

**BULLYING IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL:
PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS**

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ABSTRACT

The study emerges against a global and local backdrop of the prevalence of bullying in and out of schools. Growing incidents of bullying are a direct threat to the expectation that schools should be safe places for learners to learn, develop, participate fully and be able to reach their full potential. The study investigates the experiences and narratives of a sample of primary school learners who go to school and live in the informal settlement of Inanda, north of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, with the view to developing a greater insight into the phenomenon of bullying. The research is conceptually underpinned by perspectives offered by the Sociology of Children and New Childhood Studies, which accept children as social actors and experts on their own lives, and should be granted the status of participation in the social processes that surround them and impact on them in their everyday lives. Such a perspective offers a useful lens through which to conduct research that aims to make aspects of children's lives visible. The children in the study were listened to and viewed as competent participants in the overall research endeavour. The focus on understanding human experiences locates the study firmly within a qualitative research design, and is the rationale for the selection of personal narratives as the strategy of inquiry. Participatory methods of data generation were used, in the form of a mapping exercise and semi-structured interviews (both individual and a focus group interview). Purposive sampling was used to identify eight participants, comprising four male and four female, grade 7 learners from a primary school in Inanda. The selection of learners had been victims and/or perpetrators of bullying, and therefore knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena of interest. What emerged from the study is that bullying is experienced on an ongoing basis by learners within the primary school, as well as in their homes and in places in their immediate surroundings. The ability to identify the places and spaces which render them vulnerable to bullying, and avoid these places and spaces, is the key way learners have learned to navigate such places and spaces.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The prevalence of bullying

Bullying in schools has become a topic of international concern in recent years and active research on bullying is taking place in countries such as Scandinavia, Japan and United Kingdom (Jimerson, Swear and Espelage, 2010). Internationally, the prevalence and severity of incidents of bullying is on the rise (Winner, 2009), most prominently seen in recent cases of schoolyard shooting and violent attacks on both learners and teachers. Bullying in South African schools and in wider communities is fast becoming a matter of great concern.

In keeping with the intention to ensure that schools are safe places for learners to learn, develop, participate fully and be able to reach their full potential, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 84 of 1996 provides for the prohibition of violent activities in schools. The former Minister of Education from the period 1999 to 2004, Kader Asmal acknowledged that the installation of metal detectors and security guards in schools was not the ultimate solution to the problem of violence. Perpetrators of bullying do not need physical weapons and other harmful objects to harm their victims. They can just as easily succeed in harming and degrading their victims through their actions and choice of words. It is becoming more apparent to teachers and parents that bullying has become as dangerous and harmful a weapon as any physical weapons and objects, and thus should be a serious consideration under the prohibition of violent activities in schools.

1.2. The purpose of my research

The purpose of my study was to explore children's stories about the places and spaces of bullying in and out of a particular school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study was prompted by the prevalence of bullying in South African schools. I have found that most international studies are quantitative in nature or tend to be large-scale studies which utilize surveys or questionnaires. My study sought to access children's voices and foreground what they had to say about the dynamics of bullying they encounter in and out of their school. Moss & Petrie (2001) argue that we need to understand children as social actors and experts on their own lives – that they need to be listened to and viewed as

competent partners in research endeavours rather than as passive objects of study. It is my belief that research conducted *with* children can help to increase general understanding and awareness of bullying. This notion underpins my study and emanates from the recent shift from the traditional conceptualization of children and childhood, wherein children have been viewed as adults in the making, as yet unfinished and incompetent. My study is aligned rather with the emergence of a new sociology of childhood which is referred to as New Childhood Studies (Christiansen and Prout, 2002), which has created the related research field of *children's geographies*, conceptualizing children as human beings in their own right.

My study is conducted in a primary school in Inanda, a semi-rural, informal settlement or township area north of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The residents of Inanda were racially identified as black Africans under the apartheid government in South Africa, and forced to live in areas that were designated for black Africans only by the South African Group Areas Act (1950). Although South Africa has seen the end of apartheid, the legacy of class and racial inequality which apartheid entrenched, continues. The racial classification of apartheid created class divisions along the lines of race, privileging whites and marginalizing and oppressing black South Africans. The informal settlement or township of Inanda is the direct result of enforced segregation and class differentiation along the lines of race. Among the non-whites in South Africa, the black Africans were the most marginalized and under-developed. As a result, poverty was, and to a large extent still is, an overwhelming reality in black townships.

While a few residents of Inanda have managed to improve the quality of their lives and have secured employment and have bigger homes for themselves and their families, the majority are extremely disadvantaged and marginalized, with many people living in shacks. The average standard of living is low among the residents of Inanda and unemployment is high.

The area is a hot-spot of crimes such as robbery, rape and house breaking, and teenage pregnancy, dagga, drugs, and alcohol abuse are common social issues. Most learners are therefore exposed to a multiplicity of drug abuse practices, and the smoking of wunga (a burnt substance which is a mixture of rattex, VIM and ARVs) and marjuana is prevalent in this area. These social issues often correlate with high levels of poverty. Sullivan (2000) suggests that in economically depressed areas, higher levels of alcoholism, drug use, theft, unemployment, and vandalism, breaks down the cement that holds a society together.

As a teacher in Inanda, I am exposed to all the social issues that have been listed above. These are of major concern to me, especially the issue of bullying. My concern is that the incidents of bullying which

come to my attention on an everyday basis, have the potential to result in even wider and larger negative social issues in the area. A school is a microcosm of the wider community and society of which it is a part. It follows, then, that patterns of bullying behavior that arise at school mirror to a large extent, the patterns of power-related violence that exist in the wider community and society. My view is that, bullying at the school level, while mirroring the state of the community and society, may play a major part in maintaining and perpetuating these trends, as it starts with learners and escalates to the community at large. I see the negative results of bullying behavior and am all too aware of how bullying and the threat of bullying can act as a very real hindrance to learners feeling safe in and outside of school; to their participating freely and fully in all aspects of growth and learning in and outside of school; and to the youth reaching their full potential in their lives.

Power relations are always apparent in any social group, by virtue of strength, size, ability, force of personality, sheer numbers or recognized hierarchy. Bullying is a form of declaring and proving power within the confines of the school and within the broader community, and can manifest in a variety of ways. According to Sullivan (2000) bullying is the systematic abuse of power. Van Ingen and Halas (2006) agree that schools are contact zones where values, ideologies and social practices intersect and power relations play out. Bullying is often modelled by parents when they are violent with each other as a result of not knowing how to cope with feelings of anger and frustration, etc. Adult males often use power related tactics such as bullying to avoid being labelled as weak, therefore perpetuating traditional expectations and understandings of masculinity.

This research was prompted by the prevalence of bullying in and out of schools. The purpose of my study was to investigate this issue of bullying through exploring the narratives of children's social and cultural dynamics and schooling places and spaces as these relate to experiences of bullying. According to Horton and Grafti (2006), studies exploring children's relationships with their environment is not an easy task, since much of what they experience may be almost invisible on the physical and social landscape. As bullying mostly occurs in those areas out of sight of adults, my study sought to examine children's experiences of bullying in and out of school, by foregrounding their authentic voices and what they tell about power dynamics in bullying encounters.

My overall research questions were:

- What are the emotional geographies of children in a bullying context
- How do they navigate and explore the spaces and places related to bullying in and out of school

1.3. Conceptual underpinnings of my research

Moss and Petrie (2001) argue that we need to understand children as social actors and experts in their own lives, and that they have a right to participate in research that aims to make their lives visible. The need to listen to children and view them as competent partners in research rather than passive objects of study, is one of the main conceptual underpinnings of my research.

I have therefore chosen to be guided by the Sociology of Childhood in my research. According to Prout and James (1990) the field of Children's Geographies is associated with the paradigm shift from the traditional conceptualization of childhood to what is referred to as New Childhood Studies. From this perspective, the call is for studies of childhood to move beyond dealing with children as research subjects incapable of communicating or making sense of their own life experiences, to engaging with children as participants fully capable of sharing their experiences and making meaning of these.

According to Moss and Petrie (2001) children need to be understood as social actors and experts on their own lives, and they have a right to participate in research that aims to make their lives visible. This sentiment is also shared by Kellet (2004) who claims that children need to be listened to and viewed as competent partners in research rather than objects of study. My research position is informed by New Childhood Studies and children geographies which consider children, not as passive objects of socialization but as social actors in their own right. In endeavouring to research a sample of learners' experiences of bullying in and out of the school they attend, I chose to view them as agents, social actors and participants, who are capable of being fully involved in my research.

Alanen (1988) considers children as capable of understanding and navigating the social issues that they encounter in their everyday lives, and capable of engaging in social struggle. This view is contrary to the traditional view about how children are perceived by adults and what can be expected of children by the society, as it sees children as interpreters and actors, who are quite capable of analyzing the information they receive and making their own choices as to how they will respond and react, often showing initiative, responsibility and even leadership.

Children's geographies is an area of study in human geography that explores the places and spaces of children's lives. The prevalence of bullying is rife in children's spaces and places. Having adopted the perspective of children as social actors, it follows that children should be granted the status of participation in the processes that impact on them in their everyday lives. In keeping with the Sociology of Childhood, children are understood as social actors and experts on their own lives, and therefore

have a right to participate in any research that aims to make their lives visible. The children in my study will therefore be listened to and viewed as competent participants in my research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Prevalence of bullying

Bullying is an internationally pervasive problem that impacts significantly on the behaviour, health and wellbeing of children. It is a cross-cultural phenomenon and transcends ethnicity (Jimerson et al, 2010). Bullying is experienced in a number of different forms and covers a wide range of ages, but according to Dixon (2011) is prominent between the ages 9 -18. Bullying has generally been shown to be most prevalent in middle school but research suggests that bullying peaks during transition periods in children's school lives (between elementary and middle school and between middle and high school) as it is during these transitional periods that youth seem to negotiate new peer groups and may use bullying as a means to achieve social dominance (Sullivan, 2000).

