'Mean girls', bystanders and their victims: An investigation into relational aggression amongst girls, from a developmental perspective

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science (Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Abstract

Relational, or indirect, bullying amongst girls has more recently received greater attention from researchers across the globe, in recognition of its potentially devastating psychological effects. Particularly in South Africa, with its unique history of apartheid, racial and gender inequalities and violent struggles amongst marginalized communities to be given the freedom to have a voice, the tendency of girls to 'hide' their aggression, and to express it in covert ways needs to be understood and addressed. Additionally, in South African schools, many educators do not adequately appreciate the grim reality of girls' aggression as an antecedent to serious psychiatric illness. These girls are already coping with the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is leaving many of them orphaned and raising younger siblings whilst still children themselves, thereby increasing their vulnerability to psychiatric adjustment difficulties. The present study therefore investigated the prevalence and psychological effects of relational bullying, and explored the developmental trajectory of different types of bullying amongst school-aged South African girls.

The sample included 169 learners, from grade One to grade Twelve, in an independent school located in an urban area of Kwazulu-Natal. A self-report questionnaire, including direct questions and projective techniques, was utilized to collect data relating to the nature of girls' experiences of bullying, the psychological effects thereof, their friendships and their levels of social, cognitive and moral functioning.

The current study showed a 33.5% prevalence rate of bullying victimization amongst the sample. It was hypothesized from a review of the literature that as girls grow older, and their skills in the cognitive, social and moral reasoning domains improve, friendship ties become closer and more important, and they utilize increasingly sophisticated forms of relational aggression. The research findings supported this prediction. In addition, it was found that older girls are increasingly negatively affected by girl-bullying, as reflected in a range of psychologically unhealthy reactions, which may constitute the precursors to psychiatric illness in adulthood.

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Preliminary Comments

Abbreviations

SA - South Africa

SPSS - Statistical Program for Social Sciences

Terms used

'Victim' is used in the current study to refer to those who have experienced being bullied by other children.

'Perpetrator/Bully' is used to denote any child who engaged in bullying behavior towards other children.

'By-stander' is used to denote any child who observes bullying activity and does not get involved.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and psychological impact of bullying

There has been an abundance of research conducted into the general issues of 'aggression' and 'bullying' and its societal effects over the past few decades. However, this topic is still becoming an increasing focus of concern for researchers, due to its widespread nature and the often devastating effects on our youth, such as poor physical health, social isolation, depression and even suicide (Baldry & Winkel, 2003; Besag, 2006; Delfabbro, Winefield, Trainor, Dollard, Anderson, Metzer & Hammarstrom, 2006; Landau, Milich, Harris & Larson, 2001; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield & Karstadt, 2001). Olweus (1995), a leading researcher on the topic, defines bullying as the repeated exposure to intentional harm-doing of others, within an interpersonal relationship, and which involves an imbalance of power. In an effort to quantify this phenomenon, bullying prevalence rates among young people have been found to range between 6% and 75% (Phillips, 2003), indicating that serious attention and intervention is necessary. Bullying amongst both boys and girls is rife in South Africa, as it is world-wide. However, in girls this phenomenon seems to typically manifest in a subtle, relational manner, rather than in the overt aggression more commonly seen amongst boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Ostrov, Woods, Jansen, Casas & Crick, 2004). Since past research has tended to focus on boys, and overt forms of aggression, it is critical to investigate and build understanding around the issue of female aggression (Campbell, 1993).

1.2 Child development theories and the use of aggression

Traditional developmental theories in psychology have been criticized by feminists as fundamentally flawed, since they fail to fully explain the development of women (Greene, 2003). Early Freudian, Eriksonian and Piagetian theories focused almost exclusively on the study of men, with the assumption that women follow identical developmental pathways (Bae, 1999). However, as Greene (2003) points out, such theories still form a critical base from which women-centred theories will emerge. Likewise, studies on the development of aggression have largely ignored the

fundamental differences between the genders, but still serve as a useful starting point in the investigation of aggression in girls (Campbell, 1993).

