

**WITNESSES TO THE BULLYING SCENE:
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF PRE-ADOLESCENT BYSTANDERS.**

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Abstract

Bullying at school is commonplace in South Africa and appears to be on the increase (Burton, 2007). De Wet (2006) regards this phenomenon as one of the most underestimated problems in South African schools today. Not only does it affect learners' physical and psychological safety but their developmental trajectories as well (Courtois & Ford, 2009; Pepler, Craig, Jiang, & Connolly, 2008). Compared to the plethora of research carried out internationally on this subject, it seems that little has been done to systematically understand the phenomenon from a South African perspective (De Wet, 2006).

Since the 1990s, bullying has become increasingly conceptualised as a group phenomenon. As research in this field expands beyond the bully-victim dyad, the role of the bystander warrants more attention. It is now widely accepted that the bystander plays an unavoidably active role in peer victimization with a growing body of evidence suggesting they have the power to either facilitate, or impede bullying behaviours (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2004; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen, 1996). The question that remains to be answered, is how young bystanders can be encouraged to engage in prosocial actions and intervene to stop the victimisation of their peers? This study comprises an attempt to answer this question by giving voice to, and exploring, the experiences and decisional processes of pre-adolescent bystanders from their own perspective, using an experience-centered narrative approach (Squire, 2008).

Based on the written and oral narratives of seven Grade 7 learners, the results obtained mirror international findings and emphasise the power of group mechanisms when influencing the bystanding behaviour of preadolescent children. Each participant adopted a variety of bystander roles shaped by a wide range of contextual factors. Fear of social exclusion, relations to the victim, prior experiences as victim and bully, parental influence, social norms, and the presence of other bystanders, appears to guide the way young people reason, feel and act on moral issues in social situations. These findings are discussed with reference to previous research on the role and responses of the bystander in bullying situations.

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**CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION**

“Children cannot thrive when they are afraid.” (DeBord, 2009, p. 6)

School bullying is a complex and pervasive social phenomenon which involves between 20-65 percent of children worldwide (Pinheiro, 2006)¹. It cuts across lines of race, class and culture and prevails in all sectors of the school community. Although an age-old practice, it was not until the 1970s that the subject began to receive attention from academic scholars (Pinheiro, 2006). Much of the initial interest began in Scandinavia, and was propelled by the suicides of three young Norwegian boys, who had been severely bullied by their peers (Greef & Grobbelaar, 2008).

Since then, bullying has been systematically investigated in numerous countries, including the United States, England, Australia, Japan, Italy and Canada, with studies exploring the social and personal characteristics of both bullies and victims and the complex interaction of risk and protective factors contributing towards their behaviour (Pinheiro, 2006). Bullying has repeatedly been shown to have deleterious consequences for all involved (Smith, 1999). Subsequently, it has been decreed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as “a major public health problem that demands the concerted and coordinated time and attention of health-care providers, policy-makers and families” (as cited in Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010, p. 403).

This introductory chapter briefly discusses the consequences of school bullying and outlines the extent of the problem within the South African context. The need for additional research into the experiences of the bystander will also be considered, as will the benefits of adopting a narrative methodological approach when conducting research with children.

¹ Prevalence rates vary significantly as a function of the different methodologies used to survey bullying (Cook et al., 2010).

1.1 The consequences of school bullying

Overall, the effect of peer harassment at school can be severe and long-lasting. Victims of bullying are reported to experience a wide spectrum of clinical problems, including difficulties sleeping, anxiety, school phobia and feelings of insecurity and unhappiness at school (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja & Ruan, 2004). Typically they have lower self-esteem than their peers, and frequently suffer from loneliness and suicidal ideation (Holt, Finkelhor & Kantor, 2007). When compared to their non-aggressive counterparts, bullies are more likely to experience depression and report lower levels of school engagement (Rivers, Potteat, Noret & Ashurst, 2009). Increased rates of delinquent activity and high-risk behaviour outside of school have also been well-documented (Nansel et al., 2004). Those learners who fulfill the dual role of bully-victim, that is, they bully in some situations and become the victim in others, are most prone to somatic complaints and at greater risk of developing psychiatric problems in the future (Austin & Joseph, 1996).

Witnesses of bullying behaviour can also be negatively affected (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005; Pozzoli, Ang & Gini, 2011; Rivers et al., 2009; Salmivalli, 2010). Witnessing bullying has the potential to contribute towards elevated mental health risks, including anxiety and paranoid ideation, an increase in substance use, higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity and greater approval for aggressive retaliation (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995; Rivers et al., 2009). In some schools, the culture of bullying is so pervasive that learners are reluctant to seek help from adults (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008).

1.2. A South African perspective

According to Section 12 of the Bill of Rights (1996), every South African citizen has the right to freedom and security of person, including the right to be free from all forms of violence and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way. Additionally, Section 24 states that all individuals have the right to an environment that is not detrimental to their health or well-being. Despite this however, violence and peer harassment at school is commonplace in South Africa and appears to be on the increase (Burton, 2007). Indeed, a study by Eliason and Frank (2000) carried out in 20 schools in the Cape metropolitan area found that violence was endemic to both primary and secondary schools -

possession of weapons, fighting/physical violence, assault and gangsterism being evident in the majority of the schools involved. Burton (2007) echoes this finding:

The available evidence suggests that young people are most likely to be victimised at school; across the socio-economic spectrum, youngsters increasingly experience physical and sexual assaults, robberies, intimidation, bullying, shootings, stabbings, gangsterism and drug trafficking in or around their schools. The perpetrators are usually other children who frequently use weapons such as guns and knives (p. 113).

Within this context, the relationship between bullying in schools and violence within the broader community cannot be ignored. Many young people in South Africa are brought up in a society which condones and even normalises violence and aggression. As a result, these learners become accustomed to bullying as an appropriate means of conflict resolution (Blake and Louw, 2010; Penning, Bhagwanjee, & Govender, 2010).

Bullying or peer victimization, as it is also known, is distinguished from other forms of violence because “it represents a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event” (Pinheiro, 2006, p. 121). Regarded by de Wet (2006) as one of the most underestimated problems in South African schools, this behaviour not only affects learners’ physical and psychological safety but their developmental trajectories as well (Pepler, Craig, Jiang, & Connolly, 2008). And yet, compared to the plethora of research carried out internationally on this subject, it seems that little has been done to systematically understand the phenomenon from a South African perspective (De Wet, 2006). National prevalence data obtained from a study conducted in 2003 found that 41% (n=10405) of learners reported being bullied by peers (Reddy et al., 2003). A more recent study suggested that over a fifth of learners had experienced some form of violence at school, with approximately 13% indicating that they had been bullied (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Additional results range from 61% in a sample of Tshwane high school learners (Neser, Ovens, Van der Merwe, Morodi, & Ladikos, 2003), to 36.3% of children in Cape Town and Durban schools (Liang, Flisher, & Lombard, 2007), and 11.8% in rural Mpumalanga (Taiwo & Goldstein, 2006). On average, the proportion of South African school children involved in bullying is higher than international norms which are reported between 5% and 25% in high income countries such as Finland (11, 3%) (Olafsen and Viemerö, 2000), Germany (8%) and England (24%) (Wolke, Woods, Stanford, & Schulz, 2001).

Although limited, South African research exploring the long-term and short-term effects of bullying suggests a link between bullying behaviours and high school dropout. High school girls who were bullies or victims were found to be more at risk of dropping out of school, with bully-victims the most susceptible (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard & King, 2008). Another study conducted in Kwazulu-Natal produced evidence showing elevated levels of depression amongst male learners, particularly in the victims. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress and dissociation were also documented (Penning et al., 2010). Discussing these findings, Penning et al. (2010) conclude that bullying, as a repetitive stressful event, is directly related to symptom-clusters of ongoing trauma.

As the statistics show, bullying is endemic in South African schools and continues to place our learners at risk on a daily basis. Understandably, this significantly undermines the ability of educators to ensure a safe learning environment for their students; regarded by most as a *sine qua non* of effective learning (Mestry, van der Merwe & Squelch, 2006). Mestry et al. (2006) describe a safe school as a place where learners and staff are not only physically and psychologically secure, but more importantly, believe themselves to be so. Extending this, Burton (2008) asserts that “schools are generally seen as mechanisms to develop and reinforce positive citizens with pro-social attitudes and as sites where individuals are prepared for the role they are to play in society at large” (p. 17). Most agree that “education is fundamental to reducing world poverty and promoting a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future for all” (Townsend et al., 2008, p.22). This is especially true in the South African context, where poverty is rife, and social and economic inequalities continue to exist (Mestry et al., 2006). Understanding bullying and developing effective strategies to prevent this problem in our schools should therefore be a priority for all those concerned with the physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being of children².

² It is important to note at this point, that involvement in the bullying cycle is not confined to the learners alone (Anderson, 2011). Bullying acts can also be committed by teachers, as well as the school system itself. Similarly, Twemlow et al. (2004) believe that educators and other adults, including family members, frequently act as bystanders and may choose not to intervene when fellow teachers or learners are victimizing and/or being victimized.

1.3 Why study the bystander?

Since the 1990s, bullying has become increasingly conceptualised as a group phenomenon (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010). Criticising the narrow focus of earlier research, scholars are now beginning to examine the complex social ecology in which bullying occurs. As research in this field expands beyond the bully-victim dyad, the role of the bystander warrants more attention (Gini et al., 2008). According to a series of studies conducted by Atlas and Pepler (1998) and Craig and Pepler (1995), up to 85% of bullying incidents take place within the context of the peer group. In South Africa, the majority of these incidents are of a verbal and relational nature, however bystanders are also involved in physical and sexual bullying. Of particular concern is the finding that up to 47.5% of high school learners in a Gauteng sample were witness to sexual coercion on a weekly basis (Mestry et al., 2006).

Currently, international research demonstrates the significance of the bystander's role in the bullying process (O'Connell, Pepler & Craig, 1999). In the past, the bystander was defined as "an individual who is present but does not take part in the situation or event" (Anderson, 2011, p. 4). It is now widely accepted, that the bystander plays an unavoidably active role in peer victimization (Salmivalli, 1999; Tsang, Hui and Law, 2011). O'Connell et al., (1999), for example, found that 75% of peer interventions were successful in stopping bullying. Through acts of commission or omission, bystanders directly influence the behaviour of both bully and victim. So central is their role, Twemlow et al., (2001) aptly refer to bystanders as "the invisible engine in the cycle of bullying" (p. 167)

For the purpose of this study, the bully-victim-bystander model developed by Twemlow et al. (2004) was selected as the framework for defining the bystander's behaviour. Based on a psychoanalytic and systemic understanding of interpersonal relationships and social processes, this model draws on Fonagy's theory of mentalising³, with the premise that the individual defines themselves through social feedback from interactions with others (Twemlow, Sacco & Williams, 1996). Negative feedback as a child can result in a sense of

³ Fonagy (1991.) refers to mentalising as "the capacity to conceive of conscious and unconscious mental states in oneself and others" (p.641) Making inferences about the mind of one's self and others is important since it is a person's mental states, including their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and desires that determine their actions.

disconnection to 'the other', who then becomes dehumanized and can be hurt with greater impunity (Burns, Maycock, Cross & Brown, 2008). Bullying is placed within a wider social context, which suggests that the group has the potential to influence personal identity and sense of self (Burns et al., 2008). The bystander is thus described as assuming 'an active role with a variety of manifestations, in which an individual or group indirectly and repeatedly participates in a victimization process as a member of the social system' (Twelmlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2004, p. 5).

If the bystander has the power to either facilitate, or impede bullying, the question that remains to be answered, is how young bystanders can be encouraged to engage in prosocial actions and intervene to stop the this abuse? Gaining insight into the reasons why certain children personally intervene to stop bullying while others choose to look the other way may provide answers to this problem (Pozzoli, Ang & Gini, 2011). Recommendations for further research discuss the importance of understanding the bystander's role in potentiating the conditions in which peer victimisation occurs (Salmivalli, 2010). This includes exploring these individuals social relations, identity formation, self-efficacy, psychosocial development, and problem solving abilities. As Rivers et al., (2009) concludes "greater attention to the roles of those who witness bullying and the implications of witness status are needed in both research and practice as part of the larger effort to address bullying within schools" (p. 20).

1.4 The pre-adolescent bystander

Preadolescence, also known as late childhood or early adolescence, falls approximately between the ages of 9 and 14 years, ending with the onset of puberty (Eccles, 1999). Development during this period "is driven by basic psychological needs to achieve competence, autonomy, and relatedness." (Eccles, 1999, p. 31). One of the primary developmental tasks for the preadolescent child is to establish a greater sense of themselves as an autonomous individual (Piaget, 1971). In this regard, they begin forging "a personal identity, a self-concept, and an orientation toward achievement that will play a significant role in shaping their success in school, work, and life" (Parker et. al., 2006, p. 428).

Biological changes during late childhood include physical growth spurts as well as fluctuating hormone levels which pave the way for puberty (Eccles, 1999). Cognitively, preadolescents start to reason in an increasingly logical and abstract manner and become

capable of considering basic abstractions and hypotheses, mentally addressing several variables at one time (Piaget, 1971). Socially, the preadolescent's desire to conform to their peers peaks during this period. Social acceptance becomes paramount and they begin spending more unsupervised time relationship with their friends (Parker et al., 2006). The majority of their social interactions take place within the context of the clique, which appears to function as a source of definition and support for identity development (Parker et al., 2006). Parker and colleagues expand on the formations of these social groups by providing the following explanation:

As children enter into late childhood, they are more likely to encounter an unprecedented variability in the ascribed (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity) characteristics and personalities of their peers, especially in school contexts. These differences contribute to discernible hierarchies of power and popularity, to salient similarities among playmates or friends, and to groups that are rigidly segregated along various lines (p.425)

As would be expected in such cliques, intergroup biases arise which tend to fuel feelings of insecurity about social position and acceptance. This motivates these children to invest much time and effort in reinforcing their social statuses and guarding against imminent rejection (Parker et al., 2006). Even though older children from this period have the ability to empathise with, and show sensitivity towards, outsiders or victims of in- and out- group biases, results from a study conducted by Eslea and Rees in 2001 show that bullying was most frequently remembered from around 11–13 years of age (as cited in Parker et al., 2006).

It is evident that friendship dynamics during late childhood present children with unique interpersonal conflicts and sources of stress. Due to the emphasis on social acceptance and the high levels of bullying reported during this developmental period, it was decided that the preadolescent bystander would be a particularly interesting and worthwhile individual to investigate.

1.5 A narrative study

The majority of research done, both globally and in this country, has been quantitative in nature. While this is important in providing an overview of the prevalence and nature of bullying in schools (Swart & Bredekamp, 2009), it is unable to offer insight into “how

children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives” (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 3), especially in terms of their involvement in peer conflicts. Consequently, if one is to provide rich, informative data which will assist in deepening our understanding of this issue further, there is a need for more qualitative work in eliciting the child’s perspective. Over the past two decades, there has been a burgeoning interest in finding methods to improve the facilitation of children’s voices in all dimensions of academic research (Greene & Hogan, 2006). Narrative research is one approach claiming to achieve this.

The people who share the stories about their lives remain at the heart of the narrative approach. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) elaborate on this by declaring “the stories themselves are a means to understand our subjects better.” They believe that, “while stories are obviously not providing a transparent account through which we learn truths, story-telling stays closer to actual life events than methods that elicit explanations” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 32). According to Engel (2005), exploring the stories children tell provides insight into how they solve emotional and cognitive dilemmas, create and maintain friendships, identify with self and others and navigate their roles in society and culture.

After reviewing the literature, it appears there are no qualitative South African studies presently available, which focus on exploring children’s awareness and experiences of their role as bystanders to bullying behaviour. As a result, an interpretive narrative methodology was deemed an apposite framework for this research.

1.6 Focus of study

The aim of this present study is to give voice to, and explore, the experiences of children as bystanders of bullying behaviour. This will include the following:

- exploring the pre-adolescent’s experiences of bullying and their role as a bystander within different contexts
- investigating the way these individuals perceive and make sense of the different roles they and their peers adopt during the bullying process
- examining the ways in which these children respond in their various bystanding roles and what factors influence their judgments and decisions and ultimately their outcome behaviour

Without personal insight from real life experiences, we will not have an accurate understanding of the motivations and dilemmas confronting this group of young people in these complex social situations. In order to demystify the processes of bullying and more importantly, create new and effective ways to facilitate prosocial behaviour, one is required to consider how and why children choose to intervene or remain passive. Since bystanders have been described as experiencing a range of intrapsychic dilemmas, which may be more receptive to change through psychoeducation, they are considered crucial players in the development of successful bully prevention programmes (Tsang et al., 2011). It is thus hoped that the information acquired from this study will provide a foundation for further research specific to South Africa, with the ultimate goal being the development and implementation of –holistic and effective bullying interventions which recognise and address the role of bully, victim *and* bystander as they co-exist in the school setting and wider community context.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter represents a review of the relevant literature, past and present, which elucidates the various facets of peer victimisation and bystanding behavior. It should be noted that this topic is extremely vast and appears to be in a continuously transformative state as new means of communication are developed, evident in the sudden escalation of cyber-bullying. Considering the scope of this research however, only information most pertinent to the exploratory aims of this study has been included.

2.1 Defining bullying

Olweus (1992) classified bullying as a subset of aggressive behaviour, whereby a person or group is “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students” (p. 14). One of the defining characteristic of these exchanges is the existence of a real or perceived imbalance of power, physical or psychological, between the aggressor(s) and the victim(s), with the latter incapable of defending themselves effectively. According to Smith and Sharp (1994), bullying is the systematic abuse of this power dynamic:

While there will always be power relationships in social groups, by virtue of strength or size or ability, force of personality, sheer numbers or recognised hierarchy... [this] power can be abused. If the abuse is systematic — repeated and deliberate — bullying seems a good name to describe it (p. 2).

Despite subtle variations in the lexicon, most scholars agree that bullying is “instigated by an individual or a group of individuals who are attempting to gain power, prestige, or goods” (Espelage and Swearer, 2003, p. 368). This behaviour is typically proactive in nature; it is unprovoked and goal-directed, and therefore differs from reactive aggression which occurs in response to a perceived threat or social provocation (Pellegrini and Long, 2002).

Although a general consensus exists between theorists that bullying is intentional, systematic and repeated over time in an interpersonal relationship, it is worth noting that several studies suggest teachers, parents and the students themselves, conceptualise bullying in much

broader terms (Hamarus and Kaikkonen, 2008). Investigating this phenomenon, Naylor et al. (2006) sampled 225 teachers and 1820 secondary school pupils, and found that only 18 per cent of teachers and 8 per cent of pupils believed repetition of negative behaviour to be a defining characteristic of bullying. Moreover, the majority of teachers and pupils did not include 'intention to harm' or an 'imbalance of power' in their definitions. Other studies have produced similar results, with younger children less likely to identify a power disparity between bully and victim and more likely to consider sporadic or one-off episodes of fighting and aggressive behaviour as examples of bullying (Guerin and Hennessy 2002, Smith, Cowie, Olafsson & Liefoghe, 2002; Smith and Levan, 1995).

Understandably, these results have significant consequences for the development of successful intervention programmes in schools. Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008), citing the work of Wernersson (2004), argue that an "overly narrow" conceptualisation of bullying can "exclude certain questions from research" (p.334). It is their assertion that "the definition of bullying should be surrounded by a family of concepts through which research into bullying can be deepened". The development of a shared understanding between researchers and the community is therefore crucial if this phenomenon is to be interpreted and resolved effectively (Hamarus and Kaikkonen, 2008).

2.2 Types and prevalence of bullying

Bullying is most commonly divided into two distinct types: direct and indirect (Olweus, 1993). Examples of direct bullying identified by Quiroz, Arnette, & Stephens (2006), include: (a) hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, sexual gestures, excessive tickling (b) verbal threats, name calling, racial slurs, insults (c) demanding money, property, service and (d) stabbing, choking, burning, rape and shooting. Indirect bullying, also referred to as relational and/or social bullying can manifest as: (a) rejecting, excluding, isolating, spreading rumours (b) ranking or rating; humiliating (c) manipulating friends and relationships (d) writing hurtful or threatening e-mails or text messages and postings on websites and (e) blackmailing, terrorizing, and proposing dangerous dares. Despite the range of anti-social behaviours listed,

most, if not all bullying acts, can be classified as either physical, verbal or relational in nature⁴ (Olweus, 1993).

Historically, literature on bullying and aggression has focused on direct physical and verbal attacks. However, current studies have begun to highlight many of the more relational forms of bullying which often go unreported, or unnoticed by teachers and parents because they are more covert (Larke & Beran, 2006; Smith, 2004). Coloroso (2003) notes that while physical bullying is the most visible and identifiable, it accounts for less than one third of all bullying incidents reported by children. Verbal bullying, on the other hand, tends to be far more commonplace, with evidence suggesting that such behaviour accounts for up to 70% of all reported cases. Measuring the prevalence of social or relational bullying remains somewhat more elusive (Smith et al., 2002). As Smith et al. (2002) point out, adults and children do not always associate psychological or emotional abuse with the term bullying, and therefore these acts are less likely to be acknowledged or reported. Even so, a wide-scale study which surveyed 2132 pupils across primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom found that having lies spread about oneself and being given 'dirty looks' were the most frequently experienced forms of bullying identified by the participants (Shaughnessy and Jennifer 2007).

Advances in technology, especially electronic and online communication, appear to have exacerbated the relational nature of bullying, giving rise to the contemporary term, 'cyber-bullying' (Mishna et al., 2009, Kowlaski, Limber & Agatston., 2012). Cowie & Jennifer (2008) define cyber-bullying as "a form of covert psychological bullying conveyed through the use of electronic media, such as mobile phones and the internet, that is deliberately intended to harm another" (p. 10). Harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing (or sharing of secrets), cyber stalking, 'happy slapping'⁵ and 'sexting'⁶, describe the most common methods employed by cyber bullies (Badenhorst, 2011). Bullying of this nature is especially problematic as it exists within a virtual world which is permeated by a sense of distance and disconnection; it can be perpetrated anonymously up to 24 hours a day, and accessed, or

⁴ Sexual and racial bullying, although often manifesting as either one of, or a combination of these three categories, are both regularly referred to as specific sub-types of bullying.

⁵ 'Happy slapping' is a variant of digitally recorded assault. Originating in the United Kingdom, it describes a situation in which a group of individuals, most commonly teenagers, walk up and slap an unsuspecting victim, while an accomplice captures the event on camera phone. The nature of the assault often involves more than a one off 'slap', with the most severe cases resulting in the death of the victim (Kowalski et al., 2012).

⁶ Sexting refers to 'the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude pictures or videos via text message or other electronic means.' (Kowalski et al, 2012, p. 67).

circulated, by a much wider audience which can vary from a few individuals to hundreds, even thousands (Chibarro, 2007). The role of the bystander is therefore made more ambiguous and complex. Not only do the bystanders remain largely unknown, but studies suggest they are more likely to retaliate or be drawn into the bullying foray because of the anonymity the internet provides. Additionally, the potential number of those who have access to 'look in' on these cyber-attacks, can be far greater than in 'real-life' bullying and the role they play far more complex. As pointed out by Cowie and Jennifer (2008), it is relatively easy for a bystander of cyber bullying to become a perpetrator, for example, when they record bullying behaviour on their cell phone and distribute the footage to others. The impact of the bystander is thus magnified and potentially more destructive than in other bullying scenarios.

Whereas computer access might still be limited to more affluent South Africans, the now ubiquitous use of cell phones has propagated the usage of online and cellular technologies across all spectra of society. Research on the prevalence of cyber bullying in South Africa is relatively limited, however a pilot study conducted in 2012 by The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) found that 20,9 % of learners had experienced at least one incident of cyber-bullying in their lifetime (Burton & Leoschut, 2012).

A discussion on the types and prevalence of bullying would be incomplete without mentioning the myriad reasons behind this phenomenon and its various forms. Issues relating to actual or perceived difference appears to be the most widespread of these (South African Council of Educators, 2011). Racial, religious and cultural bullying, sexual and gender-based bullying and bullying based on disability or special educational needs, referred to as dis-abilist bullying, have all been explicated in the literature. Equally so, stories of sexual and racial abuse propagated by bullies in South African schools abound in the media and local communities (Prinsloo, 2006).

2.3 Beyond the bully-victim perspective

Over the past several decades, the compass of research into bullying has come full circle (Salmivalli, 2010). In the 1960s and early 70s, Norwegian theorist, Peter Paul Heinemann, frequently referred to bullying as 'mobbing', or 'mobbning' as it was known as in Scandinavian languages. Borrowed from the collective noun 'mob', the term described a

situation in which a class, or group of school children, repeatedly harassed and/or victimised an individual child. Bullying was thus defined in terms of 'the group', with an emphasis placed on group engagement (Salmivalli, 2010).

Concomitantly, Dan Olweus began to publish his seminal work investigating the nature of aggression in schools. In his writings, he cautioned against overemphasising the 'collective aspect' of mobbing, preferring to direct attention onto the role of individual bullies and their victims. He felt that attention should be given to all situations where a child was exposed to systematic aggression, and not solely when a group or crowd were involved (Salmivalli, 2010). As Olweus (2001) points out in a critical analysis of this period, such a focus was necessary as school bullying was an untouched area of research. For that reason, together with his team of researchers, he began the substantial task of documenting, from an empirical basis, the physical, behavioural and psychological profiles of these individuals.

Following Olweus' lead, scholars throughout the world have attempted, with some success, to investigate the significant characteristics of the 'typical bully' and the 'typical victim', exploring personality traits, emotional and socio-cognitive abilities and individual attachment styles, to name but a few (Ma, 2001; Rigby, 2005; Smith et al., 1999). Unfortunately, the result of this research trajectory led to the development of what is now known as the 'bully-victim perspective'. This arguably narrowed the focus primarily onto the individual differences between perpetrator and victim, and bullying in many ways became viewed as a conflict between two opposing personalities. In comparison, bystanders were regularly deemed neutral and/or immobile, receiving scant interest in early literature (Barton, 2006).

More recently, however, studies have begun to redirect the spotlight back onto the role of the group, moving away from an analysis of individual characteristics to include information about the social context in which this phenomenon occurs (Gini, Albiero, Benelli & Altoe, 2008). For this reason, bullying is no longer perceived as a dyadic relationship between bully and victim, but rather as an interactional process between bully, victim and bystander (Twemlow et al., 2001).

According to Salmivalli (2010), group involvement in bullying is now understood "somewhat differently than the whole group, or gang, actively attacking one person" (p. 113). Rather, the peer group's role in facilitating bullying situations is perceived as much more nuanced.