Concern has been expressed in the media about the prevalence of bullying in schools (Dixon, 2011) and there is an increasing concern from parents on the negative impact of bullying on children. It is estimated that worldwide up to 50 percent of children are experiencing bullying at school, as either perpetrators or victims. It is therefore no wonder that the phenomenon of bullying has become the topic of a growing body of research.

According to Dixon (2011) there is a history of research and interest on the topic of bullying in schools throughout Western European countries, but limited research from Eastern Europe. In Canada researchers have developed an observational methodology to gather information on school ground bullying (Dixon, 2011) which involves teacher and parent reporting. However, this method is of limited value when the aim of research is to understand the experiences of children. Dixon argues that adults know a fraction of what is going on in bullying spaces.

Research conducted between 2003 and 2005 in a number of developing countries for the Global School-based Health Survey (GSHS) found a wide variation between nations regarding the prevalence of bullying. In Beijing, China, 17 percent of girls and 23 percent of boys (aged 13 -15) reported that they have been bullied in the previous 30 days. In Zambia these figures rose to 67 percent for girls and 63 percent for boys. In Lithuania and the USA the number of children reporting having experienced bullying was less in comparison to Europe.

2.2. Forms and consequences of bullying

The landmark study conducted by Smith (2002) has examined the psychosocial dynamics of bullying through researching the street experiences of a group of urban children living in an East Midlands town in the UK. Smith (2002) claims that the street is an important part of the everyday lives of these young people and maintains that these local environments have become “tyrannical spaces”, defined in terms of “no-go areas”, danger and threat” (Smith, 2002, 49) for these young people. This case study draws attention to the form and consequences of bullying. Findings suggest there is a hidden geography of fear which needs further investigation.

A variety of literature provides evidence that bullying can assume both direct and indirect forms (Docket and Perry, 2005). Direct forms of bullying can be defined as relatively open attacks on a victim, carried out face to face. Direct bullying can manifest as more than punching or kicking, and can include the taking of an individual's possessions or the damaging of an individual's property (Docket and Perry, 2005). While the latter examples do not include physical pain or bodily harm to individual children, they still have the effect of inflicting fear. Direct physical bullying is a visible and identifiable form of bullying, and presents an obvious challenge for schools to maintain orderly learning environments (Docket and Perry, 2005). Possibly because of the overt nature of this form of bullying, direct physical bullying accounts for less than one third of bullying incidents reported by children (Docket and Perry, 2005).

Indirect forms of bullying are more subtle and less direct, and include behaviours such as social isolation and exclusion from the group. Verbal bullying is viewed as one of the most common types of bullying and is usually directed at vulnerable groups of children such as children with different sexual orientations, ethnic backgrounds and learning abilities. According to research conducted by Jimerson et al (2010), children who are ethnically in the minority in a school are more likely to be bullied than those who are in the majority. The connection between religious orientation and bullying has been reported in the media. Studies have been conducted in the UK where Hindu, Muslim and Pakistani children have reported being bullied because of their religious and cultural differences (Docket and Perry, 2005). In India the United Nations reported that corporal punishment was being administered in schools with greater severity to children belonging to the lower social caste, and that these children were also subjected to regular and ongoing stigmatization, humiliation and discrimination by teachers belonging to the higher social caste (Smith, 2002).

A common form of bullying in developing countries is cyber bullying, (that is bullying by means of email, on line chat lines, personal web pages, text messages and transmission of images). This is an indirect form of bullying where the recipient may never know or see the bully, and can include abusive phone calls, intimidating e-mails, anonymous notes containing threats, false accusations and malicious gossip (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). While innovative technologies are advantageous to children in general in that they offer opportunities to create new spaces of interaction and new forms of socialization, these technologies potentially render children vulnerable to harassment and bullying. Furthermore, this phenomenon takes place in spaces and places that are not always subject to adult supervision and are always beyond adult comprehension.

Social bullying has been defined as deliberate exclusion from social groups or intimidation within a group (Espelage and Swearer, 2003) and results in the systematic diminishment of a bullied child's sense of self. Social bullying can be difficult to detect and is often overlooked by adults as immature behaviour expected from children. Just because indirect bullying forms do not necessarily inflict direct bodily harm or threats of such to individuals, does not make them less harmful. Words and discriminatory, isolating and exclusionary actions can still be powerful tools that can break the spirit of a child and have long term emotional and psychological consequences. Studies have found that bullying is associated with negative consequences such as fear of school, low self-esteem, absenteeism, poor academic progress, truancy and children dropping out of school (Espelage and Swearer, 2003).

2.3. Understanding bullying through a gender lens

Swart and Bredenkamp (2009) argue that research on bullying has generated awareness of many aspects and distinctions between types of bullying, much of which can be understood through a gender lens. While both girls and boys are involved in bullying, research has found that boys are involved to a greater extent and degree than girls (Dixon, 2011). Dixon (2011) also found that, although not limited to one gender, boys tend to do more bullying than girls, in terms of physical bullying. The study by UNICEF in Central and West Africa indicates similarly that male students are amongst the perpetrators of bullying and sexual violence in and around schools. They use their superiority as an advantage to abuse younger and weaker children, in particular girls. Research suggests that the bullying of schoolgirls may be particularly common and extreme in places where other forms of school violence are prevalent, such as sexual violence.

MacDonald's (2006) study in Gauteng explores how the unique culture of a particular school may influence bullying. He identified values, norms, beliefs and attitudes of the school community and culture which influenced gender differences which, in turn, perpetuated experiences of bullying wherein boys used their masculinity and power to prove their dominance over girls. In certain school cultures where bullying and other forms of violence are prevalent, teachers and staff may presume related behaviours to be a normal part of school life and therefore ignore the attention it deserves.

Studies have highlighted the relationship of power to bullying. Sullivan (2000) stressed that bullying involves the systematic abuse of power relationships in social groups, and bullying is often based on the physical strength, size or ability, or force of personality. Many studies echo the finding that bullying often results from the heightened concern youth have for issues relating to appearance and popularity standings.

Jimerson et al (2010) found that males bully more than females, and that males are mainly bullied by males, while females are equally bullied by males and females. In addition, most often males are bullied about their sexuality while females are mostly bullied because they are constructed as having loose morals.

Smith (2002) argues that girls are expected to be non-aggressive and to conform to the gender stereotype of being the kinder, gentler sex, and parents discourage direct physical aggression in girls, while boys have more freedom to express their anger in direct aggressive physical ways. Smith (2002) explains that because girls are not encouraged to express their anger directly and physically, it manifests in other ways, such as social ostracism, ignoring and isolating victims, and sabotaging relationships. It appears that socially constructed gender differences are a major contributory factor to the phenomenon of bullying and socialization into gender roles could explain the gender differences in bullying behaviour which continue into adulthood.

A bully has perceived authority over another due to factors such as size, gender or age. The motivation for bullying amongst boys appears to derive from factors such as not fitting in, being physically weak, short temperedness, choice of friends and the type of clothing worn. Bullying amongst girls seems to result from not fitting in, physical appearance, emotionality and academic status. In both sexes a speech impediment of some sort (such as a stutter) can also put an individual child at risk of being the target of bullying.

According to Peter and Smith (1994) while girls and boys are both bullies, there are gender differences that exist in relation to bullying behaviour. The difference is that girls more often social bullies (bullying

verbally and psychologically) while boys are more often physical bullies. Peter and Smith (1994) also note that males bully more than females; that males are bullied more by other males; and that females are equally bullied by both males and females. Sullivan (2000) found that males are most often bullied about their sexuality, while females are bullied about their apparent morals. Smith (2002) concurs with these claims through the discovery that children predominantly use sexual putdowns towards girls, such as calling them whores or sluts. Jimersen et al (2010) note that international research suggests that while males often bully strangers or acquaintances, females attack within networks of existing friendship.

2.4. Understanding bullying through the lens of dominant discourses of masculinity

A study of three schools of various social class and ethnic composition in the UK by Stromquist (2007) examined the construction of gender through interviews with learners and teachers and classroom observation of teachers' and learners' behaviours. The findings provide clear evidence that gender continues to be constructed in an extremely polarized manner, with stark distinctions between what was considered masculine and feminine qualities and appropriate behaviours. The findings from many studies echo this framing of the concept of masculinity within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes differences between males and females. Generally it is found that masculinity is characterized by instrumental personality traits, such as independence, self-affirmation, risk-taking, social dominance and aggressiveness. In contrast, femininity is mainly shown by terms of expressive traits, such as warmth, sensitivity and altruism. The classroom culture in Stromquist's (2007) study challenged boys to be active, aggressive, competitive and interested in heterosexual conquests.

Stromquist (2007) states that learners' constructions of their gender identities takes place not only in relation to teachers and the official and hidden curriculum, but also through conversations with classmates, activities on the playground and through engagement with extracurricular activities. Interactions amongst peers constitutes a major determinant in the gender socialization process, where peer interaction can reinforce or contradict messages about gender roles and expectations. Stromquist (2007) found that the gender roles which were taught and encouraged through the school curriculum generally reinforced and perpetuated in peer relations outside the classroom.

