female aggression as this still remains a poorly researched area, internationally, in comparison to the area of male aggression.

An interesting argument is one put forward by Morrell (2001) that single-sex schools provide a safe environment for girls. My study will seek to contradict this argument, by examining forms of violence as experienced by girls within a single-sex school environment. As much of the aggression of girls is covert, the harmful effects these acts of aggression have on victims cannot be overlooked or underestimated as they can be even more damaging than overt, physical acts of aggression that they may be more exposed to within the co-educational settings. It is also my view that, as far as girls' aggression towards other girls is concerned, being in a co-educational high school environment may offer some protection to the victims.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review was conducted to develop an understanding of the nature and extent of school violence in general, boys' violence, violence in the co-educational primary school setting as well as the violence of women. In addition to that, studies conducted internationally were also included as these offered research material that was located in the exact field of my study, being girls' violence in a single-sex high school setting. In this thesis, I do not intend to generalise about the aggressive attitudes of girls within the single-sex high school environment. Considering the international findings on the increase in girls' violence and the range of aggressive

strategies employed by girls in South Africa as well, I merely suggest that the results of my study could be an indication that similar problems exist in similar settings in South Africa, and therefore requires further investigation. As girls' violence within the single-sex school environment has not previously been researched in South Africa, one may assume that future studies may reveal similar results, as the conditions within these school settings are similar. This may prompt further research in other schools, to assess the extent to which girls' aggressiveness is impacting on the quality of education in other girls' high schools and on the general mindset of girls. Data showing where this behaviour is not occurring in schools would be highly valuable as solutions to the problem would be evident in the schools where the problem doesn't exist.

Most school authorities are unaware of the existence of girls' aggression, especially the relational methods they employ. However, according to the girls in my study, these are more damaging than physical acts of violence. Many girls suffer in silence and teachers are thereby given the impression that all is well at school. However, drastic changes in academic performance are often the result of the effects of aggression and are wrongly attributed to laziness, and punished, thereby exacerbating the internal agony these victims endure. If school authorities remain unaware of forms of girls' violence, they will not be able to identify the signs of aggression. This serious problem at girls' schools will then go unchecked. It is therefore imperative that this area be investigated further, as the scope of my research did not allow for such an in-depth study.

The studies conducted by all the above researchers and writers provided a broad conceptual framework, within which I conducted my own research. Most of the issues dealt with, assisted me greatly in identifying the various forms of girls' violence at the chosen site of my study. Furthermore, the methodologies used by the various researchers mentioned, provided guidelines for my own research data collection.

The review of the literature inspired me to research this very disturbing and challenging field. Even though not much has been written in the South African context, in terms of girls' violence within a girls' high school environment, international perspectives support my study. There was a strong link, among the various researchers, that girls chose their aggressive strategies according to the situation in which they found themselves. It was furthermore generally acknowledged that girls' relational aggression could be just as harmful as physical aggression. Even though relational aggression is more commonly displayed by girls, it is becoming increasingly evident that girls are displaying more physical forms of aggression as well.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Go forth now. Go forth and question. The world is just beginning to open up to you. Each person that you question can take you into a new part of the world. For the person who is willing to ask and listen the world will always be new. The skilled questioner and attentive listener know how to enter into another's experience. (Patton, 1990, p. 78)

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of my study was to examine the extent of violence and aggression in a single-sex school in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The search site allowed me easy access, as I was a member of staff. I obtained permission from the Principal of the school, as well as from the Department of Education, to conduct this study. I initially had general class discussions on this topic, during the English oral lessons I taught. The general response of learners indicated that the problem of girls' violence did exist within this school environment. Many learners indicated, through private notes sent to me, that they wished to be interviewed. These learners revealed that they were eager to expose the problem of girls violence at this school.

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology I employed in order to conduct this study and to collect the data that was needed.

There are many methods that could be used to determine the prevalence of aggressive femininities in a single-sex school. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. As I was interested in the learners' stories rather than structured

responses, an open data-collection approach was required. My study was a qualitative one. I used semi-structured interviews as an information collection method.

3.2 Positioning myself in my research

Various researchers have highlighted the subjective nature of research, especially qualitative research, where the researcher is the main research instrument. According to Robin Usher (1996):

As researchers, we all have an individual trajectory that shapes the research we do, the questions we ask and the way we do it. But, as researchers, we are also socio-culturally located, we have a social autobiography and this has an equally if not more important part to play in shaping our research and directing the kinds of reflexive questions which need to be asked but rarely are. (p. 32)

Positioning myself involves “negotiating a multiplicity of forms of power” (Griffiths, 1998, p. 4). “Research is an interactive process shaped by his (the researcher’s) personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). It follows, therefore, that who I am will impact on what is revealed through me, so I hereby make my position clear.

I am a South African Indian female educator at a multiracial girls’ high school. As a researcher, I realised that my racial position would influence the interpretation of my findings as the majority of the participants were Black girls, in the post-apartheid South Africa, after ten years of democracy. Having had ten years of experience as an

educator of English at a co-educational predominantly Indian high school, my first encounter in a single-sex, multi-racial school setting came as a culture shock as I had my own notions about how girls of other races behaved. This was my first exposure to teaching in such a racially mixed school environment. My curiosity deepened further. There were now many questions to answer, most of which related to gendered attitudes in a country in the midst of major social, political and cultural transformations.

Being an educator at the research site immediately put me in a position of power among these subjects and could have influenced the nature of the responses. I considered the possibility that some of the participants would exaggerate the nature of the problems that existed there. Relationships and the environment are constantly in a state of flux. Learners have different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds which affect the power relations and the dynamics in social relations between individuals and among groups. As a product of this particular time, my study involved an inquiry into the forms of violence that existed in this emerging setting. One would expect that after ten years of democracy, the gaps in the interaction of racial groups would have significantly narrowed. However, it is evident that huge gaps still do exist in the group dynamics of the learners in this particular school setting. I agree with Griffiths' (1998, p. 64) statement that, "education can only be understood as a practice, in a particular social and historical context, but it also depends on the uniqueness of personal relationships, constructed as they are within social and political structures", and, that "educational research remains possible and worthwhile even in conditions of diversity and uncertainty".

I chose to do qualitative interviewing as my focus is on eliciting a great amount of detail from a few respondents. According to Paulo Freire (Crotty, 2003):

the only valid approach, is the way of dialogue. Whether we are speaking of education as cultural action for freedom or of the further phase of cultural revolution, the oppressed cannot be liberated without their reflective participation in the act of liberation. (p. 155)

In order for people to free themselves from situations that threaten to destroy them, they must actively be involved in exposing these undesirable situations through making their voices heard. The possibility of change only exists when the truth is revealed. The qualitative interviewing method therefore offered me a huge opportunity to understand the real situations as they were experienced by the interviewees.

3.3 A Qualitative Approach

According to Patton (1990), “Qualitative methods consist of three types of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and, (3) written documents” (p. 10). What people say is a major part of qualitative research, whether what they say is obtained through an interview or in written form through document analysis or survey responses. Qualitative inquiry designs unfold as fieldwork unfolds. Qualitative design cannot, therefore, be completely specified in advance of fieldwork, even though it would specify an initial focus. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, contributes to the depth, openness and detail of qualitative inquiry.

Generating useful and credible qualitative findings through interviewing, observation and content analysis requires a great deal of discipline, knowledge, training, practice and hard work. A qualitative researcher needs to report his own feelings, perceptions, experiences and insights as part of the research data. As I am fascinated by the rich variation in human experience, interviewing was my chosen method of the qualitative inquiry. Educational research is, after all, about paying attention, listening and watching, being open, documenting systematically, and applying what you learn.

3.4 Interviewing as an information collection method

This study draws primarily from data collected through one-on-one interviews. They included direct quotations, from the social actors, about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. As explained by Cohen and Manion (2000):

The research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction and explanation. (p. 241)

Interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research. The respondents are encouraged to speak freely about whatever comes to mind regarding the interview topic. The interviewer takes notes and often tape-records the interview for later transcription, so that no detail is lost. Essentially, "One interviews because one is interested in other peoples' stories" (De Vos et al., 2002, p. 292).

Oishi (2003) writes that interviews are undertaken to gather opinions, facts and stories, and to gain insight into the experiences of others from “inside” the research context. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) the interview method of doing research is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand other people. Interviewing is not just about listening to the actual words of interviewees. It involves active listening on the part of the interviewer. One must be aware of both the content and the process of the interview. The content of the interview is what is actually being said by the interviewee. The process of the interview involves reading between the lines of what the interviewee is saying, and observing how he or she talks and behaves during the interview. In this respect, the interviewee’s body language, gestures, variations in volume, tone and pitch are important considerations.

Bell (1993) argues that a major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. According to him, a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings. The interview process will provide more authentic information and thereby provide a clearer picture of the actual content as the interviewer can interpret other aspects such as the tone of voice, facial expression and hesitation. In this way, the responses can be developed and clarified. If responses are written down, as they are when using questionnaires, much is concealed as the responses have to be taken at face value. Responses in an interview can be developed and clarified.

Bias in interviews must be acknowledged. According to Bell (1993), as interviewers are human beings and not machines, they may influence responses by the manner in

which they present themselves. A few of the problems that may occur are: “Eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer, a vague antagonism that sometimes arises between the interviewer and respondent, or the tendency of the interviewer to seek out the answers that support his preconceived notions.” (Bell, 1993, p. 95). The interviewer must attempt to remain completely objective throughout the interview. He should separate his own views on the topic from the presentation of the data presented in order to hear the true stories told by respondents. There is also a great risk of respondents providing the type of information that they think the interviewer is looking for, rather than actually presenting the facts.

3.5 The semi-structured interview schedule

Semi-structured interviews are used to gain a detailed picture of a participant’s perceptions of a particular topic. Greater flexibility is given, allowing the interviewee to provide a fuller picture. Even though the interviewer does have a set of pre-determined questions on an interview schedule, the interview will be guided by the schedule, rather than be dictated by it. The interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording, explain them or add to them. Questions are usually open-ended, to allow the participants to answer freely. “The participant can be perceived as the expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his story.” (De Vos et al., 2002, p. 302). It is important to establish rapport by attentive listening, showing interest, understanding and respect for what the interviewee is saying about his lived experiences.