Group members are identified as assuming different roles in the process, compelled by a range of emotions, attitudes and motivations. Researchers (Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Twemlow et al., 2001) have identified distinct roles within the group, including different subtypes of bullies, victims and, more recently, bully-victims and bystanders. The bully-victim-bystander model developed by Twemlow et al. (2004) suggests that these roles 'are considered to be co-created and dialectally defined' (p. 4). In these roles, they argue, self-awareness, empathetic understanding and the ability to mentalise, becomes impaired.

2.4 Revisiting the role of the bully: is the stereotype accurate?

2.4.1 Social deficit versus social skill

Documenting the ways in which individual attributes are influenced by, and interact with, contextual factors has now become the primary aim of those attempting to develop effective interventions against bullying. While literature detailing the role of the victim⁷ has been comparatively consistent over the years, research findings examining the salient characteristics of bullies continue to produce inconclusive results (Salmivalli, 2010).

Sutton, Smith and Swettenham (1999) assert that bullies are frequently portrayed as "usually... male, physically powerful yet intellectually simple or backward, resorting to violence and aggression in their interactions almost because they know no other way" (Sutton et al., 1999, p.118). Indeed, research has shown that the hot-tempered, impulsive and domineering temperament of the 'typical bully' is frequently reinforced by exposure to regular conflict at home and oppressive parenting (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Parents of bullies are often reported to be "cold and indifferent; inconsistent in their demonstration of affection; and unable to set clear boundaries" (Flisher & Protogerou, 2012, p.122). A study of 856 Australian children found that a higher degree of dysfunction existed in families of bullying children, with female bullies originating from the most dysfunctional family backgrounds (Rigby, 1994).

⁷ Sullivan et al. (2004), defines a victim as anyone who shows vulnerability and does not have group support. Typically, victim status is influenced by aspects of personality, in particular passive or reactive temperaments, enmeshed family structures and/or over protective parenting styles, although this has been found to differ according to gender. Victims are most likely to be physically weaker than their peers, introverted and suffer from low self-esteem (Maynard and Joseph, 1997; Slee and Rigby, 1993, Rigby, 2004).

Repeatedly, theories relating to childhood aggression assert that behaviourally disturbed children are more likely to manifest social cognitive deficits; they display deficiencies in social perspective taking and problem solving, and in empathic responsiveness (Sutton et. al, 1999, Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Larke & Beran (2006), studying the relationship between bullying and social skills in primary school children, found that bullies were seen by teachers to lack prosocial skills, and consequently the ability to effectively manage interpersonal relationships.

In contrast to studies based on the social skills deficit model however, other investigations have rejected this view and shown links between bullying behaviour and high levels of social competence and popularity (Garandean & Cillessen, 2006, Vaillancourt et. al, 2003). As mentioned, bullying is now conceptualised as a form of proactive aggression, differentiated from other forms of aggression because it is deliberate and goal-directed in nature. Salmivalli (2010) claims that this distinction has led to the hypothesis “that bullies are not necessarily socially unskilled or emotionally dysregulated but can quite skillfully use bullying in order to achieve their goals.” (p. 113). This may depend on the age of the perpetrator and the type of behaviour they exhibit. As children develop their expressive language skills and mature in their understanding of themselves and others, they tend to select more subtle, circuitous forms of bullying, including spreading rumours and systematic exclusion. These methods require well-developed social skills to manipulate others and gain compliance from their supporters. In addition, contradicting the classical view which links bullying to peer rejection, a growing body of research suggests that bullies often rate high in popularity and have many friends (Rigby & Slee, 1993; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009).

2.4.2 Bullying and psychopathological behaviour

In a similar vein, attempts to associate school bullying and psychopathological behaviour have also proved contradictory, resulting in a complex and somewhat ambiguous clinical representation of the ‘true bully’ (Menesini et al., 2009). Menesini et al. (2009) argue that the inconsistencies in the literature are predominantly due to:

The type of symptoms associated with bully and victim statuses (internalizing vs. externalizing) and the nature of this association. These inconsistencies occur because

sometimes bullying behaviour is considered the cause of psychopathological conditions, and sometimes it is considered the consequence of psychopathological conditions (p.116).

Research focusing on the presence of externalizing symptoms, has shown that bullies commonly present with conduct problems, aggressiveness, and attention deficit and hyperactive disorders (Espelage & Holt, 2003; Menesini et al., 2009). Additionally, bullies can experience internalizing symptoms to the same degree as those they victimise. These symptoms, which include depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders, and eating disorders, are experienced to a significantly greater extent than those who were not involved (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Rantanen & Rimpelä, 2000).

Several studies involving younger participants have, however, contradicted these findings (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998; Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster, 2003). For example, Juvonen et al., (2003) found preadolescent bullies to be less anxious and depressed than their peers, and overall, emotionally and psychologically stronger. Along the same lines, Rigby & Slee (1993) and Carney & Merrell (2001), showed that bullies' levels of self-esteem were generally comparable, and in some cases, slightly higher, than their classroom counterparts.

2.5 Profiling bullies

2.5.1 Types of bullies

Taking cognisance of these wide-spread variations in the literature, there is now a growing consensus of the heterogeneity among children who bully. (Vaillancourt, Hymel & McDougall, 2003). As Lines (2007) posits, the typical constructs of 'bully' and 'victim' are no longer as clear-cut as previously believed; behavioural profiles differ according to the nature of the aggression used, the type of context it is used in and the reasons for using it.

Researchers have identified, amongst others: aggressive/sadistic bullies, ringleader bullies, followers, passive bullies, reinforcers, depressed bullies and bully/victims (Olweus, 1991; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Coloroso, 2003; Twemlow et al., 2001). In general, the three most common bullying profiles described fit the description of the aggressive/sadistic bully, the passive bully and the bully/victim (or hyperactive bully).

The aggressive bully outlined by Olweus (1991), and in many ways similar to Salmivalli et al.'s (1996) ringleader bully⁸ and Twemlow et al.'s (2001) sadistic bully, is characterised by a need to dominate others. They demonstrate high levels of both proactive and reactive aggression, are hostile in peer relationships, and more likely to attribute negative or hostile intentions to those around them. The passive bully, or reinforcer (Salmivalli et al, 1996), unlike the aggressive child, is more insecure and anxious about themselves and their role in the group. They tend to reinforce the actions of the aggressive bully, and join in once a bullying encounter has already been instigated. Olweus (1991) believes these children are more likely to come from dysfunctional homes where aggression is a common occurrence.

Although some authors do not necessarily recognise the value of creating categories such as those mentioned above⁹, the existence of the bully/victim (also known as the provocative victim) is now a widely accepted integral of the bullying typology (Mynard & Joseph, 1997; Olweus, 1991). This individual is unique because of their context-dependent role; in certain situations they bully their peers, in others they are the chosen victim. The bully-victim is considered a high-risk group because of their low level of social acceptance and self-esteem, conduct problems, and school difficulties (Andreou, 2001). In fact, evidence suggests bully-victims are especially vulnerable to both concurrent and subsequent psychiatric disorders (Mynard & Joseph, 1997).

2.5.2 Why bullies bully?

i) Individual traits

Garratt (2003) suggests that temperament is the best documented factor when it comes to differentiating between bullies and their non-bullying counterparts. In line with this assertion, Parson (2005) believes certain children are born with, or have the potential to develop a behavioural control disorder. These individuals typically meet the criteria for the aggressive

⁸ According to the work of Salmivalli et al (1996), ringleaders tend to organise other bullies and initiate bullying behaviour. They display good socio-cognitive skills and have been shown to score highest on theory of mind and emotional understanding, but low on empathy (Sutton et al., 1999). Twemlow et al.'s (2001) sadistic bully displays similar character traits.

⁹ Sutton et al., (1999), concluded from their research that the roles of ringleader, reinforcer and follower, as identified by Salmivalli, were highly intercorrelated. As a result of this, they argued that such categories were not empirically useful, and therefore should be avoided if possible.

bully described by Olweus (1991), using aggression as a means of empowering themselves, rejecting constraints placed upon them by society, school, peer groups or their family.

ii) Systemic factors

When a child bullies another child, they engage in willful and conscious behaviour that is intended to cause some degree of physical, psychological or social harm. According to Boulton & Underwood (1992), bullies believe that they victimize their peers because they are provoked or, alternatively, because they do not like the victim. It is Parsons' (2005) opinion however, that the majority of bullying is learned behaviour:

Children can learn to bully in several ways, including being treated with aggression, witnessing acts of aggression, or being rewarded for aggressive behaviour...The use of physical punishment, inconsistent punishment, and overindulgence and permissiveness have all been linked to children's aggressive behaviour. (p.13)

Due to high rates of violence within South African society, many young people are exposed to crime and violence on a daily basis within their immediate surroundings. For example, Farrington (1993) found that parents who bullied in childhood were more likely to have children who bullied their peers. Typically these parents bullied their children as well. Moreover, there is a greater chance that children growing up in aggressive neighbourhoods will interact with delinquent, criminal or antisocial peers. This increases their risk of engaging in violent activities, as well as their chance of having violence committed against them. Indeed, recent statistics indicate that 60.5% of children who experience violence at school, report crime as a problem in their neighbourhood (Burton & Leoschut, 2012).

Corporal punishment is an entrenched form of conflict management and discipline used in many South African homes (SACE, 2011). Findings from a national study suggest that up to 57% of parents smack their children, and a further 33% report inflicting more serious beatings (SACE, 2011). This form of discipline, despite being illegal, is also a common occurrence in schools. Burton (2008) describes corporal punishment in schools as an "assault on learners", one which "serves to perpetuate the many forms of violence which South African learners are exposed." (p. 29). In both the school and the family systems this type of punishment reinforces and models violent behaviour in (and to) children (Burton, 2008).

Acknowledging the impact social systems play in the architecture of bullying, Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2005) believe that a violent community is one in which there is “a chronic failure of mentalisation” – an inability to consider the needs and emotions of others (p. 295). According to their explanation:

The mirroring, understanding, and attuned social world is essential to us in early development, not just to ensure that we acquire a sense of who we are...but also so that we can develop an accurate appreciation of a shared external world. From this mentalizing perspective, the personal consensus between two people may be seen as creating an external (social) reality (p. 295).

Power dynamics which impact upon this social reality, whether as a result of individual psychopathology, or due to excessive coercion and punishment, have the potential to significantly impair the individual’s ability mentalise. Without a sense of connection to the other, the bully feels less likely to experience guilt or shame. The possibility of anti-social behaviour therefore increases (Twemlow et al., 2005).

iii) The benefit component

Another compelling motivation for bullying behaviour is the ‘benefit component’; children using aggression specifically for gain or control (Olweus, 1993; Parsons, 2005). Since authors have begun to shift their understanding of bullying based on social deficiency, towards bullying based on social reward, many now propose that social status is one of the primary goals sought after by those who bully (Salmivalli et al., 2011; Veenstra et al., 2007). This includes gaining dominance over peers, ensuring visibility in the group, obtaining a level of prestige and being popular (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). The social dominance theory, which posits that prosocial acts, in addition to aggressive behaviours like bullying, are frequently demonstrated by children and adolescents to achieve and sustain social status and dominance, is now accepted by many as a relevant theoretical framework for explaining bullying (Pellegrini & Long, 2004; Walcott, Upton, Bolen, & Brown, 2008).

Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson (2003), define status as “the outcome of an evaluation of attributes that produces differences in respect and prominence.” (p. 265). Essentially, this is a

group-related concept. Since it is the group who assigns status to its members, the bully is reliant on his/her peers in order to achieve this goal (Salmivalli, 2010). Furthermore, the earlier work of Bjorkqvist, Ekman & Lagerspetz (1982) which explored the ideal and normative 'ego pictures'¹⁰ of 14-16 year old boys, showed that bullies not only wish to be more dominant, but believe that their peers expect them to take on the dominant role within the group. In order to avoid confrontation and ensure their high status position remains unopposed, perpetrators tend to be selective in their choice of target. Victims are typically low in group status, insecure and submissive, and have often been rejected by their classmates (Salmivalli, 2010). A qualitative study carried out by Thornberg in 2010, which explored the social representations given by children to bullying causes, showed that out of 56 school children who had witnessed bullying 71% of the participants viewed social positioning as a cause for bullying. This was preceded by social deviance (82%), the most frequent explanation provided, which explained bullying as a reaction to social deviance on the part of the victim.

2.6 Participant roles in bystanding

If one of the bully's motivations is to achieve social status and repeatedly demonstrate their power to others, then it is logical to expect they will conduct their aggressive behaviour in front of an audience. Hawkins, Pepler & Craig (2001) report that peers are present in up to 88% of bullying incidents. These findings have been mirrored in several studies internationally (Bonanno & Hymel, 2006). Bystanders evidently have the power to either stop or prolong bullying. The more peers who assemble to watch a bullying episode, the longer the episode tends to continue, as the aggressor is reinforced by the bystanders' attention (Cappadocia et al., 2012). Interestingly, Twemlow et al. (2004), drawing from their clinical work, found that bullies usually "fantasise about the impact their actions will have on the bystander even if the bystanding audience is not physically present, along with states of minds suggesting prominent grandiose, sadomasochistic, and voyeuristic elements." (p. 9)

Tsang et al. (2011) point out that bystanders, present when a bullying act evolves from beginning to end, can never be considered neutral or inactive "whether they act or refrain,

¹⁰ The term 'ego' used in this context is adapted from Rogers' notion of the ego as a "social product, developed in interpersonal relations, and striving for inner consistence". In this way, the ego picture is explained as a "product of the individual's interaction with others." (1947, p. 360) Hence, the ideal ego-picture encompasses all that the individual aspires to be in a social setting, and the normative ego-picture, how they view the ways others would like them to be. (Bjorkqvist, Ekman & Lagerspetz, 1982, p. 24)

they have already added energy to wither the bully or the victim” (p. 2279). In some cases, it has been proposed that bullies can, in fact, be created by peer pressure and by the repetitive reinforcement of aggressive behaviour (Olson, 1992). As such, the role of the bystander has now been acknowledged as a key component of the dialectical interaction between bully and victim (Twemlow et al., 2001), with a number of researchers attempting to identify specific characteristics that differentiate this group from the others (Gini et al., 2008).

Bystanders have a number of choices when it comes to bullying. They can explicitly encourage it, passively accept it, or condemn a bully's actions and provide support to the victims (Gini et al., 2008). Focusing on these distinct patterns of behavior, Olweus (1993) devised a theory he termed, ‘The Cycle of Bullying’. According to his research, the bystander’s responses represent their attitudes toward the problem of bullying (either positive, neutral-indifferent or negative), in addition to the actions they would most likely take during an actual bullying incident. In this theory he identifies the bully, the follower or henchman, the supporter, the passive supporter, the disengaged onlooker, the passive defender and the defender.

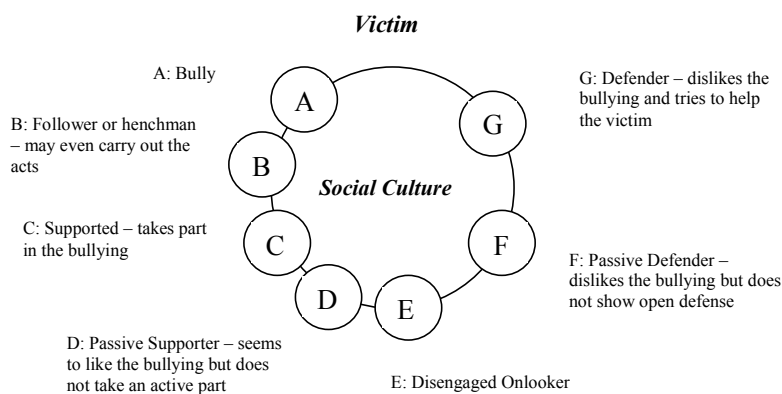


Illustration 1: The Cycle of Bullying (Olweus, 1993)

A study of several hundred Finnish children conducted by Salmivalli (1999), expanded on Olweus’ work by using peer-nomination procedures to identify various categories of bystanders. The four principle subtypes were identified as: 1) assistants, who joined the ringleader bully 2) reinforcers, who provided positive feedback to the bully through specific behaviours including laughing, cheering and/or forming an audience 3) outsiders, who

withdrew from the bullying situation and 4) defenders who made a clear stand on behalf of the victim and/or sought help.

Adopting a psychodynamic framework and using clinical samples, Twemlow et al. (2004) developed their own typology of bystanders, based on the participants' roles (see table 1). They too acknowledged the presence of bullying (assistant) and helpful or altruistic (defender) bystanders, but expanded these roles to include puppet master, sham, victim, avoidant and abdicating bystanders.

Type	Mentalization	Subjective State	Role in the system
Bully (aggressive) bystander	Collapse of mentalization	Excitement, often Sado-masochistic	Establishes a way to set up victimization within the school community
Puppet-master variant ⁴ of Bully bystander	Authentic empathy and reflectiveness collapses. Capable of logical planning and non-feeling empathy.	Arrogant Grandiose sense of powerfulness	Committed to violent outcomes, achieved by conscious manipulation
Victim (Passive) by Stander	Collapse of mentalization	Fearful Apathetic Helpless	Passively and fearfully drawn into the victimization process.
Avoidant bystander	Mentalization preserved by denial.	Defensive euphoria. An individual action	Facilitates victimization by denial of personal responsibility
Abdicating bystander	Mentalization preserved by projection and projective identification	Outraged at the poor performance of others. An agency or group action	Abdicates responsibility by scapegoating
Sham bystander	Mentalization preserved	Uses conscious largely verbal manipulation. Deliberate and calm	Neither victim nor victimizer role is authentic but is adopted for personal political reasons.
Helpful (altruistic) bystander	Mentalization enhanced.	Compassionate sometimes outraged at harm to others. Not a "do gooder" .	Mature and effective use of individual and group psychology to promote self awareness and develop skills to resist victimization

Table 1: Twemlow's typology of bystanders

According to their observations, the bullying bystander:

Engages in voyeuristic, sadomasochistic fantasies while watching assaults...this form of bystander is often present in children who screen off playground incidents from teachers' interventions by creating diversions so that the bullying can continue. Such children can

evolve as adolescents into passive participants in criminal acts, and can be charged as accomplices in crimes performed by the more active bullies (p. 302).

A variant of the bullying bystander, the puppet master, is capable of manipulating situations and people to achieve their goals. Their actions are typified by a collapse of authentic empathy and reflectiveness and they tend to exhibit a grandiose sense of powerfulness and general arrogance. Avoidant and abdicating bystanders, while actively forming an audience, or deciding not to intervene, tend to deflect any personal responsibility away from themselves. The primary distinction between these two being the utilisation of scapegoating by the abdicators who choose to avoid acknowledging their own role in the bullying act by projecting blame onto others. Victim bystanders, as the name implies, are those children who become passively (and uneasily) drawn into the victimisation process. In contrast to these responses, the altruistic bystander activates personal or social resources to help put a stop to the assault, or attempts to show support or comfort to the victim. The sham bystander is characterised by lack of authenticity in the manner in which they respond to a dispute. They are defined as taking sides for personal or political reasons and could adopt the role of an instigator, setting up the actions of the bully while pretending not to be involved, or an empathiser, avoiding full expression of feelings that might lead to intervention.

In general, 'the participant role' approach has since been implemented by a number of researchers across several countries. Results obtained from the UK (Sutton & Smith, 1999), the Netherlands (Goossens, Olthof & Dekker, 2006), Italy (Menesini & Gini, 2000) and Sweden (Olweus, 1993) validate earlier findings and confirm that most children, regardless of age, have witnessed a bullying act of some kind, and contribute to this act in a variety of ways (Gini et al., 2008).

2.7 Prevalence of bystander roles across age and sex

According to the data, it is generally accepted that approximately 20-30% of preadolescent and adolescent pupils act as assistants or reinforcers of the bully's behaviour. A further 20-30% of adolescents adopt the role of the outsider or passive bystander, witnessing the acts but choosing either to withdraw from the scene or remain silent, thereby passively enabling the bully to continue. Finally, defenders or helpful bystanders represented the smallest

percentage of the student population, comprising no more than 20% (Craig & Pepler, 1997; O'Connell et al., 1999; Salmivalli, 1996).

This pattern mirrored that obtained from investigations into students' perceptions of bystander behaviour. Again, the smallest percentage (17%) of pupils were recognised by peers as defenders, with the largest proportion identified as passive bystanders or outsiders (24%) (Salmivalli, 1999). Interestingly, this latter group (passive/outside) were often perceived by victims and other witnesses as acting in collusion with bullies, despite not being directly involved in the bullying episode (Cowie, 2000; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013). It is worth noting that while most of the participant roles appeared to be relatively stable over time, the number of outsiders or passive bystanders showed a definite increase with age (Salmivalli et al, 1998; Trach et al., 2010).

When accounting for differences in age, earlier studies suggest that younger children report significantly higher intervention rates, and are more likely to demonstrate prosocial behaviour (Stevens et al., 2000). In a cross sectional investigation of grade and sex differences of bystander responses, Trach et al. (2010) profiled the ways in which these reactions changed with grade. According to their findings, children in Grades 4-5 were more likely to report following through with direct intervention strategies, including confronting the bully, supporting the victim or reporting the event to an adult. Older children were less likely to endorse these tactics and more likely to adopt pro-aggressive or indirect retaliatory approaches, in particular, asking friends to get revenge on their attackers.

With regards to sex differences, girls were found to protect the victim more readily than boys and were less likely to reinforce the actions of the bullies. Results from the same study by Trach et al (2010), showed that boys had a greater tendency to 'do nothing' during a bullying incident, while both girls and boys reported the same likelihood of walking away or avoiding the bully. Consistent with the findings from previous investigations by Salmivalli et al. (1996, 1998), girls were more likely to be viewed as 'defenders' and demonstrate prosocial behaviours, including telling others about the bullying, directly confronting the bully, seeking help from friends, or supporting the victim. As with the boys however, these actions decreased significantly during adolescence. According to Cowie (2000), the development of the 'macho' stereotype as a result of the socially-modelled concept of masculinity, makes it especially difficult to steer boys into helpful bystander roles.

The only South African study which explores the behaviour of bystanders in a school setting was conducted by Mestry et al. (2006) as part of an international research initiative entitled 'The Bystander Project.' Led by Ken Rigby, a well-known Australian researcher in the field of bullying, this project was undertaken in Australia, Bangladesh, England, Israel and Italy and South Africa; the general aims of the research were as follows:

- to describe the behaviour of student bystanders (intended and observed) of bullying in schools
- to relate the reported behaviours and intentions to past experiences of respondents as bullies, victims and neither
- to examine the reasons learners give for their actions or intentions through an analysis of open-ended questions (Mestry et al., 2006, p.49).

Mestry et al.'s (2006) sample included 463 learners from two primary schools (n=262) and two high schools (n=201) in Gauteng. The findings from their study suggested that 76.8% and 64.2% of verbal and indirect bullying took place in the presence of the primary and secondary school children respectively. This was followed in frequency by physical bullying and finally sexual coercion. The percentage of learners witnessing physical bullying was greater in primary school while the percentage of those observing sexual coercion doubled in high school. The majority of both primary and secondary school children indicated that they would call a teacher should they witness any form of bullying, however the figures representing those who would ignore verbal, indirect, physical and sexual bullying were as high as 27.7% in some cases. Typically, girls in primary school showed the highest frequency of pro-social behaviour.

2.8 The power of peer intervention

As already alluded to, the response of a peer bystander has the potential to directly influence the intensity and outcome of a bully's assault. In this regard, the impact of their reactions not only affects the behaviour of the bullies themselves, but equally so, their targets, and the dynamics of the group as a whole (Gini et al., 2008). An observational study undertaken by Hawkins et al. (2001), showed that in over 50% of cases, the intervention of a defender bystander (i.e. someone willing to stand up for the victim) effectively put a stop to the

bullying behaviour. In a classroom setting, evidence suggests that the greater the reinforcement the bully garners from classmates, the more regularly the bullying occurs (Kärnä et al., 2008). Furthermore, bullies appear to be more sensitive to positive feedback provided by reinforcement, than to support offered to the target. This is, in part, because some defending behaviours may be provided privately to the victim, such as comforting them or encouraging them to tell an adult, and therefore have less direct an impact on the bully's actions. As Salmivalli, Voeten and Poskiparta (2011) assert:

If bullies indeed seek social power, as has been suggested, they might view reinforcing as an indication of this sought after high status in the peer group. By reinforcing the aggressive acts, the bystanders communicate to the bullies that a) their behaviour is acceptable, even admired. And b) they do not have to fear retaliation from peers.” (p. 674).

In addition to this, it is probable that the bully's friends comprise the majority of those who offer reinforcement (assistant bystanders). It could therefore be assumed that social feedback provided by these friends may be more influential in encouraging the bully (Salmivalli et al., 2011). This has prompted certain behavioural scientists to conclude that, rather than implementing classroom-based interventions, anti-bullying programmes should be targeted towards pre-identified friendship groups and cliques, and even to the wider culture of school and society (Salmivalli et al., 2011; Twemlow et al., 2004).

Bystanders' reactions are also relevant when exploring the ways in which they bear upon the victim's subjective experience or increase the likelihood of victimisation taking place. Findings outlined by Kärnä et al. (2011) identify a link between victimisation and classroom situations that reinforce the bully/bullies and fail to defend the victim/s. The social context where bystanders support the bully's behaviour rather than challenge it will therefore increase the likelihood of anxious or rejected children being victimised. Victims who were supported by one or more classmates have also been shown to experience less anxiety and depression and a higher level of self-esteem compared to those without defenders (Sainio et al., 2012).

2.9 What motivates a bystander's response?

There appears to be a discrepancy between how students view the role of the bystander and how they respond to bullying in real life scenarios (Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1996). When confronted with hypothetical situations, the majority of children expressed anti-bullying and pro-victim attitudes, as well as the belief that they would directly support the victim should they witness a bullying act (Boulton, Trueman, & Flemington, 2002; Rigby & Johnson, 2006). Observational studies however highlight an inconsistency between these views and observed behaviour (Gini, 2008; Thornberg, 2010). For some time, there has been much conjecture among scholars regarding the reasons why a bystander may fail to defend their bullied peers, even though they believe it is the right thing to do (Salmivalli, 2010).

From the research literature on altruism, it has been suggested that most bystanders feel uncomfortable embodying non-altruistic roles. Each time they witness bullying, bystanders therefore face the dilemma of choosing how to respond, and ultimately, which bystander role to enact (Twemlow et al., 2004). For example, according to Mestry et al. (2006), citing the work of Coloroso (2005), if bystanders look away or remain uninvolved when witnessing their peers being victimised, “their self-confidence and self-respect are eroded as they wrestle with their fears and their guilt” (p. 48). This can lead to apathy, which can in turn result in contempt. Supporting or cheering on the bully therefore increases the likelihood of other bystanders “becoming de-sensitised to the cruelty...even creating the image of the bully as a popular, strong, and daring role model, worthy of imitation” (p. 48).