Bullying can be attributed to more than one factor. The family is an interaction system that influences and shapes human development, and is therefore responsible for modelling behaviour that teaches children to resolve conflicts by violence. In general, boys experience more frequent and more severe

physical punishment than girls. This administering of punishment in different forms according to the gender of a child, conveys messages about what is expected of children and adults of each sex. Schools construct certain forms of masculinity through authority patterns. Swart and Bredenkamp (2009) argue that boys are encouraged to be tough and are often rewarded with parental approval for being physical and aggressive. The consistent and pervasive message that boys are getting from home, the media, society, school and their peer is that aggression and violence may in fact improve their social status. Sullivan (2000) argues that the attitudes of teachers towards incidents of bullying are of major significance for the extent of escalating or diminishing the problem of bullying in classrooms and schools. To take this further, one cannot deny the significant roles educators play in promoting gender constructions in children, and how the phenomena of gender constructions and bullying interlink.

Through the encouraging and entrenching of stereotypically constructed rules and regulations of masculinity, the institution of the school typically militates against unconditional positive regard for others. By teaching that it is desirable for males to be dominant, independent, competitive, ambitious, never to cry or show emotional weakness, general attitudes of males are hardened. Attitudes and responses to acts of bullying and to the victims under such circumstances would naturally result in a lack of sympathy and tender regard for the negative treatment of peers.

A study conducted by Rigby and Slee (1989) reveals that in general girls are significantly more supportive than boys towards the victims of bullying and in expressing the need to eliminate bullying in schools. They go on to say that with increasing age children became less sympathetic to incidents of bullying, and by senior class, the researchers found no difference in sympathetic responses between female and male learners, thus confirming that the school environment hardens children's attitudes towards bullying and the suffering of victims.

Many researchers agree that the vicious cycle of differential gender constructions perpetuates and maintains bullying and victim behaviour, and that without fundamental changes to society's attitudes towards gender and violence issues, particularly of teachers and parents, bullying behaviour will continue to be passed down from generation to generation. As far as peer relationships within the group are concerned, the masculine emphasis on self-affirmation and social dominance may lead some children to bully their peers in order to reach these goals. If bullying is allowed to continue into adulthood, the phenomenon becomes more dangerous, and result in sexual and racial harassment, assault and rape.

According to Smith (2002), the nature and extent of bullying behaviour in schools focuses on the social construction of masculine and feminine roles, norms and stereotypical behaviour. From the feminist perspective, Swart and Bredekamp (2009) highlight the imbalance of power between the sexes and the resulting differential power relations.

Under traditional and patriarchal gender constructions with clear polarized gender roles and appropriate behaviours, boys naturally fear having their masculinity or sexuality questioned and being labelled as anything less than what a real man should be. The driving force for many boys is proving their masculinity by being as tough, or tougher than their peers. Sullivan (2000) regards this questioning of other boys' masculinity as a form of sexual harassment, and views being a member of this power bloc often having sexual implications characteristic of sex-based harassment. According to Van Ingen and Halas (2006) sexual harassment is the most constant and systematic form of abuse at all levels of schooling, with girls more often being the victims of classroom and schoolyard harassment. Sexual harassment is part of everyday life for girls due to the apparent overwhelming need for boys to assert their masculine identity.

According to Peter and Smith (1994) masculinity that is violently constructed by those in positions of authority in relation to other males who are perceived as inferior and in relation to females, has been identified as hegemonic masculinity. Espelage and Swearer (2003) refer to hegemonic dominant forms of masculinities as being culturally exalted or idealized. This notion is echoed in the study conducted by Morojele (2011) where boys in Lesotho schools were expected to perform in accordance with hegemonic masculinity in their culture, or face humiliation if they performed alternative forms of masculinities. In the Zulu culture, boys who spend most of their time at home fearing the aggressive behaviour of other boys, are called 'umngqolo', a derogatory label that infers that such boys fall short of being real men. According to Xaba (1997, 7), "masculinity is not something given to you, something you are born with, but something you gain. You gain it by winning small battles...". It is clear that hegemonic notions masculinities are firmly entrenched within the Zulu culture. Young boys feel pressurized to prove that they are real men by acting and reacting in ways that are rigidly prescribed as masculine behaviours.

A wide range of literature concerning the construction of male identities among boys suggests that, although not all boys in schools are violent, most will resort to violence when they perceive it as necessary, either in individual situations or in groups. This is largely due to the fact that most boys have been socialized in this way. Individual bullies are not typically born with the characteristic. Manifesting bullying tendencies and behaviour is more often a result of the treatment these individuals receive from

authority figures including parents. Studies support the claim that aggression and violence are learned behaviours (Jimersen et al, 2010). Peter and Smith (1994) believe that bullying is a way of ensuring that boys sustain the dictates of hegemonic masculinity and the concept of masculinity emerges in much research as the major means of making sense of the power relations inherent in the phenomenon of bullying.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1. Introduction

My study employs a qualitative approach to elicit data on how learners experience and navigate bullying in and out of school. The present research aligns itself with the shift from a traditional conceptualization of childhood and conducting research on children (as was outlined previously), to a new childhood studies conceptualization of research being conducted *with* children, valuing their input and interactions in certain places and spaces.

This chapter discusses the research methodology and design of the study. The new childhood studies approach has meant a methodological shift, involving the emergence of new participatory research methodologies. Multi methods approaches such as photo voice, mapping and transect walks are often used in such research to encourage maximum participation of participants and generate authentic data which is closely aligned to the everyday experiences of the participants themselves. My study utilises mapping, individual and focus group interviews as tools in exploring children's experiences of bullying and how they navigate through such places and spaces.

3.2. Positioning myself in my research

My position is that children are competent social actors who can make their own meanings and actively construct their social realities. I will therefore research *with* them. I view the learners as agents and social actors in their lives. Alanen (1988) even highlights that children are capable of engaging in social struggle. Smith (2002) defined three constructions of children: children as consumers, as interpreters, as actors. As interpreters they are capable of analysing messages they receive and are able to make their own choices in navigating these messages. As actors they are able to take initiative and responsibility or even a leadership role in social institutions. My study has focused on environments in which children are located. Such environments may be family, school and neighbourhood.

According to Horton and Graft (2006) who were inspired by New Childhood Studies, exploring children's relationships with their environment is not easy, since they are almost invisible in their

physical and social landscape. I would need creative ways to do this. Bullying occurs in those areas that are generally out of sight

Previously research was fundamentally on children rather than with children or for children. Barker and Weller (2003) claims that historically children were viewed as objects to be studied, being regarded as incompetent, unreliable and incomplete. With the emergence of the New social studies of childhood and children's rights discourse (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; the Children's Act of 2004), children are now viewed as social actors who are on their own lives.

My study is positioned within a qualitative research design and an interpretive approach to researching bullying, which allows the research design and methodology to align with the principle of participation. "They emphasize understanding human lived experience from participants' own perspectives and situated knowledges; they articulate a view of knowledges as social constructions; and they rely on the central premise that human existence cannot be separated from its context, that people cannot detach themselves from reality but are immersed in it. Given this interdependence between participants and their world, reality as a separate entity cannot be observed, but is rather interpreted" (D'amant, 2010, 90). My stance and assumptions about children are informed by the debates of New Childhood Studies and Children Geographies. I aim to make meaning of and try to understand children's deep contextual experiences of bullying in and out of school, by relying on their participation and their authentic voices. I believe that children construct their social realities, and that their realities are local and very specific to the spaces and places of their lives.

3.3. Locating my study within qualitative research

While quantitative research seeks to explain phenomena being researched, qualitative research seeks rather to understand phenomena (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). A qualitative research approach is most appropriate to my research in that I am seeking to develop an understanding of bullying. Another major difference between quantitative and qualitative research is the distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed. The perspective that articulates a view of knowledge as a social construction and of situated knowledge is significant in that it takes into account both the importance of meaning and the knowledge of situations, contexts and particulars (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The central focus of qualitative research is to study phenomena from the perspective of interacting individuals. Adopting a qualitative research approach facilitates my investigation into learners'

experiences of bullying from their own perspectives, and in terms of meanings they attach to them and the way they make sense of them (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Such an approach allows me to generate deep, contextual data from participants in their natural setting and interpret the phenomenon of interest in terms of the meanings these learners bring to their experiences of bullying (Kellet, 2004).

Qualitative research enables the generation of rich, context-bound data (Creswell, 2009) and works on the assumption that researchers cannot directly capture lived experience, but should rather gather and present data in such a way that participants speak for themselves (D'amant, 2010). It was therefore my priority to represent my participants' experiences of bullying in as authentic a way as possible. This ensures a degree of participation not possible within a quantitative research perspective. Quantitative and qualitative approaches to research present as two entirely distinct and opposing research paradigms. The choice of a qualitative approach is more suited to my underlying assumptions of children's participation and the very nature of the phenomena being studied - the experience of bullying by primary school learners.

It has already been established that qualitative research sets out to collect rich descriptive data related to the phenomena being studied with the purpose of developing a deeper and in-depth understanding of phenomena, within their authentic contexts. Cohen et al (2007) contend that in qualitative research, data should be narrative and descriptive. Creswell (2009) argues that qualitative research offers the chance to conduct exploratory and descriptive research which uses the actual context or setting in research situation towards a deeper understanding of phenomena. Qualitative research has the ability to describe and analyse people's individual and collective social beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. Qualitative research observes the individuals in their natural settings and tries to understand the meanings that individuals give to phenomena they encounter in their lives. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the only way to find out or understand how human beings interpret phenomena, is through adopting a qualitative approach to research.