My interaction with the respondents was the main part of the data collection process. I conducted in-depth explorations in which the respondents were encouraged to speak

freely regarding the interview topic. I took notes and tape-recorded the interviews for later transcription so that I would not lose any detail. Non-verbal gestures on the part of the respondents were recorded as part of the data. This formed part of the exploratory research, which enabled me to become familiar with the basic facts, settings, contexts, concerns and social conditions. I listened to the girls as authorities about their own experiences and represented their voices in text. I did not impose irrefutable theoretical interpretations on what they said.

I paid special attention to the way in which different individual girls spoke about violence – the words they used, their tone of their voices, the emphasis placed on certain words, as well as on their silences. As a qualitative interviewer I was engaged in the conversations; however, I was careful not to impose my own beliefs and interpretations on the exchanges. Most of the talking was done by the respondents. I was particularly careful, as a researcher, about inadvertently leading girls to give responses they thought I was anticipating. As a researcher, I was aware that I could neither presume to have grasped the meanings that violence holds for the respondents, nor guarantee the accuracy of my interpretations of their talk.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The interviewees are human beings and care was therefore taken to ensure that there was no harm to them. Informed consent was the first step in the interview process. The participants were truthfully told about the research and their role in it. Their rights to privacy had to be protected through protecting their identity – this guaranteed their protection from physical, psychological and emotional harm. I sent out informed consent forms to participants as well as to their parents (see Appendix). Everything

regarding the research was clearly explained on those forms. Participants were also made aware of their option to withdraw at any time, if they so wished.

Permission was requested from each participant, for the tape-recording of interviews. They were also informed about my note-taking during the interviews and were encouraged not to be distracted by either method of recording the interview. Furthermore, after the interviews, I consulted with the participants to ensure that my descriptions of the findings accurately captured their experiences.

3.7 The Research Process

A pilot study was conducted to assess the suitability of the research instrument. Due to time constraints and other limiting contextual factors, only one Grade 10 learner was interviewed in the pilot study. The respondent was a 15-year old South African Black girl, from a middle-class family. She was an above-average learner at this single-sex school, and the captain of her Grade 10 class. She was one of my own learners who requested to be interviewed as she was a member of the target population and had indicated that she had been a victim of aggressive girls. Establishing rapport was done easily as I was not a stranger to her. Her familiarity with me also gave her added confidence and a greater measure of trust in me as the interviewer. She found the questions easy to understand and responded spontaneously.

In this pilot study, I found the semi-structured interview to be a suitable instrument for collecting data, as the respondent felt free to describe her own experiences. The information uncovered was tremendously enlightening. Though very eager to be interviewed, the respondent was tense at first. However, once she started telling her

story, she could hardly stop. Her agitated manner when she described certain experiences was an excellent indicator of how she was being personally affected by the aggressive attitudes of other girls. At one point, she expressed her own angry feelings by punching her right fist into the open palm of her left hand. The interview process (her body language, expression and tone of voice) confirmed and enriched the interview content (her actual words). She did not pause much as she recalled one incident after another. She was unhindered by my note-taking. I did not have to prompt or probe any responses. She answered informatively.

For the actual study, all the Grade 10 learners at the school were called to a meeting at which the study was briefly explained. Each learner completed a reply slip on her willingness or non-willingness to be interviewed. The replies were separated into two categories: "Yes" and "No". The "No" replies were discarded. The "Yes" replies were further categorised according to the four South African racially divided groups that constituted this school's learner population (Black, Indian, Coloured and White). Participants were randomly selected from each of these four groups, in percentages that reflected the racial demographics of this school (approximately 80% Black; 9% Indian; 7% Coloured and 4% White). In this way, a random sample of 20 learners (approximately 10% of the target grade) was selected to be interviewed. These learners attended an individual briefing session in which the interview process was clearly explained. Informed consent forms were given to these learners as well as to their parents. Once informed consent had been received by both the learners and the parents, a suitable time was allocated for the individual, semi-structured interviews to be conducted. However, only 14 of those learners selected to be part of the sample, and for whom consent had been signed, were actually interviewed. The others were

either absent on the day scheduled for the interview, or withdrew from the sample group. As a result, the sample group that was actually interviewed consisted of 10 Black girls, two Indian girls and two Coloured girls. The only White learner who had indicated that she wanted to be interviewed, and who was therefore a part of the sample group selected, withdrew. She did not offer any reason for her absence from her scheduled interview. I chose not to ask for her reasons as I had agreed that participants could withdraw at any time during the time of the study.

The Interview schedule (See appendix A) was limited to two open-ended questions:

- How would you describe the various forms of aggression displayed by girls at this school?
- Could you explain how your own experiences, as a victim of aggressive girls, affects your learning?

Once all the interviews were completed and transcribed, I met with each participant to verify the information. The final analysis and formal report were then prepared.

3.8 Process of Data Analysis

All the interviews conducted were audio-recorded. As far as possible, the interviews were transcribed immediately afterwards, to capture all the non-verbal aspects of the interview as well.

The analysis of the data was the most challenging and time-consuming part of my study. The interviews presented large amounts of rich data from which numerous

themes emerged. The following themes were identified in various interviews and would be discussed in detail in the analysis (Chapter 4).

- Everyday forms of violence
- Gender and violence
- Race, girls and violence
- Verbal abuse
- Race and class
- Physical aggression
- Cliques or girl gangs at school
- Fighting for boys
- Aggressiveness towards teachers
- Effects on learning and teaching
- Girls are afraid to expose aggressors
- Emotional effects of girls' violence

3.9 Limitations

In the pilot study, the main limitation to the interview process was that there was no quiet place to conduct the interview. As the background noises were very audible, I decided to write as much as possible during the interview, as a back-up in the event of the tape-recording not being clear enough for transcriptions to be done. I was concerned that the capturing of data would be limited to the speed with which I could write. Fortunately, both the written and audio records were comprehensive and reliable and I was able to return to the respondent to verify my record of the interview. I was also concerned that trying to write "everything" would also distract

the respondent. However, the respondent in the pilot study seemed unaffected by my note-taking. I was not so sure that other respondents would be as comfortable with my writing during the interviews in the actual study and may actually be hindered by it.

I made arrangements with the Guidance Counsellor at the school, to use her venue to conduct all my interviews. I was therefore able to use the tape recorder as I had a relatively quiet place to conduct the interviews. As transcribing the recorded interviews is time-consuming, I minimised this limitation by minimising the number of interviews conducted. I further limited the number of interviews to a maximum of three per week, to allow me sufficient time to transcribe each interview and to verify the recording of information.

Most of the participants responded with ease and were very eager to describe incidents of girls' aggression at this school. Some of the respondents needed a few prompts and probes. There was only one instance of an interview having to be stopped by me, as it became evident that the respondent was finding it difficult to talk about her experiences.

The key participants in this study were Grade 10 girls who had either been victims of aggressive girls or who had witnessed girls' aggression at this school. Ethical aspects of the study were considered, as the information that was being presented by respondents was largely of a very personal nature. I also had to consider that these girls were exposing aspects of their school lives that were mostly hidden from their parents and the school authorities. The sensitive nature of these discussions necessitated my assuring the respondents that their identities would be protected. The

sample was therefore not made known to the rest of the school population. Furthermore, the respondents were called to interviews discretely, so that other learners would not be aware of their participation in the interview process.

One of the main limitations of this study was that there was no White representation. Even though the girls mentioned incidents of violence that involved White girls, the only White girl who was going to be interviewed, withdrew. This absence of the White voice leaves a gap in the collection of the data and in the analysis thereof.

3.10 Conclusion

According to Neuman (2003, p. 81), social science is seen as a “critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to change conditions and build a better world for themselves.” He adds that research is conducted to “critique and transform social relations by revealing the underlying sources of social relations and empowering people who are less powerful. They uncover myths, reveal hidden truths and help people to transform the world for themselves” (Neuman, 2003, p. 81). I anticipate achieving this outcome through the specific research methods I have chosen and discussed. The following chapter will present the analysis of the data collected in this study.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Drawing on the interview study of girls in a single-sex school in the greater Durban area, this study explores the forms of violence that exist therein. Arguing against the view that single-sex schools offer protection against violence and aggression (Morrell, 2001), this study shows how violence permeates everyday school life in the classroom and mainly outside in the fields and during breaks. The violence is engendered by everyday attacks, both physical and verbal, involves gossip and rumours, particularly around boys, and is intricately related to race, class and ethnicity. According to Barret (2002):

A much debated issue has been the question of whether there are sex differences in aggression and violence. Conventional wisdom has it that men are more violent than women, and they are certainly responsible for a much higher proportion of homicides than women, both in traditional societies and modern western societies. This does not, however, necessarily mean that women are less aggressive than men. (p. 265)

In recent years there has been a growing interest in researching violence and aggression of teenage girls. It is now evident that teenage girls are socially significant and should be included in official statistics. However, in South Africa, there is an absence of such data. The invisibility of girls within the official statistics is a direct consequence of their subordinated and differential position within a patriarchal society. The analysis in this chapter shows that girls have created a different space for

themselves in the absence of boys. In this chapter I shall reveal how girls have redefined their perception of femininity. In describing the actual behaviour of girls, a clear picture will emerge of the ways in which identities are constructed and enacted within this single-sex high school setting.

Within this space, girls have redefined their perception of femininity to include an evolving element of aggression. The girls' values often include resisting male violence which prevents them from asserting the full range of rights which boys have in public spaces. According to Dingle (1997, p. 1), even though girls have acquired more equality in areas such as education and training, the freedom they enjoy from domesticity is merely illusory. They are being denied real freedom as a result of the endurance of patriarchal domination being reinforced through a series of myths. In reproducing gender-role socialisation processes, girls who deviate from these norms are seized upon by the media to be reduced to nothing more than a collection of gendered stereotypes. Only violent crime is reported. This ensures that the less physical varieties are not reported.