1.3 The phenomenon of relational aggression

Aggression occurs in various forms; physical and non-physical, direct and indirect, verbal and non-verbal, social and relational. Much attention has been given to physical aggression, due to the fact that it is commonly associated with criminal offences, such as assault and murder. However, relatively less attention has been given to relational aggression, which involves damage to relationships (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukainen, 1992), and may encompass the non-physical, verbal and indirect methods of hurting others. Unfortunately, says Simmons (2002), relational aggression is often completely hidden behind the façade of friendship and play, and can therefore be difficult to detect by adults, as nothing 'looks' wrong on the surface.

1.4 Gender and aggression

Traditionally, psychological theory has assumed that both genders follow a universal developmental trajectory. Josselson (1990) criticizes this approach, arguing that women define their identity in more complex ways than men, with connections to others of paramount importance. It is imperative, therefore, for the development of female aggression to be viewed in the light of this difference. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concur, arguing that the development of aggression in girls is guided by cultural and socialization processes, in which outright physical aggression is strongly discouraged and often punished by the withdrawal of both affection and social approval.

It would seem that, although both boys and girls display relational aggression, gender socialization in our society could lead boys to value physical dominance, whereas girls may place a higher value on relationship and intimacy with peers, resulting in the greater use of relational aggression as a means of control. This difference in gender-values could possibly explain why girls report their experience of relational aggression as more distressing and hurtful than do boys (Underwood, Galen & Paquette, 2001). Despite the fact that many studies (e.g. Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Rys & Bear, 1997; Werner & Crick, 1999) have found both the deliverers and victims of high-level relational aggression to be at increased risk for

social and psychological adjustment problems, there has been little research investigating the developmental trajectories of this phenomenon in girls (Stauffacher & DeHart, 2006). Research on girls in various stages of psychosocial development could be useful in enabling early identification and intervention strategies for those who are likely high risk candidates as bullies or victims.

1.5 South African context

In South African schools, asserts Smit (2003b), the issue of bullying has become further complicated by the history of apartheid in this country. In his study, racist verbal abuse occurred in 30% of the reported cases of bullying. Although it is not within the scope of this study to analyse the impact of racial discrimination on aggression amongst school children, such a history of negative social encounters must be given due consideration, as there is no doubt that many bullying incidents are nested within entrenched patterns of racial conflict and derogatory attitudes towards 'the other' (Smit, 2003a). De Wet (2005a) points out that there is a problematic discrepancy between public demand for the reduction of bullying in South African schools and the response of key role players in this arena – they do not seem to 'hear' the victims' cries for help. Such passivity on the part of teachers and other adults, says this author, implies that bullying is acceptable: "A prerequisite in the fight against bullying is an acknowledgement by adults and children alike, that bullying is not a normal part of growing up – it is dehumanizing and degrading" (p. 723). Goffman (1967) points out that 'rules of conduct', which are a socially sanctioned set of actions involving both obligations and expectations, are necessary for order in society and a healthy sense of self. Bullying is an infringement on such rules and therefore needs to be eradicated.

A thorough understanding of the predominant form of aggression amongst girls is crucial. It needs to be recognized as a potential factor in the aetiology of certain types of psychopathology in women, particularly in the case of mood and anxiety disorders. Simply because it is different to traditional concepts of 'bullying' and adults find it difficult to detect, does not give us the excuse to ignore it, or to pretend that it does not exist.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Bullying, as defined by Craig and Pepler (2007) can be described as ill-treatment of an individual by his/her peers. Most importantly, bullying involves an unequal relationship of power and occurs repeatedly over time. These authors assert that such power differentials may arise from physical factors such as size and strength or social factors such as social status, role-dominance, group-power or that which arises through the existence of social systems such as racism, sexism and other forms of institutionalized discrimination. In addition, people may gain power over others by knowing their specific vulnerabilities, and using this knowledge to control and inflict distress. They therefore point out that bullying is a "*destructive relationship problem*: Children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others; children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and unable to defend themselves from this peer abuse" (Italics in original text, p. 86). They argue that such childhood lessons can lead to destructive and abusive relationships in later life for both the bullies and their victims. Zahn-Waxler (1986) proposes a need for investigation into the different kinds of developmental trajectories occurring amongst children, which may be related to differences in socialization, circumstances and innate temperament. The dearth of developmental research on both the quantitative and qualitative changes in aggression over time needs to be addressed, says this author.