Adopting a qualitative approach to my research, required me to select data generation methods that encouraged maximum participation of my participants and relied on my participants' own experiences, contexts, words and meaning-making (Creswell and Garret, 2008). A qualitative research design allows the researcher to create the research design best suited to the research (D'amant, 2010) and requires flexibility, creativity and imagination throughout the process of data generation (D'amant, 2010). Narrative inquiry allows for this authentic and participatory engagement of learners' experiences of bullying as they navigate through their spaces and places (in and out of school).

3.4. Narratives as a strategy of inquiry

It was my intention to utilise participatory methods of data generation by actively involving participants in the process of data generation and foregrounding the voice of my participants. My research methodology works on the premise that participants can be self-determining, self-directing and the source of knowing. Furthermore, I designed the data generation exercises to facilitate the active articulation of subjective experiences of participants. I have selected narrative inquiry as a strategy of inquiry, as this method resonates with the purposes and intentions of qualitative and interpretive research (Creswell, 2009).

Data generated through narrative inquiry would show participants in the complexities of lived moments and experiences of bullying, and would bring to the fore the meanings and values participants place on situations of bullying (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Attending to participants' narratives can reveal how they interpret their social world and their place within it, thereby revealing a great deal about them and the social, contextual world they inhabit (D'amant, 2010). Narrative inquiry is more than simply storytelling. It is a mode of inquiry (Cohen et al, 2007).

Within research which has chosen narrative inquiry, various methodological strategies can be developed to generate data. For the purposes of my research, the narrative responses of my participants were developed through the use of mapping, and were expanded through in-depth, unstructured one-on-one and focus group interviews.

3.5. Understanding the context

My study was conducted in a primary school in Inanda, a semi-rural area north of Durban. The school is situated in an informal settlement. The area is rife with crimes such as robbery, rape and house breaking. Most learners are exposed to a multiplicity of drug abuse practices, and the smoking of wunga and marijuana (wunga is burnt substance which is a mixture of ratted, VIM and antiretroviral drugs) is prevalent in this area. Many children in the area smoke those types of substances.

As a teacher in this area I am exposed to many incidents of bullying. My study takes place in an economically depressed area. Sullivan (2000) drawing from his studies, suggests that in economically depressed areas where there are high levels of alcoholism, drug use, theft, unemployment and vandalism, one may find high levels of bullying in schools.

3.6. Sampling

When considering the selection of the sample of learners, I needed to keep the focus and purpose of my research in mind. My strategy was therefore to select learners who had been victims and/or perpetrators of bullying. This would ensure that my sample had been exposed to bullying in one way or another, and would provide valid and meaningful insights into the phenomenon of bullying in and out of school. According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2006) a good strategy is choosing small groups or individuals likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena of interest and from whom the researcher will be able to generate contextual data.

Through conversations with teachers, the Principal and the disciplinary committee, a pool of grade 7 learners was identified who had been victims and/or perpetrators of bullying. The teachers, the principal and the disciplinary committee relied on minutes of disciplinary meetings and the School Governing Body meetings and letters to parents, which related to the phenomenon of bullying in and out of the school.

It was my intention that participation in my research be voluntary. I informed the learners identified of the aim of my study and invited them to participate in it. From the initial pool of grade 7 learners identified, a smaller pool agreed to participate, and thereafter I randomly selected eight participants (four girls and four boys).

3.7. Gaining access and seeking consent

Cree, Kay & Tisdal (2002) claim that when undertaking research with children, research must gain the cooperation of all gatekeepers, such as school staff and parent. According to Barker and Weller (2003), this process can range in complexity depending upon the situation. The informed consent should be freely given without coercion, threats or persuasion, and participants would need to make an appropriately informed decision before agreeing to participate in research.

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Department of Education, the Principal and teachers, and the members of the School Governing Body. After consent to participate in the research was given by the identified participants, permission was then sought by these learners' parents. (Refer to Appendices).

Consent obtained from participants was informed, in that learners received a full and clear explanation of tasks expected of them, in order for them to make an informed choice to participate voluntarily in my

research. In no way were participants coerced, manipulated, rewarded or promised any benefits to secure their participation in my research. Autonomy, anonymity and rights of participants were prioritised. I made sure that they understood that they could stop participating at any time during my research, and that this decision would not be held against them in any way. This was in alignment with a very real obstacle in conducting research identified by Macmillan and Schumacher (2006) – the fact that many learners often find it difficult to withdraw from research once the school and parents have given their consent.

Barker and Weller (2003) argue that when planning a research project it is important to bear in mind that the research context might affect what children will talk about. Participants were only encouraged to share information that was central to the study and that they were clearly comfortable sharing. They were also encouraged not to implicate any other learners or adults by using people's real names. I assured participants that I would not report any information they shared with me with the teachers, Principal or School Governing Body.

Another concern regarding conducting research with learners was the risk of learners interpreting participation in the research, especially in learners' free time such as lunch breaks. This I considered when developing the research design and methodology. The methods and tools of data generation were non-academic and fun, to counteract this possibility.

3.8. Data generation

From my position as a researcher influenced by the paradigm New Childhood Studies' conceptualization of childhood, I planned to conduct my study *with* children, valuing their input and interactions in places and spaces of their lives. For this reason, it was important that all data generation tools be participatory. Foregrounding the participation of learners in my sample attempted to eradicate the power imbalances between myself as the researcher and the learners, as participants. Further, according to Babbie and Mouton (1998) a participatory approach to data generation is an essential component of in-depth qualitative research, as it produces grounded knowledge through collaborative relationships between participants and researcher. According to Christensen and Prout (2002) participatory techniques are particularly advantageous as methods of information generation as they place greater emphasis on the power of visual impression and active representation of ideas.

I utilized the following data generation methods in my research:

3.8.1. Mapping

Various methods and techniques have been adopted when conducting research with children. Sanders and Munford (2005) argue that researchers should reflect critically on the methods and techniques they use and the way they use them. Christensen and Prout (2002) suggest that the research methodology chosen needs to match the research questions of the project; respect limitations of time and resources; be sensitive to ethical issues; and look at the characteristics and needs of the participants as well as the cultural and physical setting where research takes place.

I have selected as part of my research design to use the participatory tool of mapping as a means to work with my participants in generating relevant and appropriate data for my study. Mapping is a method used to spatially explore the relationships that exist between social actors and phenomena. Furthermore, it enables new voices and perceptions to emerge and helps researcher and participants to understand the context of the issue investigated (Mathew, 1992). It has the potential to successfully generate rich data with regard to exploring spaces and places in and out of school wherein participants encounter bullying. Maps can provide the researcher with various information such as socio-economic conditions, attitudes and perceptions, and the use of space by various social groups.

According to Stromquist (2007), mapping is a concrete methodological tool or process of data generation that works especially well with young participants due to its visual and participatory nature. Drawing maps has been used as a fun and enjoyable activity for children to express their own views and experiences. This is a popular method in research *with* children and has been used in many studies to gather information about significant places and spaces in children's everyday lives and for exploring their perceptions of these (Leonard, 2006). Children have been asked to draw maps related to various phenomena in a number of research studies (Baker and Weller, 2003; Leonard, 2006). In these studies, researchers have focused exclusively on their interpretation and understanding of what the children's drawings meant, rather than on the children's explanation of their drawings. Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005) believe that there should be a shift in focus from what the children draw to what the children say about what they draw.

Participants were asked to draw a map of places and spaces where they experienced and encountered bullying. Using such a mapping exercise served as an effective ice-breaker for the purposes of my study. It counteracted the threat of participants seeing their time spent with me as an extension of schoolwork, as it was fun, enjoyable, informal and non-academic. It also helped participants relax and helped in establishing the necessary rapport between me and my participants. Participants were asked to use a red pen to mark those areas where they felt vulnerable and unsafe. The red pen illuminated

the hot spots where bullying was inflicted, either inflicted on them by others, or where they themselves bullied others. The maps formed the basis for discussion in the focus groups and the individual interviews. The process of following up the mapping exercise with interviews allowed for reflection and comparison as well as clarification and negotiation. Mapping successfully acted as a prompt for participants to remember important issues and occurrences; for eliciting relevant discussion; and helped participants organise their own narrative responses.

Mapping has been described by many researchers as a useful and fairly quick way to gain a considerable amount of information. However some drawbacks in using mapping as a data collection technique have been identified by Leonard (2006): not all children may consider drawing fun; some may be inhibited about their drawing capabilities; some may draw what they find easy to portray or what they think would please the researcher; older children may not wish to draw pictures, since they might see it as 'babyish'; drawings can be easily seen and copied by peers thus hindering the authentic depiction of individual's perceptions. As the exercise consisted of drawing a map of individuals' everyday environments in and out of school, rather than drawing pictures, I assured my participants that their maps did not rely on their drawing or artistic capabilities; that mapping was a mature exercise; and, that each learner's map was relevant to them as an individual and while there may be shared and overlapping places and spaces (such as the school) for all of them, there were other places and spaces that were specific to them alone (such as their homes and the paths they take to and from school). I stressed that there could be no mistakes, no right and wrong maps, and that individual maps were open to each participant's creativity and expression. This was done in an attempt to counteract the possible drawbacks of mapping highlighted by Leonard (2006).

These maps were used as data triggers, in that they served as prompts in the individual and focus group interviews which followed. Participants were encouraged to speak about their maps individually and in a group situation. Using the maps as starting points for verbal explanations and group discussions about bullying, offered participants a non-threatening and non-academic opportunity to talk about the issue of bullying in and out of school.