This chapter provides descriptions of girls' aggressive attitudes. An explanation of these behaviours as well as a discussion on the effects of these behaviours will follow. This study provides a clear insight into the nature of teenage girls' aggressive attitudes in a single-sex high school environment, in the context of their everyday lives. The focus is on girls drawn from a range of socio-economic, class backgrounds and race. These girls were engaged as active subjects in the research process. A detailed description, of the selection of these girls, can be found in Chapter Three.

This study sought the voices of Grade 10 girls to investigate their views and experiences of aggressiveness at school, to grasp how aggressiveness is understood by them and how it is “encountered and mobilized” (Alder & Worrall, 2004, p. 81) in their daily lives, within a single-sex high school setting. They were the voices of the girls who personally experienced girls’ aggression, as well as the voices of girls who witnessed such attitudes of girls towards other girls.

This research was conducted by means of individual interviews, as outlined in Chapter Three. My central research strategy was “talking” to the girls. This qualitative research encounter provided an opportunity for open conversations with the girls.

Nickie is a Coloured girl who comes from a middle-class family. She lives in a predominantly Coloured township. She expressed her initial reaction to girls’ violence at this girls’ school as follows:

Nickie: ...the forms of violence between them are very different because usually at a co-ed school, you wouldn’t find the girls fighting for whatever reasons you would get, but then you get to an all-girls school and because there’s no boys...they say there’s no pressure or something and so the girls tend to DO what they want and, you know, let themselves GO at this school. Being an all-girls school here, it was actually quite shocking in Grade 8 when I saw the first girls fight – I never knew that at an all-girls school... you think that they would be more... that it would be better than a co-ed school but it’s not like that.

The view that girls do not do violence and that single-sex girls' schools offer an escape from violence is powerful. Even Nickie confirms the powerful assumption that girls do not fight and particularly so in the single-sex school.

4.2 Everyday Forms of violence

The interview process revealed the normalisation of girls' violence at this school.

The following participants made comments about fights starting over minor issues. They believed that much of the fighting that was going on was unnecessary and could well have been avoided by just being civil about differences. Sinethemba, Phumelele, Sinenhlanhla, Nosihle and Sindiswa come from middle-class families and live in the neighbouring townships. Carol comes from a middle-class Indian family living in a typical Indian area further away from the school. Nickie is a Coloured girl from a Coloured township.

Sinethemba: Most of the time you will find that what they are fighting for are petty things which could have been resolved if only they had sat down and talked about it.

Nickie: They started shouting at us because they said we were looking at them funny. I mean, that is so stupid; even you get the other girls who fight for girlfriends and for rumours and for stupid things that could be solved by talking, will result in fighting.

Carol: They fight a lot over simple things and they scream and they shriek.

Phumelele: It's mainly over petty things... over a guy... and who said what about who... you know, spreading rumours and stuff like that.

Sinenhlanhla: There is no particular incident... it's just that things are happening every DAY, in EVERY BREAK... its just the groups that are targeting each other... its getting worse and worse like it used to be just with the seniors and now it is going to the juniors. So it is getting worse and every time one group calls up another then soon enough this set of girls join up with another set of girls and the school will be divided pretty soon... and its not getting any better... its just getting worse.

Nosihle: Some children at this school, they bully other children because of how they look, how they dress up. Sometimes they think that they are better than you in academics and stuff, the way you look. Sometimes they say names and stuff. Sometimes you get a bad mark they say bad things.

Sindiswa: Maybe at break time, when you have lunch, they will just come and grab your lunch without even asking, or they will tease you and call you names like... they will know that you don't like being called names and they will still call you names... and (inside the classroom... It was the last lesson – the 6th lesson – I was in the 6th lesson and then one girl had a braid on the floor and she picked it up and then they told me that I must pick it up because it was mine, but then they started to throw the braid at me... in front of the whole class.

The above responses describe the regime of everyday violence outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom. Fights seem to start for trivial reasons, or for no apparent reason. The girls above note that violence begins over petty issues. Rumours also give rise to fights. The girls above also show that fights are an attempt to assert power over another- for example doing badly in a test will give another girl leverage to judge and make comments that are harmful. Like the violence of boys (see Bhana, 2005) Sindiswa shows that girls bully for lunch and are mean as she cites the example of being forced to pick up the braid.

4.3 Race, girls and violence

The following responses by girls of different races provide a clear indication of the forms of inter-racial conflicts and violence that exist at this single-sex school. Even though much of the violence described throughout the interview process revealed violence among the different race groups, the responses that follow show the occurrence of violence and aggression within particular race groups as well.

Nosihle: Well, actually it was in English class... we were sitting and then the teacher said if she could please be excused because she was called in the front office so the class was making a noise and I asked if anyone has a sharpener in class and she said that no one will ever borrow... she said no one will ever borrow to a black child like me and I was like 'what you mean black child cos you're also black' and then she told me that... she started making comments about me which really felt bad

and then everybody laughed and then this other friend said to me 'you know what, I know u can do it. Just tell her to back off.' So I told her to back off and she said 'what u gonna do about it?' and I said 'I'm not going to do anything' and she said 'I thought as much' then she pushed me so... which wasn't good... so she pushed me. I bumped into a desk and I started crying and then I hit her back...

NP: How did you hit her?

Nosihle: Basically I PUNCHED her and then she punched me back we started fighting, we were rolling on the floor our uniforms were dirty and the whole class was screaming and screeching...

In the case of Nosihle, unlike other girls in the sample, there is evidence of this study participant being an active participant in violence and, after provocation, becoming physically aggressive. Judging, humiliating and rejecting another person is enough to begin a fight that turns to violence. Here it is not the case of coloured or Indian girl against black girls but black being used as a marker by another black girl to humiliate and shame Nosihle.

4.3.1 Indian Girls and Indian Girls

Considering that the Indian girls at this school consisted of less than 10% of the entire learner population, I had preconceived ideas that the Indian girls would support one another (as a racial group) against aggressive attacks by other race groups. I was taken by surprise when the interviews with the Indian girls revealed that much of the

aggression and fighting existed among the Indian girls themselves. There seemed to exist, at this school, a level of animosity and rivalry amongst these girls. This discovery discarded my own perceptions and assumptions of intra-racial togetherness at this multi-racial girls' high school.

Annie is an Indian learner who comes from a middle- class family living in an Indian area.

Annie: It actually happened the first time I walked into the school in Grade 8's... and a bunch of Indian girls (they were in Grade 9 and I was only in Grade 8) they called out to me and asked why I was looking at them... I am like 'I just came into this school... I'm exploring everything' and she comes up to me and tells me she is going to slap me... it happened right here outside... and she said she has Grade 11 friends who are going to '*Fuck me up*' and I was... I started to cry... I didn't know what to do... I just came to this school and here she is picking a fight with me and we actually reported the incident and we had to write out things and give it to Miss L. And last year a PREFECT said she was going to slap me... apparently I was looking at her as well... It was an Indian girl... she said 'if you don't stop looking at me I am going to slap you'... and even with the other girl still up to now whenever she passes me she still has to make a comment... but I still talk to her because she comes with one of my friends to talk to one of my other friends.

NP: **So YOUR problem is basically Indian on Indian aggression?**

Annie: Yes! That's exactly how it is and I don't understand WHY! Because they rather be nice to the other cultures because they feel that if they don't show respect to the other cultures that they are going to get something back; whereas if they are fighting with Indian people they know that they are not gonna get anything back.

NP: **Do you find there are a lot of Indian girls that do this?**

Annie: All of them. Another incident my friend was telling me... because she was standing right there. The same girl... the one that was fighting with me in Grade 8... another friend's mother came and swore her outside the school and said that she is uncouth and she always keeps on fighting at school... I think for some people its different races, but for Indian girls its more Indians that they tend to pick on.

NP: **Why do you think they don't pick on the other races?**

Annie: Because they know they will get a smack or something. Because the White girls and the Coloured girls here, they fight; and so do the Black girls. As for the Indians, they just keep quiet.

Being Indian, Annie was obviously disappointed and shocked that the Indian girls at this school were provoking fights with her. She had obviously expected to get along better with the Indian girls than the girls from other race groups. She also notes that the Indian girls are scared to pick on girls of other races as they were afraid of retaliation. They seemed to consider their fellow Indian learners as softer targets. Annie presents the forms of aggression displayed by Indian girls as “picking on” other girls and “swearing” for no reason. To Annie, aggression presented in the form of verbal and psychological threats amongst the Indian girls as opposed to the physical aggression evident with the other races. No incident of physical aggression among Indian girls was mentioned.

4.3.2 White Girls and White Girls

Annie continues, to describe the forms of violence she has witnessed among White girls. She describes one incident where a White girl provoked a fight by insulting another White girl’s socks.

Annie: It was two White girls. And the one, well, she wore dirty clothes and dirty socks and she was in my grade at that time. This girl who was in Grade 12, she actually came to our field... we had the junior field and she comes up to her and says 'you should wash your socks... they're brown...' and they just ended up fighting, throwing each other against the wall and I was standing right in front... I was there.

NP: **What did they actually do, when they fought?**

Annie: They started banging each others heads against the wall and that girl actually turned red and after the other girl left, she just started to cry.

The forms of violence displayed by these two White girls, as described by Annie, are more physical: “they started banging each other’s heads against the wall”, in full view of other learners on the field.

4.3.3 Coloured Girls and Coloured Girls

Coloured participants described similar incidents of aggression among Coloured girls at this school. Rachel is a Coloured girl from a middle-class suburb. Her description of Coloured girls’ aggression was similar to Annie’s description of Indian girls’ aggression. They “picked on” Coloured girls and “swore” for no reason.