2.2 Understanding aggression and bullying

2.2.1 Forms of bullying and aggression

Much of the research in past years tended to consider only overt physical and verbal aggression (such as hitting and kicking) in the study of bullying, largely because researchers tended to focus only on males, who were documented to be more physically aggressive than females (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Ostrov & Crick, 2007; Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000a). However, non-physical bullying needs to be exposed and recognized as a potentially devastating source of psychological distress and

illness, particularly amongst girls. Studies have found that many girls find non-physical aggression as painful as physical harm, and more so than do boys (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Since bullying amongst girls occurs largely within friendship networks (Besag, 2006), and girls place a high value on their relationships, girl-bullying offers vast potential for emotional damage. Coyne, Archer and Eslea (2006) argue that we will find that girls are subjected to just as much aggression as boys, when more covert forms are taken into consideration. Explanations are crucial in determining which interventions will effectively reduce relational aggression amongst girls (Owens, *et al*., 2000a). Although recently there has been a sudden increase in studies on aggression amongst girls, research on the nature, functions and developmental course of this phenomenon is still extremely sparse.

2.2.2 Defining and operationalising the concepts

It is clear from research that 'bullying' is not a unitary construct (Xie, Swift, Cairns & Cairns, 2002) and it is also not necessarily the same as **other** types of 'aggression' in terms of the following: age of occurrence (aggression in the form of bullying occurs mostly amongst children); intention (bullying is mostly intended to humiliate, rather than to give the aggressor access to resources); degree (bullying is mostly not life-threatening); it involves an "asymmetric power relationship", wherein the victim is relatively helpless to defend him/herself (Olweus, 1993, p. 10); persistence (bullying is generally repeated, in various different forms and across many occasions) and finally, emotional pay-off (bullying seems to give bullies some pleasure, a boost in self esteem, improved social status, power, etc.) (L. Lachenicht, Personal Communication, 17 November 2009).

It is necessary for the purposes of validity and reliability to ensure that the nature of what is being studied is clearly defined and operationalised (Pellegrini & Roseth, 2006). Bullying can therefore be defined to include a diverse range of actions, from covert aggression (such as social manipulation, spreading rumours, malicious gossiping, social exclusion, disapproval, betrayal of secrets) to overt aggression (physical attacks or threats of such attacks, teasing and verbal abuse) (Besag, 2006; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Another distinction that can be made is that aggression may be confrontational or non-confrontational. Relational aggression more

often involves non-confrontational, covert behaviours and physical aggression is more often confrontational and overt (Ostrov & Crick, 2007; Xie *et al*. 2002).

Ostrov and Crick (2007) state that in relational aggression the victim is harmed through the damage, or threat of damage, to relationships (friendships). They argue that studies on aggressive behaviour in early childhood, and on the developmental course of aggression, are crucial, since the development of peer relationships and friendships is particularly important for the academic, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children. Gomes (2007) provides a list of themes that are central to the concept of relational aggression: Power imbalance, manipulation, torment, lack of empathy and unobservable to 'outsiders'.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'relational' aggression will refer to *all forms of non-physical bullying with the intention to harm someone through the vehicle of a relationship,* and is considered roughly synonymous with the term 'indirect' aggression.

2.2.3 Prevalence

Solberg and Olweus (2003) point out that in order to be considered useful in making comparisons across groups, prevalence estimates need to be carefully defined and operationalized. Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield and Karstadt (2000) indicate that surveys of bullying amongst school children have revealed prevalence rates of 8% to 46% of participants reporting 'frequent experiences' of physical and verbal victimisation. In their study, where they measured through self-report the prevalence (in terms of 'frequent experience') of both relational and direct (physical/verbal) bullying amongst 1 639 primary school children, they found the following: With regard to direct bullying, 4.3% of the sample could be identified as bullies, 10.2% as bully/victims and 39.8% as victims. With regard to relational bullying, they found 1.1% to be identifiable as bullies, 5.9% as bully/victims and 37.9% as victims of relational bullying. However, there was a **partial overlap** in participation in direct and relational bullying, whereby 31.8% of the children who were counted as either, bullies, bully/victims or victims were involved in **both** direct and relational bullying behaviour. Only 32.5% of the participants were regarded to have no involvement in any bullying behaviour at all. Olweus (1993) reported that 15% of the students in his

‘special project’ conducted in Bergen, Norway were involved in bullying (either as bullies or victims), “now and then” or more frequently. About 5% were involved in more serious bullying, “about once a week” or more frequently.