Clearly, the position the bystander finally chooses to occupy is effected by a range of contextual factors including group mechanisms, physical environment, their personal characteristics and intrapsychic qualities. Since the actions of defenders, reinforcers and outsiders are essentially dissimilar, it is logical to assume that the motivational underpinnings of each response will vary (Poyhonen et al., 2012).

2.9.1 Group Mechanisms

i) Normative group influences

Children's positive or negative reactions to bullying behaviour may be shaped by normative influences from the peer group. By belonging to a social group, members are endowed with a

sense of collective identity, which not only describes, but also prescribes acceptable behaviour (Gini et al., 2008). To quote Salmivalli (2010):

Children with similar participant roles tend to belong to same peer clusters, resulting in a social structure where some cliques consist of children who tend to take on pro-bullying roles (bullies, assistants, reinforcers) and others involve more prosocial (defenders) or non-involved (outsiders) children (p.116).

Group members are more likely to develop discriminating attitudes when their group has norms which promote bullying, especially when the bullies are perceived as powerful and high in social status (Salmivalli, 2010). Empirical evidence, albeit scant, suggests that bullying children are often drawn together not because of a genuine attraction felt between group members, but rather because of a desire to be accepted by the dominant bullies, or to improve social standing by associating with them (Witflet et al., 2009; Olthof & Goossens, 2008). From this perspective, mimicking aggressive or unfriendly behaviour towards a selected target, or target group, becomes a way of 'fitting in' and asserting one's position in the group. Research based on classroom norms appears to underpin this hypothesis. Dijkstra, Lindenberg, and Veenstra's (2008) study indicates that there is a greater degree of social acceptance in classrooms where popular learners, in particular, instigated bullying at high levels. They conclude that the popular children's behaviour is more likely to become normative in the classroom setting, increasing bully-related norms.

It has been suggested that normalisation is one of the ways school children deal with the high rates of crime prevalent in South African society today. Increased exposure and reinforcement of violence means that these young people consider aggression as a normal way of relating (Leoschut, 2008)¹¹. As mentioned previously, Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004) outline wider systemic issues, over and above friendship and classroom norms, which they believe directly impinge upon the actions of the bystander.

Peer clusters can also exert a positive influence on their members. Like their bullying counterparts, defending children have a tendency to belong to friendship groups comprising of children who are just as likely to defend bullied peers. Empirical evidence indicates that

¹¹ Relational aggression is also included in this.

children who believe their friends and family expect them to engage in prosocial behaviours and support their peers, are more willing to do so (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). As a result of this, it has been proposed that the expectations of friends, classmates, teachers and parents significantly predict individual attitudes and behaviour, social responsibility as well as coping skills among the bystanding population (Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1997; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013).

Prior research suggests that the internalised social norms or moral principles which motivate prosocial acts develop through the process of socialisation (Thornberg, 2007). Two salient norms have been identified as a basis for helping behavior. These include, 'the norm of reciprocity' which states that one should help those who help in return, and the contrasting 'social responsibility norm', which implies that one should help or assist those who require help (Thornberg, 2007).

ii) Social Identity and othering

In their qualitative study, 'School bullying as a creator of pupil peer pressure', Hamarus & Kaikkonen (2008) conclude that:

A bully who defines what is different in the pupil community creates the group of 'us' and 'them' and through the definition gains acceptance for the values represented by 'us'...(p. 342).

According to Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Nesdale's (1999) more recent adaptation, the Social Identity Developmental Theory (SIDT), peer group membership is an essential component of the formation of one's sense of identity and self-worth. This membership is dependent on defining 'otherness' by identifying certain individuals as part of the in-group and others as constituting the out-group. Flisher & Protogerou (2012) believe that bullying incorporates all the characteristics of social inter-group bias where "one group of people – the in-group – systematically and consistently perceive themselves more favourably than another group, the out-group." (p. 123). In-group/out-group bias can include negative behaviours, cognitions and attitudes and is considered unreasonable, because it is not based on objective evidence of the situation. While it is argued that a certain amount of in-group preference is required in order to establish and

secure social identity, bullying occurs when in-group children use out-group degradation in an effort to improve their status, or because they feel threatened by those belonging to the out-group (Flisher & Protogerou, 2012).

Participating in a bullying act therefore becomes a way of creating bonds with other children and/or ensuring your place within the dominant in-group, which in turn, results in an improved sense of social confidence and self-conception (Juvonen & Cadigan, 2002; Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). The alternative of this would be social exclusion and marginalization. Understandably, the threat of being rejected or 'turned on' by the in-group would serve as a warning to those bystanders who may challenge the identity of the group by defending members of the out-group and upsetting the status quo (Salmivalli, 2010). According to Hazler (1996) children often remain passive bystanders because they are afraid of becoming the focus of their bullying peers.

The concept of 'othering', the social and psychological mechanism used to distinguish between the own ('us') and other ('them') social groups, is explored by Twemlow and colleagues in their Peaceful Schools Project (2004). It is their assertion that a power dynamic "fuels the victim-victimizer-bystander interaction, [and disrupts] mentalisation through the impact of conscious and unconscious coercion on the individuals and groups" (p. 5). From this perspective, the roles of the bully, victim and bystander symbolise a dissociating process, one in which the victimised child is "dissociated from the community as 'not us' by the bully on behalf of the bystanding community" (p. 5). The bystander/s are therefore implicit, albeit not always knowingly, in selecting both the victim/s (the other) and the bully, the latter's behaviour being crucial for the development of a more robust in-group identity. The bully is therefore no longer acting as an individual but, as argued by Twemlow et al. (2004), becomes to some degree 'an agent' of the bystanding audience.

iii) The Bystander Effect

The classical 'bystander effect' received its impetus from a series of well-known investigations instigated by Darley and Latané in 1968, following the murder of Kitty Genovese¹². A summary of their findings showed, paradoxically, that bystanders of

¹² Kitty Genovese was a 31-year-old American woman who was sexually assaulted and then stabbed to death on 13th March, 1964. Two weeks after her death, an article was published which claimed that 38 witnesses had

potentially dangerous or harmful situations were less likely to intervene when there were other bystanders present (Latané & Darley, 1979). It was their conclusion that, “the presence of other people serves to inhibit the impulse to help” (p. 38) which they later described as “the social inhibition of helping” (Latané & Nida, 1981, p. 308).

Over the years, the bystander effect has been reproduced and tested in a number of experimental situations, including theft, falls, electric shocks and asthma attacks, and continues to remain one of the most robust phenomena in social psychology (Thornberg, 2010). Even though the majority of participants involved in these studies have been adults, and the situations recreated in many ways different to that of bullying, the social processes underlying ‘the bystander effect’ are certainly worth noting for the purposes of this review. According to Thornberg (2010) the following mechanisms have been suggested as contributors towards various bystander effects:

- *Pluralistic ignorance*: this refers to “a collective perception or definition of the emergency situation as not being a real emergency” (p.5) which is a direct consequence of social comparison between passive bystanders. By comparing the lack of involvement of those around them and by seeking clues as to how to behave, they assume that the situation is not serious and their intervention is, therefore, not required.
- *Audience inhibition (fear of social blunders)*: the presence of a group of bystanders can inhibit helping behaviour in certain individuals because they fear embarrassment or the possibility of looking foolish in front of other witnesses. As a result they attempt to remain passive and composed. This may explain findings which imply that the more ambiguous an emergency is, the less willing bystanders are to become involved.
- *Diffusion of Responsibility*: When multiple bystanders witness an emergency event, the responsibility to intervene is shared by all bystanders. As a result of this, the pressure to support the victim does not fall on any one particular individual. According to Rutkowski, Gruder, and Romer’s (1983), this can be counteracted when there is a high level of cohesiveness among the bystanding group, combined with a

watched the crime take place from their apartments, but had failed to intervene. Although this story has since been dismissed as lacking in evidence, it continues to remain an iconic event in the timeline of helping research (Manning, Levine & Collins, 2007).

prominent social-responsibility norm. They also found that the greater the psychological distance between the bystander/s and the victim/s the less likely the witnesses were to become involved.

Although scarce, studies investigating the influence of the bystander effect amongst children have produced similar findings to the aforementioned results. Rivers and Smith (1994) argue that the majority of bullying in schools comprises seemingly 'mild' attacks, including teasing and verbal insults. Since the effects of these are predominantly psychological, children find it easier to distance themselves from the situation by claiming the perpetrators were 'only kidding', thus minimising the seriousness of the situation (pluralistic ignorance). In this way, the children use social comparison to define their situation, inferring from one another's behaviour that the victim does, in fact, not require their support. It has even been suggested in certain cases, that the victims themselves may attempt to conceal their suffering from their peers as a consequence of this phenomenon (Salmivalli, 2010).

Gini, Pozzoli, Borghet and Franzoni (2008) used hypothetical scenarios to illustrate the extent to which children look to, and are influenced by, the behaviour of others when witnessing a bullying incident. Focusing specifically on children's attitudes towards victims, they discovered that middle-school children reported more victim-liking in imaginary situations where other bystanders intervened on behalf of the victim, than when bystanders sided with and/or assisted the bully (psychological distancing). As discussed previously, literature indicates that children may distance themselves from low status victims by avoiding them, being unfriendly, or even resorting to aggressive acts in an effort to adapt to their current social context and 'fit in' (Garandeau and Cillessen, 2006).

Generally, bullies tend to select one or two main targets to victimize, as this is the least risky and most effective means of bullying in the classroom setting; there is less chance of the victims supporting each other when they are isolated and in the minority. The fewer the number of victims, the more likely both bystanders and victims themselves are to blame the target, perceiving them as personally responsible for their plight. This point is reinforced by Thornberg's (2007) study alluded to earlier, which found that school children (all of whom considered themselves bystanders) attributed deviance on the part of the victim as the primary reason for bullying; essentially the victim is seen as "deviant, different, or odd, which in turn provokes others to bully him or her" (p. 317). In his writing Olweus (1978,

1991) posits that gradual cognitive changes in the perceptions of the victim occur over time. This has been corroborated more recently by Hedges and Perry (1999) and Ladd & Troop-Gordon, (2003) who found that victimized children, selected by bullies because they are already low in group status, become even more rejected over time. The blaming-the-victim mechanism has been underpinned by two classic theories: Lerner's (1980) Just World theory¹³ and Weiner's (1986) attributional perspective¹⁴. Both theorists espouse the view that "victim blame is not only used by aggressors to justify their behaviour, but...can be a more general mechanism that observers can activate when a negative episode, such as peer aggression, occurs." (Gini et al., 2008).

Hazler (1996) avers that children frequently choose not to intervene on behalf of the victim because they are unsure what they should do, or are worried they will make the situation worse (diffusion of responsibility). Caplan and Hay's (1989) study has suggested that diffusion of responsibility may, in part, contribute to a lack of involvement among bystanding children in a pre-school setting. Results suggest that while these young children knew how to respond to a distressed classmate, they did not believe they were supposed to intervene when more competent adult bystanders, such as teachers, were present. Olweus (1991) has shown that teachers are often in attendance when bullying occurs. Teachers are either oblivious to the occurrence of this behaviour, or may choose not to intervene. Crothers and Kolbert (2008) believe adult non-intervention can be viewed by children as endorsement, which in turn sustains and reinforces bullying, as well as non-disclosure of the event (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008).

Thornberg (2007, 2010), aiming to extend the body of literature relating to bystander effect among children and adolescents, used a single-case qualitative field study to explore the experience of fifth grade children who demonstrated passive or non-intervention bystander behaviour when witnessing a distressed peer. In addition to those processes already identified, he documented several others, including:

¹³ According to Lerner, the majority of people assume that the "fates and fortunes" of others are dependent on their character and behavioural patterns. Believing this, people feel secure in the assumption that they themselves will be exempt from suffering undeserved adversity (Gini et al., 2008).

¹⁴ Weiner's attributional perspective assumes that people commonly try to attribute causes to behaviour. Theoretically, attribution is considered to occur over three-stages: firstly, behaviour is observed, then determined to be intentional, and finally, attributed to internal or external causes (Gini et al., 2008)

- *Embarrassment association*: when the student does not want to join “the embarrassment-making audience” and add to the victim’s humiliation
- *Busy working priority*: when priority is given to a work project instead of attempting to help the distressed peer
- *Compliance to a competitive norm*: when the group’s predominant social norm is in conflict with helping behaviour, such as a classroom rule which prescribes when one enters the room they should be quiet, go directly to their place and sit down
- *Responsibility transfer*: the belief that teachers are the most capable individuals for dealing with potentially harmful situations in the classroom

2.9.2 Individual Factors

Tsang et al. (2011) believe that intrapsychic qualities are not only “directly and immediately relevant, they are also the factors most amenable to the control of the bystander” (p. 2280). In recent years, a number of individual attributes and personal characteristics, including moral reasoning (Hoffman, 2000), social cognition (Kaukiainen et al., 1999), empathy (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010), and personal attitudes around bullying and victimisation (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013), have been identified as possible predictors of bystanding behaviour. Previous studies have shown that both defenders and passive bystanders show low levels of aggression and are able to avoid victimisation (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Furthermore, both defending and passive witnesses have been shown to demonstrate average-to-good social-cognitive skills, specifically the ability to understand the intentions, thoughts and values of others¹⁵ (Caravita, Di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009; Gini, 2006).

i) Identity, self-efficacy and self-determination

According to Tsang et al. (2011) identity, self-efficacy and self-determination have a significant influence on the ways in which a bystander reacts during a bullying episode.

A coherent and positive self-identity¹⁶ is dependent “on building self-esteem, facilitating the exploration of, and commitment to, self-definition, and reducing inconsistencies in the self to

¹⁵ Also known as ‘theory of mind’ (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013)

¹⁶ Identity is defined by Tsang et al. (2011) as “a constellation of personality characteristics and social styles through which one defines oneself and is recognized by others.” (p. 2280)

enhance role formation and achievement” (p.2280). Numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between high self-esteem, general well-being and prosocial tendencies (Lease, Kennedy, & Axelrod, 2002; Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2006). Shek & Sun (2010) found that students with higher self-esteem were less inclined to engage in problem behaviour and demonstrated higher life satisfaction. Likewise, a positive *social* identity has also been linked to defending behaviour (Tsang et al., 2011). Research by Salmivalli et al. (1996) showed that children who come to the victim’s defence tend to have the highest social status. They concluded that “a child’s social approval (positive status) is connected with obedience to rules, with friendliness, and with prosocial interaction” (p. 3).

In addition to identity, self-efficacy and self-determination have also been identified as influential factors in the decision-making process of the bystander. Children and adolescents who feel incapable of stepping in to help their peers will, understandably, be less likely to do so (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010). Gini et al. (2008) claim social self-efficacy to be a primary distinguishing characteristic between those willing to intervene and those who remain uninvolved. High levels of self-efficacy beliefs, particularly in the realm of interpersonal relationships, were reported amongst defenders (Poyhonen & Salmivalli, 2008). Passive bystanders, on the other hand, scored low in comparison (Gini et al., 2008). This finding however, was not consistent with earlier research by Andreou and Metallido (2004) who found there to be no relationship between self-efficacy (for assertion) and defending in a sample of Greek primary school children.

Extending the work on self-efficacy, Pozzoli and Gini (2010) suggest that problem-solving coping strategies and personal responsibility for intervention are positively correlated with active intervention and negatively associated with passivity. Passive bystanding, on the other hand, was positively correlated with distancing strategies¹⁷.

ii) Empathy

Social cognitive skills notwithstanding, the influence of emotions on the thoughts and actions of the bystander are also worth mentioning. Cohen & Strayer (1996) define empathy as “the ability to understand and share another’s emotional state or context” (p.998). Although there

¹⁷ In a subsequent study, Pozzoli and Gini (2012) describe ‘distancing strategies’ as, “behavioural, cognitive, or emotional activities oriented away from a stressor to avoid it.” (p. 3).

are a limited number of studies investigating the relationship between empathy and bystanding behaviour, the majority of evidence available suggests a significant relationship between empathy and the actions of the bystander (Pöyhönen, Juvonen & Salmivalli, 2010). In a group of adolescent boys, Gini et al. (2007) found empathy to be negatively associated with bullying behaviour and positively related to the bystander's tendency to help their victimised classmates. Successive studies conducted by Gini and colleagues highlighted a positive association between empathy and both outcome behaviours (defending and passive) amongst adolescents (Gini et al., 2008).

Interestingly, when empathy is separated into its affective and cognitive components, affective empathy becomes a predictor of defending behaviour among preadolescent boys while cognitive empathy is shown to be associated with bullying behaviour in adolescence (Caravita, Di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009). Pöyhönen, Juvonen & Salmivalli (2010) comment on this result by hypothesising that the "cognitive understanding of others' feelings can be used against others, whereas feeling what others feel is more likely to trigger behaviours that would ease their negative affect" (p. 145).

iii) Moral and personal responsibility

As Pozzoli and Gini (2013) assert, "helping the victim of bullying should be regarded as a complex behaviour that includes not only the positive attitude toward the victim but also a 'moral' assumption of personal responsibility to intervene" (p. 3). It has been argued by some scholars that a high moral sensibility can explain the prosocial behaviour of certain children who observe bullying and provide assistance to the weaker individual (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013). With this in mind, one could assume that bystanders acting in less supportive roles would present with a greater degree of moral indifference. Additional research has shown however, that this is not always the case, especially when comparing defenders with their passive counterparts, who tend to demonstrate similar levels of moral competence and moral disengagement (Gini, 2006; Menesini et al., 2003). In contrast, passive bystanders have been reported to experience less guilt and shame, which some researchers liken to indifference (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). In these cases, the young person who witnesses the victimisation of

their peers may not experience any significant “moral conflict”¹⁸, which results in them feeling less responsible to intervene (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008).

2.10 Summary

It becomes evident, as one reviews the expansive literature on bullying, bystanding, and the multifarious issues in-between, that our understanding of the problem of school bullying has significantly increased over the past several decades. Worldwide collaboration and attention both from the media and the academic community has helped researchers unravel many of the facets of this phenomenon, however, despite this intensified focus, it seems that more questions need answering. This is especially true of the role of the bystander which has only recently been placed under the academic telescope. It is clear from previous bystander studies that group mechanisms, as well as individual factors, both play a role in the decisional processes of these individuals. What is not clear however, is how the pre-adolescent bystander understands their own role in the bullying process. For example, what dilemmas do these individuals experience when faced with a bullying situation and how do they perceive themselves in relation to their bullying and/or victimised peers? Given South Africa’s unique history and the legacy left by a violent and oppressive apartheid regime it is especially important to understand these anti-social processes in order to adequately address bullying in the school context.

¹⁸ Coined by Hoffman (2000), this moral conflict describes the experience of a person who witnesses someone else in pain, danger or distress and who has to decide whether or not to come to their aid. (Menesini & Camodeca, 2008)

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“It is clear that a story reflects a dynamic process, one which is influenced by a myriad of forces. Those who elicit, record, and analyse such stories need to be acutely aware of the ways in which their methods shape their findings.” (Engel, 2005, p. 215).

The following chapter provides a step-by-step description of the research design of this study. This includes a brief summary of the research aims, followed by a discussion on the theoretical framework underpinning this investigation, and the processes involved. Pertinent issues relating to reflexivity and ethical considerations, specific to qualitative research involving children, will also be examined. The terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’¹⁹ will be used interchangeably throughout this document. Kamp (2003) suggests that, “by using the two interchangeably, or as fits the context, you can capture the experiential quality of “telling a story.” At the same time, a particular way of thinking or knowing and a framework for telling – narrative – is revealed.” (p. 3).

A number of narrative researchers break from traditional academic research writing by including the ‘first-person’ in their text. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). This avoids the production of ‘author-evacuated text’ (Geertz, 1988) and ensures readers remain aware of the presence and influence of the researcher’s subjective assessments throughout the research process (Wolcott, 2001, p. 22). With this in mind, a first-person perspective was utilised at certain points in the write-up of this study, particularly when discussing the researcher’s choice of methodology and the analysis of the participants’ narratives.

Commented [SR1]: Correction – justifying my decision to write in first-person

3.1 Research Aims

As already highlighted, there is a paucity of South African research representing the voices of young people involved in school bullying. International literature suggests that the majority of children feel uncomfortable when witnessing peer victimisation. However, despite approximately 80% of learners believing that bystanders should intervene on behalf of the

¹⁹ A story is considered an example of a narrative, typically the term is used when speaking in a familiar, personal or conversational way. The word “narrative” calls to mind a particular genre with formal characteristics. A story is always a narrative, but narrative structure is not limited to story (Kamp, 2003)

victim, observational studies indicate that less than half do so. The most common behavioural responses of these young people are therefore not consistent with their private sentiments (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Twemlow, Fonagy & Sacco, 2004).

Over the past decade, there has been a sustained effort to better understand the contradictions inherent in the behaviour of the bystander (Salmivalli, Voeten and Poskiparta, 2011). Most of the research conducted on this subject has, however, been quantitative in nature, resulting in the subjective perspective of the bystanders themselves remaining markedly absent. The present study aims to address this gap by documenting the lived narrative experiences of children who witness bullying at school. Although predominantly exploratory in nature, the primary aims guiding my research were to capture how bystanders actively impart meaning to themselves and others when witnessing a bullying event, and how they negotiate, construct and perform their bystanding role.

Although researchers have speculated about how peer group mechanisms operate to perpetuate bully/victim problems and especially what leads to peer inaction on the part of bystanders, few have tested their hypotheses directly. Moreover, research to date has focused on observations or peer reports of 'adult-determined' bystander roles. What is lacking is the child/adolescent's perspective of their own experiences. The present study thus aims to examine what it is that children do, or try to do when witnessing bullying among their peers and, more importantly, why.

3.2 A Narrative Methodology

3.2.1 Experience-centered narrative research

This study was conducted using an experience-centered narrative approach (Squire, 2008). According to Reissman (2008), narrative research "refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (p.11). Central to these approaches is an interest in how people frame, remember and recount their experiences. Scholars working within a narrative framework believe individuals organise experiences of the world into narratives - meaningful units which help them make sense of the complexities and ambiguities existing in their lives (Moen, 2006). Narratives represent "storied ways of knowing and communicating" (Reissman, 2001, p.1); they provide links, connections,

coherence and meaning both to those who narrate them and those who listen. Typically, narrative analysis is case-centred and, like other qualitative methodologies located within an interpretive paradigm, focuses on the deepening of perception and experiential understanding rather than the accumulation of knowledge (Sikes & Gale, 2006).

The experience-centered approach employed in this study focuses specifically on studying the meanings of narratives as stories of experience, as opposed to events. Squire (2008) suggests that this work “rests on the phenomenological assumption that experience can, through stories, become part of consciousness.” It also “takes a hermeneutic approach to analysing stories, aiming at full interpretation and understanding.” (p. 16).

Experience-centered research identifies four defining characteristics of narratives, as outlined by Squire (2008). The first of these distinguishing factors is the assumption that a personal narrative incorporates all sequential and meaningful stories of personal experience shared by the individual; these can include event narratives, or those deemed more flexible with regards to time and experience. In general, Squire (2008) suggests, these narratives are “defined by theme rather than structure.” (p.17). Secondly, producing narratives is considered a fundamentally human endeavour, a vital means of human sense-making. Indeed, as Barthes (1966) avers, “the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind; there does not exist, and has never existed, a people without narratives” (p. 14). It is through stories, told to ourselves and to others, that we are able to interpret the world, our relationship to that world, and the relationships that exist between ourselves and others (Lawler, 2002). The third characteristic identified by experience-centered scholars, is the reconstructive nature of narratives across time and space. Essentially, narratives are the re-presentation of an individual’s experience; remembered and shared at a specific point in their lives to a specific audience and for a specific purpose (Etherington, 2007) Narratives both mirror reality, and reconstitute it. Moreover, they are considered to be jointly constructed by narrator as well as listener (Squire, 2008). Emphasis is placed on the participation between researcher and research subject, which positions the subject as a collaborator rather than an informant (Moen, 2006). Finally, experience-centered research posits that narratives are fundamentally transformative in nature. This assumption locates change and its attempted resolution at the core of personal narratives.

3.2.2 Studying children's narratives

Noble-Carr (2006) states, "the way we think about childhood inherently shapes the research in which we engage." (p. 3). Typically, narrative research involving children conceptualises the child as an active social agent, competent in voicing his or her experiences, and capable of fulfilling a valuable role in society. Children, like adults, are therefore considered fully adept in contributing to all aspects of the research process (Noble-Carr, 2006). Narrative scholars also advocate that children tell stories for a number of psychological purposes. According to Engel (2005), the stories children tell "do not merely convey special fantasies or the representation of unusual feelings or experiences, but also provide a fundamental intra- and interpersonal process through which children make sense of themselves in the world." (p. 200).

Although studying children's narratives provides us with unique insight into their worlds, it is important that researchers remain cognisant of the following points when undertaking an investigation of this kind (Engel, 2005). Firstly, children's stories vary as a function of development; as children become older there is a change in form and interpersonal context of their stories. For example, as they reach their middle childhood years, research has shown that children's stories become less spontaneous and expressive and more complete. Secondly, children's stories are shaped by the purpose they serve, as well as the age of the narrator (Engel, 2005). Studies have found that younger children, in particular, are especially sensitive to the reaction of their audience. Engel (2005) highlights the relevance of this to the research process:

Children are not likely to tell the kind of story to a researcher that they might tell to an intimate friend as a way of reaffirming intimacy, for instance. The child's sensitivity to context raises major questions about how typical the narratives elicited by a researcher can be. (p. 206)

In this regard, it is important that the researcher of child narratives remains aware of how closely associated the form of the story is to the function it is serving (Engel, 2005).

3.3 Participants and setting

3.3.1 Sampling of participants

The sample for this study consisted initially of ten²⁰ Grade 7 learners between the ages of 12 and 13 years old, all of whom attended the same primary school in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. Guided by the aims, objectives and practicalities of this study, participants were selected using purposive sampling which took place in two stages.

Purposive sampling selects participants according to specific criteria; including in the sample those elements that are of special relevance to the study; typically, the group has been specified in advance, based on the judgement of the researcher (Polkinghorne, 1995). These samples are characterized by particular features which support a detailed exploration of the principal themes and puzzles under investigation (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). Examples given for relevant criteria include: socio-demographic characteristics, experiences, behaviours and/or roles (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003).