Rachel: You can just see by the way she dresses and stuff like that... oh and we were walking from class the other day and she was screaming... she and this other Coloured girl and then... I don’t think she saw me walking behind Nickie-Nickie was in front of me. So Nickie carried on walking and they were talking about someone, then all of a sudden she just started screaming and pointing at Nickie and she didn’t see me looking at her. Nickie didn’t see but she was screaming and saying something about her and just pointing at her. Ya. She got a thing against her. Ya, so girls like to have grudges against other girls in this school.

From the incidents of Coloured girls' aggression that she has witnessed, Rachel deduces that girls "like to have grudges against other girls". This is one of the forms of aggression that were highlighted in the Literature Review in Chapter Two.

4.3.4 Black Girls and Black girls

Most of the incidents of violence involving Black girls, towards other Black girls have been evident in the everyday forms of violence, as discussed in section 4.3. Furthermore, homophobic violence and xenophobia harassment was most evident among Black learners at this school.

4.3.5 Black Girls and Indian Girls

Carol is an Indian participant from a middle-class family. The following response is just one of several responses that indicated that inter-racial tensions existed within the space of this single-sex school. These tensions gave rise to several incidents of violence among the girls.

Carol: I feel that Black children have a problem with Indian children. They always seem to be picking on Indian children, besides like Black children, although if something is wrong with us, just maybe a different kind of hairstyle, it becomes a big issue, and they embarrass you in front of EVERYONE, irrespective. But if it is a Black child, they wouldn't do much... all they will say is 'take it off' and the child wouldn't do it at all... It HAS affected me, because the girls are SO terrible... I DREAD coming to school... because you're Indian, because you're White, they don't like to associate with you, they don't want to do any projects with you...perfect example in Drama...you

can just see they're racist... and there are only two Indian girls in the Drama class and the rest of them are Black and when they put us to do group work they all just go to their own groups and they leave us out and the teacher doesn't understand why our work is not done properly. Learners have such a bad attitude towards non-Black kids. It is so difficult and I complain to my parents every day.

Carol expressed her frustration as an Indian learner in this school, where the majority of learners was Black. She describes this inter-racial tension as an everyday problem. This leads to the isolation of Indian students within classes. Carol mentions that she experiences great difficulty and unhappiness at the aggressive attitudes of Black girls towards her, as an Indian. Complaining to her parents about this unpleasant situation, did not help her situation. She gives no indication that her parents took any action to stop this abuse at school.

4.4 Verbal Abuse

Aggressiveness is seen as a form of intentionally harmful behaviour that girls both engage in and experience as violence. The results of my research support other international research findings (Alder & Worrall, 2004, p. 85), that most girls consistently maintain that they experience verbally abusive behaviour (threats, name-calling, taunting, etc) as more hurtful and damaging than physical violence. Most girls in my study defined verbal abuse as "violence" and "aggressiveness".

Nelisiwe: When girls pick on other girls, that's the worst. I think it's even worse than physical, basically, it's even worse... they always pick on me;

they always make sure each and every day I would end up crying, each and every day, and that was the best for them just to see me sad and low and to see me down and stuff like that.

This sentiment was echoed by most of the participants in this study. Even though physical forms of violence did occur at this school, girls were most affected by the verbal abuse.

Rebecca: Everybody, everybody here. They make up stuff – like if you say something, they'll exaggerate it and it goes fast throughout the whole school.

There were many other ways in which girls were described as being verbally aggressive. There were reports of girls threatening to beat up other girls. Others spoke about being shouted at, mocked and embarrassed. Lies were frequently told to ruin their good reputation and to turn their friends against them. Rumours spread rapidly throughout the school. There were many reports of bullying. Girls were reported as wanting to know as much as they could so that they could gossip about others. Many of the participants also described incidents of disruption to lessons and to back-chatting the teachers as forms of girls' aggression.

4.4.1 Sexuality and Verbal Abuse

Girls at this school are often verbally abused by other girls at this school, who pick on their physical appearance as well as on their sexuality.

Rachel: Ya, and I heard stuff like girls calling other girls names and about how they look. There's this one girl in Grade 10 and walked with her home... it was a while back and she said that those other girls at the back of us... I don't remember their faces but they were... they talk about legs and how the shapes of the legs were and they giggle in the back and when the person is alone.

4.4.1.1 Homophobic Harrassment

Several participants indicated that girls' violence arose out of possessiveness towards other girls, either as their girl friends or as sexual partners. Nosihle describes how she was wrongfully accused of having a relationship with another girl, and was consequently threatened with physical violence.

Nosihle: Ya... they point fingers at you and sometimes they want to hit you... oh [raised voice] and sometimes like in Grade 8 another girl tried to hit me because I was a friend to another girl and they thought I was going OUT with that other girl... it was very bad and they waited for me and they hit me and I cried and all that and I told my parents and they were going to talk to the girls... ya... sometimes they just hit you for something that you don't know.

The most touching account was that of Sindiswa, a Black girl from a nearby Township. She was from an middle-income family and a troubled home environment. Her father had passed away and she lived with her grandmother, as her own mother was employed in another province.

Sindiswa: There's teasing... it's when they talk to... tease someone... like they call them names and stuff and they know that you don't like being called names and they will still call you names.

NP: How do you feel when they call you names?

Sindiswa: I feel sad.

Sindiswa was eager to speak about her experiences of girls' aggression. However, as this was the first time that she was talking about this, she found it very difficult to describe her actual feelings. I had to regularly prompt her to get more than a monosyllabic response. The many silences in between her responses were a clear indication of the effect of the girls' aggressive attitudes towards her. She became emotional and spoke in a quivering voice. Her experiences were obviously too painful to express.

To Sindiswa, the name-calling was the biggest problem. She was singled out and picked on about the way she looked and the way she walked. The aggressive girls grabbed her lunch and called her a "lesbian". This was especially painful as Black lesbian women (especially in the townships in South Africa) are stigmatised and victimised (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Homophobic abuse is rife. Black women are afraid of coming out as lesbian, because of violence and hatred. The well known case of a Black woman, Zoliswa Nkonyana, being stoned and killed in Cape Town in

South Africa - bears witness to that. Being accused of being a lesbian is a great stigma, and therefore very painful.

According to Jessica Stern, a researcher for Human Rights Watch's lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program, lesbians in South Africa do not fit the image of how women are expected to look and behave and therefore face abuse and violence. (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The mere fact that Sindiswa was being called a lesbian, instilled terror in her. She couldn't cope with the situation and it affected her ability to concentrate in class. The name-calling even occupied her thoughts while she was at home and she could therefore not study. The interview had to be halted as she was finding it too painful to continue describing her experiences.

No behaviour has come under the microscope as much in recent years as social aggression. Many girls harass or make fun of girls who are perceived as different or as threats. Such things reach their peak when girls go through puberty and begin forming cliques based on the clothes and activities and the boys they like. Girls are socialised to isolate other girls whom they don't want as part of their culture. (McClelland, 2003, p.45)

It was very clear to me that the problem of social exclusion is indeed a serious one and needs further investigation.

Although most of the other participants were more composed than Sindiswa was, they made similar comments about their own experiences:

Rachel: Ya, and I heard stuff like girls calling other girls names and about how they look.

Carol: What they mostly do, is they like to belittle you.

Sinenhlanhla: They call each other names.

Phumelele: The most aggressive one has got to be verbal where girls use forms of names that they call you... violence is another thing that happens but its not as big as verbal violence; verbal violence IS the biggest one... so many girls are dealing with those things of being called names, being called sluts and bitches.

Phindile: It's mostly vulgar... that is verbal abuse that is with most girls, because they will put you down about where you come from or the kind of clothes you wear or what you have for lunch, and that really destroys some people, you know.

Nelisiwe: They pick on you.

It became clearer as the interviews progressed that all participants had either witnessed or experienced relational forms of aggression and violence, such as threats,

rumours and name-calling. All the participants regarded these forms of aggression as very damaging and serious.

4.4.2 Vulgar Language

Several participants mentioned the liberal use of vulgar language. It was clear that many girls perceived the use of profanities as a typically male mode of communication. It was therefore disturbing to many of the participants that many girls also communicated freely in vulgar language. The use of profanities was seen as a display of aggression, as many of the participants felt that exposure to such language within the school environment was an imposition on their rights to have a decent education. They expressed that it was bad enough for girls to use vulgar language when they were angry or in a fight, but that it was totally inappropriate and unacceptable for them to use profanities in normal everyday communication.

Nickie: The way they swear each other; the way they talk to each other in general...the girls just talk, you know, without minding what they say and the girls who actually talk like that think that it's normal.

NP: Are you talking about vulgar language?

Nickie: Yes... when they're having a fight and in the general language... they swear and talk... it's disgusting when the girls swear...

4.4.3 Subverting isiZulu in a single-sex English medium school

4.4.3.1 Language, race and violence

The school environment is a place where African working class girls converge with other middle-class African girls. They use language as a powerful tool to provide them with a resource to resist the cultural context of the school. This is an important tool for girls to create their agency, BUT in doing so, they use toxic forms of communication. This was confirmed by the African participants as well and there was a clear indication that this tool of aggression was used most frequently.

Carol is an Indian girl from a middle-class family. She lives in a predominantly Indian suburb; Rachel is a Coloured girl from from a middle-class suburb.

Carol: They say a lot of things in Zulu that, when you find out about it, it hurts you feelings at the end of the day... and... in class, they scream and shout and say remarks in Zulu.

Rachel: If you're not Zulu speaking they'll insult you in that way and then they'll all laugh... actually it hurts because if they want to insult you they can insult you in English then you can understand what they are saying and you can justify yourself.

The participants experienced the use of isiZulu at school as being hurtful and intimidating. They felt powerless to defend themselves, as they merely knew that they were being targeted. They were frustrated that they could not understand what was

being discussed about them. This was a consequence of the other race groups being in the minority at this school.

4.4.3.2 Language, ethnicity and violence

Nelisiwe describes how Black girls from minority ethnic groups are singled out and targeted by other Black girls at this school.