Forero, McLellan, Rissel and Bauman (1999), reported an overall prevalence (an experience of a least one or more encounters) amongst a sample of 3 918 primary and secondary school students of almost one-quarter (23.7%) bullying others, 12.7% were victims of bullying and 21.5% were both bullies and victims within one term of the school year. Therefore, it would seem that at least three out of five school children in this study either experienced or participated in bullying behaviour during this short period of time. No differentiation was made between relational and direct forms of bullying in this study. Olweus (1993) concludes that according to numerous studies, bullying is a substantial problem in many parts of the world and that it not only seems to be more prevalent nowadays but it also seems to take more serious forms.

Consistent research findings have pointed towards a higher incidence of physical bullying amongst school-aged boys, whilst non-physical bullying seems to be the preferred *modus operandi* of school-aged girls (Besag, 2006; Young & Sweeting, 2004). However, McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriquez, and Olson (2003) found in their study that boys not only exhibit more physical aggression than girls, but were also overall more relationally aggressive than girls as well. Underwood, Scott, Galperin, Bjornstad and Sexton (2004) point out that some studies have found no gender differences in relational aggression. Such discrepancies in the literature could have several reasons; that other ethnic and/or sub-cultural differences play a role, that gender differences in relational aggression are less prominent than in physical aggression, or that girls are less inclined to report on their relational aggression, resulting in a lower prevalence than there is in reality. Alternatively, Owens, Shute and Slee (2000c) assert that gender differences in relational aggression only really become evident in adolescence, therefore studies on younger children are less likely to report significant differences.

2.2.4 The developmental perspective

Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann and Jugert (2006) state that much is already known about general trends in the different types of bullying throughout the life course, for example; primary school age children are more likely to be victims than are

adolescents, overall bullying decreases as children grow older, prosocial behaviour increases with age and finally, forms of bullying become more subtle and complex as age increases. However, they argue that little research has been conducted focusing specifically on **indirect** forms of aggression and gender or age differences. Björkqvist *et al.*, (1992) found in their studies that the type of aggression used by children (both males and females) follows a developmental trajectory from overt forms (physical and verbal) in younger children to greater use of covert forms as they grow older. They argue that relational aggression requires more advanced social-cognitive and linguistic skills and therefore hardly occurs before the age of eight years.

2.2.5 The South African Context

Thirion (2007) and Govender (2009) point out that South African society is often a violent and abusive one, characterized by structural violence, and since our children model themselves on adult behaviour, bullying is bound to occur. Staub (1986) says: "An analysis of historical events suggests that the conditions that are likely to give rise to aggression on an individual level also increase the probabilities of violence within or between societies. Economic problems, chaos and political disorganization within a society, increase the likelihood of violence and of scapegoating and persecution of subgroups in the society" (p. 137). Thirion (ibid) adds that with the advent of more sophisticated technology in South Africa, young people have access to a new potentially very dangerous method of bullying, namely: cyberbullying. Text messages, chat rooms and e-mail are easy ways to spread rumours to large numbers of people in an instant, leaving the victims powerless and helpless to protect themselves against the attack. De Wet (2005a) asserts that girls engage in cyber-bullying more often than boys, and due to the lack of boundaries or tangible consequences of this behaviour, it may become extremely destructive. Since girls may be more sensitive to 'image' or 'reputation' than boys, they may prefer the anonymity of this form of bullying in situations where they aim to eradicate enviable female rivals without being seen to do so. Boys, on the other hand, may prefer to use more overt forms in their attempt to increase their position of dominance in the hierarchy (L. Lachenicht, Personal communication, 17 November 2009).

In studies conducted in South African schools, de Wet (2005b) documented that only 32.15% of a sample of 339 learners from secondary schools in the Free State province reported that they had never been exposed to indirect verbal aggression, whilst Smit (2003a) reported that 29% of the girls in a sample of 60 South African primary school learners reported being subjected to indirect forms of bullying, confirming that this phenomenon is a common problem amongst South African school-girls. Maree (2005) comments that: "bullying is embedded in the broader picture of spiraling violence in South Africa…" (p. 15). It would seem that the central elements to girl-bullying still remain predominantly indirect, hidden and non-physical. To date, a thorough cross-sectional exploration of relational aggression amongst girls in South Africa is still sorely lacking.