The inclusion criteria set out for this study required the research subjects to be children between the ages of 9-14, who had witnessed bullying within their school environment. Children from this age group were pre-selected because developmental literature suggests they are able to reflect upon their own, and others' behaviour, in a reliable and candid way, and are at an age where the inclusion by peers is of primary importance (Mishna, 2004). More importantly, international research indicates that bullying peaks between grades 6-8 (Bauman, 2007; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). All Grade 7 learners at the school fulfilled the age requirement outlined above and were thus involved in the first phase of the research process.

Phase 1: Gathering written narratives from Grade 7 learners

The initial phase of sampling took place as part of the Grade 7's Life Orientation/English curriculum. One hundred and twenty learners from 4 Grade 7 classes were asked to complete a written narrative describing a time when they had observed bullying at their school. The

²⁰ This number was later reduced to seven, for reasons which will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter.

same instructions were read out and explained to each of the four classes involved (see Appendix for an outline of the instructions provided).

Phase 2: Selecting participants for interview

Once the narratives were completed, I selected 10 participants to interview based on the stories they produced.

Since it is depth of understanding rather than breadth of knowledge that is sought, qualitative research often relies on relatively small sample frames (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). Polkinghorn (2005) believes that participants for a qualitative study should not be selected because “they fulfil the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation.” (p.139). In view of this, as well the logistical considerations which arise in an educational setting, such as time-table scheduling, as well as the elaborate analytical procedures required of a narrative study, a sample size of ten was considered as manageable and worthy of investigation (Jones, 2004).

Of the 103 narratives that were obtained, 37 wrote stories that did not meet the study’s criteria, for example writing from the perspective of the bully or victim, or describing a bullying situation which occurred outside the school grounds. Of those who satisfied the brief, the stories were further categorised according to the type of bullying that was witnessed, the bystanding behaviour that was described, and the outcome of the event the child had observed. From these subgroups, I made the final selection based on the level of detail and self-reflexivity evident in each learner’s writing. It was my intention to select a group of participants who displayed variation with regards to their bystanding experience and yet, who would be able to reflect on, and articulate, their experience in a meaningful way²¹. Patton (2002) refers to this as stratified purposive sampling, a hybrid method which selects samples from within samples. During this procedure, subgroups of the population of interest are first identified and individual cases then selected from these subgroups in a purposive manner (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This allows for the in-depth discovery and description

²¹ This was a difficult and subjective task. In the end, those stories which described in detail the inner experience of the bystander, either in the form of their thoughts, feelings or beliefs, were given preference.

of characteristics that are similar and difference across subgroups, which could prove valuable when conducting exploratory research (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

Race and gender were not criteria in selecting this sample, fortuitously however, of the final participants approved, there were four African, four White and two Indian children represented, as well as an almost equal gender mix of four males and six females. Six of the ten participants were in the top academic set. Again, this was not intentional. However, it is not surprising that children with a greater proficiency in writing would produce stories in more detail.²²

3.3.2 Setting

The setting for this study is a co-educational, ex-model C primary school located in a historically white suburb of Durban. The school is well-resourced, and according to its website, prides itself on being “a diverse and dynamic learning community...committed to the care, development and growth of the whole person”. I was able to gain access to this location through personal connections with members of the school staff. Expressing a strong commitment to research that would contribute towards an improved learning environment, the school principal willingly gave permission for this study to be conducted at his school and assisted in obtaining relevant permission from the Department of Education for its completion. The Grade 7 teachers were equally co-operative and assisted me with the scheduling of both phases of the data collection process. Although bullying was not reported as a significant problem in the school, the principal and class teachers felt that an investigation into the perspective of the bystander would provide added insight into this issue.

3.4 Data Collection

The data for this research was collected in two stages which corresponded with the two phases of participant sampling. The first stage involved the collection of a written narrative, the second a semi-structured interview. Moen (2006) suggests that narrative researchers commonly draw on a variety of data collection methods when carrying out their research;

²² This point will be discussed further in the Limitations section of this dissertation.

eliciting more than one form of narrative has the potential to enrich understanding of the participant's experience. Polkinghorne (1995) identifies two acts of data collection (or data production as he prefers to call it) in narrative research: The first act of production involves selecting from "all of the possible sources that are available the ones that are most likely to inform the researcher about the character of the experience being explored." (p. 142). The second "occurs in drawing out from these sources the data that serve to render a refined and rich description of the experience under study" (p.142).

3.4.1 Stage 1: Written narratives

In the present study, the initial stage of data collection involved the production of written narratives. Participants were asked to write a story about an occasion when they witnessed bullying behaviour at their school. I provided instructions which highlighted the narrative aspect of the exercise, i.e. that their stories include a beginning, middle and end, and provided a standard definition of the terms 'bullying' and 'bystander'. It was explained from the outset that participation in the activity was voluntary and that the children's stories were not going to be used for marks or read by the teachers.

Although written accounts omit the performative and dialogic aspects of told stories (Engel, 2005), Polkinghorne (1995) considers them valuable supplementary sources of data in qualitative research. Written narratives were considered appropriate in this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, these stories were employed during the sampling of participants to identify those who would be capable of adequately reflecting on, and verbally describing, their experience as a bystander. Secondly, the activity was used as a rapport-building exercise. I was able to introduce myself in a non-threatening, group setting and outline the purposes of the research, as well as the collaborating role the children would be assuming should they wish to participate. Engel (2005) argues that children have certain expectations of what is required from them when interacting with adults in the school context. It is her opinion, that their responses, particularly during the interview process, may well reflect these expectations. In this regard, completing a written activity provided time for the participants to think about, process and write down their bystanding accounts in a safe environment with their peers present before engaging in a more intimate, and potentially more intimidating, one-on-one interview.

The third reason for including the written narratives, and possibly the most significant, is that they laid the foundation for the interviewing process. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that the researcher is required to dig below the surface in order to unearth experiential accounts. During the each interview, I began by referring to the participants' written stories in an attempt to 'dig' deeper in search of more in-depth narratives, and to provide the participants with a starting point for which to base their oral narration. It was thought that this would assist them during the interview process as it would hopefully minimize any insecurities or anxiety they may experience as a result of having to express themselves orally in front of a relative stranger.

3.4.2 Stage 2: Semi-structured Interviews

Once the participants were selected on the basis of their written stories, written permission was obtained from both the research subjects and their parents/guardians (see consent forms in Appendices). Following this, they took part in an individual, narratively sequenced, semi-structured interview (see interview schedule in Appendices). According to Squire (2008), this is the most common form of experience-centered narrative interviewing. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for the researcher and participant to develop rapport and actively construct knowledge as part of the interview process (Kvale, 1996). In narrative research, stories of experience are shaped through dialogues with the research subject (Moen, 2006). Squire (2008) describes researcher involvement as existing along a continuum, "depending on where the researcher 'thinks' the narrative lives". (p. 29).

Commented [d2]: Include in appendix

The interview schedule adopted in the present study included questions which focused on the plot (significant events in the story), characters (the actions of the bully, bullied and bystander), and underlying thoughts and feelings (experience) of the participants. These general themes were informed by Reissman's (2008) thematic approach to narrative analysis²³ and the experience-based approach embraced by Moen (2006). In addition, questioning methods were based on the guidelines proposed by Steward and Steward (1996). When interviewing children, they encourage interviewers to oscillate between open-ended and closed-ended questioning. Typically, the interview should begin with an open-ended question to encourage a spontaneous narrative and free speech. Following this, direct

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²³ Thematic analysis categorises accounts or aspects of accounts that are being told (Reissman, 2008)

questioning can be used to fill in any gaps which may appear in the narrative or clarify the researcher's understanding. This procedure is repeated throughout the interview session. Although questions were developed prior to this stage of the research, it was used as a guide only and questions were modified according to the responses of the participants (Smith, 2003). It has been suggested that a flexible method of this kind is particularly appropriate when interviewing children as it takes into account the variations in children's language and communication abilities, cognitive development, prior experience engaging with adults and personality types (Steward & Steward, 1996).

Most of the interviews took place during break sessions or extra-mural school activities, such as play rehearsals or sport's day practices. As already alluded to, the nature of power relations is of paramount importance in narrative research. Therefore an atmosphere that promotes "reciprocal and empowering interaction" is essential if both researcher and research subject are to produce data that is rich and meaningful (Cohn & Lyons, 2003, p.41). By allowing each child to decide where they would like to be interviewed (they could choose between 2 different venues) and offering them a chance to be in charge of the recording equipment, I hoped to add to their sense of empowerment in the research process. I also included a rapport-building or introductory phase at the beginning of each interview. This involved reiterating the purpose of the study and reading through a consent form with each participant, which they were then required to sign. I stressed the participatory role the children would be assuming in the research and encouraged them to think of themselves as experts in their personal experience of bullying. Each child was given time to ask questions and was encouraged to challenge me if they did not understand a question or agree with any of my clarifications. According to Engel (2005) this process is particularly worthwhile since "making explicit reference to both the child's and interviewer's expectations again contributes to an interview that is meaningful to both adult and child, and in which the child is more likely to freely participate." (p. 149). The interviews, which ranged from 20 minutes to just over an hour, were tape recorded. Interviewing took place either in the school counselor's room or the office of the public relations manager. Prior to the taping, the participants were presented with their stories and given the opportunity to re-read what they had written. They were then asked to share with me, in more detail, the story they had told.

Each session was transcribed as soon after the interview as possible. Conventions for transcribing in narrative research vary, however experience-centered scholars tend to produce

less detailed transcripts omitting, for instance, certain speech elements or nonverbal features, in the interest of ensuring narrative progression (Squire, 2008; Mishler, 1986). For the purpose of this study however, and because I did not want to leave out any potentially useful information, I opted for a more extensive approach, including all words, word fragments and clear paralinguistic elements, including laughs and emphases/drawn out words (identified in italics) (Squire, 2008). I also noted when a participant responded to a question with silence, or paused in between a question-answer exchange. Personal notes reflecting my own internal experience of the interview were written at the end each interview.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of data in narrative research is a complex and often controversial endeavor. Since narratives “do not speak for themselves or have unanalysed merit; they require interpretation when used as data in social research” (Reissman, 2005, p.2). In some cases, this interpretation focuses on “the relationships internal to a storied text” where attention is given to eliciting themes and analysing content and form (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.13). In other cases, focus is given to the contextual factors shaping the narrative, including historical and cultural contexts, audiences for the narrative and the dialogic interaction between researcher and research subject (Reissman, 2008). Since no single analytical model was considered appropriate for this study, an amalgamation of experience-centered methods were used, specifically the holistic-content perspective outlined by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998), and Holloway and Jefferson’s (2000) free association model. Reissman (2005) believes it is perfectly acceptable to combine different narrative approaches, as they are not mutually exclusive and, as with all typologies, boundaries are not always clear.

According to Lieblich et al. (1998), the first step in narrative analysis is finding meaning and structure in the text as a whole. To achieve this, they recommend re-reading the raw data several times, making notes and highlighting significant extracts and units of meaning until a pattern becomes apparent. There is no clear direction at this stage, although Holloway and Jefferson (2000) suggest it is important to respect each Gestalt as unique since “the significance of any one element of a person’s story will always be best understood within the context of everything we have been told by that person.” (Bryan & Loewenthal, 2001, p.21).

Following full immersion in the raw data, each case is then summarised into a 'pen portrait' or case study - a narrative account which "makes the person come alive for the reader" (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 70). Bryan and Loewenthal (2001) describe pen portraits as predominantly descriptive. They are holistic interpretations which identify focal themes and free-associated links, and should provide "enough information against which subsequent interpretations can be assessed." (p. 21). Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest presenting one's general impressions of each case as well as any features of the story that may be considered unusual, including contradictions or unfinished descriptions.

Once the pen portraits are completed, the researcher then decides on "special foci of content or themes" which emerge both within and across the participant's stories (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 63; Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). These are selected on the basis of the research aims and "distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, its repetitive nature and the number of details the teller provides about it" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 63). Omissions of certain aspects or a very brief reference to a subject in the story may also be considered as significant focal points worth discussing. The final stage of this process is a comparative analysis which compares and contrasts the dominant themes and focal points elicited from the participants' narratives. From this, "the researcher is then able to develop and test theories that give a predictive explanation of the stories, moving back and forth between the interviews themselves and generalizing about them in a classic hermeneutic circle." (Squire, 2008, p. 34)

From the outset of this study, a sample size of ten was considered suitable. However, as the research process unfolded it became apparent that this number was unrealistic considering the scope and page limitations of the research project. Subsequently, the decision was made to reduce this number to seven, selecting the narratives which illustrated a range of bystander experiences and were detailed and rich in description. This decision was made with reference to two other narrative studies using a similar case-study method (McCance, McKenna & Boore, 2000; Bryan & Loewenthal, 2001). In both cases, the authors chose to include fewer participants in the write up of their research, with McCance et al. (2000) choosing to develop only 6 out of a possible 18 narratives.

3.6 Reliability and validity

Assessing the reliability and validity of research-generated knowledge claims is an integral component of any social science research (Polkinghorne, 2007). Increasingly however, qualitative scholars have begun to question the value of applying these traditional criteria to the study of individual narratives. Webster and Mertova (2007), for instance, argue that narratives relate to the experience of individuals, and therefore “it can be neither expected nor assumed that the outcomes from one narrative or a collection of stories will consistently return the same views or outcomes.” Instead, by studying the “individual human experience of reality and the impact of critical events on our own understanding... differences between individuals are to be expected, indeed valued.” (p. 93). Subsequently, researchers working within a narrative framework, place greater value on the trustworthiness and dependability of their data compared to claims of consistency and the ability to generalize results.

In this regard, Reissman (1993) outlines three criteria she believes should be used when evaluating narrative research, namely, coherence, persuasion and pragmatic use. Coherence relates to the ways in which the various facets of a story are brought together to form a complete and meaningful picture. This can be evaluated both internally and externally by asking whether parts of the narratives ‘fit together’ as a whole and whether they are rendered meaningful and coherent from a theoretical perspective (Lieblich et al., 1998). Persuasiveness refers to the researcher’s ability to present their data, and subsequent interpretations, in a genuine and authentic way. Polkinghorne (2007) insists it is up to the readers of the research “to make judgments on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim.” (p.7). Persuasiveness is augmented when theoretical claims made by the researcher are supported with evidence from the research material and when alternative interpretations are taken into consideration (Reissman, 2008). Finally, pragmatic use, “the ultimate test of validity” as Reissman (2008, p. 198) describes it, evaluates whether a piece of narrative research is trustworthy enough to inform the work of others in the research community. Transparency as a researcher, which includes making explicit how methodological decisions were made and interpretations produced, is one way to achieve this.

Throughout the research process, every effort was made to follow the guidelines set out by Reissman (1993, 2008), Polkinghorne (2007) and others (outlined above) in attempting to

produce a meaningful, persuasive and honest narrative study. In an attempt to strengthen the coherence and persuasiveness of the findings, methods were selected which supported a holistic interpretation of the participants' accounts. These included a step-by-step description of the data collection process, a detailed transcription of each interview which aimed at producing an accurate account of what was said, and a holistic-content approach to the data analysis which provided verbatim quotations from both the participant's written and spoken narratives. Additionally, since this study centered on exploring the experiences of children, the power differences which naturally occur between researcher and research subject, especially in a school context, were openly acknowledged and efforts made to redress this issue by involving the children (as much as possible) in the research process and encouraging the participants to consider themselves as co-workers involved in this project. In the end, I am aware that my representations are not factual reports of events but rather interpretive accounts of the bystander's experience, my own attempts at "storying the stories collected." (Reissmann, 2008, p.188). The findings from this study are therefore relative and do not assume to represent a universal or incontrovertible truth that can account for the experience of other student populations.

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is closely related to issues of validity in qualitative research and should form a central part of the research process, especially when working with children. Maintaining a reflexive stance requires critical reflection, not only on the role of the researcher and their assumptions, but also on their choice of research methods and how they are implemented (Punch, 2002). In addition, reflexive practice emphasises the fact that researchers are not 'other' from those they study (Emond, 2005). As Emond (2005) suggests, "the researcher's own social biography and relationship with the field, constructs the 'lens' through which the researcher views the field." (p.126) Working with children can be especially challenging in this respect, as adults may experience difficulty in maintaining the necessary distance required to conceptualize children and childhood from the viewpoint of the child themselves (Solberg, 1996). This is reiterated by Fine and Sandstrom (1988):

It is difficult for an adult researcher ever to totally understand the world from a child's point of view: Assumptions that might seem valid because we believe that we know and

understand children, both because we were children once and because we see them so often, present a methodological problem. (p. 35)

Having worked as a teacher prior to undertaking this research and having witnessed bullying as a child, I was fully aware that I had my own biases and preconceptions relating to the topic of bullying. Unbeknown to me, as a teacher, I had embodied the role of bystander on a regular basis, witnessing students bully other students in the classroom, playground and outside the school grounds. During this time, I had been called upon to console victims and reprimand bullies, and as a result, became acutely aware that the bully-victim relationship was not as straight forward as I had previously thought. When interacting with the participants, I frequently found myself associating them with children I had taught previously. Feelings of empathy, ambivalence, irritation and dislike were triggered during the interviews, as I imagined each child in the classroom situation, or superimposed my own childhood experiences onto theirs. In order to address these biases, and remain aware of how they may influence my understanding of this issue, it was imperative that I stayed self-reflective throughout the research process. In this regard, I found it useful to keep notes documenting my own thoughts and feelings at the end of each interview. This performed the dual function of increasing my ability to remain self-aware and reflexive, while also providing me with useful information I could include in my narrative analysis.

Since I have worked with children previously, in an environment which fostered positive adult-child relationships, I felt confident in my ability to engage with the participants of this study in an appropriate and empowering manner. In practise however, it was far more complex than I had anticipated. As my interaction with the children was limited, it was difficult to develop the rapport required to elicit detailed narratives from certain participants. Considering my own lack of experience interviewing children, and the participants' inexperience at being interviewed, it was often difficult to alleviate anxiety and maintain flow during the interview process. This improved with time, however I frequently questioned whether the children were attempting to portray themselves in a certain light and provide socially desirable responses to my questioning. Understandably, considering my age, appearance and background, it is very possible the children continued to associate me with their teachers. As a result, they may have felt uncomfortable sharing their private experiences with me, especially since the issue of bullying is loaded with moral connotations. Furthermore, the elements of silence which were infused in many aspects of the participants'

stories could also be interpreted as mirroring the silence associated with bystanding in general, as well as representing dissociated feelings of guilt, shame and helplessness which, on both a conscious and subconscious level, they did not want to reveal.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Bullying in children is a sensitive subject to investigate. Throughout the course of this research it was therefore important that ethical issues were carefully and respectfully considered and research decisions made which emphasized the importance of respecting children and their diverse competencies (Noble-Carr, 2006). As Denzin (1989) points out:

Our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us. (p. 83)

Prior to the commencement of the study, a research proposal was developed in accordance with academic requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics committee. Following this, the school principal, who agreed to the project, assisted in obtaining permission from the school Governing Body and the Department of Education for the research to be conducted at his school (See consent forms in Appendices).

3.8.1 Informed Consent

To ensure autonomy of respondents, written consent from both the selected participants and their parents was obtained before the interview sessions (tier 2 of the study). The initial written accounts (tier 1) produced by the Grade 7 children, fell under the Life Orientation curriculum covered within the school's syllabus and therefore written consent was not required. Verbal consent for the stories to be read by the researcher was sought out however; and it was clearly explained that handing in these stories was voluntary and they would not be shown to teachers or other school staff.

Both class teachers and the researcher explained each stage of the study to the children who were encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns they had about the process. It was

explicitly stated that they would be at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time should they wish and that all participation was voluntary.

3.8.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Issues of anonymity can be fairly challenging when working with children in a close-knit school community. The Grade 7's were encouraged to use code names in their writing when referring to other learners at the school and wrote only their initials and class at the top of the page. In order to protect the anonymity of the selected participants as far as possible, pseudonyms were used throughout the write up of the research findings and the school remained unnamed. It was however necessary for names of the chosen participants to be given to class teachers as they assisted with timetabling the interviews and sending out the letters of consent.

3.8.3 Child protection

Considering the sensitive nature of this research it was possible that the participants could experience distress when thinking about past or current traumatic experiences related to bullying. Taking cognizance of this, the emotional states of the participants were continually monitored throughout the duration of the project, both by myself, and the children's teachers. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study and were offered the services of the on-site school counselor in case they required additional support; this provision was also extended to their parents. In addition, parents were provided with the number of the UKZN Applied Psychology clinic, and encouraged to contact either myself or my supervisor if they were concerned about any aspect of the research process and required further psychological assistance. None of the participants, or their parents, chose to utilize this service.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
ANALYSIS: PEN PORTRAITS**

This chapter offers a summary of the narratives for each of the seven participants selected, in the form of pen portraits or mini case studies. Each portrait is written differently, in some I have included sub-headings to assist in collating the various stories into an over-arching narrative, others were less complex and therefore did not require this additional structure.

4.1 Sunita: “Were they really our friends?”

My first impression of Sunita was that of a confident, insightful and well-spoken 12-year-old girl. In many ways, she was the most ‘adult-like’ of all the interviewees, often engaging with me as one would a peer of equal standing or age. Throughout our interview Sunita portrayed a robust self-esteem and sense of self-agency. She described herself as someone who is known for speaking out about matters that are important to her...

I’m brave when it comes to that but most people don’t test me because they know I will speak my mind. I always speak about what I think and I don’t ever hold it back

...and who has confidence in her own problem solving ability: *What’s the point of telling teachers when you can sort it out yourself.*

Sunita’s performance suggested that she wanted to be viewed by me as a principled individual, a defending bystander and a brave friend - someone willing to stand up to a powerful bully in defense of the more powerless victim. She resolutely dissociated herself from the role of the bully, who became ‘the other’:

I always protect the victim. No matter who’s right, pick the victim. That is, I think, the right way because the victim is being bullied... I know I wouldn’t ever bully anybody. I may, like, have an argument but it’s never been to the point when I bully anybody. ‘Cos it’s not me.

By doing this, she positioned herself as the hero of her story, albeit not always successful (which she was not afraid to admit to), but a champion of the weak nevertheless. Interestingly, I found Sunita quite forceful in her opinions of herself and of others, often judging her peers harshly for their flaws, and yet choosing to ignore the same shortcomings in herself. While this behaviour can be considered age-appropriate, it caused me to question whether Sunita may be viewed by her classmates as intimidating, despite insisting that she would never bully another person or talk about them behind their back, because “*it’s stupid*” and “*immature*”.

Sunita’s story spans many months, comprising a series of incidents which unfold into a cohesive narrative underscored by themes of alienation, exclusion and the striving for a stable social identity. The complex nuances of in-group/out-group dynamics comprised the core context of her story and revealed the ways in which the hierarchies implicit in pre-adolescent cliques are formed and maintained. Focusing on Sunita’s role as a bystander, it became clear that one cannot separate this from the context within which the role is created. In this way, she is as much the bystander as she is the victim; bystander to the bullying of her friend, but equally so, victim of in-group subjugation. In order to chart the critical points in Sunita’s personal narrative and make sense of the themes which arose, I separated her account into three temporally-ordered, chronological parts.

4.1.1 Seeking acceptance

The overarching story began with Sunita and her friend joining a new friendship group, because they “*thought it would be cool to hang out with the popular group.*” From the outset Sunita makes the listener aware of her need to belong to this group, her (somewhat understated) desire to be popular and liked. As the plot develops however, it becomes evident that they are not fully accepted, in fact, they are gradually marginalised because they are different:

We were the only two that were not of colour so they would always talk in Zulu, which was fine in the beginning, but then they would talk about us in Zulu.

Sunita then begins to make a distinction between herself and her friend:

Luckily for me I caught onto the language and could understand what they were saying and she didn't, so I used to always translate for her.

By depicting her friend as more helpless, more alienated because she does not understand Zulu, Sunita gives prominence to her role as a self-appointed protector. In doing this, she sets herself up as more powerful, and perhaps projects her own, displaced vulnerability onto someone else. She also implicitly implies that she is one step ahead of the bullies and therefore less vulnerable to their schemes. It is perhaps significant that throughout Sunita's account, she omits mentioning any personal feelings she may have been experiencing - there is no reference to hurt, disappointment, or other emotions common to narratives of social exclusion. Rather, when she does allude to emotions of any kind, they are those of her friend:

She was sad and distant from everybody ...she got really hurt and she went to counselling with Mrs B (school counsellor) because it really touched her and she couldn't deal with it anymore.

4.1.2 Bullying and betrayal

Sunita does however express feelings of betrayal, mistrust and anger in response to the bullying her friend experiences at the hands of the other girls in the clique, most especially the powerful leader, who becomes the archetypal villain of the story. As the other group members begin to employ increasingly divisive techniques to maintain their exclusive position at the top of the social hierarchy, Sunita realises that not only has she and her friend been excluded from this inner circle, but that they are being manipulated and used as well, as described by Sunita:

They started going out to movies and then they were 'the big five'. It was a group of five girls... the rest of us got left out... and when they went out they'd meet up and talk about us when we weren't there...Then the following week they would talk about how much of fun they had, they would talk like that in front of those who never got invited. They made us very unsure of ourselves and think 'were they really our friends?' Sometimes they were nice to us only when we had something to offer, which is not fair.

At this stage, Sunita describes her role as the bystander and the defending actions she felt compelled to take in this position out of loyalty for her friend and a greater awareness (or anxiety) of how these girls were manipulating them for their own purposes. The example selected here depicts one of a series of episodes which took place within the group at break time. This particular incident forced Sunita to choose between her desire to belong and her desire to be true to herself and fulfill her responsibility to protect her friend. In the end, she chooses to speak out for what she believes is right, maintaining a sense of coherence between her beliefs about herself and her behaviour:

My friend... was starting to go red and that's when I knew something was going wrong. So I confronted them and they said they weren't talking about her because they didn't know I understood the language, like not properly, but I understood what was happening... and they carried on talking. And when I confronted them they said they weren't, they were talking about somebody else but I knew they were...

According to Sunita's account however, the true villain behind this flagrant bullying, who presided over the rest of the girls with malevolent powers, was, I assumed, the group leader. Although never explicitly labeled as the leader, Sunita describes her as the instigator of her friends victimization:

There's one girl in particular that just torments my friend. If there's a group of us she will torment her - give my friend dirty looks or look her up and down, you know what girls do.

The power dynamic introduced earlier in the narrative is further illustrated as Sunita paints a picture of this powerful, seemingly popular bully, who is able to control those around her by 'poisoning' and 'brain-washing' them into acting as she wishes. And yet, according to Sunita, the power and popularity this girl wields, is based on pretense - it is not real. Interestingly, she never seems to confront the ring-leader bully, although she claims, more than once, that she is not afraid of her. Instead, in this case, she decides to remain the passive bystander, keeping her interactions with this particular girl to a minimum:

I've never said anything mean to her. I just keep my distance. She has been mean and excluded us but I've never spoken about her behind my back.