Nelisiwe: The thing is that its... there's something called... okay I know we're still all Africans but there is that thing WITHIN the Black people there still that thing, for example I have a Xhosa friend this year... just because she CAN'T pronounce some Zulu words and other things... it's like it's hard for her to speak Zulu properly, so they tease her and she is always feeling emotionally depressed and I try all my best to say 'you know what, you shouldn't care about what they're saying'. Whatever she has to say in class they turn it around and they make her feel bad about how she speaks Zulu which is why she prefers speaking English but still the more she speaks English they have to get something out of that by making her feel bad. So it's like not nice when we are all one nation and you are criticising the same colour... that's not good.

Nelisiwe is obviously embarrassed and disappointed with the Black girls who choose to humiliate Black girls from other ethnic groups. She feels that they should support one another as a race group, rather than see these girls as different from them.

4.4.3.3 Language and xenophobia

Andiswa is a Black girl from a nearby middle income suburb. She is an above average learner and expresses concern about the aggressive attitudes displayed by fellow Black learners, towards Black girls from other countries.

Andiswa: O boy... its actually a cultural one there are girls in this school who come from other countries. There are these two girls... one's a Nigerian and the other one comes from Congo... I've seen it with them because girls usually reject them... they call them names... they talk Zulu behind their backs, calling them bad things which is quite wrong because even these girls can see that that they're saying something bad about me and they actually saw that they weren't being accepted at this school until recently... but still they're not accepted by some students.

4.5 Race and Class

Girls at this school came from different racial groups and different social classes. A typical incident of violence that was triggered by these differences, follows:

Nosihle: Fighting... for silly things and (laughs)... fighting for a watch.

NP: Explain to me exactly what happened.

Nosihle: Okay. Another girl took somebody's watch... I think... I don't

know... the other girl said she wants it back... and the other girl said I've got it at home and stuff. So the other girl got cross... then another girl she was using that watch... which was wrong.

Having a watch and not having a watch provides a differentiation between class and race. This explains why some girls steal and why fights begin over these material goods.

4.6 Physical Aggression

These were some of the responses to the question: "How would you describe the various forms of aggression displayed by girls at this school?"

Sinenhlanhla: Well, most of it is verbal and it usually takes place during the breaks, in the groups as they keep secrets and they tend to keep secrets about the other groups. Okay, the verbal aggression usually leads to the physical... they will be hitting each other, scratching and slapping each other. They call each other names and they gossip and when the other group finds out that they have been gossiping about them, then they start.

Sinethemba: First it is verbal, they talk to each other... well talk, but in a very aggressive manner; and from there it escalates to pushing each other and finally most of the time they end up fighting, punching, pushing each other, fist-fighting, sometimes even biting, pulling of hair and that sort of thing.

Although most participants perceived verbal aggression as the most prevalent and the most damaging, more attention was given to the various forms of physical aggression that were displayed by girls at this school.

Nelisiwe: She started making comments about me which really felt bad and then everybody laughed... so I told her to back off... and she pushed me. I bumped into a desk and started crying... then I hit her back... I punched her and then she punched me back and we started fighting, we were rolling on the floor, our uniforms were dirty and the whole class was screaming and shrieking.

Nelisiwe had finally retaliated after months of verbal abuse. She admitted that she could not tolerate the abuse and that it was the verbal aggression that had eventually led to her becoming physically aggressive. This was seen by many participants as a reason for the many incidents in which girls became physically aggressive. As Nelisiwe says later “They too (the aggressive girls) could have been in the same situation in the past so they think that it’s time that they can pay back by hurting other people.” Another participant, Sidiswa, said: “I can’t cope because I am thinking about how I am going to get back at that person who did this thing to me.”

Zinhle: I’ve seen girls like fighting, fist fights... body fighting... they like use their bodies to actually like fight... like when they’re fighting they like PUSH, they PUNCH, KICK, I’ve seen where they actually like GRAB each other’s HAIR or they actually like PUSHING each other; or

another physical is like... like I said if you're going up or down the stairs or anywhere around the school they would purposely just sway their bag on you and they will they shift you and then they just look at you in that way and they don't actually say, 'Hey, we've got a problem with you' but then you can actually see the body language that they are trying to pick a fight or something... or like... you'll be like talking and maybe they'll bump you or push you or something... they want you to get irritated.

There were many ways in which girls were described as being physically aggressive. They pushed and did not give way to others so they could pass them on the corridors. They mentioned that a major one was the pulling of hair. On the stairs, they bumped others with their bags threatening to drop them. At the tuckshop, they pushed others out of the queue on purpose, just to start a fight. They fought on the fields over the particular spaces they claimed as their own. They punched and kicked each other. Some girls were thrown against the walls. Others had their heads banged on walls. There were many reports of hitting, slapping, scratching and even biting one another. Physical aggression was also displayed in public places and in the toilets of the school. There were many reports of girls' physical aggression inside the classroom as well.

Special mention needs to be made of the fact that all participants clearly stated that no weapons were used in the fights. The absence of weapons in fights clearly indicates that, in this way, girls' aggressiveness is different from boys' aggressiveness, the latter often marked by the presence of weapons (Alder and Worrall, 2004).

4.7 Cliques or Girl-Gangs at school?

Most of the participants very eagerly told their story. It was clear that they did experience girls' aggression as a major problem at this school and that they wanted something to be done about it as they saw it as a growing problem.

NP: Do you think this is a common problem at school?

Sinethemba: You find a lot of fighting going on in this school... you find one girl being attacked by 5 or 6 girls... I... I think it is a GROWING problem.

Sinenhlanhla: It's just that things are happening EVERY day, in EVERY break; it's just the groups that are targeting each other; it's getting worse and worse and everytime one group calls up another then soon enough this set of girls join up with another set of girls and the school will be divided pretty soon... and it's not getting any better... it's getting worse!

There were other incidents mentioned of girls "ganging up" on a girl in the toilet, because she had used the wrong toilet. Similar incidents of girls "ganging up" on other girls, were linked to race. Most of these incidents involved primarily Black girls. However, Miller argues that, "the rush to assume that girls are becoming more violent – or that certain groups of girls are especially violent – is highly problematic, and linked to contemporary stereotypes and fears about race, gender and adolescence."

(Alder & Worrall, 2004, p. 173). Stereotypical notions of particular race groups, especially in considering the South African political history, should not cloud our perceptions about violence in schools. At my research site, Indian girls also formed cliques and harassed other Indian girls. It must be understood that at this particular research site, the main aggressors were Black girls; As Black girls made up more than 80% of the school learner population, these figures are not surprising.

4.8 Fighting for Boys

Most of the participants regarded issues surrounding boys as a major contributory factor towards girls' violence. Andiswa describes what happens when there is rivalry concerning boys.

Andiswa: There are always incidents at this school (laughs). I have experienced the one with this one girl... she was accusing this one girls' of stealing her boyfriend. (Loudly) Everything about this school is about boys. Because they actually feel threatened by these girls that their boyfriends like to go out with... so they want to fix the girl up so that she won't go out with their boyfriend... and then it's always physical.

Other similar responses were:

Rachel: They fight with their friends about boys – the aggression here it's about boys... mostly everything here is about boys.

Carol: They were fighting over a boyfriend issue, where the two girls who

were fighting were going out with the same guy.

Zinhle: In this school most of the time it is when they fight over boys. They like fighting over boys.

Sinenhlanhla: There were a few friends who went to the Debs ball as a group and they were dancing with these guys and then another group of friends... these two groups are like enemies, they always go against each other, so when the other group of friends was seen hanging out with those boys, then they started gossiping about them. It didn't get physical at that time, so a day after, when they came to school they had been gossiping and spreading rumours around the school because they had been jealous of what they had seen. They started spreading rumours around the school that the girls went out and had drugs and whatever so after the other group found out, it started getting physical, but it wasn't the entire group, it was just a few girls because there had been girls who had been pin-pointing each other, who live closer to each others home and they always have these fights, so they start after school, to fight.

Heterosexuality and the competition for boys produced a violent context at this single-sex school. The girls explained that aggressive girls felt threatened by the girls that their boyfriends would date and, as a result, wanted to "fix the girls up" so they would no longer be able to go out with their boyfriends. They threaten these innocent girls, shout at them, call them names and start fighting with them. Sometimes a girl would

just go up to another girl and slap her, only because she “heard” that her own boyfriend liked that particular girl. Then there would be swearing and kicking and punching and hair pulling.

There was even an incident mentioned of the girls being aggressive towards girls from a nearby co-educational school as there was rivalry over boys. They had actually planned to attack a particular group of girls from that school, after school, in a public place. The message was quickly spread throughout the school and at the end of the day, the girls rushed out of school, to witness this “big fight”. This is also another indication of the gang mentality that seems to be sweeping high schools... and in this case, these were girls fighting over boys. This kind of behaviour has often been reported about boys (boys fighting over girls), so it is not surprising that this kind of behaviour by girls is somewhat disturbing.

4.9 Aggressiveness towards Teachers

Many of the participants described the general disobedience towards teachers as aggressiveness. This included lack of attention in class, a bad attitude towards work, being disrespectful and back-chatting. Many of the participants reported that girls screamed and shouted in class and spoke continuously while teachers taught. They were particularly disturbed about girls speaking in isiZulu in the presence of class teachers who did not understand that language, as is evident in the following descriptions.

NP: How are they aggressive towards the teachers?

Sinethemba: Well girls who are constantly talking in class and so the teacher reprimands them or tells them to go outside, they will have comebacks or something to say... 'I wasn't the only one talking; SHE was also talking'. I find that very aggressive... some of them you can actually see that if they actually had the power they would actually go up to the teachers and hit them.

Carol: Maybe some girls just do it to be 'cool'... if you can just tell the teacher off everyone will think, 'Wow, she has the guts to do it so I can do it as well.' So if one can do it, everyone can. Sadly, many teachers are leaving because of attitudes like that.

The impact on teaching and learning is apparent in the above responses. Girls' total lack of respect for their teachers as the authorities in the classroom, was a clear indication of their aggressiveness. Girls' challenged the authority of their teachers, even when it came to discipline in the class and attempted to overrule the decisions made by teachers.