3.8.2. *Individual Interviews*

Interviews are one the most commonly recognised forms of qualitative research methods. The choice of interviewing was driven by my ontological position which aligns with the foundational notions of New Childhood Studies. Interviewing is a legitimate and meaningful way to generate data on the topic under

study, and allowed the opportunity to talk interactively with participants, to listen to them, to ask them questions, and so gain access to their individual and authentic accounts of bullying. Using interviewing suggests that learners' knowledge, views, understanding, interpretation, experiences and interactions are seen as meaningful and valuable to me as the researcher, thus conveying the importance of their social realities and their individual everyday experiences. This aligns with the conceptualization of most qualitative research in that it operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual. Interviews prompted by the mapping exercise allow for the phenomenon under study within the relevant context to be the focus of interviews, thus generating situated knowledge.

Mason (2010) argues that qualitative, semi-structured interviews, while being organised, have their own character, and allow considerable flexibility in their execution. My study used semi-structured interviews with each participant, wherein I obtained background information and data on how they experience bullying. Cameron (2005) suggests that in order to establish rapport it is advisable to start asking about things children already know and witness in their everyday lives as relatively unthreatening, such as specific daily events, routines or feelings. A period of free narrative is also recommended by Cameron (2005) when beginning an interview, as this serves to put the participant at ease, builds rapport between the researcher and participant, and allows the interviewer the chance to grasp the participant's communication style. These suggestions were taken into consideration while conducting the individual interviews.

3.8.3. Focus group interviews

According to Cohen et al (2007) focus group interviews prioritize the perspective and experience of the research participants, enable the participants to jointly reflect on topics, and provide a critical context for exploration guided by the facilitator. Maree (2007) describes focus groups as particularly significant in engaging communication especially around difficult issues, in that they allow for exploration of differences as well as similarities in experience and thought.

Creswell (2009) draw researcher's attention to the issue of sensitive issues being researched, and advise that researchers present less difficult questions first. They further recommend that researchers should be consistently alert to children's responses such as falling silent, or changing the subject suddenly. He advises that children's reluctance to answer questions that might be difficult or painful for them, should be respected, understood and anticipated. Morrow (2001) advises that while some participants might agree to participate in research, they might appear to be unwilling, shy or

embarrassed throughout the interviews. He suggests that if it becomes clear that children do not wish to continue the research process, it is respectful to talk for a while and then end the interview positively and thank them without suggesting it may have been a waste of time. This advice and these suggestions were seriously and carefully considered during the course of the focus group interview.

The focus group interview required that all participants sat together, looked at the various maps and spoke collectively about them. The interviews were conducted in English but participants were free to use their home language, isiZulu, if they so desired. All interviews (both individual and focus group) were recorded and transcribed, and I translated responses into English where necessary. These transcriptions made up participants narrative responses which were then analysed. Participant's maps were scanned and inserted at relevant points in the section on presentation and analysis of data.

3.9. Interpretation and analysis of data

There is no right or wrong approach to interpreting data in qualitative research (D'amant, 2010). Narrative responses are best suited to whole-text analysis, where chunks of text are interpreted and analysed, and units of meaning are identified and themes emerge through the use of inductive analysis. According to James, Jenks & Prout (1998) qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories or themes and identifying relationships amongst these. Inductive means that categories and patterns emerge from the data rather being imposed on data prior to data collection.

This process of organizing and interpreting the data, and grouping them into themes, "required sensitivity and openness to the data and to the undercurrents of participant's realities, experiences and processes of meaning-making" (D'amant, 2010, 135). I was interested in the stories my participants had to tell about their experiences and encounters of bullying, and I remained sensitive and open to each participant's responses, as best as I could.

3.10. Ethical issues

The research presented in this dissertation is part of a larger project in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, titled, 'The geographies of children's schooling experiences in six Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries: Narratives of children, parents/caregivers and teachers' (School of Education, 2013). Ethical clearance for the project has been obtained from

the University of KwaZulu-Natal (HSS/0250/013). The ethical clearance certificate is included under the appendices.

Cohen et al (2007) states that informed consent involves comprehension and competence to make a decision to participate in a study; an understanding of what voluntary participation means; and access to full information about what participation involves. If the participant is a minor, consent should be sought from parents. Confidentiality, anonymity, caring and fairness are the key principles to protect the rights of research participants. I took these issues into account in my study. The ethical issues I considered included:

- The participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the research.
- The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.
- Since the participants are children, permission was sought from parents or caregivers.
- The principal was asked permission to conduct this research at the school.
- Every step in the research was taken with the full understanding and consent of the participants.
- Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time if they wanted to.
- Permission was sought from the Department of Education to conduct this research.
- Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Office of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Participatory techniques were used in an endeavour to address the power dynamics between the researcher and the child participants.

3.11. Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Cohen et al (2007) validity is the key to effective research. In qualitative research, validity can be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness, and scope of data achieved, and the extent of triangulation. Maree (2007) has identified the following dimensions which increase trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability and dependability. In the attempt to make research findings “worth paying attention to”, Guba and Lincoln (1985, 290) propose four issues which demand attention in any qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These issues are concerned with: evaluating whether or not research findings represent a credible interpretation of the data; the degree to which findings can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of specific research studies; and measuring how well findings are supported by the data generation (D'amant, 2010; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Using layers of data generation (mapping exercise, individual and focus group interviews) provided multi-layered, richer and more credible data, than simply using a single method of data generation. Triangulation refers to the practice of validating results by using multiple methods of data collection. This was employed through the consideration of more than simply one method of generating data and clarifying meaning and thus enabled me to verify the repeatability of an interpretation. Through this process, individual narratives could be judged and contrasted against each other. While each individual narrative is particular and specific, they can hold elements of the typical and generalizable. Data generated conveys both the particular and the generalizable. Although findings pertain to a particular sample of learners, it is very possible that they can be transferred beyond the bounds of this study, to inform a broader insight into and understanding around the issue of bullying in and out of schools.

3.12. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my approach to inquiry that would allow me to generate data that would elicit a deeper and more insightful understanding of the issues involved in bullying in and out of schools. It was important to me that all methods, techniques and tools of data generation reflected my commitment to encouraging the maximum interaction and participation of participants, and creating spaces for participant's authentic voices to comprise the primary data.

The following chapter will present and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, data was generated through the use of mapping, individual and focus group interviews as collection strategies, in order to explore the experiences of bullying in and out of school, of grade 7 learners at the school which I teach at in Inanda, Durban. Participants were required to draw maps of school, their journeys between home and school, as well as their homes and immediate surroundings. These were then used to generate dialogue with respect to the phenomenon being researched.

This chapter presents the findings of the research – participants' narrative commentary which have been selected from the transcripts of the data generated from the individual and focus group interviews.

The generation, organisation and interpretation of data cannot be divided neatly into separate processes when employing qualitative research. These processes, instead, occur simultaneously and continuously (Creswell, 2009). However, for the sake of "imposing some structure and order" on the presentation of data (D'amant, 2010, 146), I will present and discuss my findings according to themes which emerged from the data. More importantly, I have analysed the data in three broad themes which respond directly to my three research questions. These themes were actively identified from the data itself and from insights I had already gained from conducting a review of literature and related research studies on the topic of bullying. It is because of these previously obtained insights that I feel it necessary to present a post analysis discussion, thus providing me a space to express these insights and how they may have been influenced by related literature as well as the spoken words of the participants aided by their unique drawings.

4.2. Presentation and data analysis

Data will be presented in the following way. The authentic voices of participants appear in the form of direct quotations, in keeping with the intention to privilege the voices of the participants. Participants'

maps are also included in this chapter. Interpretive discussion of the data is presented through the lens of insights gained from the literature review conducted.

After I revisited the recorded audiotapes and transcripts, the themes which featured predominantly were learners' experiences of bullying; spaces and places in which bullying occurred; and the emotional geographies of bullying – all of which respond directly to the three research questions framing this study.

4.2.1 Learners' Experiences of Bullying

4.2.1.1 Bullying is experienced as a deliberate act which affects persons and possessions

The participants in my study defined "bullying" as unruly behaviour that scares and is often directed towards someone physically smaller or weaker. Sullivan (2000) defines bullying as a general way of victimization of learners as they are exposed repeatedly, and over time, to negative actions.

When asked for their understandings of "bullying" one participant responded by describing bullying as the following; *"it is when you treat someone badly because he/ she is younger than you, you call him/ her demeaning or derogatory names, beat or confiscate her/ his belongings"*. This description finds support in the work of Rigby and Slee (1989) who argue that bullying is not random but a deliberate act, causing physical, psychological and emotional harm.

Another participant described bullying in the following way: *"when someone or a group takes your belongings forcefully without your permission, they beat or strangle you if you refuse to allow it. It becomes worse if you report them as they then come after you."*

In the spoken words of the participants above, it is apparent that bullying in their minds and through their experiences extends itself beyond physical attacks on one's body to the claiming and using of one's possessions without permission. The inability to fight off physical attacks as well as the inability to protect one's possessions likely leaves victims in a state of powerlessness. It is this powerlessness to which I will now allude in my discussion of the dominant discourse which suggests that many people believe bullying must simply be lived with.

4.2.1.2 Experiencing bullying because it “must be lived with”

In the words of one of the participants, *“We boys have pride. Being a boss oh... oh hero I feel that inside me. If sir there is another boy who...tries to dominate or try take away my power and prestige. Those who show disrespectful behaviour are subjected to punishment. In my area where I live we experience and live under those circumstances, where our big brothers make us fight, just to test who is stronger than the other.”*

“If we refuse to fight, the group will beat you or chase you away. Calling you a coward or “Umnqolo” you will not be allowed to play or participate in any activity because you are not man enough.”