2.3 The psychological impact of physical and relational aggression

2.3.1 Normative or harmful?

There are many conflicting views on the relationship between bullying and psychosocial wellbeing in the literature. In some cases, involvement in bullying (as a bully, victim or bystander) is argued to be a normal experience in the development of a child, whereas in others it is considered a significant cause of psychological maladjustment, particularly depression and clinically significant social anxiety (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin & Patton, 2001; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). De Wet (2005c) concludes that: "Traditional wisdom regards bullying as not seriously harmful, a natural part of growing up, and helpful in toughening up children and preparing them for adulthood" (p. 44). However, she says, public attitudes have shifted since the early 1980s when three children committed suicide in Norway, partly as a result of bullying. De Wet (2005a) points out that the attitude of many educators in South African schools towards bullying as a 'natural part of growing up', and their tendency to dismiss learners who report being bullied as 'childish' or 'a drama queen', and the bullies as just going through the normal stages of childhood, has resulted in a alarming situation where only a small percentage of victims seek help from their teachers. She states that educators have lost credibility amongst school-children with regard to how to deal effectively with bullying, and that this problem needs to be addressed by training teachers to recognize bullying as unacceptable and destructive to all involved. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) agree: "Teachers are not

powerless when it comes to bullying and victimization. Rather, they are the leaders and diplomats of their classrooms. Their goal is not only to enforce rules, but also to resolve conflicts and promote healthy relationships. Teachers are in a unique position to have a positive influence on childhood social dynamics" (p. 396).

According to Landau *et al.*, (2001): "It is clear that schools represent the preeminent setting in which children's peer relations and social well being are shaped…but it is clear that victimized children are not able to escape potential teasers or bullies while at school" (p. 331). In addition to the fact that there is often no escape for victims of bullying at school, these authors found in their research on teachers-in-training that they often do not appreciate the seriousness of non-physical victimization, such as teasing. If a child therefore reports non-physical victimization to the teacher, she is unlikely to obtain the sensitive response that she needs to recover from this negative emotional experience, which may then have long-term damaging effects. In other words, insensitive responses by a teacher may **add** to the trauma and therefore to the low self-esteem and other psychological problems already manifesting within the child.

Craig and Pepler (2007) assert that children who are repeatedly abused by their peers tend to experience significant mental health problems, become increasingly isolated from their peer groups and ultimately may fail to develop positive and adaptive social skills which are essential for healthy relationships in adulthood. Staub (1986) surmises that such negative experiences may result in an increased motivation to protect the self, with the subsequent decline in concern for others, or empathy. In line with the theory of social information processing and Seligman's theory of learned helplessness, children who hold self-blaming attributions for their maltreatment and who perceive themselves to be helpless to control the bullying have been found to be more likely to experience adjustment difficulties (Dill, Vernberg, Fonagy, Twemlow & Gamm, 2004). Early social experiences, which develop cognitive interpretation structures, are therefore crucial in determining the vulnerability of an individual to maladjustment when facing victimization (Dill *et al*. 2004). Such findings suggest that intervention methods should include both decreasing the incidence and prevalence of bullying activities, as well as improving children's social skills, prosocial behaviour and their coping strategies in dealing with emotional distress (ibid).

Due, Holstein, Lynch, Diderichsen, Gabhain, Scheidt, and Currie (2005) believe that adolescents may be particularly susceptible to the effects of negative social interactions: “Adolescence is a period of changes and challenges especially concerning control over behaviour, psychological orientation and social interaction. This period of development is strongly influenced by relations to parents and family, and as they grow older to an increasing extent by peer relationships and their acceptance and positive feedback” (p. 129). Murray-Close, Ostrov and Crick (2007) agree with this view.