4.10 Effects on learning and teaching

Most of the participants were concerned about the effect that these aggressive girls were having on their learning. Most said that many girls were disrespectful towards the teachers and that they would talk during lessons and argue with teachers when they were asked to be quiet.

Many of them expressed their reluctance to come to school and their growing hatred of school life. They felt that their right to an education was being violated as the aggressive girls were disruptive in class and frustrated the teachers and other learners alike. Teachers were forced to spend valuable teaching time just to try to discipline these girls and lessons remained incomplete, or that class lagged behind others.

Rachel: They are so rude to the teacher... they don't keep quiet... but they are always disruptive and very noisy... he couldn't teach them anymore.

Nickie: They don't worry if the teacher is there or not there. Plenty of times I've been in class when a fight has started.

Zinhle: Eh... it does. It's quite difficult to learn... well, for me, see I can't learn in a noisy place; I lose my concentration quickly. So like when the girls are busy making noises and the teacher is trying to shout here it is very difficult to learn and when the teacher comes back to the work you're still thinking about that and your concentration switches. Or like a whole lesson is spent trying to discipline the girls forever, for making a noise and then you miss out on the education. Also at times the teacher WILL teach but then the girls are busy misbehaving and the teacher doesn't say anything but then the girls are busy talking so you can't really concentrate when someone is disturbing you.

The participants complained that these girls made learning difficult as they could not concentrate in noisy classes. Others said that having these girls in class made them

feel uncomfortable. They felt that they couldn't express themselves openly and freely, as they were afraid to offend these girls. They therefore had to tip-toe around them so they would not do or say anything in class that might provoke an aggressive outburst or attack. Even some of the teachers seemed to be intimidated by these girls and felt helpless. Disrespect towards teachers was common, making it easier for fights to begin in class.

4.11 Girls are afraid to expose aggressors

Most of the girls spoke about their reluctance to inform figures of authority, especially their parents, about the aggressive attitudes of other girls towards them.

Nelisiwe: I always just kept it inside me and I've... no, I've never told anyone... I've always kept it to myself... I was hurting a lot. I bought myself a diary... My mum would always ask me 'why aren't you happy to go to school?' and I'm like 'oh, it's nothing; it's just that I have a lot of work to do.'

NP: Have you spoken to anyone about this?

Sindiswa: No... I think about it and I write it down.

Phumelele: I don't think many speak about it, because many girls rather keep these things in.

The girls were generally afraid to report incidents of aggression as they were afraid that the aggressive girls would taunt them even more. They were even afraid that once they expose these girls, that they would be targeted by the friends and they would have to live in fear of being attacked outside the school by the friends and bigger brothers or sisters of the perpetrators. They wanted to feel safe and therefore remained silent.

A few girls spoke about the bystanders to these acts of aggression. They either cheered the fight on, or they merely watched and did not report these incidents.

NP: **Was the incident reported?** (A girl had been banging another girl's head against a wall)

Annie: No, it wasn't.

NP: **So the girls just saw what happened and went away?**

Annie: Yes.

NP: **Why do you think it was not reported?**

Annie: I think they felt that they are going to get into trouble... but they just like didn't care; they don't care whether it is reported or not – they don't want to go through the botheration of actually taking effort and doing it.

It is therefore clear that the reluctance on the part of the girls, to report incidents of girls' aggression, is two-fold. Firstly, the girls are afraid of being targeted and victimised for reporting incidents. Secondly, the administrative process of completing formal reports is more easily avoided. Unfortunately, the failure to report such incidents of girls' violence, contributes to the continuance of such behaviour at this school, as it remains largely unchecked by authorities as a result of lack of information.

4.12 Emotional Effects of Girls' Violence

Throughout the interview process, most participants expressed their unhappiness and frustrations about the problem of aggressive girls at school. Many even pleaded that something be done to eliminate this problem at school. Some of them even considered ways in which these aggressive girls could be helped.

Nosihle: And you just don't want to go to school.

Carol: I am very angry and because of this school being like this, I want to leave this school... the girls should be more civilised... it HAS affected me because the girls are SO terrible... I DREAD coming to school... I feel very disappointed about the attitude of the girls at this school, and especially to the teachers... they should be respected and not spoken to anyhow and I would like to see something being done about it because there's absolutely nothing being done.

The daily frustrations of learners who want to get a good education are evident in the above responses. Learners are becoming “angry” as they feel that they are being denied their right to a proper education. It becomes increasingly difficult for learners to cope with the continual disruption of lessons, and the accompanying frustrations of the educators. There is a growing desire to leave this school, in the hope of a better education elsewhere.

It is not surprising that “nothing is being done” as it has been made very clear that the victims of aggression are mostly silent about this problem at school. As long as this silence is not broken, nothing CAN be done. It is hoped that the results of this research project will prompt further and deeper investigations into this very serious problem at single-sex girls’ high schools.

4.13 Summary of Findings

Various reasons for girls’ aggression were revealed through the interviews that were conducted. Some participants believed that these girls just wanted to fit in. They wanted to feel part of a group. They sought attention in this way. A few participants felt that the aggressive girls might have been exposed to similar acts of aggression and therefore protected themselves by turning into the aggressors. It was the general view that the aggressive girls probably lacked parental attention at home or that there might be parental conflicts at home. It was suggested that these girls might have psychological problems and were therefore expressing their personal negative emotions in aggressive ways. There were several comments about aggressive girls thinking that they looked “cool”. Some of the participants believed that aggressive girls wished to maintain the image of the bully and would behave in aggressive ways

to ensure that others were afraid of them. Being recognized as a leader adds to the bully's experience of power over other girls.

The fact that prefects are behaving in the same way, as described by Annie, doesn't just indicate that a group of "bad girls" are behaving this way. If the school role models are behaving this way it indicates a fundamental problem with the system too. The findings of this research have made it clear that there is indeed a serious problem of aggression at this girls' high school. Whether this holds true for other girls' schools has not been researched. It can only be assumed that similar problems may exist at other girls' schools based on the findings of this study.

The various forms of aggression displayed by girls at this school included both direct and indirect forms. There were many incidents of direct physical attacks that were cited. These took the form of slapping, punching, hair pulling, hitting, kicking and other such attacks. These seemed to be an everyday occurrence at this school.

The form of aggression that seemed to pose the most serious problem for learners at this school, was verbal aggression. Learners seemed to be affected most by the name-calling and the vulgar language. These affected them on a deeper level and they found it difficult to cope with such attacks. The spreading of rumours also posed a major problem as learners lost friends and accumulated enemies because of false stories that were being spread about them.

Most of the physical forms of aggression were as a result of relationships with boys and protecting their "territory". Possessiveness over boys and jealousies were key

contributors to fights. These might have been limited to a smaller scale had these girls had boys as their peers (my own view). Having boys around seems to neutralize girls' meanness. In this single-sex school setting, girls tended to aggressively hold onto these boys - and jealously guarded their associations and relationships with them. They even went to the extent of engaging in gang warfare activity with girls from other schools in which boys were present. Being in a girls' school obviously raised serious issues around boys.

Of particular interest is the way girls perceived other girls as being aggressive towards the teachers. They did not merely refer to problems of discipline, but rather to the effect that the aggressive attitudes of girls were having on their teachers and on the teaching and learning environment. Most of the participants expressed frustration. Some even considered leaving this school to enjoy a more "peaceful" and "complete" education.

The participants were very enthusiastic about making recommendations for the improvement of this situation at this school. There was a suggestion that close circuit television cameras be installed in certain classes, to identify aggressive girls in class so that they could be dealt with. Others suggested getting psychological help for these girls. There were further suggestions to form youth groups at school.

4.14 Conclusion

It is hoped that the findings of this study would raise awareness of this very serious concern at girls' schools and that further investigation into this field will be prompted. There is very little research that has been conducted in girls' schools. This is an area

where much work needs to be done in order to understand the real dynamics within this very protected environment. More and more parents are opting to enrol their daughters at girls' schools in an attempt to get them away from the perceived dangers of co-educational high-schools and boys. Given the high incidence of violence that is reported, it is not difficult to understand what motivates parents to do this. Parents, school authorities and the public in general should be made aware of the unique everyday challenges faced by girls at girls' schools, so that these too can be reported and dealt with. Educators, parents and stakeholders in the education sector need to be made aware that girls can develop and nurture violent and aggressive environments and the detrimental effect this has on other girls can no longer be further ignored.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Overview of the Study

Robert Morrell (2000) argued in favour of single-sex schooling for girls, on the premise that it offered a safe space for girls to receive an education. My thesis provides evidence to show that this girls' school is indeed not safe and that girls can also display forms of aggressiveness and violence towards one another, that can be even more damaging than that which they are exposed to in a co-educational school setting. The interviews of 14 Grade 10 girls in a single-sex high school in Durban, brought to light the complexity of problems that arise in a girls' school as a result of girls violence and aggressiveness in the absence of boys.

Dunne et al. (2006), Bhana & Pattman (2008), and Reddy & Dunne (2007), all argue that focus on girls remains important but neglected. Educational research in South Africa has, in the past, focused almost exclusively on boys, violence and masculinity, often sidelining issues relating to girls' schooling and femininities. As important as the research on boyhood and masculinities may be, femininities must also be given a prominent place in South African research. In more recent years, there is a growing body of knowledge on South African aggressive femininities, through studies conducted by researchers such as Virasamy (2004) and Bhana (2008). However, to date, no studies have been conducted on girls' violence in the single-sex school environment. This unexplored terrain in South Africa, was my chosen site. This study focuses on the aggressive attitudes of girls in a single-sex high school setting. Using interview data, the study focused on witnesses to, and on victims of girls' aggression. Although the interviews revealed that girls' violence and aggression was a serious

problem at this school, it was clear that the victims were not helpless and pathetic. As much as they were affected by the violence and aggression of other girls, they chose to be silent about these problems at school. In this way, they became the agents of violence and aggression at this school. They refused to utilise the power they had to report incidents to the school authorities and to their parents. In this way, they enabled the aggressive girls to continue along a destructive path.