A participant who admits to being a bully himself had the following to say, *“When we come to school, we always find a perfect place to show our dominance without any fear of being bullied, since they are younger than us. I confiscate their belongings (money, pens calculators) the language we use (siyakugcwalisela) shows you that nothing can be done except to listen and follow the instructions. We use the forest behind the school. Many bullying activities have occurred here, we lure our victims here because the place is not visible to teachers.”*

It appears that sometimes the fear evoked by the mere spoken words of the bully is enough to force the victim to comply with the bully's demands. One participant reported that learners who do not give in to bully's demands are humiliated by means of derogatory name-calling. This has in fact been suggested in the extracts above. In addition to that the fact that the bullies “always find a perfect place” to show their dominance suggests that this bullying is on-going which accordingly leaves one to assume that not much has and is being done about bullying. This could possibly be because bullying has become accepted as the norm to such a degree that it is viewed by many as simply being something that must be lived with. A dominant discourse of bullying, in particular in schools, is that it is something children just have to live with. However, evidence suggesting it can lead to depression and can have far reaching negative effects on children and their education exists. Schools and surrounding areas have become a ‘nightmare’ for many learners as the data presented suggests.

4.2.1.3 Experiencing bullying in the context of religious diversity

In South Africa many studies reveal that most learners are being bullied because they are different from the normative group. In my encounters with the participants it became clear that this was the case with many of them as the following data suggests:

“On my first day at school I met a group of girls. I was standing alone, since it was my first day, I had no friends. These girls asked me the name of my previous school, followed by a number of questions such as why I left the school. They then began to make fun of my uniform's colour, a colour associated with my previous school's religious background. It was losing colour. They kept teasing me and making jokes about this”.

In our school, learners do discriminate and isolate each other based on religious grounds. Religious orientation is quite topical these days. The media has reported on the connection between bullying and religious orientation. Swearer and Carey's (2003) study in U.K. argues that Hindu, Muslim and Pakistan children are often being bullied because of religious or cultural differences.

A participant indicated that she was ridiculed for her religious orientation. Her family belongs to that church (Shembe) which is not an issue to her, but it is to other learners.

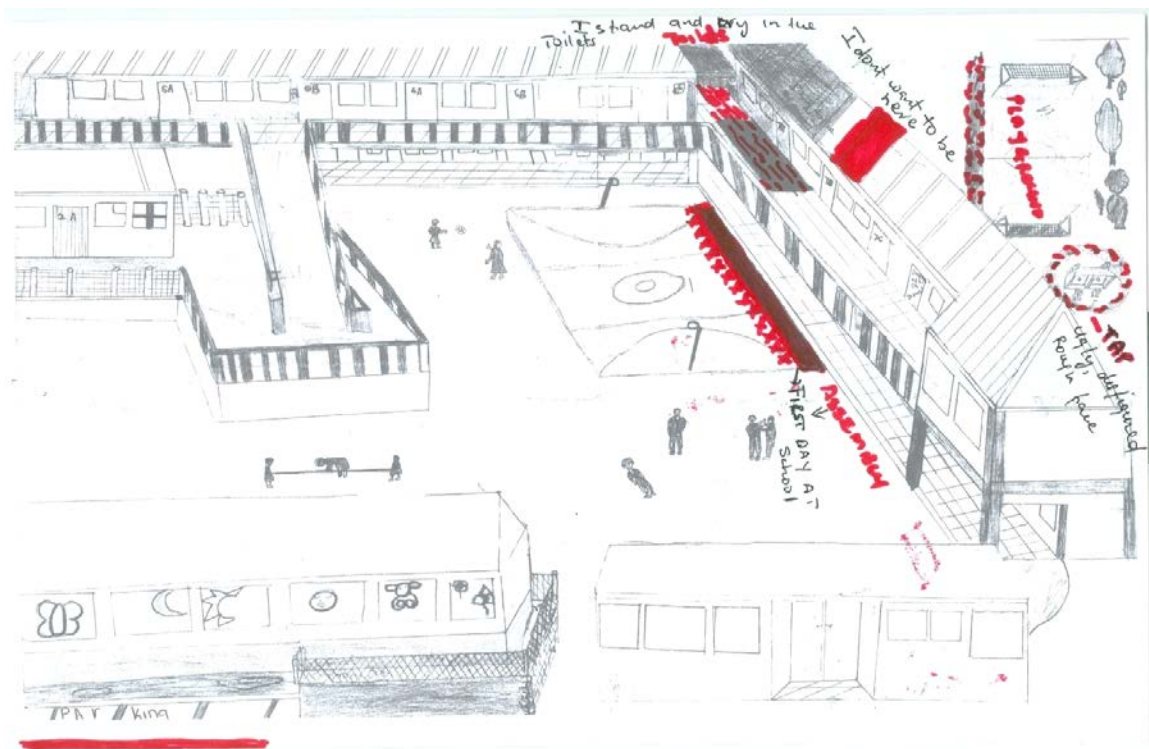
“Two learners laughed at me. I was wearing sandals. I also feel ok if I wear sandals since at church we believe in walking barefoot in white aprons. Now I got a new teasing name “Shembe,” even teachers have started calling me by that name.”

From the extracts above it is apparent that religious difference is most certainly a ground on which bullying is based and even justified. Indeed various religious affiliations result in learners in some instances dressing differently. It appears as though it is this physical difference which initiates the attention given to them which ultimately makes them vulnerable resulting in their fast becoming the object of ridicule by many a bully. We see further from the extracts above just how easily teasing and in particular name calling catches on as the learner who was initially teased “Shembe” by other learners now finds herself being called that name by some teachers as well. Undoubtedly this teasing and in fact bullying, stemmed from the learner's religious difference.

4.2.2 Spaces and Places of Bullying

The learners were asked to draw maps of their schools and to identify all the places in which bullying occurred. They indicated all the places in which they felt vulnerable and exposed to incidents of bullying with the red pen.

Figure A



In reference to the illustration above, the following were participants' responses:

"Places with red marks are hot spots where incidents of bullying are happening, I have marked places like assembly, classroom, corridors and playground".

"Bullying occurs on corridors, by gates and in the playground. It also happens in toilets, by water taps and next to the kitchen....."

One of the participants indicated that he was bullied by a group of boys in the forest behind the classroom: *"In that forest next to playground I was surrounded by some boys, they took my money and earphones, they also kicked me. One of them warned me not to tell anybody".*

"I am happy it's towards the end of the year. At least I will get some time to relax without being teased and ridiculed by learners at my school. They call me all sorts of things. They even called me and said I have 'flat bums.'"

"The first year was the worst (grade 6). My first year was very difficult to adapt and find friends. I remember the first week at the assembly, a group of boys were looking at me. I tried to ignore them. Afterwards they followed me up the stairs. They were talking about me, they said I was disfigured and shapeless. They all began to laugh."

"It's unfair I suffered a lot. They (other learners) said I'm ugly. My face is rough with pimples. They even said that god was in a hurry when he created me. Now I've got a new nick-name "stalsweat." They even tease me in our Maths class."

From the above bullying appears to be taking place in spaces of schooling, thus justifying an earlier claim that often learners find schools to be places of nightmares. We see in the third extract that one learner was bullied in the so called "forest" just next to the school, a place which is not visible to teachers. Property was taken from him and he was in fact assaulted. However, in the fifth extract it becomes apparent that instances of bullying are in no way limited to spaces out of sight of authority figures as the learner in this extract describes being followed all the way up the stairs from the assembly simply to be tormented by another group of learners. If that is not bad enough, the final extract indicates that bullying even occurs within the classroom, an environment which should ideally be free from such instances so as to create a safe and pleasant space which is conducive to teaching and learning.

However, bullying was also reported to have occurred in spaces of supposed recreation, such as on the playground during break as the following extracts suggest:

"We experience a number of bullying incidents during the break, if you see, there is only one water tap which, looking at the number of learners, when the bell rings we cannot all get to the tap. Big boys push everyone standing in their way, many young learners get injured during the rush".

Another participant indicated that the older boys look for him during the break just to bully him. He explained the following:

In reference to the illustration above, learners had the following to say:

"This is my home, I played here with my friends after school and during holidays. We go by here to fetch water from the river. One boy took my bucket once and said he would only give it back if I had sex with him."

"We played on the grass (umacashelana) and climbed trees (oqithi). Other children make fun of my house because it's small. I was very disappointed, my father worked so hard to erect that small house. Which they make a mockery about."

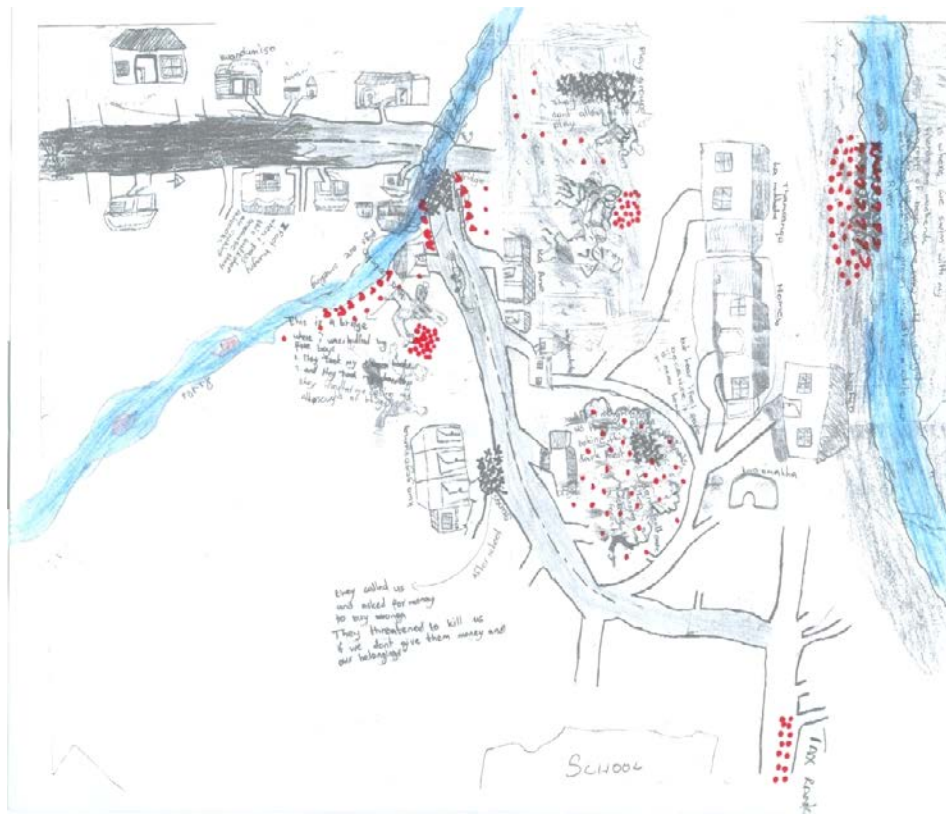
"My parents always quarrel over nothing. The situation becomes so volatile that I sometimes seek refuge in the neighbourhood."