The anger she does express however, is directed predominantly at the girls who support this individual, the reinforcing bystanders, the girls she thought were their friends:

I was angry because she (the victim) is one of my close friends. I was angry because she used to be their friend at one stage... My one friend told me that she doesn't like the bully. Nobody in that group likes her, she told me. And the rest of them have told me, but they pretend to be her friend and I'm not sure why they do that. They talk about her behind her back and stuff and I told her it's not right and I told them, the friends, that that's not right because you just feeding her and making her ego bigger.

4.1.3 A new sense of belonging

Although Sunita is aware that she does not always understand the thoughts, motivations and behaviours of others, it seems the conflict in her narrative is resolved when she acknowledges that the power she has, may not come from her popularity or the group she belongs to, but rather from her sense of loyalty and her belief in herself and her ability to change her circumstances and the circumstances of those around her. Sunita and her friend choose to move away from their original friendship group and start their own group, one in which they can belong without any pretence and mistrust. As Sunita concludes in her written account, both her and her friend transform into better people as a result of this experience and realise that being authentic is more important than trying to change in order to be popular. *"We must look at ourselves in the mirror and think, "Do we need to change?"*

While the ending of Sunita's written story suggests all loose ends were tied up, and everyone lived 'happily ever after', her oral narration was far more complex and the ending more ambiguous. Sunita suggested that she had moved on and changed, but that the girls who she had once sat with could very possibly be participating in the same bullying as they had before. Despite this however, she claims that she has remained on friendly terms with some of them. The facade of friendships and the gossiping behind others' backs was an issue Sunita appeared to accept as an integral part of the social landscape one was required to navigate at school, reflected in her final statement:

I don't know if it still carries on we, don't talk about it anymore, we act civilized to each other but we're not close friends....some of them pretend to be our friends, me and my

friend, they pretend to be our friends, but you see when it comes to that you don't know who the genuine ones are.

4.2 Mbali: “What do you think about me?”

Mbali, a school prefect and ‘popular person’ (as she described herself), shared her personal experience as a bystander with a degree of contemplation and sensitivity, often articulating her inner thoughts and feelings as part of the narrative. Her story outlines what one might identify from the literature as a typical school bullying scenario: a boy, Freddie, with a learning difficulty (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), is verbally harassed in class on a regular basis by Anele, a loud, “mean” bully, who encourages the rest of the peer group to join in. The multiple exchanges between bully and victim are played out in front of an audience of peers, some of whom choose to remain passive spectators, while others (his friends included) become directly involved as bullies, reinforcers and/or defenders:

This person gets bullied by one person... He's got ADD so he's really active and sometimes he can't control himself you know, I think he takes Ritalin... and then some people didn't like him so they just start saying something not nice to him, like he'll just talk and say something, and then everyone will say, “Ah, you always want attention”, and stuff like that. And then when that person says that, then another person joins in, and then another person and another person, and then eventually it's everyone. She (Anele) always says that he's irritating and on Tuesday she was like, “he can just shut up... I'm tired of embarrassing you in front of everyone”. She tunes him, like emotional and verbal abuse, well like bullying. She's like, “shut up, I'm tired of embarrassing you in front of your friends.

4.2.1 Blending into the background

For the majority of Mbali's narrative, she positions herself as an observer, looking from the outside in, watching the drama unfold like a play on stage. She is not alone in this role instead she is able to keep out of the spotlight and away from potential victimisation herself by blending in with others like her, as she claims:

I just watch, I don't do anything, I just watch it because if you try to get in then they'll start to bully you and you can't do anything about it, just keep quiet with the other people at the side and just look.

She continues to explain how she uses her fellow bystanders and her school work as reasons for avoiding involvement as well as justifying this strategy by claiming that Freddie is able to stand up for himself:

What I do is, because some people that sit behind me or next to me, they don't do anything, so I just look around and do my work and then when I'm finished, I'll talk to people who are not bullying the person and then I'll just, like, ignore it and pretend like nothing's happening... It's not like he's vulnerable, he can, like, stand up for himself.

On more than one occasion Mbali articulates her thoughts as a form of commentary provided from the sidelines. In this way, she maintains a distance from the bullying itself, while still showing her concern for the boy being harassed:

Well, the thing is with the boy that is always picked on, he's got ADD, so anytime he does something, the people they just say, "Ah, he's got ADD, he always wants attention and always he makes a noise" and then today he was being bullied, like virtually the whole class, but I was just watching, and I was thinking, "you shouldn't have done that"

4.2.2 Stepping into the spotlight

Although primarily an observer, at times Mbali chooses to forgo her passive role and become an active participant in the narrative, stepping in to defend the victim. She indicates two primary reasons for doing this. Firstly, in both her written and oral accounts, she responds empathetically to Freddie's plight, disturbed by the fact that he may feel embarrassed and upset. It is possible Mbali responded in this way because she associated his experience with a similar situation of her own, which was not quite bullying, but hurt her feelings nonetheless:

Sometimes at home, when I'm alone in my room. I just think about it... Because some people, you know when they tune you, like "Get a life" I like to think of that when I'm at home, because one of the girls said that to me and I was like, "what did I even do to you?"

Here she reveals a developing sensitivity towards the ways in which the words or ‘tunes’ of others can cause another to feel hurt. Moreover, by concluding her remarks with a question, she implies that the verbal attack she was subjected to was unjust and uncalled for. Later Mbali describes Freddie’s experience along similar lines:

I felt really bad because it’s not fair for a group of people to gang up on one person and expect them to be okay with it.

Secondly, Mbali’s efforts to put a stop to the bullying also appeared to be motivated by a concern for external sanctions:

I was like, “Guys we must keep quiet ‘cos he’s going to end up in tears, and then half the class could get into trouble after what they were doing.”

Freddie’s crying in this case would be a cause for concern not because it indicates serious emotional harm, but rather because it could lead to the teacher and principal finding out about the bullying. At this stage, she seems more perturbed by the way her class (and therefore indirectly herself, and her school) would be perceived by others if they were punished:

If you get into trouble on your, like, last term, everybody’s going to be like “Ah, this is such a boring school because you guys got caught in your last term”. You might find out that the person who’s bullying him might get suspended and then a few more people and ...when someone is suspended you look at them in a different way. And they’ll say the last term in Howard School was the worst ever and I don’t want to ever go back to that school.

Initially Mbali portrays herself as a silent member of the group, repeating phrases such as “I’ll just keep quiet” and “I don’t say anything.”, however when she feels the victimisation has gone too far, she will become vocal and speak out against the behaviour in an effort to convince the perpetrators to stop. In doing so, she transforms her character into ‘the voice’ of reason and morality within the class. It is worth noting that her protestations are always directed towards the group (she doesn’t seem to confront Anele at any stage), and do not seem very effective:

I was trying to stop them but then they kept saying I am being forward²⁴ and I should let Freddie deal with the truth.

Essentially, by forming a united gang, the group is able to drown out her pleas, while Anele chooses simply to ignore her and “normally just carries on”.

Despite this, Mbali still attempts to portray herself as having a significant role in the school and emphasises her ability to be listened to by “most of the class”. She goes as far as suggesting that she is in fact more powerful than Anele in terms of social security:

She doesn't have as many friends as I do, like I even think about it, if you had to take sides...I would say all the people that like me go to that side and all the people who like her go to that side, there would be a really huge difference. Obviously I'd have more people. She's popular in grade 7, but not in the whole school...

At a later stage in the interview however, focusing again on the classroom bullying, Mbali admits that, while half the class will listen to Anele, only a quarter listen to her. Regardless of what she says or does, Mbali seems aware that she has little power to influence Anele's conduct and ultimately the behaviour of the grade 7 group. One therefore assumes that this social feedback has a negative effect on her sense of self-agency, her belief in her ability to bring about true change, therefore feeding into her passive bystander behaviour.

One way she attempts to solve this, is by moderating her interactions with Freddie. During episodes when he is irritating her in the classroom by acting silly, if she reacts to him out of annoyance, the bullies would use this against him:

I can't always show the others cos then they gonna say that “Ah, look you're irritating Mbali now, and look you're bringing attention to yourself by irritating her.

Instead, she tries to model the correct behaviour, insisting that she treats him with respect, which is why he listens when she asks him to stop. In this way, Mbali believes she is making

²⁴ “Forward” meaning presumptuous.

some effort, although indirect, to alleviate the victim's suffering by showing others how to engage with him. This helps to assuage her own guilt.

4.2.3 Fitting into the group

Throughout her entire narration, Mbali places great emphasis on how she is perceived by others. She constantly seeks affirmation with regards to her social standing, wanting to be well-liked and considered a "nice", "normal" person. The dilemma she faces with this however, centers on her belief that popular people are often not liked because they are "mean", and, "if you look really deep..[are] not good". She is therefore required to ensure at all times that she is liked and popular for the right reasons. This means she cannot associate with, or act like those who are perceived as popular.

Mbali expands on this theme half way through the narrative when she re-enacts a conversation she had with an unnamed group of her popular peers, who start off as hypothetical but become real towards the end of the dialogue:

*Well the popular people, they're confident. I'm a popular person but I'm like, I don't go around like that. And people don't like them because they're such a nice person, they just like them cos they're popular. You know, like if you hang around popular people you just become popular, **they think**, but like, if I asked some of the group if they actually liked these people, they said no they don't like them because they're so mean. And I'm like, "what do you think about me?" and they said, "no you're so reserved, you not like one of those people that are always wanting to do something, so we do actually like you, but the other people are always doing things for attention and just bully people for the attention and power of being popular.*

According to Mbali, friends are a form of protection from 'dissing' or 'tuning', a social currency of sorts. They are therefore crucial backup if one wants to feel safe when negotiating social situations:

It's like you always have kind of protection, you know, if you're their friend and they come round to your house to tune you, they'll back you up.

As she explains in Freddie's case:

His friends they also stopped doing it because they see he's had enough. They say... "No guys we shouldn't do this because we're hurting his feelings and he's keeping his sadness inside."

Paradoxically, although Mbali claims that she does not participate in the bullying and chooses to sit "with people who are not popular because they're actually nice", she is unknowingly under the peer group's control. Her fear of being called a snitch, or being accused of seeking attention like Freddie, prevents her from informing a teacher or confronting the ring leader of the bullying. This fear challenges her ability to act like the good person she desires to be and keeps her in line with the rest of the group. As a result, the harassment continues and the status quo remains unchanged. As she concludes in her written story:

Right when Anele was going to say something really mean, the teacher walked in and the whole thing finished and Anele just carries on with her life like nothing happened at all and unfortunately...still kind of bad mouths Freddie.

4.3 Sudhir – "I said I'd stay here and he said he would go and tell."

Sudhir, a softly spoken boy who wore glasses and liked science and maths, struck me from the outset as a probable target for bullies. This was purely my own subjective evaluation based on the stereotypical construct of the 'nerdy' victim, and was not corroborated by Sudhir's narrative. I found this particular interview one of the most challenging. It ran for a mere 19 minutes and I struggled to engage with Sudhir in a way that would elicit more than basic retelling of the events he had witnessed. I wondered whether this was because, on a cognitive or developmental level, he was unable to express himself or offer personal insight in the same way as his peers, or whether he felt shy and uncomfortable in front of a stranger and therefore unwilling to open up. Additionally, I questioned my interviewing method as I felt that my line of enquiry may have been too closed-ended and prevented us from exploring his narrative on a deeper level. Nevertheless, since Sudhir constitutes a member of the bystanding community, I feel that his personal account, however minimal, captures the experience of a typically uninvolved bystander and therefore provides relevant data for this study.

The bullying episode Sudhir chose to describe was similar in setting to Mbali's as it took place in the classroom while the teacher was out on an errand. The victim in this case was a learner who had been placed in charge of the class and was required to take down names of anyone who talked during the teacher's brief absence. After following the teacher's instruction this boy became the target of verbal abuse from those whose names he wrote down with others joining in on the action. After a while, this boy rubbed everyone's names out and started to cry. The teacher then came into the classroom and punished all those who were bullying with de-merits.

Sudhir's retelling of this episode did not extend far beyond outlining the chronological events which occurred. When probed about the boy being teased, he claimed that he used to get bullied in grade 5, but was no longer picked on other than this most recent occasion. He was described in a similar vein to the victim from Mbali's narrative, as impulsive and prone to fights, demonstrating typical bully-victim characteristics:

He got into confrontations easily and, like, when two people were talking to each other he would interrupt.

Sudhir's narrative, again like Mbali, sums up the experience of 'the outsider'. He too, did not want to get involved for fear of becoming a victim himself:

I sat and watched...I didn't say anything because I didn't want everyone to start to tease me, so I waited for a teacher to hear the noise. But nobody came.

In contrast to Mbali's narrative however, Sudhir seems completely removed from the in-group/out-group dynamics of the class and grade. His understanding of the situation is presented as far less nuanced and more simplified. He is not involved with the victim or the bullies and appears to have no significant interaction with any of them. Moreover, there was a certain passivity and abdication of responsibility expressed by Sudhir. He expected others to deal with the situation, first and foremost his teachers, and then his peers, who were more confident and proactive. He described the bullies in a fairly one-dimensional manner, simply as learners who get de-merits and are not popular. He was unable to elaborate on their

characters and could not give reasons why they may have bullied the victim on this specific occasion.

Sudhir only alluded to an emotional response three times throughout his narration. At one point in his written story he stated, "*I felt sorry for him.*" Later, after this boy had cried and was being called a 'cry baby' he wrote, "*I felt bad.*" He repeated this when asked in the interview to describe his feelings during the bullying event. One can assume from this reaction and the way in which he positioned the victim as the main character of his story, that he identified himself more closely with the experience of this boy than with that of the bullies. Sudhir maintained that he had never been bullied before, although he mentioned a series of incidents where he was picked on by another boy in his grade, who according to him, pushed him around and continually told him he was doing things wrong but "*not in a nice way.*"

Sudhir has two friends, one of whom he is closer to and spends most of his time with. In the past he remembers his friend being bullied and another friend going to tell a teacher. It never crossed his mind to confront the bully or stand up for his friend. Indeed, Sudhir shared that he had never intervened on behalf of another student before. To him, the teacher was the only person able to put a stop to his friend's bullying. It is possible that feelings of anxiety and helplessness prevented him from taking a stand.

Overall, the impression that remained after talking with Sudhir was that he was an isolated member of grade 7, existing with one other friend in a remote world, outside of the intense social hierarchy mentioned by the other participants. The results of this exclusion means that he is passed over by bullies, since his reaction would not be worth bullying for, and thus he has little opportunity to strengthen his problem solving skills and demonstrate pro-social behaviour. This exclusion is, perhaps, a protective mechanism. By painting a vague picture of the bullying scenes he has witnessed and/or been involved in, Sudhir remains removed and therefore buffered from the potentially disturbing experience of being a bystander. Nevertheless, despite these attempts to avoid participation, he continues to epitomise the quintessential passive bystander.

4.4 Jenny – “*They know I don’t really care.*”

Jenny, 13 years old at the time of our meeting, came across as an assertive, talkative young girl. Her interview provided a richly layered narrative in which she articulated her beliefs about herself, her likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and especially her social standing amongst her peers with emerging insight and self-confidence. Enjoying the opportunity to have her opinions listened to and valued, Jenny interpreted her bystander experiences with a level of maturity not evident in some of the other participants’ narratives. She seemed eager to present herself in an adult-like and sympathetic manner, and spent much time emphasising her pro-social attributes and rationalizing her negative thoughts and behaviour.

As she told her story, Jenny engaged in a process of meaning-making, often re-phrasing her statements, or working through her understanding of social issues via role-play and soliloquy in order to prove her maturity, personal power and self-agency, not only to herself but to her listener. Jenny had a tendency to be condescending when I asked for clarification on certain issues, using words like ‘obviously’ and ‘like I said’ which were accompanied by rolling eyes and an irritated tone. I was left with the impression that this confidence could easily be misconstrued as superiority and self-righteousness which may not ingratiate her to her peers or teachers.

Much of what Jenny shared during her interview centered around her thoughts on the concept of popularity and how the key social players in her school operate. From the beginning, she emphasized her disapproval of the school’s social hierarchy. When referring to the majority of her Grade 7 peers, she would be fairly dismissive about their behaviour, periodically expressing total disbelief at the lengths certain individuals would go in order to be accepted by the popular groups. Her identity as an individual emerged from this narrative and was a fundamental part of how she viewed herself. She made it known that she is not considered popular by her peers, but that she did not deem their judgment of any worth, repeating several times that she and her ‘unpopular’ friends was not concerned about what the rest of the grade thought about them:

Well, there are a few people like them who have the same taste in, like, fashion and things and, at a young stage, like, in Grade 1 or so, they’ll go and make friends with each other

and then they'll start ganging up on us, on the people that are different. No, I'm saying this wrong...it's like the people are basically like more trendy, so people notice them so they get more popular but people like myself, and my friends, we don't really care about that so we just stay down there.

Jenny employed a number of defense mechanisms in an attempt to deal with her early rejection from the in-group. These included projection (seeing her friends and others in her year group as vulnerable individuals who need protecting, rather than confronting her own anxiety and/or insecurities), reaction formation (repetitively informing me that she did not want to be popular and was happy not to be liked by her peers) and rationalisation (neutralizing any negative feelings of herself by rationalizing her behaviour and providing reflections as to why she may act like a bully in one instance but defend a victim in another).

Since her narrative lacked a sense of coherence and was somewhat disjointed, I chose to group together her bullying experiences under three separate headings which signify each of the different roles she embodied at various times in her life. Her primary position throughout the narrative was that of the defender, however her behaviour changed according to circumstance and was also shaped by her experiences as a bully-victim.

4.4.1 The defending experience

As she spoke, Jenny appeared most comfortable positioning herself as a defending bystander. Having been subjected to victimization herself, and aware of how it feels to be targeted, she felt that this was the only option available to her. This was magnified by the fact that other people would stand by and do nothing, something which she perceived as inexcusable. Moreover, by choosing to intervene, she continued to set herself apart from the crowd, reinforcing the construction of her identity as an empathetic, principled and unique individual:

I don't see why people don't do that [defend the victim] because if you were bullied you'd want everyone to come and say, "Ah, it's ok, it's ok, they didn't mean it". But now when some people just watch and they go, "Whatever", I don't get it...this person has dug into them, probably about something personal, and started teasing them about it and you don't want to go and just make sure they're OK? I don't get it.

When recounting an incident involving one of her good friends, who was as close as a sister to her, she discusses her confusion at the bully's behaviour and her reaction at the way her friend was being treated:

I didn't just feel angry, I felt shocked that Hannah would be so mean to Lola (friend), I also felt angry cos like I said Hannah doesn't know anything about Lola. She can't just go be mean to her when she doesn't even have anything to back it up, she can say stuff like that to her friends, I don't want her to at all, but she can go and tease her friends, because she knows stuff about them, but she doesn't know anything about Lola so she can't say those things.

Her immediate response was to stand up for her friend: *"I just went there, I just walked in there and said, "Stop it, you don't know anything about Lola. You can't tell her these things because you don't know her."* Following on from this, Jenny takes her friend to the bathroom and decides, like Sunita, that the best way of dealing with the situation would be proactive and move away from the group of girl bullies. Here confidence in her ability to solve the problem is reflected in the number of "I" statements Jenny makes:

Well ya, she swore at us and walked away and Lola was really upset, she was just like crying, so I took her to the bathroom and I cleaned her up and we went outside and the group were sitting there and they were just like staring at us, and we were just sitting under the shelter and they were just staring at us and we were feeling very uncomfortable and I could see she was very agitated so I was just like, let's go sit behind there, like here behind the other side, let's just go sit here where we can't see them, so we will feel better.

Jenny's relational loyalty is a strong theme in her narrative. She is fiercely protective over her close friends and family. In this role, Jenny fights for the rights of those who she perceives as more fragile and defenseless than her. An example of this is also seen when she recounts a bullying incident involving her sister who was sent to a remedial school because she wasn't coping in mainstream. According to Jenny, her sister *"has a problem"* and that makes her more exposed to being picked on by her peers. In cases like these, Jenny's defending behaviour changes. Instead of standing up to the bully, she considers the feelings of the victim and tries to minimize their embarrassment or hurt as much as possible.

Her strategy in this particular case was to remove her sister from the bullying situation and keep her away from the bully, a technique which she frequently uses, as noted in the previous example with her friend. Again, like Sunita, it is possible that Jenny knows the more powerful and admired bullies may not listen to her if she was to confront them, instead the reason she offers focuses on the victim's plight. It is her opinion that facing up to the bully could be even more harmful to the victim, as it would result in another person talking about them in public and making an issue out of something they are self-conscious about:

Yes, I didn't want to make it worse, because she knows she has a problem and she's very... it's like her weak point, she's very fragile about it. As soon as you start mentioning it's a big problem...So I didn't want to get started, I didn't want to get her crying, cos I love her you know, so I just said, "Let's go".

4.4.2 Choosing to walk away

Despite earlier stating that she did not understand how people could remain uninvolved when witnessing peer victimization, Jenny admits that she had, on occasion, observed other learners bullying each other and decided not to intervene. It took her sometime to think of an example, but when she did, she clarified that they were younger learners who she did not know. Explaining her reaction, she states: *"I just watched and then the one person stopped and said, "Hey man, this is getting lame, and I was just like, "Ah, they're gonna solve it" and so I just walked off."* This example demonstrates a classic case of 'diffusion of responsibility'. Since Jenny did not know the victim, and it seemed as though the situation was under control, she made the choice to ignore what was happening and walk away.

4.4.3 The revenge state

A revenge narrative emerges towards the latter part of Jenny's story. This is reflected in her angry tone and use of negative language when talking about individuals who have social power and prestige, and who use their power to denigrate others. Jenny compares this group to the 'paparazzi' who *"dig into you until they find something to spread"*. The revenge state, as she refers to it, stems from her experience as a victim at the hands of these types of people.

In this state, Jenny will not intervene if other 'less popular' people gang up against the 'more popular' bully because she wants them to know how it feels. As she explains:

I'm just like "Ag, whatever", I just think, "Oh they were being so mean to me, well not mean but they were saying things to me, they deserve them.

In another hypothetical example, Jenny emphasizes her belief in her own ability to stop bullying from escalating. Here, she clarifies how she will allow others to verbally confront a bully, but will step in if it becomes physical:

I mean 'cos like if a group of people, like Hannah is on her own and a group of less popular girls are ganging up on her and stuff, saying, "Why are you doing this?"...I won't stop that you know. I'll let them say why you're doing this, but if they're starting to like, push her around I'll say, "Guys, guys, calm down, stop touching her, go back to class.

For the most part, Jenny claims that she does not care if they tease her about what she looks like or what she wears because she thinks dressing to be liked or considered trendy is a silly concept. However, she draws the line if they mention her family or anyone close to her. As she explains:

It depends on what they're teasing me about. If they're teasing me about something stupid like what my jeans look like then it's just like, hmp, but if they're really getting it in like, "Ah, your sister has a problem, she had to repeat grade 2", then I get really upset and then I'll go to a teacher and just say "Sir or mam, they were really digging at me about my sister" but if I don't, it depends.

By highlighting the change in thoughts, feelings and actions she experienced as the bystander in different social contexts, she revealed the homogenous characteristics of bystander behaviour. Jenny clearly aligned herself with the victims of bullying at school. According to her these people were not popular, they were genuine and similar to her. Because she is in tune with her own past as a victim, and the victim experiences of her friends and sister, she has made the effort to become stronger and less susceptible to the efforts of those seeking to bring others down

This appears to be a precipitating factor of her defending behaviour. Because of this, she is able to listen to her conscience when responding to bullying situations rather than following the expectations of others.

4.5 Andiswa – “Everyone was looking at me and expecting me to join in, so I did”

Andiswa told her story in a clear and chronological order and was able to draw cause-and-effect relationships between events she experienced and their effect on her thoughts and behaviour as a bystander. She often provided reflective evaluations which, at times, contradicted her previous statements, but which came across as honest nonetheless. In this regard, there was a certain naivety about the way Andiswa presented herself to me. During her interview, she commonly used phrases such as “*kind of*” and “*maybe*” expressing a level of uncertainty about herself and her understanding of others and social situations. The descriptions she gave of the primary characters in her story were also vague, and surprisingly, although openly acknowledging her membership with the bullying group, Andiswa spoke more about the victims than the perpetrators.

Throughout her account, Andiswa remained focused on the specifics related solely to the topic of bullying and the role she played in this phenomenon. She chose not to mention anything seemingly unrelated, or provide additional details about herself, her family, and/or any extramural or leadership activities she may have been involved in. This made interpreting Andiswa’s narrative less complicated compared to the other participants. The continuity and authentic simplicity of her story lent itself to the development of a global impression of her experience as a reluctant bystander, capturing the inherent conflict in this role with clarity and openness.

Andiswa’s story began on a Monday in her grade 7 year with an example of in-group bullying. A girl belonging to her friendship group, who she referred to as ‘Dark Chocolate’, was being bullied because of a bandage around her finger:

Someone started teasing her about how big her finger was and how two of our fingers make up one of hers. And then I saw that she was getting upset about it and then everyone was looking at me and expecting me to join in, so I did. and then somehow it got around

the whole school and every time she walked past people would put their fingers together and make signs.

According to Andiswa, this girl was a regular target of this type of bullying, but she was unsure why. She assumed it may have something to do with “*the way she looked, or maybe the way she ate, because she ate a lot more than some of us do...*”, but believed people came up with excuses to bully her at random. Although Andiswa referred to ‘Dark Chocolate’ as a friend, the terms used to describe the victim implied a distance between them; she made it clear that they were different. This was in direct contrast to the girl who instigated the bullying in the peer group. Here, Andiswa used words such as ‘similar’ and ‘same’, mentioning that they ‘got along’. She did however, make these statements with some level of ambiguity, choosing to hedge her comments with phrases like “*not quite the same status but similar...we were just kind of the same.*” She did not elaborate on this relationship.

From the outset of her narrative, Andiswa clearly juxtaposes her internal state, including her thoughts and feelings with her final response as a bystander. During the initial scene, she acknowledges that the victim’s feelings were being hurt by the name calling however at the pivotal moment when she is forced to choose a bystander response, she succumbs to the group’s expectations and makes the decision to join in regardless. Interestingly, by her account, Andiswa’s involvement appeared to herald the beginning of victimisation that spread to the whole school and escalated to include rude hand gestures.