Olweus (1993) states that bullies themselves are often not simply children who are ‘normatively competitive’ as many theorists have assumed, but rather are children who have a strong need for power and dominance and often a fair degree of hostility towards their environment. He argues that bullies obtain distinct benefits from their aggressive actions, in the form of tangible rewards and prestige, and that their behaviour is part of a conduct-disordered pattern of anti-social and rule-breaking activities. As such, aggressive children are four times as likely to become recidivist criminals as their non-aggressive peers (ibid). In addition, according to Zahn-Waxler (1986) the personality characteristics of ‘aggression’ and ‘lack of empathy’ are: “…increasingly becoming part of the diagnostic criteria for a number of psychiatric disorders in children and adults” (p. 305). Terrie Moffitt (2003) points out that we need to differentiate between ‘life-course persistent’ and ‘adolescence-limited antisocial behaviour’; the former originates in early childhood with a combination of high risk personal factors (such as cognitive deficits, difficult temperament or hyperactivity) and high risk social factors (inadequate parenting, disrupted family relationships and poverty) and is likely to manifest in violent crime in adolescence and adulthood, whereas the latter emerges at puberty, and involves a more-or-less normative phase of delinquency, due to a gap in the adolescent’s biological maturity and right to adult privileges, which usually ends in adulthood.

2.3.2 The effects of physical aggression versus relational aggression

Leadbeater, Boone, Sangster and Mathieson (2006) argue that there are differential ‘costs’ (such as punishment, victimization, emotional distress, depressive symptoms) and ‘benefits’ (status, power, popularity) for males and females in respect of the

different types of aggression. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) assert that those who are bullied consistently over a period of time are severely at risk for negative adjustment that may impact on their entire lives. Much research has been conducted on the effects of physical aggression on the psycho-social development of both bullies and victims. Findings have consistently demonstrated that physical aggression in young perpetrators is predictive of peer rejection thus of later maladjustment and poor school performance (McEvoy *et al.*, 2003). Crick, Ostrov and Werner (2006) found in their research study that when physical aggression in children is co-morbid with high levels of relational aggression, such children are *especially* vulnerable to social and emotional problems in the present as well as the future.

Although there have been relatively few studies on the effects of relational aggression on perpetrators, some have found that relationally aggressive children, particularly those with poorer social skills, have been found to be at a higher risk for social maladjustment (Crick, 1996; McEvoy *et al.*, 2003). Storch and Masia-Warner (2004) investigated the impact of overt and relational aggression on adolescent female victims and found a positive relationship between victimization and social anxiety and loneliness. They concluded that girls may be more likely than boys to internalize bullying acts towards them. Underwood (2004) states that although boys may also use relational aggression amongst their peers, in girls the non-verbal expressions and gestures may have a special meaning and therefore would account for differential reactions in the two genders. However, it is often difficult to measure the impact of relational aggression due to the difficulty in detecting such behaviour as it is often not openly observable (Olweus, 1993). According to Remillard and Lamb (2005): “Although considered indirect in its action, relational aggression is direct in its effectiveness, and it appears to cause both distress and psychological harm” (p. 221).

Felix and McMahon (2006) suggest that different forms of aggression have differing impacts upon the victims, due to the fact that they may communicate different messages. Therefore, they state, further research needs to be conducted to examine the adjustment outcomes for each different type of aggression. In addition, Willer and Cupach (2008) utilized Goffman’s (1967) concept of ‘face threats’ (threats to an individual’s social identity that s/he would like to portray) in studying the relative harm of different relationally aggressive acts. They found that higher social status in

girl bullies than their victims had a greater adverse impact on a victim's 'positive face' (her need to belong and feel accepted) and negative emotions.

Some research reports that relational aggression has been closely related to serious problems in social-psychological adjustment in *both* bullies and their victims (Crick *et al.*, 2006; Prinstein, Boergers & Vernberg, 2001) and psychopathology, such as clinically significant social anxiety (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004), depression (Bond *et al.*, 2001) and suicidal behaviour (Baldry & Winkel, 2003; Besag, 2006). However, Wolke *et al.*, (2000) found in their study that 'pure' relational bullies displayed the lowest rates of behaviour problems of all the children, but at the same time their behaviour was the least pro-social. These authors suggest that social cognition theories, such as theory of mind (or the Machiavellian personality) may offer explanations for this finding. They argue that 'pure' relational bullies are not lacking in social skills, but rather the opposite – they have a superior ability to read the minds of others, which allows them to dominate and manipulate: "To be a relational bully requires subtle, careful planning by means of competent social skills and, at the same time, ruthless implementation" (p. 999). Andreou's (2006) findings support this theory. She found that cognitive aspects of social intelligence were positively associated with the use of relational aggression, whereas a lack of social skills was positively associated with the use of overt aggression. Staub (1986) also points out the effect of a very positive self-concept in children may be to allow a greater feeling of self-sufficiency and a sense of less connectedness to others, resulting in less prosocial behaviour.