"When walking in the street if people are calling me names, it hurts too much to tell someone. When you experience that you look like a fool. You don't protect yourself because of fear. When a group of boys asked me for money I didn't refuse, I told nobody about it and felt sorry for myself."

Based on the extracts above participants have experienced bullying beyond the boundaries of the school, as incidents of bullying appear to take place within the streets of the community. The first extract highlights the fact that a task of fetching water becomes a potential for being bullied with dire consequences, such consequences include the possibility of being raped. The next extract suggests that even when trying to play in the neighbourhood bullying prevails. A participant speaks of other children making fun of the size of their house. However, sadly from the third extract it becomes apparent that some children are forced onto the streets due to conflict within the house. Thus children are forced to leave their refuge and are thus subjected to the dangers of the streets in the community in which bullying is rife as the other three extracts here suggest. The final extract echoes the dangers of the streets as far as bullying is concerned as this participant makes clear the fact that when walking on the streets one will often be made to look like a fool through bullying, often resulting in one feeling sorry for oneself. From the above, it is clear that bullying takes place in spaces beyond the fences of the school.

4.2.2.2 Places and spaces outside of the school where bullying is experienced

Figure C



Participants indicated that they encounter bullying in a nearby tuck shop, on the playground and by the river. Participants indicated that they view those areas as places and spaces where they come together to have fun, but sometimes they become battlefields, where one must be strong to withstand the agony and harsh treatment experienced in these places. They indicated that they tried to fight to end their suffering, but they did not succeed since their perpetrators were more powerful than them. The following extract explains:

"Nearby the tuck shop...is not safe to walk freely, most of the troublesome groups of boys stay waiting to pounce. We used to go there with my younger sister, they are very clever, they pose as innocent people. They tried to grab me. Their intention was to take my takkies and my jacket. I escaped with minor injuries, but the money which was in my pocket disappeared. I may have dropped it while trying to fight them off, but I think one of them must have taken it."

"In that river we swim here...with my friends, we enjoy playing games, some are dangerous, older boys come and disrupt our games, one day they held us trying to drown us. They ask you to swim across the river to show that you are man enough. If you fail to do that, the boss will hold you under water for a few minutes. Sometimes we lose our belongings on the banks of the river as they are confiscated by the older boys."

Indeed bullying is experienced in spaces outside of the school as the extracts above suggest. It appears as though learners are bullied when going to the tuck shop as older children attempt to rob them of their possessions and even launch physical attacks on them should they resist. In addition to that, the second extract makes apparent the fact that spaces which learners would prefer to use as recreational spaces, such as playing in the river, because of bullies have become volatile spaces in which bullying takes place. In fact in such a space bullying appears to take place to such a degree that the lives of the victims seem to be at risk as the possibility of drowning is made explicit.

4.2.2.3 Bullying occurs in places where one has authority over another

Bullying has been perceived as authority over another often influenced by factors such as size, gender or age. Smith (2002) argues that norms relating to physical, intellectual and emotional competence are reproduced within the school through children's socio-cultural relationship. These relationships reflect the social organization of children's home and school lives on the basis of mind-body emotion differences as well as age.

The excerpts which have been discussed in the themes and sub-themes above concur with Smith's (2002) claim that these relationships are inherently spatial because they ultimately take place in and out of spaces and produce experience of inclusion and exclusion within and outside of the school environment.

4.2.2.4 Bullying occurs in places where the teacher is a bully

The age / power authority relationship between the teacher and learner are a fundamental structure of schooling. The institution of the school officially condones teacher's regulation and control of appropriate learner behaviour through for example, the allocation of rewards and sanctions, the

distribution of their time and the attention in the class as well as corporal punishment, this is supported by the quote below.

"Here at school my class teacher did something that I will never forget. This year I should be doing grade 8. Mr.....wrote "failed" on my report. I was very disappointed. I was very hurt by his remarks that I am lazy, and that my work is disappointing. The following year he did the same thing. I went straight to him. I confronted him with the intention to remind him that, this is the second time. He wrote a new report. I took both of them to my uncle. The following day my uncle came to see him. Till now I don't know what transpired in that meeting. Since then our relationship with Mr.... is not good, I realized when he chased me out of the school choir. But he is still my class teacher and I am worried what is going to happen at the end of the year".

Above, a situation in which teachers become bullies of those with less power than themselves is suggested. The mere failing of a learner can in no way be viewed as an act of bullying on its own. However, what seems to be suggested is that the teacher in question threw the learner out of the choir simply because he challenged the teacher's decision to fail him by getting his uncle involved. It is likely that this teacher did not appreciate being confronted by the uncle and the removal of the learner from the choir is an act of revenge instituted by the teacher. This is certainly tantamount to bullying.

4.2.3 Emotional geographies

"I feel uncomfortable and depressed at school. I can't concentrate under circumstances of bullying. My performance was weakening further. I managed to get a friend, unfortunately she fell pregnant and left the school. Now because of the size of my breasts some people said that I've got a baby. They said I had a miscarriage and that I'm in love with an old man (a local taxi driver) who impregnated me and my friend."

Indeed bullying goes beyond mere physical attacks and extends itself to affecting one emotionally as the extract above suggests. This participant feels uncomfortable and depressed due to her being teased simply because of the size of her breasts. Literature reveals how in Western society standard of femininity are built on, and measured against, patriarchal standards, the ideal presentation for women should reflect toned bodies with firm breasts. What is expected is a "Barbie doll-like" figure while a fat body is rejected. A "tyranny of slenderness" results from gender knowledge (Swart and Bredekamp, 2009). As Cree *et al* (2002) point out, since ordinary women have normally different dimensions, they

must of course diet in order to meet dominant social expectations of how the female body image should ideally be presented. From the extract above it is clear that non conformity with such a perceived norm may often result in one becoming the victim of bullying.

4.3. Post analysis discussion

Many learners become victims of bullying. Stigmatization and isolation amongst learners leads to hostile behaviour and depression on the part of the victims. When this occurs in schools teachers are at the fore. However, in many cases little or no action is taken as the following extract suggests.

"My friends are very rude. They talk about me behind my back. My friend came to me and said, mmh.. my classmate x and y advised her to stop sharing sweats with me, as I may infect her with aids. I expected my teacher to intervene but nothing happened."

4.3.1 Cultural constructions of gender and authoritarianism

Harro (2000) asserts that our socialization begins before we are born. The identities that are ascribed to us at birth are done so through no effort or decision or choice of our own. Harro (2000) claims that dominant groups are considered "*the norm*" around which assumptions are built.

Children involved in bullying are both victims and perpetrators. Males are often bullied about their sexuality (what the community/culture considers being a man). Socially constructed gender differences are a major contributory factor. Not only are participants experiencing being bullied from fellow learners and their peers, but repeated negative action is also common from teachers at the school as the discussion under the next heading explains.

4.3.2 Teacher as a bully

James *et al* (1998) maintain that by using their age/ authority power position, teachers normalize certain aspects of learner and teacher behaviour. She further raises her concerns about the behaviour of children who look at teachers as parent figures. However, from the discussions and extracts above

we see that teachers often allow other learners to humiliate victims in their presence. The following quote supports this claim.

"The teacher added more salt in my wounds, he asked where I came from and why I left the previous school. I told him that I was ill treated by my school mates, fortunately my mother relocated to Inanda. I made a mistake by revealing all sorts of names they used to call me. Now learners in my new school started calling me those names. The teacher reprimanded them, but they received immunity without repercussions."

The school is an institution where learners should receive support and be nurtured. When the school climate is not supportive and healthy, then the problem of bullying persists resulting in a higher level of bullying occurring.

4.3.3 Poverty and bullying

Poverty means far more than not having enough to eat, it means people have limited choices to change their lives such as where they live, and what they can do in a space of time. Participants have indicated that their parents have passed away and have to fend for themselves. Participants living in poverty are often victims of bullying. Participants indicated that conditions such as being orphans resulted in them being seen as inferior when compared to other youngsters at school, thus becoming victims of bullying at the same time. Participants complained that 'living in a poverty stricken environment some friends offer them money to perform unacceptable acts of bullying.