Using the results of my own study, as well as the results of similar studies conducted internationally, I was able to answer the key questions to my research on girls' violence and aggression. These questions were:

- What are the gendered relations between girls in Grade 10 at Thekwini High School?
- What forms of aggressive behaviour are evident amongst girls in Grade 10?
- How do girls construct and contest aggression?
- What steps can be taken by the school to reduce or eliminate the aggressiveness of female learners?

The motivation for this study came from my own experiences as a teacher and witnessing the extent to which school violence affects girls. In addition, I was further motivated after reading about the tragic suicide of the 14-year-old Canadian school girl, Dawn-Marie Wesley after continued abuse from female classmates. It concerned me that adolescent girls in single-sex high schools in South Africa could be similarly affected by girls' aggression. It was also possible that parents, being unaware of such

harassment of their daughters at school, would not be able to intervene and thereby prevent further escalation.

My decision to interview Grade 10 girls was as a result of prior discussions held with learners at this school during English oral lessons. Through these discussions, it became clear that girls' aggression at this school was most evident among Grade 10 learners. This was supported by several international researchers who indicated that it was during the middle years at high school that girls' aggression became most problematic (Bright, 2005). A possible reason for this is that girls' entering Grade 10 are moving from the junior phase of high school to the senior phase, thus, affecting power dynamics and relationships. Furthermore, they move into different class groups as a result of the courses they have chosen to study. New friendship groups are formed and this in itself creates certain challenges that many girls find difficult to deal with.

Burman (2001, p 445) argues that this particular age range (13-16 years) represents "a crucial time for the development of the feminine identity". Adolescence seems to be the phase in which forms of girls' aggression becomes more severe, words are more cutting and aggressive acts are carried out in more devious ways. Being publicly humiliated diminishes girls' feelings of self-worth, making the effects of aggressive acts particularly painful. As there is less adult supervision during the adolescent phase, more opportunities arise for aggressors to taunt their victims.

I began this study in order to do a data informed assessment of what I was witnessing at my research site (this was established in the very early stages of this study). Once

that was established, I undertook to discover the various forms in which adolescent girls displayed aggressive attitudes and how these were similar to, or different from, those displayed by boys. My study revealed that the problem of aggressive girls at this school is serious enough to warrant intervention.

In this chapter, I consider the implications of my research and briefly discuss the limitations of such a study. Furthermore, as it is hoped that the school climate would improve for all learners and educators in the future, the focus in much of this chapter will be on the various recommendations made by the participants in this study to reduce the various forms of girls' violence at school, as well as on recommendations made by international researchers who have had some success with strategies for intervention. I shall therefore draw on the advice of these experts to make further recommendations.

5.2 A summary of the findings of my study

The findings of my research can be summarized as follows:

- The problem of girls' aggression does exist at Thekwini High School.
- Girls consider relational (indirect) aggression as more damaging than physical (direct) aggression.
- Girls do engage in physical forms of aggression as well.

Girls' aggression is evident outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom, even during lessons. Girls' violence extends to aggressiveness towards educators as well. The environment of teaching and learning is affected by girls' aggression at school.

Gender identities and the construction of femininities contribute to the various forms of violence among girls. Race and class play a key role in incidents of violence at this school. Often, aggressive girls are not easily recognizable by school authorities.

Finally, there is a definite need for intervention.

5.3 Implications of this study

Aggression is seen as a form of intentionally harmful violating behaviour that girls both engage in and experience as violence. It is understood as the conscious manipulation and undermining of others through social relationships. Girls also lash out physically to reach a higher status and to remain in control. In addition to physical forms of violence, most of the girls that I interviewed also defined verbal abuse as violence and aggressiveness. The problems associated with girls' aggression are clearly evident in Roberts (2006) words:

Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in schools as in society at large. No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child. (p. xiii)

Girls are adopting potentially problematic attitudes and behaviour patterns. International studies have provided evidence that girls' aggression is more prevalent today than it was in the past. Extensive international studies on adolescent girls (as

described in Chapter Three) have revealed that adolescent girls' aggression is a growing problem. Aggressive girls have the impression that physical force and psychological intimidation are acceptable ways of solving their problems. The need to have physical and psychological power, creates an imbalance of power between aggressors and victims. Aggressors consciously seek to dominate their victims. According to Jackson (2006, p350), "these girls are constructing femininities in opposition to conventional 'nice girl' femininities". These nice girl constructions are then perceived, by the aggressors, to be weak.

Race, class and gender was a major element in this study. Feelings of superiority and prejudices against girls of different races and social classes were key contributors to violence and aggression. The various constructions of femininities also contributed to girls' violence. Within this multi-racial and multi-lingual girls' high-school in a democratic country, the girls still have to be educated about respecting human rights and about tolerating differences.

It is crucial that concerted efforts be made to curb the spread of girls' violence in schools, as this could quickly escalate and contribute to an already increasingly violent society. Schools have the power to improve conditions for all learners within them, but by doing nothing this problem will continue to escalate. Nothing can change if nothing is done. Ignoring or underestimating girls' aggression will not make it go away. The problem has to be confronted and dealt with. Girls need to be aware of the intervention methods that will be used to curb aggressiveness at school. This would facilitate the reporting of incidents to the relevant authorities, so that intervention methods may be applied effectively.

5.4 Limitations of this study

This study was a small scale study conducted in one girls' school in KwaZulu-Natal. There are several girls' schools in KwaZulu-Natal as well as in other provinces. In order to get a true picture of girls' aggression in South Africa in general, it would be necessary to conduct a full scale, longitudinal study of all girls' schools throughout South Africa. Even though the findings of my study collaborate those of similar studies internationally, it would still be necessary to conduct research within South Africa, to establish the existence and extent of girls' aggression in single-sex high schools. This will provide valuable information to all role-players at schools and especially to the growing number of parents who are opting to send their daughters to single-sex schools.

In recent years, more attention has been drawn to girls' relational aggression. Although girls are constantly aware of aggressiveness amongst their peer groups and the damaging effects thereof, it seems that adults have remained blissfully unaware or unconcerned. Most girls have been raised to be passive and compliant. It is thus of great concern that social aggression among girls, which has recently become more apparent, remains "a dark underside of their social universe" (Currie, 2007, p. 23). This study therefore remains limited in that it fails to provide a complete exposition of girls' aggression that could offer thorough insights. A further limitation is that this small-scale study could not accommodate a complete exploration into the reasons why girls are aggressive. Understanding the many factors that contribute to aggressiveness, is very important in order to plan and implement successful

intervention strategies. Successful interventions are necessary as aggressive girls may carry their aggressive styles into adulthood as well.

5.5 Recommendations

My study revealed that girls' aggression at this single-sex school is indeed a major problem. It was clearly indicated that the main obstacle preventing victims from asking for adult intervention to incidents of aggression, is the fear of retaliation by the aggressors. In the suicide note to her parents, Dawn-Marie Wesley (Bright, 2005) wrote:

If I try to get help it will get worse. If I ratted they would
get suspended and there would be no stopping them. (p. 98)

The girls interviewed were concerned about all learners as well as educators and the impact that girls' violence was having on all role players at school. Throughout the interview process, participants expressed the need for intervention. When asked to make comments, participants expressed their disappointment at the attitudes of girls at this school. They were adamant that nothing was being done about this problem.

Some girls offered interesting recommendations to curb the aggressiveness of girls. One victim suggested the installation of hidden close-circuit cameras inside classrooms, so that it would not be so easy for perpetrators to deny their engagement in acts of aggression. Another suggested that aggressive girls needed to get help so that they could understand how to conduct themselves appropriately and to learn how to resolve conflicts without resorting to aggression. Both recommendations focus on

the aggressors rather than the victims, with the intention of one being the identification and suggested punishment of the aggressors, while the other recommended helping the aggressors. The recommendations that follow show that it is imperative that punishment should not be meted out in isolation, but that the aggressors also need help to curb their aggression and to deal with life more appropriately. Equally important is helping the victims to be more assertive.

Even though this study focused on the forms of girls' aggression as heard through the voices of victims, when considering intervention, it is crucial to include the aggressors as well. Just as an alcoholic needs help and support in breaking away from self-destructive habits, so too do aggressive girls (and boys) need support in their efforts to control their aggression and to replace angry and negative feelings with constructive and positive ones. Aggressors must be held accountable for their actions. However, much research is still needed to assess what makes girls aggressive as, often, aggressive children come from aggressive homes and use the only methods they know -yelling, hitting and intimidation- to take out their frustrations on their victims.

It is important to understand that not all intervention strategies will work equally well in every school with the problem of girls' aggression. However, it is of utmost importance that partnerships are built between school personnel and parents to help both victims and aggressors. When victims report aggressive acts to school personnel, it should be acted upon responsibly, by investigating the problems that exist and holding perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, effective policies should be put in place and enforced whenever aggressive incidents occur or are reported. Roberts (2006) explains that the best of teachers, in ignoring the impact of harassment and the

resultant poisoning of the entire atmosphere of the school environment, are showing disrespect towards students. He recommends a four-point strategy for intervention, claiming that it has proven to work successfully in curbing aggressiveness at his own school. He makes further claims that by using the following strategy, different school personnel and different schools have met with varying degrees of success.

1. Survey the student body to establish the frequency and dynamics of aggressive behaviour within the school. This is an important step in assessing the prevalence of aggressiveness within the school environment.
2. Safeguard the victim. Victims are often afraid of retaliation. These victims should be offered protection through the implementation of disciplinary measures to hold aggressors accountable. The victim may even have to be physically separated from the perpetrators. Parents may need to be informed and included in resolving the situation.
3. Listen empathetically to the story the victims tell. Listening to the victims entails active listening, with careful consideration of all the details. Nothing should be ignored or overlooked. The victim should get the assurance that proper action would be instituted against the perpetrators, to prevent further episodes. This needs to be done in an atmosphere of caring and support.
4. Listen to the story the aggressor tells. The aggressor should also be listened to, in order to gain an understanding of the possible causes of her aggressiveness and to understand her rationale and logic. Teaching aggressive girls about

boundaries, accountability, anger management and alternative strategies to aggression, will go a long way to reducing incidents of aggression.