Continuing on from this, Andiswa begins to describe a series of bullying events involving the same victim, who was subsequently teased for looking more masculine than the other girls in the grade. At this stage, Andiswa makes a clear distinction between different types of bullying and when she will draw the line and distance herself from the perpetrators’ actions. She claims that bullying someone about “*the way they look and the way they were born*” is more harmful than other teasing and feels the bully should “*be put in his place and be reminded that he is not perfect.*” Her attitude towards what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour encourages her to move away from a reinforcing role and, on these occasions, she reported trying to defend the victim against a single male bully. In the end, the pressure from ‘everyone’ reluctantly draws her back into the position of reinforcer, and she once again acts against her personal convictions:

People started teasing her about being man-featured and man-like and that she was not a real girl... And this carried on, the whole man thing I never commented about it because when she liked a boy she was very honest and open with it and the boy would just be like I don't date men and all of that, so I would kind of stand up for her when it came to that point, but sometimes people would pick on her but everyone would just look at you and expect you to join in so I did but I kind of felt bad and sorry for her because I knew she was upset about it and I didn't like it.

Andiswa's narrative highlights a sensitivity to the feelings of others, nevertheless, when examining her bystander behaviour, it is evident that she finds it challenging to behave in a way that corresponds to this sensitivity. Like some of the other participants, Andiswa is easily encouraged to move from a passive bystander role to the role of a reinforcer in the beginning stages of the bullying situation, because, as she claims, '*it was funny when it started*'. Once she becomes aware that the seemingly harmless teasing was upsetting the selected victim, she tries to remain in the background and step away from involvement in this cycle.

In the first episode she justifies her lack of defending behaviour by implying that others would accuse her of sticking up for someone who has the power to stick up for themselves. As she says, "*I never told anyone to stop because everyone would be like, hey why are you sticking up for her, she's a big girl, she can stick up for herself.*" This subtly excuses the group's behaviour as it dismisses the bullying as 'a joke', and the victim's response as an overreaction. Similarly, if another person stepped in to intervene, the group could minimise their attempts for the same reasons.

A lack of agency and confidence dominates Andiswa's interactions with both the bullies and their victims, and one senses that she knows she should do more to defend her victimised peers. A low self-esteem may have prevented her from doing this, especially since Andiswa's experience at school, and with her friends, suggests that she is fearful of acting against them and losing her social security. This fear is never openly acknowledged, but is fuelled by her need to be with others she feels are similar to her, i.e. part of the in-group. By her own admission, Andiswa's popularity is precarious. Her role in the in-group is therefore not well-established and she acknowledges that her popularity status would not protect her if she decided to tell a teacher about the bullying.

It is possible that Andiswa's own experience as the victim of in-group bullying contributes towards her insecure positioning. She recalls this half way through the interview, although dismisses what happened to her by saying, as Mbali did, that she wouldn't necessarily describe it as 'bullying'. Like the earlier victim, Andiswa was teased because there was something different about her - she had cut her hair shorter than usual. Her response in this situation was to cover up her feelings, and pretend she wasn't upset:

I kinda tried to make it look like I was fine with it, I'd joke along...I wouldn't say anything or show that I was hurt...You don't want the tables to turn and then for them to start on you 'cos now you know how it feels and you don't want it to happen again. So now you've regained yourself and built your title back again you don't want people turning on you. 'Cos they will be like, "Oh you're such a cry baby get over it, we were just joking, we're not going to play with you anymore, we're just joking"...So I'll just be like, hahahaha, I'm ok with this. It's okay. I'm fine.

The strategy of 'covering up' true feelings seems central to Andiswa's narrative. Her experience of being bullied and the ensuing fear of it being repeated, despite developing her empathetic understanding of the victim's internal state, reinforces the group's power over her and her need to hide her genuine feelings. This results in her buckling under the pressure of her peers, whether real or perceived. Ironically, it is this experience as a victim (albeit short-lived) which motivates her to attempt to remain apart from the 'popular' children or 'big dogs' as she describes them:

I know what it's like and I don't want to see other people upset like that. I'm not a person who likes to make people feel down. I want people to be happy and bubbly. I'm not really...if being popular means you have to do that than I would rather not be popular, I'd rather be an outcast.

Because she can identify with those who are targets of victimisation, she cannot feel comfortable supporting the popular bullies and yet, incongruously, she chooses to be friends with girls who seem to act in this way because, as she says, they have similar interests and status. She therefore makes the choice not to become an outcast. This outcome behaviour

sums up the conflict at the heart of Andiswa's narrative. In the end, it is her actions which speak louder than her words.

4.6 Lumelo – “*I just want to see a tiny part of what’s going to happen and then I’ll stop it. I wanna see a tiny, tiny part*”

Of all the participants, 13 year-old Lumelo showed the most enthusiasm during our time together. He was proud of being selected to participate in the research process and shared his bullying stories with passion and intensity. Much of what Lumelo said was difficult to decipher; he was a fast talker and, at times, became extremely animated during the interview session. It was challenging to locate coherent and relevant narratives from what he shared, since his train of thought was not always logical and he often made contradictory claims.

Demonstrating a solid loyalty to his school, Lumelo told me several times in the middle of our conversation that there was no bullying currently taking place at his school. This was despite him mentioning a bullying incident in the sentence before, and documenting an instance of bullying in his written narrative. He seemed more comfortable discussing the topic when I avoided the actual term ‘bullying’. I was left with the impression that he wanted to please me on the one hand, providing provocative stories about bullies and victims (that were reminiscent of movie plotlines), but, on the other, was concerned about sullyng the name of his school, or getting himself in trouble with the teachers despite my assurances of confidentiality.

Two key motifs can be identified across Lumelo's narratives. The first is the theme of authority and power, manifest in his role as ‘gang leader’ and bully (in the past) and his current position as a prefect and tainted hero, the other, is redemptive change. In addition, Lumelo brought up the issue of race several times in his interview providing a cultural framework for his narrative which was clearly shaped by his identity as an African, Zulu-speaking, young boy. He differentiates between blacks and whites, by claiming that black children are more likely to become physical towards their peers: “*I would say, not that I’m racist, but if you looking at race...if you are black, I think you will actually fight.*” And are better at insulting others: “*you see, black people, when they insult people, they actually do it*

very nicely.”Although this would normally have negative connotations, Lumelo made this claim with pride and a degree of satisfaction.

Lumelo’s narrative is also situated in the context of his home life and the neighbourhood he lives in. When he was younger, he claimed that he ‘*hated*’ his mother and was scared of his father. He would receive beatings if he did not achieve at school or behaved inappropriately. Although he was unable to make the association between this conflictual home environment and his behaviour at the time, he remembers being perpetually angry:

Anger, yes, I used to have a lot of anger, when someone did something so little I would react with speed, so if my cousin actually pushed me, I would push him even harder. I would react, I would get very frustrated. I don’t know why, I was just a very very aggressive person at that time, but in a very bad way.

He elaborates on the ways in which this impacted his school life and led to him feeling ‘sad’, highlighting the harmful cycle he was caught up in, and also signifying his growing urge to rebel, which he did not necessarily understand at the time:

When I am in my angry stages and the teachers used to shout at me at school, then I’d come back sad, and, like my mother used to say your food is ready and I’d say, “No, I’m not going to eat it” and she’d say, “GO and eat” and I’d say, “NO”. I’d get very frustrated because everyone would always start by saying, “Do something”, and you don’t want to do it, or you do want to do it but you’re not feel excited to do it and you’d say “Nooo” and they try to push you a little or try to play with you and you get very angry.

In addition, according to Lumelo, he was (and still is) exposed to bullying and fighting on a daily basis in the township where he lives. This includes organizing dog fights and ganging up against rival groups in his area.

4.6.1. Anger, control and excitement

Lumelo’s story is particularly unique because he filters the issue of bullying and his role in the bully-victim-bystander triad through a lens of culture, community and home life. His perception of himself as a leader who has authority and control over the behaviour and well-being of others is echoed throughout the content of his narrative and in the language he uses.

In every school-based bullying and/or fighting scenario, Lumelo describes himself as having the ultimate power to influence the outcome of the situation, clearly in contrast to, and possibly resulting from, the powerlessness and frustration he experienced during his early childhood. In some cases, Lumelo describes how he ‘allows’ the fighting to continue, in others, he puts a stop to it, either by going to a teacher or getting involved personally. For example, he recalls a conversation between himself and a grade 7 boy who was having a problem with one of his classmates:

So I said, “Do you want me to take him” and he said, “No, no, just let him go but if he does it again...” I said, “Ok, I’ll let it go for now but if you have a problem just call me and I’ll take it to the teacher and sort it out.

Unlike some of the other participants, Lumelo does not position himself in the background and is rarely passive as a bystander. He expresses an element of excitement when witnessing someone being insulted or physically victimized. This, combined with a voyeuristic fantasy, motivates Lumelo to engage with the bullying process in a way that reinforces the bully’s actions, even if only in the initial stages. According to him, his moral belief in what is right and the fact that he is now more ‘mature’ than he was in previous grades, creates a conscious dilemma. He believes bullying is wrong, but feels exhilarated watching it:

Actually when I stop a bullying, I think about, mmm I did the right thing, but I think I could have let it go to a little bit so I can see what’s actually gonna happen. So, actually if I do the right thing I should be happy, but inside I say, “Oh, man, I don’t know if I should’ve stopped it”. Though I stop it usually, sometimes I let it go and let my friends hold me back, then soon enough, I just want to see a tiny part of what’s going to happen and then I’ll stop it. I wanna see a tiny tiny part...

It is Lumelo’s opinion that everyone takes some degree of pleasure in the bystander role. By doing this, he is able to feel less anti-social and justify his uncaring and therefore undesirable behaviour. What is interesting to note in the following excerpt, is that, unlike the other participants, he does not see physical assaults as a form of bullying which calls for significant intervention, in fact, he finds it more thrilling. This makes it harder for him to intervene:

To be honest mam, when you see bullying, especially when it's physical it's kinda exciting for me, but at the end of the day there is a time when you have to say you should stop it and all that stuff. But some people, they are also bystanders, they hold you back because they want to also see more of it because they enjoy it. I would say, everyone enjoys, I enjoy seeing it sometimes. It's just hard to stop it when you enjoy it...

Lumelo openly acknowledges that he feels a greater connection to the bully rather than the victim, which is consistent with his need to feel powerful and in control. Moreover, it is understandable, considering the prominent 'bully' narrative which emerges from his past.

Although he seems to lack the ability to mentalise on most occasions, Lumelo highlights a desire to remain loyal to his friends and a sensitivity towards peers who have a specific physical disability. He describes his relationship with a boy from the adjacent school for learners with physical disabilities who he commuted with every day. During this time together, they became friends and Lumelo assumes the role of this boy's protector. Although the example he gives does not fit the requirements of bullying per se, it is useful to note his reaction to the way others were behaving and the link he makes between his protective, defending behaviour and feelings of sympathy and sadness. It is at this point where he demonstrates theory of mind:

When he was disabled, when people were asking him these questions and I said, 'What has it even got to do with you?' When I see people who are disabled, I feel very sorry for them. It's very sad to see...Let's say you're born without an ear and they ask you too many questions about that, if you were my friend, I'd say that's none of your business. I would be offended because the person who is disabled is getting hurt because people are asking the same questions and they are reminding him that he's actually hurt. So I actually feel sorry for them and then I imagine myself if I was in their shoes how would I feel? So actually, I'd say, it's none of your business.

4.6.2 Splitting past and present

As mentioned, Lumelo's narrative can be divided into his past and present lives, and reflects his conviction that he has changed for the better. Consequently, one can trace the redemptive quality of Lumelo's narrative and the positive transformation which he feels has occurred in

his life. Perceiving his past self less favorably, as an angry and frustrated young person, he recounts how being forced by his mother to attend church exposed him to Christian principles (particularly the concept of heaven and hell) and encouraged him over time to change his negative attitude and turn into a conscientious and proactive citizen:

Well, in the past... I felt like I was big and everything. I had friends so I felt like I was leading them. Every time I always created a gang...I was the gang leader, so I enjoyed it.

Then I thought about it very, very carefully, I said, time to change. So I think the church, Sunday school, I did a lot of changing. Then as I went higher, I started to mature... I saw things in the world that were, wow, very interesting. Some people who are very successful and nice and share with you how they did it. And in the bus, you talk to a stranger, like last year my cousin was in this school, we had a debate about Christians and other races, and I was like oh ok, so it's very interesting, so I started to look at the world and say, well things are changing you know, I don't know, the generation, the world.

Representing an epiphany moment (or series of moments), Lumelo's developing self-awareness and his maturing responses to his community and the world at large, helps him to feel more positive about his current and his future selves. This shift in identity also provides a greater understanding of the dilemmas he is forced to grapple with when faced with bullying in the present, since each bystanding experience confronts him with the choice to respond according to his 'old ways', or to his 'new' beliefs about himself and the world he lives in.

In addition to this personal shift, Lumelo recalls positive changes in his home life and even the school environment. He explained that he now views both his parents in a positive light, and although his mother still hit him when he was 'naughty', he felt that she helped him to strive to be more successful. When I enquired as to whether he was still punished physically, he said he was not. In parallel with the changes in his home situation he now identifies a similar change in his school environment:

Yes, this school has really changed. There are more stricter rules... but in the past, things used to go wild. Now actually Mr M (the principal), and our teachers, [they] actually give you tips if people say you're ugly, you're fat, or you're thin. They actually give us tips on how to deal with it so...people just move on.

In all spheres of his life, Lumelo has experienced transformation, the climax of this resulting in him being selected as a prefect and therefore being recognized and respected by both teachers and peers. This now places him in a pro-social position which comes with the responsibility and expectation to do the right thing. Lumelo now has the confidence, in certain situations, to become the defending bystander, taking the problem to the teacher, who is on his side. Despite this change however, what is still apparent from Lumelo's narrative, is his attitude that any bullying he does take part in, or reinforce, is justified i.e. the victim is to blame or he simply wants to enjoy himself like everyone else, before it becomes out of hand. It is likely that Lumelo's early 'victim' experiences at home, which were ongoing and caused him a great deal of anguish, have resulted in an underlying desire to rid himself of this role rather than identify with it. His internalised self-blame is thus projected onto another who can fulfil this role in place of him. Thus, he can continue reinforcing victimization without experiencing feelings of guilt, shame or blame.

4.7 Ndumiso – “*And when I looked...I laughed as well because I thought it was funny.*”

Thirteen year-old Ndumiso, was the first participant interviewed in this study. He presented as anxious and shy in my presence, as well as more reserved. Subsequently, he responded to my prompting with short answers and I found it challenging to encourage more elaboration. It is very possible that my own anxiety and feelings of inexperience influenced this as well as the fact that he was the first of his classmates to be interviewed and therefore would not have known what to expect.

Ndumiso's bystander narrative centers on themes of friendship and personal responsibility. From the outset (his two opening sentences), he locates himself firmly within a friendship group and makes it known that he is a prefect:

I was on duty at break time because I'm a prefect...So my friends were in a group and I went there and they were all laughing.

He continues to describe a once-off event in which his friends were teasing another one of his friends causing him (the friend) to cry:

I asked them why they were all laughing and they wouldn't tell me. But when I listened I saw that they were laughing about one of my friends. And when I looked at 'F' I laughed as well because I thought it was funny. And then after break time he started crying. And he was also laughing at himself there, but then after break he was crying.

This opening sequence does not compromise the main plot of his story but, as mentioned, introduces the key themes which are expanded upon later in his account. Ndumiso reveals his position as a reinforcing bystander as he joins in with his friends to tease another friend. By his own admission, his friends are hesitant to share the source of their amusement with him. This could be because they believe him to have a more defined sense of right and wrong, and do not want him to spoil the fun by telling them to stop. Although Ndumiso talks about two other bullying incidents which do not involve his friends, his most common, and most memorable experience as a bystander, i.e. the story he wrote about and chose to concentrate on when talking with me, deals with the victimization of a friend by children who are also considered his friends. He is located directly within a friendship group and it is from within this group that he engages with his primary role as a bystander. In the above instance, Ndumiso's decision to support or comfort the victim occurred after the bullying had stopped, when the victim finally expressed his distress by crying. Once his friend's true feelings were in the open, Ndumiso had to face up to the role he played in contributing towards this development. He felt uncomfortable knowing he had upset his friend and therefore attempted to make amends, by this stage however, it was too late and his friend tried to dismiss the whole event:

Well, um, he was crying and I went to apologise to him and he said, 'I don't care.'

From this point, he then goes on to talk about the continual bullying experiences of another of his friends. Again, this boy is picked on by Ndumiso's close friendship group. At a later stage, he adds that most of the other Grade 7's are perpetrators as well. Teased because his 'lip is a little bit lower' than the average person. They call him 'isiNdebele' which is the Zulu word for 'lips'. As in the first occasion, Ndumiso responds because he thinks it's funny, but after some time becomes cognizant of the fact that this behaviour is harmful and should not continue. He discusses his response:

They (his friends) joke about it since the year started and they haven't stopped. And I keep telling them to stop but they don't want to stop cos I don't know...if something's funny then

I just laugh. I can't help it. Yes, I only think about the joke and the laughing, afterwards I tell them to stop but they keep doing it...

When prompted to consider why this boy in particular is a target, Ndumiso is unable to think of possible reasons to explain the extent of the bullying. When asked why he reacts differently from the majority of his peers, he highlights his ability to recognize negative emotions in others, “*because, ah, when I look at the person I see them get sad and I tell them to stop because of that.*”

Ndumiso believes that his efforts to stop the bullying are only partially effective. Half his peers respond to him affirmatively, the other half chooses to ignore him. His position as a prefect helps to facilitate the former. This appears to have a positive effect on his belief in himself and his ability to bring order. It imbues him with the confidence to actively step in to the complicated and socially precarious milieu which exists between the bullies and the victim. Ndumiso is unsure why the others do not listen to him. The victim, who has other friends and is apparently a very good artist, hides his true upset by smiling and threatening to tell on, but never doing so. According to Ndumiso however, this option is not really available to the target because the teasing will only escalate as a result and they will be called a ‘snitch’. Interestingly, it is Ndumiso’s prefect badge which also prevents him from making more of an effort to stop the bullying for good. At this point, he suggests that he would be in even greater trouble than his peers should he be found to have become involved in bullying behaviour as his leadership position implies more is expected from him.

Ndumiso’s pro-social, defending behaviour appears to be linked to his desire for positive interpersonal relationships with all he knows. He is on friendly terms with most of his grade and ultimately wants to do the right thing, even if it is because he feels compelled to out of fear of punishment or his unspoken belief in the positive expectations of others, including his teachers. In the following example, he describes how he puts a stop to teasing by identifying the culprits and punishing them (in his capacity as a prefect). He then continues to discuss how the victim pinpointed him as one of the perpetrators when the teacher arrived, but another boy stood up for him and corrected this allegation:

On Tuesday night, for the concert, um, there was a boy. His sister tried to trim up here (points to his hair) with a razor but then actually went too far back. So they started

laughing at him, saying if he gets a haircut they'll charge him half price. So I told everyone about them to stand up, and then the teacher saw us and came there and started shouting at everyone and the other boy...pointed to all of us and said we were all doing it and then the other one said no I (Ndumiso) didn't. SO then the boy, the one they were laughing at, I said everyone was laughing at him to the teacher.

His response to the decisions he made that night made him feel proud because he did the right thing, and surprisingly, no-one called him a snitch (although this seems to be a fear all the participants have). He later acknowledges that it is easier to tell a teacher if none of the perpetrators are his friends. It is his opinion that the teachers have the ultimate power to prevent bullying, as the children listen to them. Unfortunately, since Ndumiso seems to get on with most of the children in his grade, the majority of the bullying he witnesses occurs among his friends, as a result, telling the teachers about these hurtful acts is not an easy decision for him to make.

4.8 Summary

All the participants attempted to make meaning of their bullying experiences through the bystander stories they recounted. As is expected from pre-adolescent children, the majority of the participants recognize, and use, social categories as a means for organizing their social world. Stereotypical notions of the 'popular group' versus the 'unpopular group' were continually highlighted, with the popular children being described as 'powerful', 'big', 'cool' and those in the out-group as 'lower' and 'different'. Constructing and performing their preferred social identities with various degrees of self-perception and cognitive and emotional maturity, the participants actively perceived, defined and manipulated their environment in order to attain their social and personal goals (Burns, Cross and Maycock, 2010). Together, their narratives expose a pattern of interacting influences, including personal characteristics, contextual variables and individual behaviors which influence their identity and behaviour as bystanders.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

The results from this study underscore the complexity inherent in the bystander's experience. This complexity extends to the bystander's perception of their own involvement in the bullying process as well as their perception of the involvement of others. The crucial role of peer ecology in the bullying phenomenon was a common denominator across all the narratives. All the children demonstrated different, context specific, ways of negotiating the challenging and often ruthless school environment. While doing this, what became evident, was the fluidity with which each of the individuals moved between participant roles and the variance of prosocial and anti-social sentiments they expressed. This variance occurred not only across a series of bullying situations but equally so, within a single incident and appeared shaped by a wide range of factors. This suggests bystanding roles are not constant, and while some children tend to embody certain positions more than others, they alter their attitudes, thoughts and behaviour depending on who is involved in the bullying, the kind of bullying which is perpetrated and even where it takes place. This is guided by the developmental needs and dilemmas facing the preadolescent, which

Overall, these findings correspond with the existing body of research which emphasizes the significant role group mechanisms play in perpetuating or preventing peer victimization among pre-adolescent children. The peer group becomes a salient influence in bullying behaviours during this period of schooling (Burns, Cross and Maycock, 2010). From this perspective, echoing Twemlow et al.'s (2004) theory, bullying is clearly not restricted to a single conflictual relationship between two stereotypical characters, but grounded in the group dynamics of peer relationships. It is the result of a complex interactive effect between bully, victim, and bystander in which the responses of each directly impacts the severity of the outcome (Salmivalli, 2010; Twemlow et al, 2004).

Seeking peer acceptance and wanting to conform to the group, whether this involves acting in pro-bullying or anti-bullying roles, is paramount to these children. This, in conjunction with individual factors, including self-perception and the ability, or inability, to mentalise, guides the decisional processes underlying their ultimate bystanding behaviour. In the following chapter, the results obtained from the participants' narratives and the commonalities and emergent themes will be summarised and discussed. In line with the objectives of this

research, each of the three primary bystanding positions, passive, reinforcing and defending (Salmivalli, 1999) will be explored and married to the relevant literature from this field.

5.1 The passive position

Inaction on the part of bystanders, as evidenced from this study, seems linked to inhibitory feelings and/or cognitions, including fear of retaliation from the group and social rejection. The majority of the participants acknowledged that siding with a victim, and acting against a bully, may have negative relational consequences for them in the long run. Low self-esteem and, for some, previous experiences as a victim, seemed to undermine the participants' sense of agency and confidence in their ability to bring about positive social change. Moreover, the majority seemed to believe their intervention would have little impact on the long-term behaviour of the bully. The theme of helplessness was common throughout the passive narrative. Clearly, defending the victim is viewed by the passive bystander as relatively ineffective when dealing with bullies whose actions are powerful and, at times, ruthless (Salmivalli, Voeten and Poskiparta, 2011). This confirms Burns et al.'s study (2010) which highlights the difficulty one member of the peer group can experience when attempting to change established group behaviour.

All of the participants used distancing coping strategies, including avoidant and abdicating tactics, to explain their evasive positioning. The children were clearly uncomfortable in their inactive bystanding roles and thus made attempts to deny, justify or abdicate their responsibility to intervene in order to detach themselves from feelings of guilt, shame and impotence. Victim-blame (victims were described more than once as impulsive and irritating), moral justification and diffusion of responsibility were either implied or explicitly mentioned by most participants (Bandura 1986, 1999). In addition, the learners often chose to remain passive when both bullies and victims were unfamiliar to them, stating that is had nothing to do with them, or that they believed that the children involved would sort out the problem for themselves. These forms of moral disengagement are well-documented as mechanisms used by children who bully their peers (Burns et al, 2010; Pornari and Wood, 2010); this study suggests such techniques are also frequently used by both passive and reinforcing bystanders

Children who felt a level of empathy for the victim (and disliked the bully), but exhibited less self-efficacy and were fearful of external sanctions and/or becoming victims themselves were typically the most conflicted. They chose to remain physically outside of, or separate to, the bullying exchanges, rather than simply rationalizing their behaviour. This involved engaging in tactics which included, looking the other way, ignoring the situation, focusing on school work and blending in with other outsiders.

At least half of the participants mentioned their fear of being labeled a 'snitch' as a reason for seeking to remain outside of the bullying foray. This imminent threat, which extended to the entire social group, seemed enough to prevent those who would otherwise demonstrate prosocial tendencies from telling a teacher or a person in authority. In the case of Lumelo and Ndumiso, occupying the position of prefect appeared to mediate this effect; both were confident enough to seek out help from a member of staff when they felt the situation was out of control and it was their duty to do so. Interestingly however, this was usually with children in other grades and not when the perpetrators belonged to their immediate peer group. When dealing with the latter, in addition to their friends labeling them as tell tales, they were fearful of being implicated in the bullying and thus losing the respect of their teachers. From a theoretical perspective, this behavior links with developmental theories which highlight the need for pre-adolescents to be affirmed by their peers and maintain a sense of belonging with the group.

Jenny, the only other participant who sought adult intervention, seemed comfortable communicating her experiences with her parents, who were supportive and were also willing to help. Social cognitive theorists such as Bandura (1986) believe that individuals are more likely to model the behaviour of those who they most identify with. Jenny's identity was securely embedded within her family relationships and it is possible that her help-seeking actions were the result of those modeled by her parents, reinforced by her belief that teacher intervention did in fact make a difference. She does however only choose to utilize this strategy when she is the victim herself. As a bystander, witnessing the victimization of close friends and/or family, she feels adult involvement may increase their humiliation or shame and ultimately exacerbate their bullying.

It is worth noting that most of the passive bystanding described by the participants took place within a classroom setting, when the teacher was out of the classroom. This environment

seems especially conducive to such behaviour for several reasons. Firstly, the classroom is a confined microcosm of the peer group and includes all types of children: those who bully, those who are bullied and those who are forced to watch. In the instance of classroom bullying, the teasing usually escalates, led by one or two dominant individuals, which initiates further group participation. The bystander is therefore confronted by more than one bully which fuels a sense of impotence and increases peer pressure. This pressure is however ameliorated by the large number of classmates who are not directly involved. The bystanding group is therefore inhibited by their fear of standing up against the group and the ease with which they can merge into the remaining passive audience (safety in numbers and diffusion of responsibility). At least two participants also indicated that they believed the bullying would stop when the teacher re-entered the room, thereby abdicating their duty to intervene.