Some research has also pointed out that relationally aggressive children are higher-risk candidates for psychological maladjustment than are non-relationally aggressive children (Merrell, Buchanan & Tran, 2006). Werner and Crick (2004) point out that research on this issue is still in its infancy, and therefore no clear-cut conclusions can yet be drawn. However, their study on the contribution of maladaptive peer relationships to both relational and physical aggression found that peer relationships seem to play an especially important role in the development of relational aggression in girls, as opposed to boys:

> Prior research has shown that females place a greater value on emotional closeness in their interactions with friends compared with males, who tend to

> emphasize interpersonal status and dominance…Relational aggression, which often involves the derision or purposeful exclusion of a third party from a small friendship circle, is the antithesis of emotional closeness – at least with respect to the relationship between aggressor and victim. When two *friends* collaborate in the use of relational aggression against another peer, on the other hand, this aversive behavior may actually promote cohesiveness, or otherwise strengthen the ties, between the friends. If this is true, females may be particularly susceptible to modeling and reinforcement of relational aggression by their close friends (i.e., because the potential consequences of partaking in relational aggression are highly valued by girls) (pp. 498-9).

These authors had predicted that both rejected girls and those whose friends were extremely relationally aggressive, would become increasingly relationally aggressive over time – their findings were supported.

2.3.3 Protective factors

Prinstein *et al.* (2001) found evidence to suggest that close friendships can serve as a protective factor in mediating the relationship between relational aggression and social-psychological maladjustment. In addition to the physical protection that such friendships may offer, they may also provide an opportunity to improve the self-esteem and social skills of potential victims, as well as emotional and cognitive support (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). These authors state:

> …victimized children may develop inaccurate or distorted views of social relationships due to frequent harassment…It may be that positive peer relationships provide an arena to correct negative beliefs about self and others thereby reducing loneliness and enhancing self-esteem…[and] facilitate the development of interpersonal skills enabling the victim to adaptively cope with aggressors and feel less helpless… (p. 360).

2.4 Role players: Bullies, bystanders and victims

2.4.1 Bullies and/or victims

Olweus (1991, as cited in Shafer, Korn, Brodbeck, Wolke & Schulz, 2005) identified two major roles played out within the bullying scenario: that of victim (a child who is bullied on a regular basis over a few months) and bully (a child who bullies on a

regular basis over a few months). He also acknowledged however, that some children fit the description for both. A child may simultaneously bully a lower-status child whilst being bullied him/herself by someone higher in the social hierarchy. Alternatively, a child who has been bullied may at a later stage vent his/her anger on a 'weaker' individual. More recent research has found that a large proportion of children are both bullies and victims (bully/victims) and that such children may be at the highest risk for psychological problems than either 'pure' bullies or 'pure' victims (Holt, Finkelhor & Kantor 2007; Wolke *et al.*, 2000). In addition Holt *et al.* (2007) found that bully/victims are at increased risk for victimization in other domains, such as conventional crime, child abuse, sexual victimization and witnessing victimization of others. Therefore a child who is a victim at home may become a bully at school. Holt *et al.* (2007) conclude that interventions must take such factors into consideration in order to be successful: "This is consistent with the social-ecological model of bullying, which highlights the importance of understanding the multiple contexts in which youth are embedded and the ways in which these contexts interact" (p. 357).

Social context is likely to be an important potential influence on the prevalence rates for different bullying roles that are found in school children. As Schafer *et al.*, (2005) point out, primary school tends to be characterized by dyadic friendships, where there is less chance of hierarchical social structuring becoming entrenched. Children identify themselves as bullies and victims on an ever-changing basis, resulting in the high prevalence rates for both categories found in the research literature. However, in later school years, with socio-cognitive development, children become more capable of sustaining complex reciprocal relationships amongst their peers. Thus the potential for the establishment of peer hierarchies, with fewer numbers of low-status individuals being more systematically targeted as victims by the more powerful bullies, becomes greater.