One participant explained in her story that...*"When my parents past away, I went to stay with my grandmother. At first my grandmother treated me well. The situation completely changed when my granny also passed away. Her daughter started to pass remarks, saying I eat too much. "don't you see that you are going to burst". I tried to ignore her, but the problem persisted. It became worse after she started to drink alcohol. The money I received from support grants vanished. One day at midnight she came back drunk, swearing, pulled my hair and punched me several times. So... there was no pocket money, and no breakfast. At school where I think I will get food, older boys are very greedy, all the food which is supposed to be for the whole class is eaten by them."*

4.3.4 Racism and bullying

Racism is an issue of great concern around the world. One participant reported that she was racially abused, an act which she viewed as bullying. Participants indicated that they have been victims of racial slurs and insults. Participants indicated they feel that racial discrimination in the form of bullying has resulted in their being victimized simply because of the colour of their skin as well as their physical attributes.

"Originally I am from Zimbabwe, when I first enrolled at the school, I struggled to communicate with the rest of my school mates , I am fluent in Shona and Sitswana and Shangaan. Zulu was very difficult to speak, other children laughed at me."

The effects of bullying included feelings of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal and academic difficulties. *"I've stopped talking to people that much because of my accent".*

The extracts above indicate that the issue of racial discrimination serves as a breeding ground for bullying. As this difference easily detected by physical attributes, and often by the way in which one speaks draws greater attention to learners displaying such differences. Hence, they are left vulnerable to being victims of bullying.

"One day a group of girls harassed me, they called me a foreigner. I tried to ignore them. I then even warned them that I will report the matter to the teacher. One of them said I will do that in Harare. They all laughed about this. I cried."

It appears, based on the extracts above, that racial discrimination is often used by the bullies to prey on their victims with language being a strong contributor to bullying. Discrimination on the grounds of race is reflected through various behaviours including social exclusion and harassment based on cultural or language differences (Sanders and Manford, 2005).

4.3.5 Gender constructions

It appears as though participants who are bullied often become bullies themselves and this could be due to pressures from their immediate environments as they are encouraged to "act like a man" and "to be dominant". We are each born into specific sets of social identities related to various categories

(gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) and these social identities predispose us to unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression. Harro's (2000) "Cycle of socialization" affirms that we are socialized by powerful sources in our world to play the roles prescribed by an already existing social system. Hence, if we are constantly encouraged to "act like a man" even if this requires us to bully others, in most instances we will conform. The following extract is pertinent in this regard.

"Sometimes to prove our man-hood we play dangerous games. In one such game we find venomous snakes, spiders and locusts. Some boys use reptiles and insects to chase each other, that is very dangerous. A friend of mine said he preferred to stay at home, due to aggressive nature of games played in those areas. However, if you refuse you will be isolated or expelled from the group."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This dissertation has reported on a qualitative study of learners' experiences of bullying in and out of school. The study examines how learners experience and navigate the spaces and places of bullying.

In this chapter I reflect on the findings and research processes of the study. The chapter begins by reflecting briefly on how the study has illuminated the questions it set to explore as described in the chapter one. It then considers how the study contributes to knowledge, and its strengths and limitations. Finally it outlines the implications of the study and considers directions for further research.

My study was positioned in the interpretivist paradigm but at times overlaps into the critical theory paradigm. My assumptions about the children and their experiences have been informed by the new childhood studies paradigm and the notion of children geographies. My aim was to explore the experiences of bullying by primary school learners. The methodology used aimed to elicit data from learners perspectives. Learners were able to reflect on their maps in the narrative form. Participants showed a great understanding of their environment, interpretation and drawing skills.

5.2 Summary of findings

The three research questions which underpinned my study were: How do learners experience bullying in and out of school; Secondly how do they navigate the spaces and places of bullying in and out of school; and lastly, what are the emotional geographies of children in a bullying context. This section briefly reflects on these questions and how they have been satisfied.

5.2.1 *How do learners experience bullying in and out of school?*

In South Africa young people, particularly those in the primary school are generally on the receiving end of bullying. Sullivan (2000) argued that international and local studies have attributed the youth's

vulnerability to victimization to a number of factors, including their lack of physical strength, limited options concerning the people they associate with, and the environment in which they live.

My study found that most learners agreed that bullying occurs at school. The common places where these incidents occur are in the classroom and on the playground. Most participants share the same view that bullying is prominent. From learners' perspectives bullying may also take different forms: physical (hitting, kicking, or taking belongings); verbal (name calling, insults or racist remarks); and indirect bullying (excluding someone from social group or spreading nasty stories about victims). It was argued that these occurrences are a part of growing up. As a result learners do not report such incidents.

Physical aggression emerged as the most common form of bullying to which the participants in my study were exposed. From the participants' descriptions of the incidents of physical aggression it became clear that it may take different forms. Some were forced to engage in physical labour e.g. carrying bullies' books to and from the school while others were constantly teased or robbed of their belongings.

5.2.2 Factors associated with bullying

The prevalence of bullying as displayed in my study necessitates further exploration of experiences of learners on how they navigate through those spaces and places. My study attempted to provide a comprehensive understanding of children's experiences of bullying within the school, along their journey home from school, as well as at home and in their immediate surroundings.

Several themes emerged through the analysis of individual and focus group interviews. The participants were asked to narrate their stories based on the maps drawn by them. Themes that surfaced through the data analysis included: body politics, religious diversity, older boys, social stigma, teachers as bullies, and cultural constructions of gender. The participants identified the classroom and the playground as the hot spots where bullying took place.

My study found that learners are often bullied for not fitting in, their physical appearances, body structure, emotional state, and being overweight. My study also reveals the role played by ethnicity. Ethnic discrimination was reflected in my study, and is often reflected in various behaviour including social exclusion and verbal harassment based on culture or language (Liang et al, 2007). These

behaviours are motivated by ethnicity-related stereotype or characteristics such as language, physical appearance and accent.

Language is a strong contributor to stress experienced by immigrant children. The ability to speak the language of the new country can play a significant role in an individual's social affiliation (Korova and Emme, 2006).

My study also reveals that diversity in schools propels learners to bully each other for not forming part of the normative group. Discrimination was described as stereotypical comments made about the person's cultural background, including religious belief, cultural traditions, physical dress and food.

Gender stereotypes played an important role in bullying. Those who did not conform with traditional gender stereotypes were humiliated by means of derogatory name-calling (amabhotela, umnqolo). Boys in particular were bullied for being young, or small with this making them soft targets. Girls and boys experienced gender as a contributory factor to the form of bullying to which they were subjected with girls often being emotionally bullied (teased and harassed) and boys being physically bullied (beaten up and robbed of possessions).

5.2.3 How learners navigate the spaces and places of bullying?

When I began this study my intention was to identify the hot spots where learners experience bullying and how they navigate and negotiate the places and spaces of bullying to uncover these geographies of fear, learners recalled many instances of neighbourhood bullying.

Participants acknowledge being ridiculed due to various factors, such as language, accent and physical appearance. Some stated that because of their language barriers and strong accents, peers made assumptions about them such as their being stupid. As mentioned language proficiency emerged as a predominant indicator of adjustment and establishment of peer groups.

I came to realize that not only are there specific places in the community where participants find they are vulnerable to incidents of bullying, but participants experience negative action repeatedly and over time in the home. The home is always imagined as a safe place where children and youth can find refuge from the harsh realities of the world, but this was sadly not the case for many participants in my study. Hence, this is clearly an idealized vision of what a home should be, and the reality of some children's home lives is in stark contrast to the ideal. My sentiments are affirmed by Cree *et al* (2002) who argue that unsafe, violent and disorganized homes are breeding grounds for bullies and bullying.

Shifting the attention back to the schools, teachers play a major role in creating a positive or negative school climate. When the school climate is not supportive and is unhealthy, then bullying will continue to exist (Jimerson *et al*, 2010). Schools are comprised of classrooms it therefore stands to reason that healthy classroom environments will have less bullying and victimization within them.

When teachers in the school system ignore bullying or feel that bullying must just be accepted, as seen in my study, it will naturally continue to exist (Smith, 2002). Some learners indicated that they reported incidents to their teachers, but nothing was done. This suggests that none of these were taken seriously.

5.2.4 Direction for future research

The use of narrative inquiry limits the extent to which one can draw universal conclusions. This study has highlighted specific participants' narratives in relation to the phenomenon of bullying in their particular context. This may or may not be generalizable to other contexts. The need for more in-depth research in this regard in other neighbourhoods and contexts is thus justified.

Due to the elusive nature of bullying with regard to prevalence, type, form and consequence, there is much room for future mixed method studies. Further mixed method studies could be employed to further examine the extent to which learners negotiate the spaces and places of bullying in their specific contexts.

5.3. Conclusion

My study focused on primary school learners' experiences of bullying, how they navigate such places and spaces as well as the emotional geographies of bullying. What emerged is that bullying is certainly experienced on an ongoing basis by the participants in my study with it taking place not just within the schooling environment, but also in their homes as well as places in their immediate surrounds such as local tuck shops and alongside rivers. The participants in this study were able to identify so called "hot spots" for bullying, these being places in which instances of bullying are rife. Such identification enabled them to navigate through these spots usually by means of mere avoidance. In my study it also became clear that the effects of bullying are far reaching, often leaving victims emotionally affected for long periods of time. By allowing victims, through my study, to voice their unique and often sad

experiences it is hoped that I have in fact given a voice to them in some way; a voice which otherwise may never have been heard as constant suppression of victims' voices by bullies (oppressors) would likely prevail. It is further hoped that my study will have some impact on teachers and other authority figures who are most likely in a position on a daily basis to ease the ongoing suffering of victims of bullying merely by acting when and where appropriate, rather than brushing off incidents of bullying as "a normal experience" as was often seen to be the case through the narratives of the participants in my study.

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