Pöyhönen, Juvonen, Salmivalli (2012), studied the motivational basis for remaining passive and concluded that “when students experience a set of conflicting expectations and values, they may choose to withdraw from the situation to avoid unwanted consequences of one’s action.” Twemlow et al. (2004) suggests that avoidant bystanders experience a form of defensive euphoria when witnessing another peer being bullied as it means they have successfully evaded the bully’s radar. However, as mentioned, they inadvertently facilitate victimization by denial of personal responsibility. Those bystanders, who watch and yet remain uninvolved, are characterised predominantly by a subjective state of apathy, fear and helplessness.

5.2 The reinforcing position

Consistent with previous studies (Gini, 2006, 2007), passive bystanding appears to shift towards a more active, reinforcing role when the learners witness their friends, rather than children outside of their peer group, perpetrate anti-social acts. This subjugation usually occurs within the group where victims are typically other group members on the periphery in terms of reputation and social status. Sometimes outsiders who threaten the group are also targeted. As previously mentioned, preadolescence is now considered the developmental stage in which social hierarchies emerge and the most popular peer groups are comprised of those children who are also the most socially dominant. Studies have shown friendship networks have a direct influence on bullying behaviours; these findings, particularly Mbali’s

and Ndumiso's narratives, confirm this to be the case with bystanders as well (Burns et al., 2010)

Several of the learners equated popularity to power. The leaders of their friendship groups, or the children with the highest social status, often maintained and enhanced their superiority through the demotion of others. This is in accordance with the work of Adler and Adler (1995, 1998) who found that popular group leaders have the power to promote or demote other children as they wish. Those participants who identified more readily with these children, and who emphasised an underlying need for social security and belonging, often chose to play along or imitate the behaviour of their more popular friends – they showed little affiliation towards the victim, even though they still considered them part of their friendship group. They also appeared undeterred by the bully's unkind behaviour in these situations. In-group bias is a possible explanation for this result. This means, in order to protect their own identity, bystanders are required to positively judge others they deem similar to themselves (Capozza & Brown, 2001).

Acknowledging that being popular and being perceived to be popular were different phenomena, many of the participants insisted that the more socially secure children were not necessarily the most liked. Burns et al. (2010), citing the work of Prinstein and Cillessen (2003), suggest that "being liked occurs at the dyadic level while the perception that someone is popular occurs at the group level" (p. 210). According to their work, perceived popularity, "reflects whether a child is thought to be popular, in contrast to being liked by classmates (indicating likeability)" (p. 210). Perceived popularity in primary school has been linked to a range of factors which seem to influence reinforcing bystanding responses, including the goal for social visibility, social dominance, and social prerogatives, such as leadership, admiration, and social control (Lease, Kennedy & Axelrod, 2002). Similarly, studies have found that "the values children placed on tangible and status rewards achieved by aggression predicted reinforcement of bullying over and above efficacy beliefs." (Pöyhönen et al., 2012, p. 3)

Pretense was a prevalent theme throughout the narratives, although it seemed exclusive to the girls' experience within the group. They frequently pretended to condone the aggressive behaviour of their bullying friend/s despite admitting they felt it was morally wrong and expressed empathy for the victim's plight. As Catanzaro (2011) concludes from her study of indirect aggression and victimization amongst girls, the combination of power and security

shared from close girl relationships can pressurise them into behaviours they would otherwise reject as unacceptable. When they themselves were teased by fellow group members, they masked their true feelings with a façade of nonchalance and humour. It seems pretense was the key factor in shielding the participants from the attention of the bullies. Those, like Jenny and Sunita, who refused to participate in this charade, were targeted.

Generally speaking, the active bystanders repeatedly played down their reinforcing or condoning actions by insisting they were followers rather than initiators of the bullying. They maintained they would tell the group to stop when the situation became too destructive. By claiming a threshold for such bullying acts, the participants could benefit from an alliance with the popular bully or bullies, and yet continue to view themselves and their behaviour in a positive light. It has been proposed that by doing this they avoid additional feelings of dissonance²⁵ (Festinger, 1964; Burns et al., 2010). Worth mentioning at this point, is the finding that most of the participants, regardless of whether they adopted a passive or reinforcing position, displayed some level of empathetic understanding and theory of mind. This result confirms emerging literature which suggests that having a good theory of mind by itself, does not necessarily mean the individual will choose to act in a prosocial manner (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001).

The enjoyment derived from observing and participating in bullying should not be underestimated when considering the bystander's response. Although a predominantly male characteristic, several of the participants were fairly honest about the fact that, at times, they found peer victimisation exciting and fun. What is more, they all attempted to play down this type of bullying with their use of language, referring to the group's behaviour in euphemistic terms such as 'tuning', 'joking' or 'chirping'. According to Twemlow et al's (2004) theory, the individual's ability to mentalise collapses at this point, as does their authentic empathy and reflectiveness. Most of the participants, particularly Ndumiso, admitted to reinforcing the bullies' behaviour, but only in the beginning stages of the victimisation. They became sympathetic and subsequently ceased participating when realising that the victim may be in distress and that they were indirectly playing a role in his/her harm. The threshold of this distress however was often difficult for the bystander to evaluate, especially when their friends were involved. As Ndumiso explained the victim generally pretended not to be

²⁵

affected during the actual incident, and only cried or showed their true feelings once the damage had been done (theme of pretense).

Lumelo, the participant who most closely resembled Twemlow et al's (2004) puppet-master bystander, appeared on occasion, to demonstrate the most aggressive tendencies and the lowest levels of empathy overall. The subjective state of this bystander according to Twemlow et al. (2004), is one of arrogance and a grandiose sense of powerfulness. Although insisting he had changed, Lumelo admitted that in the past he would restrain those who wished to intervene so that the bullying would continue for his vicarious pleasure. His early childhood experiences both at home, where he was beaten by his parents, and in his community, which appeared to normalize physical aggression, gives insight into his behaviour and provides a link between his narrative and the literature. Exposure to domestic violence and poor parental monitoring, as well as negative community influences and cultural norms which lead to aggressive masculine identities, are all strongly associated with bullying perpetration and aggressive tendencies in children (Baldry, 2003). Being raised in violent contexts has been found to negatively impact children's understandings of the way the world works (Liang et al. 2007). Their sense of safety in the world is lessened causing feelings of anxiety and fear. Acting violently thus becomes a normal or legitimate way of handling conflict and keeping safe (Schwartz & Hofmeyer Gorman, 2003). Lumelo's experience suggests that this can affect the actions of the bully bystander as well.

5.3 The defending position

As Pozzoli and Gini (2010) state:

Defending behavior during bullying episodes cannot be reduced to a simple prosocial behaviour because it represents a risky behaviour in which the helper confronts a powerful bully and, sometimes, even his or her supporters (p. 4).

Research shows an association between defending, or approach coping strategies, and two likely positive outcomes: firstly, the bullying decreases and secondly, the victim's distress is alleviated (O'Connell et al., 1999; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2012). Considering the results from this study, there appeared to be a number of interconnected processes, both social and cognitive, which motivate the participant's desire to intervene.

The first of these is related to social convention. For three of the learners, their primary motivation for intervening during a bullying incident, particularly in the classroom setting, was to avoid external sanctions. Concerned primarily with decreasing bullying, they were explicitly aware that they risked sullyng their own image and that of their class and grade if the group was caught behaving anti-socially. They felt that bullying could lead to punishment, even expulsion, and since they were involved, albeit only as observers, were anxious they may be accused of playing a participatory role by their teacher. The efforts of these children were very rarely successful however, and usually involved instructing the group to stop, or warning them about the consequences of their behaviour. While certain children listened to their pleas, most admitted that the more dominant perpetrators generally ignored them.

Extending the motif of external sanctions, feelings of guilt and shame were also prominent prosocial triggers. Although displaced shame was a characteristic of both the passive and reinforcing roles, in the case of the defending bystander, it appeared to inspire positive behaviour. Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) explain this as follows:

In acknowledging shame, an individual accepts that they feel shame, comes to terms with their responsibility for what has happened, and takes steps to make amends for the harm done. Once these three elements combine together within the individual's belief system, they create an internal sanctioning mechanism helping the individual discharge shame (p. 2).

In these cases, the children would describe how they apologised to the victim after a bullying event or made attempts to alleviate further distress.

Empathy and a well-developed understanding of both the cognitive and emotional states of others was another factor which appeared to bolster prosocial and helpful behaviour. Hoffman (2000) believes that bystander situations stimulate empathic distress, that is, the bystander become distressed when observing another person in a state of real distress. This form of distress becomes a prosocial motive by being transformed into feelings of sympathy, concern, guilt or empathy-driven anger. According to Hoffman (2000), high-empathic arousal can also act as an aversive experience, motivating the bystander to reduce this negative state

by engaging in prosocial behavior. Empathetic distress was intensified if the victim was a friend or family member and therefore easy to identify with, as was the case with Jenny and her sister and Lumelo and his travel partner. Indeed, having a positive attitude toward the victim increased most of the participants' personal responsibility for proactive involvement. This corroborates existing research which suggests both attitudes and responsibility are significantly associated with approach coping strategies and inversely associated with distancing tactics (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). Furthermore, some of the children who had previously been victimised were able to draw on this experience and respond towards the victim with empathetic understanding. They wanted to alleviate the victims suffering because they had shared in their plight. As a result, these learners tended to adopt a supportive role, which included comforting the victim, taking them to the bathroom or, in Mbali's case, trying to encourage them to act in more appropriate ways, for example, to stop behaving so impulsively. In these instances, the victim was the priority; the bully was rarely confronted and teacher support was not sought in case their involvement made the situation worse.

Empathetic response has been consistently identified as a correlate of prosocial behaviour, however some researchers argue that it is not sufficient enough to encourage helping acts per se (Gini et al, 2008; Tsang et al., 2011). Gini et al (2008) for example, believe other variables may be equally significant in favouring or limiting the likelihood of a bystander stepping in to intervene. In their study on bystanding determinates, they found that "self-efficacy beliefs in the domain of social relationships positively predicted active involvement in defending behaviour" (p. 101). In contrast to this however, children with low levels of self-efficacy were less likely to intervene, regardless of their levels of empathetic responsiveness. The narratives obtained from this study appear to reflect this result. Of the three children who intervened the most regularly, a distinguishing factor was their self-confidence and ability to exercise their own personal agency. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996) state that "unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act" (p. 1206). Self-efficacy therefore functions as "a multilevel and multifaceted set of beliefs that can include a global self-efficacy or self-efficacy regarding different domains of the self" (Tsang et al., 2011, p. 2281). A supportive family appeared to be an important variable in the development of self-efficacy in the case of some of the participants.

In a similar vein, learners who display robust self-determination, are less inclined to submit to negative peer pressure and are more likely to take positive actions when witnessing peer victimisation (Tsang et al., 2011). The more the participants experienced success in the defending role, and the less they cared about the opinions of their peer group and the more likely they were to adopt the same role in a different circumstance. Moreover, these children demonstrated the cognitive ability to define and interpret a situation effectively and act in ways that both decreased the bullying and ameliorated the victim's distress. For example, Jenny, Sunita and Mbali realized that changing friendship groups and sitting away from the popular children was the most effective way to improve their situation and that of their victimized friends. This decision also ensured they were no longer seeking acceptance from the popular crowd but were surrounded by others whom they felt they could be genuine with and who had a positive influence in their lives.

What seemed to be the most powerful influence in motivating defending behaviour was altruism. Altruistic tendencies and the ability to reason from a moral standpoint surfaced on several occasions in varying degrees, in four of the participants' narratives. Some indicated their desire to act in the best interests of others, valuing principals of fairness, respect and fairness, regardless of the social norms or personal relationships of those involved. At times in their narratives they indicated high levels of compassion and empathy. Some, like Jenny, expressed outrage that certain individuals, especially those who perceived themselves to be popular, could cause others harm for no apparent reason. Generally speaking, moral reasoning is more abstract than other social mechanisms and requires a certain level of cognitive and emotional maturity. This could explain why the majority of the children were unable to fully engage in this process. Twemlow et al. (2004) suggest that certain altruistic bystanders are able to use "mature and effective use of individual and group psychology to promote self-awareness and develop skills to resist victimization." (p. 27). This was evident in Jenny's story and her description of herself and her world-view. Jenny's previous experiences as a victim, and her supportive family and friends, motivated her to no longer desire acceptance into the group of popular children who had been responsible for her prior victimisation. She was an individual who expressed a respect for people's differences, and because of this, she was able to successfully navigate the peer pressure many of the other participants succumbed to. Hence her ability to act pro-socially, seeking teacher support when she felt it was necessary and confronting the bully or rescuing the victim depending on which she believed would lead to the most beneficial outcome.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at exploring the experience of school bullying, specifically from the perspective of preadolescent bystanders. My interest was to access these young people's stories of bullying and to tap into their usual ways of thinking and talking about these experiences, examining the various factors impacting their responses and the reasoning behind their outward bystander behaviour. Whilst by no means representing a comprehensive investigation into the subject, this qualitative, narrative analysis has provided a useful starting point from which to develop a deeper understanding of the role of the bystander in a South African school. Fear of social exclusion, relations to the victim, prior experiences as victim and bully, parental influence, social norms, and the presence and behaviour of other bystanders, appears to shape the way young bystanders reason, feel and act on moral issues in social situations. This final chapter concludes the findings of the research and outlines the limitations inherent within this study, as well as providing recommendations for future research.

6.1 Limitations

A number of limitations arose from the research process and should be considered when reviewing the findings of this study. Firstly, logistical restraints, including time constraints imposed by the school timetable, prevented the gathering of more comprehensive data. Although narrative research does not focus on generalizing results to a wider population, the findings obtained from the narratives would have been richer and more nuanced had I not been restricted to a single interview but rather engaged with the participants on a more regular basis. This would have granted me more of an opportunity to become part of the landscape of the children's lives and therefore given me a greater insight into their lived experiences.

Working with children in a school environment also brought about its own set of difficulties. As mentioned in previous chapters, power differentials are unavoidable when an adult conducts research with children, especially when it takes place in the confines of their school. Although these issues were addressed and discussed in Chapter 3 of this document, one

should not ignore the possible impact this may have had on the stories they shared. In addition to this, as a novice researcher inexperienced in narrative techniques, I found the methodological framework of this study particularly challenging. My ability to elicit narratives from the participants using a semi-structured interview was fairly rudimentary, and although this improved with time, I would perhaps have benefitted from conducting a comprehensive pilot study, or interviewing a larger sample of children. Similarly, narrative research is widely considered as an ongoing hermeneutic or interpretive process which continues throughout the entire research process (Moen, 2006). Although not necessarily a limitation per se, it should nevertheless be noted, as Hart (2002) contends, that narrative methods “are always exploratory, conversational, tentative and indeterminate” (p. 141). My own re-interpretations of the participants’ narratives are therefore partial and selective and represent merely a ‘limited portrait’ of these young people’s experience (Reissman, 1993).

6.2 Recommendations for addressing bullying in schools

This investigation has highlighted the extent to which individual children adopt a wide range of bystander positions depending on the circumstance of the bullying event they witness. Although the learners appeared to have an understanding of the undesirability of bullying, the children were unable to recognize this behaviour in their own group processes. Stereotypical and dyadic explanations describing a big, nasty bully and a weak, nerdy victim seemed to prevent these young people from understanding the nuances involved in the dynamics of bullying. Despite a quasi-theoretical understanding of this topic, even the participants’ definitions of peer victimization varied across bullying situations.

Preadolescents are especially vulnerable to peer victimization and social pressures. It is therefore imperative that schools address the role of the bystander directly and attempt to facilitate open discussion on a regular basis, about topics such as popularity and peer pressure, in a way that avoids simple stereotyping but considers thinking, emotions, motives and actions in the children’s real-life experiences as bystanders, bullies and victims. By exposing these children to an in-depth breakdown of the key processes involved in bullying, it may be that they are able to better understand their roles in this phenomenon.

Learners should be provided with support in recognizing bullying, refusing to participate, and in coming to the aid of victims in a skilful and nonviolent manner. As Twemlow et al. assert,

placing sole attention on remedying pathological bystander roles and/or bully and victim roles will not alleviate bullying in the school setting. Rather, they believe that activating the helpful and often altruistic bystander role is an essential, and perhaps even critical, part of the solution. Any school anti-bullying intervention should therefore pay attention to transforming the role of the bystander into a committed community member/witness.

6.3 Implications for future research

As already alluded to, this was an exploratory study which makes no claim to provide an extensive description of the preadolescent bystander in South African schools. It is imperative to acknowledge that this investigation was conducted in a well-resourced, ex-model C school which already has several established life skill programs in place. As such, further research, both quantitative and qualitative, is required to better understand the specific determinants of these children's behavior across a broader spectrum of needs. The scope is vast and the necessity of combating school violence remains paramount. As a population group, bystanders are hugely under researched in South Africa today, and yet the possibilities of mobilizing their potential to prevent or minimize bullying, both inside and outside of the school context, is immense.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Letter of Informed Consent for Parents/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian

Re: Research study on understanding the experiences of children who are bystanders of bullying behaviour.

I am a Counselling Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, currently conducting a study on the experiences of children as bystanders to bullying behaviour.

Bullying is an area of concern in many schools throughout the country. While much research has attempted to describe the characteristics and behaviours of bullies and victims, the role of the bystander has received little attention. It is hoped that this study will help to understand how children respond in situations where they witness bullying and obtain insights from the children themselves regarding ways to encourage prosocial behaviour from all involved. Mr Madgin has kindly offered to assist in this research and has given permission for the study to be performed at Penzance School as part of the Life Orientation programme.

Your child has been selected to participate in this study based on the observations they made in a story they wrote at school. This study will include participation in an individual semi-structured interview and a focus group, all of which will be conducted on school premises during school time, primarily during Life Orientation lessons.

The interviews and focus groups will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour each, and will be tape recorded for transcription purposes. Information provided by your child will remain confidential and used only for the purposes of this study. Pseudonyms will be used to disguise any identifiable information. All participation in the study is voluntary and no adverse effects will result from discontinuing the participation. If your child becomes distressed at any time during this process, you will be informed and a counselling service will be provided by the researcher and the school. Should ancillary care be necessary, you may contact Professor Duncan Cartwright at The Centre for Applied Psychology, UKZN (tel: 031 - 260 7616) who will provide further assistance.

At the end of the study a document will be drawn up describing the findings. A copy will be handed to the principal and will be available to you, the parents, to read. If at any stage of the research you feel your child has been adversely. Should you prefer your child not to participate, please could you indicate this on the attached consent form.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries regarding this study.

Thank you for your contribution.

Yours faithfully,

Ms Shelley Rogers (Researcher)

Consent Form for Parents/Guardians:

I _____ (parent/guardian) of _____ hereby give permission/ do not give permission for my child/ward to take part in the above mentioned study being conducted at Penzance School. I have read the attached letter and know what the study is about.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please tear off and keep for future reference

Researcher: Shelley Rogers 0825761810
Supervisor: Duncan Cartwright (031) 260 7616
The School of Psychology University of Kwazulu Natal (031) 260 7616

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher.

THANK YOU

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Participants

Research study on understanding the experiences of children who are bystanders of bullying behaviour.

Volunteering for this study involves taking part in an individual interview and a group discussion during school time. The interview and the discussion will each take approximately (about) 45 minutes, and will be tape recorded.

I _____ (participant) understand that taking part in this research project is completely voluntary and that I can pull out from this project at any time. I have been told that there will be no negative consequences should I choose to pull out from the study. I understand that I will not be expected to answer any questions which I do not feel comfortable in answering. If any of these questions cause me to become upset at anytime, I can tell my teacher or the researcher I no longer wish to carry on and I can speak to them about what has made me feel upset. I have been told that my answers and participation will be kept confidential (private) and that my name will not be used in this study. If I feel upset about anything that was discussed during this research I can also ask my teacher if I can speak to the school guidance counsellor.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: Ms Shelley Rogers

Supervisor: Dr Duncan Cartwright

Appendix 3: Letter of consent for school principal (and Department of Education)

April 2011

Consent Form: XXXX Primary School:

Permission has been granted to Shelley Rogers (Psychology Master's student) to conduct her study "*Investigating the experiences, dilemmas and recommendations of pre-adolescents involved as bystanders of bullying behaviour.*" with the Grade 7s at XXXX Primary School in 2011.

Mr XXXX

Principal, XXXX Primary School

Appendix 4: Instructions provided to Grade 7 learners (tier 1)

Bullying occurs when a person, or a group of people, repeatedly hurt or threaten to hurt, another person or group of people.

Bullying can take on many different forms. This includes (Olewus, 1993):

1. Verbal bullying, including derogatory comments and bad names.
2. Bullying through social exclusion or isolation, for example, not allowing someone to join in a game or ignoring them in class.
3. Physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting.
4. Bullying through lies and false rumors.
5. Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully.
6. Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully.
7. Racial bullying
8. Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet)

Most people have been involved in some kind of bullying during their life. In different situations they might have been the bully, or the person being bullied. Sometimes, they might only have watched or observed the bullying taking place.

Today, I am trying to find out what it is like for children when they watch or observe someone, or a group of children being bullied. Responses to bullying can be very different; sometimes a person might call for help from another friend or teacher or they may choose to watch and not become involved. Other times, they might encourage the bully or join them, or could even end up being bullied themselves.

I need your help this morning to investigate what it is like for the person who witnesses bullying; what they think, how they feel and why they act the way they do in those situations. For this, I need you to tell me about a real life occasion when you watched bullying occur. I want to know what you thought, how you felt about the event and what action you took, so that we can work together to understand the experiences of other children who observe this kind of behaviour.

To do this, I first want you to spend a few minutes thinking about a time when you watched or observed a child, or group of children, being bullied **at school**, either physically, verbally or socially. I want you to try and remember as much as you can about that event.

I want you now to write a story for me describing this event in as **much detail as you can**. Remember to include a beginning, middle and end and to describe **what you were thinking and how you were feeling** at different times (e.g. at the beginning and the end of the story), what you did and why and how it all ended. You must try to be as honest as possible because the more honest you are, the more you'll be able to help me understand what it's like for other children in similar situations. Everything you say will be confidential, which means that only I will know who wrote each story. To make your stories really useful for our investigation, I need to you try very hard to write what you really felt and thought about on this occasion and not what you have been told, or what you think, is the right way you should have felt or thought, for example, you may think you should feel cross and tell a teacher when you see someone bully someone else, but on this occasion you might not have – that's ok. I want you to be as honest as you can be. I would also like you to change the names of the

people in the story, so I don't know who you are talking about. Don't worry about spelling, or punctuation I am only interested in what you have to say.

Handout (for participants):

TO REMIND YOU:

Write about a time when you WATCHED someone or a group of people being bullied AT SCHOOL.

Remember to include:

A beginning, middle and end to your story

Where it took place, how you felt, why you think the bullying was happening and what you did.

IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE!

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview schedule

- 1) Tell me a bit about the story you wrote when I was last with you?
- 2) Describe the child/ren who was saying or doing the unkind things?
 - i. *Do you know them/friends with them?*
 - ii. *Do they often bully other children?*
 - iii. *Why do you think they were bullying the other child/ren in this situation?*
 - iv. *How did you feel about this child/ren when they were doing this?*
- 3) Describe the child/ren who was being bullied?
 - i. *Do you know them/friends with them?*
 - ii. *Are they often bullied by other children?*
 - iii. *Why do you think they were being bullied?*
 - iv. *How did you feel about this child when this was happening to them?*
- 4) Can you remember how you felt when this was happening?
 - i. *Did you want to stop the bullying?*
 - ii. *If yes, how did you do that?*
 - iii. *If no, why did you choose not to become involved?*
 - iv. *What do you think would have helped you to become involved?*
- 5) Are there other times when you have stopped bullying before? Can you tell me about some of these times?
 - i. *Why do you think you tried to stop this bullying?*
 - ii. *What are the ways you think you could help the person being bullied at the time?*
 - iii. *What do you think is the best way to stop bullying when you see it?*
- 6) Have there been times when you have watched someone/some people saying or doing unkind things to someone and have not done anything about it? Can you tell me about these times?
 - i. *Why do you think you didn't want to stop this from happening?*
 - ii. *Have there been times when you might have sided more with the bully (they might have been your friend? Or someone who you wanted to be friends with)?*
- 7) Have your friends ever encouraged or pressurised you to bully someone with them?
 - i. *What made you want to become involved?*
 - ii. *Can you remember how you felt about the person who you and your friends were being unkind to?*
- 8) Have your friends ever encouraged you to stop a bully when they are being unkind?
 - i. *How did they do this?*
 - ii. *Can you remember how you felt about the person was acting unkind?*
 - iii. *Can you remember how you felt about the person was being bullied?*

Shelley Rogers 204516488

***The above questions will be modified according to A) the written description produced in session 1 and B) the responsiveness of the child being interviewed.**

Appendix 6: Example of written narrative

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One day at break on a very sunny day my friend and I decided to join a group of "African" girls because we thought it would be cool to hang out with the popular group. Within the group we were the only two that were not of colour so they would always talk in Zulu, which was fine in the beginning but then they would talk about us in Zulu. They carried on acting like that, as we went along I started to understand what they were saying but my friend didn't, during that time they acted as if they were our "friends". They made us very unsure of ourselves and think "were they really our friends?". Sometimes they were nice to us only ~~but~~^{when} we had something to offer, which is not fair. When we decided to confront them they denied everything. So as the year progressed we carried on as if nothing had happened. Then they started only inviting a "certain" five to go out with them or to movies. The five called themselves "the big five", They would leave the rest of us out. Then the following week they would talk about how much of fun they had, they would talk like that in front of those who never got invited. We decided to leave the ~~group~~^{group} and become our own group. The change really helped as my friend and I are much better people and much closer friends. We also realised that we must look at ~~ourselves~~^{at ourselves} in the mirror and think "Do we need to change?"

Appendix 7: Example of participant transcript

Interview – JM

I: Ok, J, can you tell me about your story. What you wrote about and why you decided to write about that?

J: Well, 'Lola' has been a friend of mine for a long time and she's really close to me, you know, if people could be sisters and not be with blood, it would probably be us, and when I saw her being bullied by this person that actually, you know, it doesn't really seem like the sort that would bully, like the popular person, doesn't seem that mean, that's really not nice because they don't even know each other. Why would she be saying those things if she had no idea about 'Lola', so I thought maybe you'd be interested in the story.

I: Ok, so J can you describe where you were, tell me about the person who was bullying... just tell me about what happened?