5. Girls' violence within the context of a single-sex high school setting must be addressed as a specific and serious problem. Concerted efforts should be made by school authorities, educators and parents, to bridge the gaps between the various race and social class groups, by raising awareness of human rights issues and the need to respect the rights of all. This should be implemented on a continuous basis, within school, at home and in society at large.

These strategies may work well at some schools and may not work at others. It is up to the school authorities and parents to adapt strategies that will best work within their particular setting.

5.6 Conclusion

My study suggests (as do most other studies on girls' aggression) that girls witness and endure far more abuse from other girls than teachers and parents are aware of. Sadly though, when girls bring this problem to the attention of the parents and when the parents in turn approach the school, the school often fails to address it. This reflects negatively on institutional attitude and structure and says a lot about the genderisation of the problem. Lacking support from the school authorities, these parents move their daughters to other schools. Schools and parents need to instill within girl-children the need to stand up against aggressiveness as they could ultimately save a life.

The school learner population of my research site consisted of teenage Black, White, Coloured and Indian girls. Furthermore, some girls are rich and others are poor. Some have a stable home life while others are from single-parent homes. This school and experiences therein are based on these girls having their own histories which collide to produce a climate of hostility and violence. In this multi-racial school setting, tension existed both within and between the racial groups. This was further complicated by the mingling of girls from various socio-economic backgrounds. These factors contributed significantly to much of the aggressiveness that was displayed by these girls. A further factor contributing to girls' aggression at this school was the language differences. As the majority of the school learner population was Black and spoke Zulu in and out of the classroom, girls from the other race groups who spoke only English, often felt that they were easy targets as they knew that they were being teased or insulted, but could not understand exactly what was being said about them. In this case, knowledge is power and power comes from nation belonging ideals too. Not only are the girls being excluded by the class group, but the non-black students are being excluded from the African identity as well. Even the use of "African" to indicate Black often leaves academics arguing if that excludes non-Black people from the African identity. These girls may be doing the same thing. by not speaking English and only speaking an African language. That goes beyond social exclusion; it goes to the core of your overall identity construction too. This resulted in increased feelings of frustration among victims, and was often used as a powerful weapon of aggression by Black aggressors, in order to intimidate others. Black-on-Black aggression was also common as girls fought over boys, and sometimes female friends as well as female sexual partners. There were also accounts of hostility among

the Indian girls. This was not evident among the Coloured girls or among the White girls at this school.

It takes courage to actively stop girls' aggression and harassment in our schools and in our children's lives. Punishment should never be used as the sole means of those who use aggression against innocent victims. It takes time to formulate strategies that will work with both adolescent victims and aggressors to address all emotional, cognitive and behavioural needs. School personnel need to be educated about dynamics behind relational aggression to ensure they become more alert to and proactive in dealing with incidents of aggression. Girls should be observed in the classroom as well as outside the classrooms, noting non-verbal reactions to other girls. School authorities and parents should recognise that relationally aggressive girls are at risk for adjustment difficulties in later life as are those victimised during these exchanges.

My study revealed that girls' aggression within the single-sex high school environment does exist and that urgent attention needs to be paid to implementing intervention strategies to curb this growing problem. The girls at Thekwini High School have indeed led the way in exposing the various forms of girls' aggression at South African girls-only schools. It is hoped that this study would inspire other researchers to engage in further studies on this problem. This would further an understanding of girls' violence in general. Much work still needs to be done in order to ensure that our adolescent girls are allowed the freedom to receive an education in an environment conducive to effective learning.

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PROPOSED LETTER TO THE KZN DEPT OF EDUCATION

37 Downhaven Road
Foresthaven
Phoenix
4051

05 November 2005

Mr S.R Alwar
Research, Strategy, Policy Development and ECMIS Directorate
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3200

Sir

Request for Permission to Conduct Research at my School

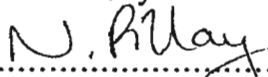
I am presently registered as a part-time student (Master in Education) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). The topic for my research is "Aggressive Femininities". My research involves identifying various forms of aggression among grade 10 learners at a single-sex high school in KwaZulu-Natal. I request permission to conduct my study at the educational institution at which I teach. To protect the identity of this school, a fictitious name will be used.

In order to answer two of my critical questions, I plan to interview about 15 grade ten learners (as individuals and in focus groups) from July 2006 to September 2006. The actual names of the participants will not be recorded in order to protect their identity. Informed consent forms will be given to the learners as well as to the parents, before the interviews. I have attached the full details and documentation for my proposed study.

The results of this study will be beneficial to this school as the problem of aggression can be identified and addressed, thereby creating a safer and happier school environment for everyone.

My Supervisor is Dr D. Bhana, a Senior Lecturer at the UKZN Edgewood Campus. She may be contacted to verify the details I have provided. Her contact details are as follows:
Office Telephone Number: 031- 260 2603
E-mail: bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully



.....
Nalini Pillay (Student No: 205522180)



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATALI
PROVINSIE KWAZULU-NATAL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO
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Pietermaritzburg
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INHLOKOHHOVISI

PIETERMARITZBURG

HEAD OFFICE

Enquiries:
Imibuzo: Sibusiso Alwar
Navrae:

Reference:
Inkomba: 0164/06
Verwysing:

Date:
Usuku:
Datum: 24/05/2006

To: **Nalini Pillay**
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3065

RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Please be informed that your application to conduct research has been approved with the following terms and conditions:

That as a researcher, you must present a copy of the written permission from the Department to the Head of the Institution concerned before any research may be undertaken at a departmental institution bearing in mind that the institution is **not obliged to participate** if the research is not a departmental project.

Research should not be conducted during official contact time, as **education programmes should not be interrupted**, except in exceptional cases with special approval of the KZNDoe.

The research is not to be conducted during the fourth school term, except in cases where the KZNDoe deem it necessary to undertake research at schools during that period.

Should you wish to extend the period of research after approval has been granted, an application for extension must be directed to the Director: Research, Strategy Development and EMIS.

The research will be limited to the schools or institutions for which approval has been granted.

A copy of the completed report, dissertation or thesis must be provided to the RSPDE Directorate.

Lastly, you must sign the attached declaration that, you are aware of the procedures and will abide by the same.

for SUPERINTENDENT GENERAL
KwaZulu Natal Department of Education

Declaration and Understanding

I the undersigned declare that I acknowledge that I have read and understood the abovementioned terms and conditions and agree to abide by them. The Research, Strategy, Policy Development and EMIS Directorate reserve the right to withdraw my approval should I be found not to abide by the terms and conditions. I undertake to bid myself to the RSPDE directorate, to submit a copy of the completed report, dissertation or thesis as per terms and conditions.

Name (print): NALINI PILLAY

Date: 20/05/2006 Signature of applicant: N. Pillay



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Dear Parent

I am presently conducting research on aggressive girls at a single-sex high school in KwaZulu-Natal, as part of my studies to obtain a Master's degree in Education. In order to identify the various forms of aggression displayed by girls, I will be interviewing a selected number of learners who identify themselves as victims of aggression. Participants will be grade ten girls who have been randomly selected from those who have requested to be interviewed. Your daughter has been selected to be interviewed. I hereby request your permission to interview your daughter.

Your daughter will benefit from participating in the study, as she will become involved in rooting out this problem at school; she will also be helping to create a safer and happier learning environment for everyone at school.

The interview, which will be tape-recorded, will last approximately 30 minutes. The information gathered will be burned once the study is complete. Your daughter's actual name will not be mentioned in the research report. Her participation is voluntary and she is free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason. Should she decide not to participate, she will not be disadvantaged.

N. Pillay
.....

Nalini Pillay (student number: 205522180: UKZN-Edgewood)

Please complete the following consent form:

<u>CONSENT FORM</u>
I(full name of Parent) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I consent to my daughter's participating in the research project. I understand that she is free to withdraw from the project at any time, should she so desire.
Name of Daughter:
Signature of Parent:

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Dear Participant/ Learner

I am presently conducting research on aggressive girls at a single-sex high school in KwaZulu-Natal, as part of my studies to obtain a Master’s degree in Education. In order to identify the various forms of aggression displayed by girls, I will be interviewing a selected number of learners who identify themselves as victims of aggression. Participants will be grade ten girls who have been randomly selected from those who have requested to be interviewed. You have been selected to be interviewed. .

You will benefit from participating in the study, as you will become involved in rooting out this problem at school; you will also be helping to create a safer and happier learning environment for everyone at school.

The interview, which will be tape-recorded, will last approximately 30 minutes. The information gathered will be burned once the study is complete. Your actual name will not be mentioned in the research report. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason. Should you decide not to participate, you will not be disadvantaged.

N. Pillay
.....

Nalini Pillay (student number: 205522180: UKZN-Edgewood)

Please complete the following Declaration:

DECLARATION

I(full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

..... (signature of participant)

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT (Interview Guide)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

“Hello...(respondent’s name). As you already know, I am conducting research on aggressive attitudes of girls at this school. Thank you for requesting to be interviewed. All the information you provide will be treated with confidentiality. Your name will not be recorded or used. The information will be very important in highlighting some of the problems that exist at girls’ schools. This would guide future decisions to improve the school environment for everyone. The interview will last for approximately 30 minutes. I will be tape-recording and taking notes as you speak. Do you have any questions? ... May I continue?...”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the various forms of aggression displayed by girls at this school?
2. Could you explain how your own experiences, as a victim of aggressive girls, affects your learning.

NOTE: There are no predetermined probes or prompts and no response categories. Questions are to be clarified as the situation warrants.

CLOSING REMARKS

“Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?”...OR,
“...Any comments that you would like to make?”...
(Engage in a small amount of conversation)
“Thank you for your participation in this interview.”



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

19 JULY 2006

MRS. N PILLAY (205522180)
EDUCATION

Dear Mrs. Pillay

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/06123A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"Aggressive femininities"

Yours faithfully


.....
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Dr. D Bhana)