J: Well ya, I was at break obviously, right outside this room, um, H, she's popular, she looks nice, she's got a very nice appearance, the sort of person who keeps to her own group, she doesn't go and spread out, she's very nice to the people in her own group, but they tease each other, very friendly. Like if you're not in her group and you talk to her, she, like, will say stuff but leave as soon as she can and um, but L had gone up to her and asked her something, like I said I couldn't hear, but it must've been like she didn't really care for the answer because she said something, and L looked like, what do you mean? And she just kept talking and then her friends started gathering around and, like, just, like, laughing and she started getting like more and more hurt and stuff.

I: So J, before we start talking more about that, you said H didn't strike you as someone who you would imagine would be a bully, why?

J: Well when I see her with her friends they just like teasing each other, not like bullying. But she seems like a really nice person with her friends and stuff. It's just, like, you know, some bullies it's like they really close themselves off and stay away from everyone, and when they do see you, they like bully you. No, she's like very friendly, obviously to people in her own group, but she doesn't seem like a person who would go and hurt someone's feelings on purpose.

I: Ok, and your friend, how was she reacting.

J: Well she's obviously, like I said she was crying, and I think it might have been because her parents have been divorced, cos at the time her parents had split up, so at the time maybe they were teasing her about that, I don't know. Maybe that just, like, really hurt her you know, because she loves her parents and they were saying stuff, like maybe, like, "Ah, they don't love you anymore", ya, I just think, I don't know, she was really upset. She was crying. So I imagine that that must have been it. And she's like, you know really upset.

I: And in the story, you said you felt angry, can you tell me about how you were feeling?

J: I didn't just feel angry, I felt shocked that H would be so mean to L, I also felt angry cos like I said H doesn't know anything about L. She can't just go be mean to her when she doesn't even have anything to back it up, she can say stuff like that to her friends, I don't want her to at all, but she can go and tease her friends, because she knows stuff about them, but she doesn't know anything about L so she can't say those things.

I: And, then you said you went and told H to cut it out.

J: Ya, to stop it,

I: Tell me what you did?

J: I just went there, I just walked in there and said, "Stop it, you don't know anything about L, you can't tell her these things because you don't know her."

I: And at that time, you felt angry and you decided, because she's your friend, you're going to try and get involved and stop what was going on.

J: Yes

I: So you were thinking about how L was feeling and you were feeling cross. So what happened after that?

J: Well ya, she swore at us and walked away and L was really upset, she was just like crying, so I took her to the bathroom and I cleaned her up and we went outside and the group were sitting there and they were just like staring at us, and we were just sitting under the shelter and they were just staring at us and we were feeling very uncomfortable and I could see she was very agitated so I was just like, let's go sit behind there, like here behind the other side, let's just go sit here where we can't see them, so we will feel better.

I: You said you hadn't seen H bully people before, does that group ever do bullying behaviour...

J: Well, with boys obviously they'll go and tease them and stuff, like the group will go and say, "no don't do this", they'll tease them and then if you go up to them while they're sitting in class, not all of them, but just like 3 or so sitting in the class, they'll just like look at you and then you'll just look away, so they don't actually move, they'll just, like, look at you like this and you'll feel, like, comfortable with them.

I: Do they do that a lot to the same people?

J: Well it feels like they feel comfortable in their own group and if they like some people outside their group they'll go and chat to them, but basically if they don't like you and you're not in their group (cos you know they don't like some people in their group and they not really friends with them), but if you're not in their group and they don't like you basically you get the message straight away.

I: And so can tell me how you get the message?

J: Well, it's like you can just *feel* that you're not wanted

I: So in this situation, it was your friend, you went to stop it and the girl didn't respond to you she actually got cross with you as well.

J: Ya, cos I can imagine, you know, because she's busy, you know like someone like me, if you look at the popularity ranks I'm like nowhere near her and now she's busy doing this bullying thing and her friends are encouraging her and I'm like stop it, and it's me, so I can imagine that she's getting cross cos she's all like, all my friends are enjoying this...

I: So do you think she was doing it to show off in front of her friends as well?

J: Ya, I think so cos when she was talking to L, all her friends came and stood behind her and they were like, "Ah huh" and then she looked around and smiled because she saw her friends were backing her up, so she carried on. So ya I guess that's one of the reasons.

I: Um, is L often bullied by other people.

J: Well, no not really. She's recently moved to England. She was a really nice person.

I: Because I want to know, why she might have been picked on in particular, what happened to make H pick on her?

J: I think it was because she was vulnerable, she had something to be picked on, and her parents had been fighting before and she had been picked on for that and just now there's another stage to go and she had come and she was there and they could just...

I:..it was another opportunity?

J: Ya, to show off.

I: Had people mentioned the divorce before

J: Well they do, they talk about it in their group but it's like me, I don't even mention it, I don't even talk about it like its happened because you know, she's my friend, because people that are her friends don't mention it because we feel sorry for her, but they talk about it a lot and if they're really feeling like, they need to do something, they'll walk past it they'll say,

“Hey, L how are your parents going?” And they they’ll say, “Oh, sorry I forgot I mustn’t mention that”. I guess they just do it to show off.

I: Ok, so is this the only kind of bullying you’ve witnessed or been involved in?

J: Well ya there are, like the natural thing where someone walks up to someone and says, “Can I hang out with you guys?”, and she’ll say like, “No”. And then she walks away all upset. Like with my sister for example, at Livingstone, when she had this fun day going on and she was hanging out with me the whole time and I just wanted to go do stuff, I wanted to go on the rock climbing wall and she didn’t want to, so I was like Tash just go and play with your friends and she was like fine, stop being mean and I didn’t mean to be but she thought I was bullying her, so she ran off to her friends and I went and tried to explain it to her, and her friends were just like, “You’re such a whip” xxx so sometimes you can be the cause of the bully.

I: But I suppose with that, you weren’t really bullying, she just thought you were being unkind... because with bullying it’s when a group or a person keep being unkind or act in an unkind way whether its physical, or not talking to one group or one person in particular, so perhaps with you and your sister it was just a case of a misunderstanding?

J: Yes.

I: So in Penzance, are there certain people who are often the ones who do the bullying, or pick on someone?

J: You mean in a pattern?

I: Yes, not just a person who’s friends with someone and fights with them, but I’m talking about a specific person or a group, like this group, like the group of girls you were talking about earlier.

J: Well boys are included obviously. It’s basically like two separate groups that go together when they’re in the same room.

I: Ok, so what I’m trying to find out is what types of bullying you have seen

J: Well, it’s mostly the people who have more power in the school, power I mean popularity to back them up. I’ve noticed that people like me who are lower down on the popularity ladder are more friendly, more like, because we have nicer friends, but people like H who are more like high up like they bully because they have more power, more popularity

I: Can you tell me why you think they are more popular?

J: Well, there are a few people like them who have the same taste in like fashion and things and at a young stage like in grade 1 or so they’ll go and make friends with each other and then they’ll start ganging up on us, on the people that are different. No I’m saying this wrong...it’s like the people who are basically like more trendy, so people notice them so they get more popular but people like myself, and my friends we don’t really care about that so we just stay down there

I: So what you are saying, is that there are more of them that like the same thing

J: No what I’m saying is that we don’t really care about what we look like, so were down there, but they do, so they’re up there. So that the people who do care about their appearances are more popular and things like that.

I: Do you think it’s that they care about their appearances more, or is it because they make them themselves look a certain way so that they can all look the same and come across as trendy.

J: It might be both cos they might like doing it cos I know some girls are nuts about fashion, my sister is one of them, but she doesn’t have a lot of money to go and buy stuff so she just goes with what she can, but they like looking good and then they’ll see like, Beyonce’s wearing this dress, now I better go buy it and then they’ll, like, they already like that so it’s both really...

I: So you're saying there are the people that are 'different'. Do you think that makes your group more vulnerable to being bullied by these people?

J: Well, we've got something that they have an opportunity for, we're not in the fashion, we just care about what we like and what's comfortable even if it's from the late sixties, so now they can say, "Ah look you're not wearing Rhianna's perfume, or you know, they can pick on us about that, because they think that they've got everything so we can't bully them. But now we don't have everything, but we don't really care, or at least I think we don't (laugh). I think so?"

I: As a bystander, can you think of another instance, maybe in the classroom, where you witnessed some kind of bullying?

J: Does it have to be verbal?

I: No

J: Oh, it can be anything...Ya, you know, I know I've been talking about my sister a lot but there was this one time at Livingstone, where I was going to go pick her up because we were running late and I'm the fastest runner other than her (laugh) so I just ran in to go and get her and she was packing away some of her books and one of the boys and, I um, don't think it was in her class, and one of the boys came up to her and he was like, "Hey Tash, how do you think you did on that test?", and at first I thought oh, one of her friends, one of her many friends is talking to her, and she was like, I don't know, you know, I haven't gotten it back. And then he was, like, "Ah you probably did bad you know", and she was like, "No, I studied hard, Jessie and my mom helped me" and he was like, "Don't kid yourself, you're here for a reason" and then I was thinking, he probably doesn't come from Livingstone because he wouldn't say that if he had the same problem, so then she was just like really upset and then just proving my doubts she said, "Just because you don't come here doesn't mean you can be so mean!" and I was just like, how can he do this because it's so mean. I mean she has a problem, lets all get over it! And we can't tease her about it. It's the same here. It's just was really mean, so I just went there and got her books and I was like, "let's go", and we walked out. I didn't want to start a big thing, so I was like, "let's go".

I: Ok, so you saw it happening and you decided not to get involved.

J: Yes, I didn't want to make it worse, because she knows she has a problem and she's very... it's like her weak point, she's very fragile about it. As soon as you start mentioning it's a big problem, like wada wada, even if you mention her teachers in Penzance couldn't handle her properly, she gets all upset because she wants to be normal, as she calls it. So I didn't want to get started, I didn't want to get her crying, cos I love her you know, so I just said, "let's go".

I: So you weighed up that situation and you saw that your sister was the one being spoken to in that way and was being pushed, so you felt more for how she was feeling and you didn't want to get involved because you thought it would make her feel worse?

J: Ya

I: Have there been times when you have watched someone or a group of people being unkind (bullying) and not done anything about it? Just watched it?

J: Well, I'm trying to think here...pause... well, like you mean just didn't do anything. Ya, but I don't know any of them, I just saw them walking down the hallway, I think they might have been grade 4 or 5, I don't know, I just saw that they were like pushing each other and I just watched and then the one person stopped and said, "Hey man, this is getting lame, and I was just like, "Ah they're gonna solve it" and so I just walked off.

I: So if the people that are involved... you don't know them... then you would choose not to get involved?

J: No, I was just watching, and then they were like pushing each other and the one guy pushed him and he was on the wall like this and then he was like, "Hey dude let's stop this

someone's going to get hurt" and I was like well, aaawww, and then it looked like they were going to stop, so I don't know if they did, but it looked like they did.

I: I see what you mean. Would there be other times when you might see bullying and not get involved? Are there any other reasons why you might not get involved if you saw bullying take place?

J: Well, I wouldn't want the person to get hurt, I wouldn't want their feelings to get hurt like if I'm going to say don't mention their problem, it's a problem, get over it, like I would've made my sister cry then, I'm basically saying she's got a problem and that would hurt her, so I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't like to hurt their feelings, I wouldn't like to hurt them back. I know some people when they are in two groups... they're in the popular group but as well as a 'bottom group' so they don't want to stand up to this person because they might look stupid, but if they don't stand up for them this person might go 'whaat'. So they just grab their shirt and say, "let's go".

I: They take the person away...

J: mm

I: So some people might be in two groups?

J: Yes, cos they're up there to act cool but they actually want to be down by the less popular people, they actually want to, but you know, they like being noticed.

I: So in those situations, so they would just take the person who is not in the popular group and take them away from...

J: Yes, but I wouldn't want to hurt them, because sometimes they're really rough taking them away, but in the end they're like, I was doing that for your own good. I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't do that. I don't like having a link to two opposite teams. It's like being a sharks fan and a blue bulls fan. It's not going to happen (laugh) you've got to be one or the other because if you're both you're going to end up hurting someone, mentally, physically...

I: And those people in both groups, have you ever heard or seen them bullying someone because they felt more pressure from the popular group or do they often side with the person who is not in the popular group...do they get pressured from the popular kids?

J: Well obviously they do, popular kids aren't just gonna say...I've seen it, if they think you're dead weight they're going to chuck you out of their group, so obviously it depends on where the pressure's coming, like the situation, so if the situations all pressure on this person and there is no other way to go I'm sure they'll like, he or she will just join in, not huge, just like teasing here or there but if it's the other way round it's, they don't really do it. It's like power, cos if you're standing with them and they see you and just like teasing you it's not gonna be like right, she'll just walk past and say like "Ah, ya, good point...haha well done." Not huge and stay with them, that's right.

I: So they'll get involved just a little bit?

J: Obviously like they'll get a bit more involved with the popular people because they've got less power but then they'll make sure they're like background people, it's like I don't get it.

I: You said you're not as high in the popularity group, can you explain why the people not considered popular might get picked on/bullied?

J: Well it's like they're paparazzi, they dig into you until they find something to spread about. It's like, I don't really care what I look like, I just go for comfort, so they'll dig at me about that sometimes but they know I don't really care you know, because they don't bug me that much, because they know I don't really care, but if they really get into it and they tease me about my family. Then I get really upset, but I'd get my dad to come in and say, "Why did you do this" and this sort thing, and then they keep quiet.

I: In that situation, if you were being bullied how would you handle that in the moment –tell a teacher, go to the bathroom?

J: It depends on what they're teasing me about. If they're teasing me about something stupid like what my jeans look like then it's just like, hmph, but if they're really getting it in like, "Ah, your sister has a problem, she had to repeat grade 2", then I get really upset and then I'll go to a teacher and just say "Sir or mam, they were really digging at me about my sister" but if I don't, it depends.

I: So it depends on the situation and what they are bullying you about.

J: Normally I just go to my dad or my mom because they actually go to Mr M (principal) and say this must stop, because this is a school and there shouldn't be bullying.

I: And then do you find that the people who were doing the bullying get angry with you because they got into trouble?

J: Ya, they do, they get angry, and then they just ignore you. I'm actually happy about that because they ignore you for a while and then when they look at you they give you the death stare... "ahhh, you shot me"...(fake acting being shot) So no, it's not. But then they ignore me and then they start after a few weeks. They'll start getting back in but I don't really care... *if* they don't get too personal.

I: And the ignoring, do those groups/people, do they use ignoring/social isolation as a means to make other people uncomfortable? Have you seen that happen? Or has it happened to you?

J: Ya it happens, but I don't really care. It's like the silent treatment - if you don't respond to them and go "hahahaha, like do that", then nothing's going to happen. But when you walk towards them and they stare at you like this, (pretend stare) then yes, that feels uncomfortable but if you just ignore them back its easy to just go on with life, cos then they're not worrying you. Yes because if they're ignoring you then it's just like, well very good punishment hey, you're pretending I'm not here, very good punishment hey, I don't care, well done.

I: Do you think it might have more of an impact on other people that you know?

J: Some people they want to be popular, they don't want to be 'down there', so when people like H ignore them, they get really upset. But then you just go up to them and say, "Its ok, if they're going to ignore you then they're just ugly people, you ignore them back. If you ignore them back they'll stop, they'll obviously stop because they're not getting anything out of you".

I: So J it sounds like you've taken on the role of encouraging the people who are being bullied by the popular group. That you help those people feel better about themselves?

J: Ya, I don't see why people don't do that because if you were bullied you'd want everyone to come and say, "Ahh, it's ok, it's ok, they didn't mean it". But now when some people just watch and they go, whatever, I don't get it because this person has dug into them probably about something personal and started teasing them about it and you don't want to go and just make sure they're ok, I don't get it?

I: I wonder whether that's maybe because you don't want to be in the popular group and maybe because that's happened to you sometimes so you know how that persons feeling. Would you agree with that?

J: Yes I would.

I: Ok, have your friends or anyone you know ever pressurised you to be unkind to someone, become involved in bullying?

J: Ya, I guess so, they like gossiping and stuff, so they'll say, "Hey J, did you know this" and I'll say, "No not really" and they'll say, "Come on Jess you've got to be more into this gossip thing" and I'll just be like, "I don't really care about stuff like that". I don't care who is dating who because they'll be dating someone else next week. So then um, then like they'll do something, like if they're teasing people...cos I don't want to brag but I'm really good at 'chirping' people. But I don't like having that gift at all, so then we'll have a chirping contest. You know what that is right?

I: Yes

J: And then they'll be like, "Hey J, do you want to add anything? Then I'll go "Nah", so then the boys will go, "Ah J, you've got such a cool gift, why don't you just show it. And I'm like, "No, its mean" (laugh)

I: So you've got this ability to give really good insults, is that your 'chirping'...

J: I don't like it though, like chirps are like saying, "you're so long" or like, "you're so big"...I can make up ones really quickly. I can make up new ones really quickly. In fact once I accidently said one that's actually one of the best ones in the school, but I don't like it because that goes around and people will say that to people. Like someone will go around and say it to someone else who has nothing to do with soccer and then it hurts them.

I: So you said sometimes when people are chirping you'll get involved. They'll say, "Come on J, get involved" Is this chirping or teasing people that are in the same group or of equal standing in terms of power?

J: Ya, people normally say that to their own people, in their own groups but if they really getting into it, like a fight with someone who is not in their group, sometimes they'll like chirp them or 'diss' them. Sometimes I do chirp people in my own group but it's like we all know it's a big joke. You don't mean any of it.

I: Do you think that bullying doesn't happen much within groups, or do you think it happens more between groups?

J: But no we're just, like, having fun, we're just joking with each other, were not bullying, we don't mean it to hurt. Like if we do say something that hurts someone else we'll say, "No, ok guys stop it", so if someone says, "Hey dudes that actually hurt me", then we'll say, "Ok everyone, stop it someone's getting upset". But like, it's like with H and a different group, if that happens and someone gets hurt they're just like, oh well, there's your weak spot and they'll dig in.

I: Ok, so in a group of friends do you think... you say you tease each other, do you think that teasing doesn't carry on because everyone feels comfortable enough to say, "hey please stop it you've taken it too far, I'm getting hurt".

J: They won't say that word for word, they'll go like... "Dude" and you can see it by their face that you know they've been hurt. They'll show that they've been hurt by their face and then we'll all look at them and then were like, ok we'll all stop because we don't mean to hurt, we just mean to joke around and make fun of...sorry not make fun of, just have fun, just joke around with. We don't mean it, it's like a contest, who has the best chirp, sort of thing, but we don't mean it, just who has the best chirp.

I: Have any of your friends encouraged you to get involved in a bullying situation and asked you to stop it, or tell a teacher.

J: Ya, I guess so, once I got into a fight with someone and I was, like, really mad at them, you know how that happens... and so I just walked off and then later on, when they were getting into a fight with someone else, but they were the one being hurt, so I was just standing watching thinking that's what they deserve but I was not actually thinking what's going on, I was just thinking revenge...it's so stupid, I don't get it, I just do it, it's so stupid, so one of my friends is like, "Hey J, what are you doing just standing there? You're the one that's good at stopping fighting", and I'm like, "Ya, tell that to my sister cos she fights" (laughs)

I: So did you end up getting involved?

J: Ya, I just like, just went in and said "Hey dude just stop this it's not cool" and they were like, "oh, ok"...

I: And they listened?

J: Ya, cos they were just bullying to show off, they didn't mean it. They were just like, "Ah, ok whatever. It's also depending on their answer. If you know they were doing it because they wanted to or because they were showing off. If you say stop it, and they go like, "Why must I", and if they carry on saying "No I'm not going to" because they want to and that they

are like a real bully, but if they were doing it to just show off then they'll say, "why come on man", and you say, "no, this is not cool" and then they stop and then you know they were just doing it to show off.

I: Um, there was something else I wanted to ask...oh yes, revenge. What I am trying to figure out, is when people are watching bullying, what their thoughts, feelings are behaviours are. So what I'm hearing from you is that you always side with the person being bullied?

J: Well not always. I mean cos like if a group of people, like H's is on her own and a group of less popular girls are ganging up on her and stuff, saying why are you doing this?, its mean, I wont stop that you know. Not if they're bullying, if they're just saying, why you doing this then I won't stop it, I'll let them say why you're doing this, but if they're starting to like, push her around I'll say, "guys guys, calm down, stop touching her, go back to class".

I: So in that situation, you wouldn't side with the person who is being bullied necessarily because they deserve it really...?

J: Because she doesn't really deserve to have someone on her side to stop them asking her why she's bullying them, so I'll get them to stop pushing her and bullying her. I'll get them to start asking questions again, like an interview again.

I: So the pushing, would the physical bullying be the point where you'd get involved then?

J: Yes, cos what if they pushed them and they hurt themselves.

I: Ok, so do you think at that time, you're thinking, actually that person does deserve it I'm not going to get involved because they often bully other people and deserve it?

J: No, actually, just if you have a fight with someone and you get really frustrated with them, it's strange how our minds work, it's like all common sense goes and we just think, how am I going to get this person back and then when they're fighting you're just thinking, "Ah, this is how I'm going to get them back. I'm just not going to do anything and then when someone actually comes and slaps you out of that I go oh, what am I doing...it's what I call 'the revenge state'. I call it the revenge state. I try not to get into that state because that's what I do, I just like "Ag, whatever", I just think, oh they were being so mean to me, well not mean but they were saying things to me, they deserve them.

I: That's interesting. So that's why there might be something else going on in their head when everything they've learnt and they know is right sometimes that goes out the window, like you talked about the revenge state. So some people might get into the state where they so badly want to be popular that they forget everything that they've learnt...?

J: Yes, that actually happens sometimes when they were in grade 1 or they just joined the school or something and they come and they've got their pig tails and they're looking so nervous, they're immediately put into a box that says 'not cool'. So it's basically ranked in cool and not cool. If you're cool, you're popular. If you not cool you're not. So immediately they said they're not cool, they're not popular and leave them there but they want to be popular because they're like, maybe they didn't have friends or they just want to be popular or maybe they were popular but they don't know what to do here, so they get like so messed up, like not messed up, they get really hyped up and then they didn't even think of people like me, someone who's not on the same level as they were on, ladder, whatever. And I'll go to them and say, "Hey, are you ok. They're just stupid" and they'll slap you and say, "I don't care". They get like they've been drinking or taking drugs, they really want to be popular.

And half the time they don't end up being popular they just end up being a mean person with no friends who is not popular, but sometimes the kids do look at them and say, hey wait maybe we should consider them again.

I: So why would they end up being a mean person?

J: Because you know, because most cool people are mean because they have the power... no, not that they don't want to be their friends sometimes they label people and say don't look at them anymore we don't care.

I: I mean, is that, are those the kind of people you describe as bullies?

J: Well yes, one of the people. I would consider quite a few people to be bullies. But yes, I would consider them...

I: And are they often the target of the 'cool' people's bullying as well?

J: Well not always, cos sometimes they can see that, oh this person, they want to really be in our group let's just ignore them and leave them alone. But sometimes they do get into a heated argument and the person won't fight back cos they actually want to be in that group. And some people are just really mean. Some cool people are just really mean, so they will fight with them because they know that they won't fight back.

I: Because they want to be there friend?

J: Yes, don't bite the hand that feed you basically (laugh).

I: Do you think that the lessons that you learn at school, of highly effective children for e.g. the seven habits, and being taught about bullying in class, do you think that makes a difference?

J: Well some people know they're bullying and they don't really care and they just want to bully and sometimes it's because they're being bullied in their life so those people who just want to bully people or those people who just show off, the people who just want to show off, have to learn that you can show off in other ways, you can show off with gogos you can show off with clothes but you don't need to show off with bullying. It's because they want to show off their power. Some people, they just want to bully so they've got to be taught that that's the wrong thing to do.

I: Ok, let's put those people aside for now, do you think the lessons that you learn at school or from teachers, do you think that does encourage other people to do the right thing?

J: Ya, the people who don't really know what to do, it's like, do I bully just to act cool or do I bully just to, then they know that that is just not cool.

I: And is it also because they know that they won't get away with it?

J: No, it's because then they know that they're hurting someone else's feelings

I: Then there is that separate group, and tell me if I'm right in saying this, you saying whether they get taught or not they are still going to bully other people?

J: Ya, they just need to know that, like sometimes when you see that, we'll just go and, well like, go and be mean to them to show, not the whole time, but just to show them what it feels like, but then they're just like, "Oh no", then they're a target now, but they've just got to be taught that its just not cool.

I: And do you think that the reason why they do carry on, is because there are a few other people who support them?

J: Ya, some people support them, and sometimes it's because other people are bullying them. So basically what this whole thing is about, if we get people to stop bullying were going to get no one being bullied and if we get people to stop bullying because they show off, just to do something else that they can show off about like you know not bullying.

I: So you're saying if peer pressure can be used in a positive way and the more people say it's not cool to bully the less those people will do it?

J: Ya, cos its mostly because people are being bullied that they bully other people and because those people are bullying it's because they are just sick and you can't help that, or because they are being pressured into doing it. So basically if people stopped pressuring other people than most of the bullying would stop.

I: And when you say, they bully because they're being bullied. Why do they do that?

J: They're thinking, how can someone do this to me I'm just going to do it to someone else to show that I don't care, sort of thing, like, I'm just going to do it to someone else because it happened to me. Surely I can do it to someone else.

Sometimes, because they were bullied once or more times in their life and they think its not nice and sometimes its because they're popular and they just want to show off. It's like their ticket.

Can I just say one thing... Not all people who bully want to bully, like if there are people who are just bullying so they can show off they might not be happy doing it. They might not want to be in the group and they don't like making other people hurt, but like I said it's peer pressure. Or else they don't want to bully but there is nothing else to do cos sometimes they don't want to but they just can't stop what's happening to make them bully. And they think that if I leave the group they will stop bullying but they don't leave the group because they're friends, you know I just, ya...

I: Do you know people like that?

J: Some of them, I think H might actually be one of them because like I said she doesn't seem like the sort that would bully but when she does bully she does it with a vengeance and so I don't know. Cos ya she's so nice with lots of people outside of her group but you know if she would just be friendly with everyone, then everyone would be so happy. And I do know some people who are so friendly because when they bully it doesn't seem right because you know they are actually a nice person

I: Ok, well thank you for that J. You have been very helpful

Shelley Rogers 204516488

Appendix 8: Ethical Clearance Letter



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21 July 2011

Miss SJ Rogers (204516488)
School of Psychology
Faculty of Humanities, Development and
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Howard College Campus

Dear Miss Rogers

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0595/011M
PROJECT TITLE: The Role of the Bystander: Investigating the experiences, dilemmas and recommendations of pre-adolescents involved as bystanders of bullying behaviour

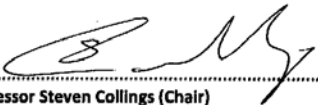
In response to your application dated 15 July 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor: Prof D Cartwright
cc. Mrs S van der Westhuizen, Post-Graduate Office