2.4.2 Bystanders

A consideration of the functions (active or proactive) and forms (physical or relational) of aggressive behaviours in the context of peer relationships is important in understanding the different roles that are taken on by the players in a particular scenario (Ostrov & Crick, 2007). Smith, Cousins and Stewart (2005) comment on the

different roles that peers can play in a bullying-scenario, such as “assistants” (help commit the act), “re-inforcers” (provide verbal encouragement as the act occurs) and “onlookers” (an audience who tacitly reinforces the aggression by giving it their attention). They conclude that bullying often occurs in the presence of peers, who in a direct or indirect way more often encourage it rather than try to stop it. It follows that relational bullying, largely used to enhance a girl’s social position, must have an audience in order to be successful.

2.5 Risk factors in the development of bullying and victimization

2.5.1 Psychosocial risk factors

Much research has focused on the personal characteristics of victims in an effort to identify those at risk. Such factors as physical weakness, internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression, withdrawal and somatic complaints) and externalizing behaviours (e.g., aggression and defiance), lack of pro-social skills, low self-worth, hyperactivity and emotional dys-regulation have, amongst others, been cited to irritate peers and thereby to incite aggression (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Olweus, 1993; Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Other research has suggested that nonassertive behavioural styles may precede becoming a target of victimization, which is then further amplified by the experience of being bullied, creating a vicious cycle of abuse and worsening psychological problems in the victims (Dill, *et al.*, 2004).

Neser (2006) conducted a study investigating the psychosocial attributes of school-going victims and non-victims of bullying. This research operationalised psychosocial attributes as feelings about school, peer relationships, individual characteristics and family background. Significant differences were found across all variables between the victim and non-victim groups. Victims of bullying reported much higher feelings of loneliness, lack of safety and school avoidance than did the non-victims. In addition, this group indicated much higher levels of social isolation and difficulties in gaining social acceptance and making new friends. The victim-group reported lower self-esteem, higher depression and higher levels of anxiety than the non-victim group and also were more likely to be religious, only children in families that did not regularly share meals together, and experiencing less adult supervision at home after school (i.e. lower levels of ‘parental watchfulness’). Neser (2007), who reported

similar findings in a study on the relationship between school connectedness and peer victimization, recommends that more research needs to be done to understand victims and non-victims of peer victimization in order to facilitate the identification of risk and protective factors in this phenomenon.

There is still much controversy over the nature of children who bully; are they self-assured individuals who calmly plan their cruel campaign, or are they actually anxious, depressed, insecure or psychiatrically disordered? Different studies have reached completely different conclusions on this issue (Wolke *et al.*, 2000). Sprott and Doob (2000) announced research findings to show that a sample of the most aggressive children in middle childhood (aged 10 and 11 years) in Canada: "are unhappy children. The notion that they believe themselves to be 'better than other people' or, in a more colloquial sense, are happy-go-lucky children who enjoy their aggressive lives is simply not supported by data…" (p. 131).

With regard to family variables in bullying and victimization, Smith *et al.*, (2005) state that bullies tend to:

> …come from homes where aggression is a favoured problem-solving method, negative emotional attitudes (e.g., lack of warmth and involvement) are common, and the children are encouraged to fight back when harassed…Furthermore, research indicates that chronically victimized children may have histories of insecure parental attachments in infancy and are subject to intrusive and overprotective parenting…Conversely, parents who communicate love and warmth, monitor their children, set age-appropriate limits, and use non-physical punishment to deal with misbehaviour constitute and important protective factor against involvement in bully/victim problems (p. 742).

In addition, Cullerton-Sen, Murray-Close, Cassidy, Cicchetti, Crick and Rogosch (2008) found that childhood maltreatment is positively associated with relational aggression amongst girls and physical aggression amongst boys. More specifically, sexual abuse predicted relational aggression in girls, but not in boys.

Scholte, van Lieshout, de Wit and van Aken (2005) conducted a study on adolescent personality types and sub-types in relation to psychosocial adjustment and found that

personality type is closely tied to the use of aggression, and acceptance or rejection by peers. Smit (2003a) asserts that bullying is a learned behaviour, and therefore children need to be taught healthier ways of relating to others, in order to unlearn it. Vogel, Seaberry, Barnes and Kelley (2003) point out that the issue of conflict is an inevitable part of life and relationships, and emerges out of the process of individuals becoming socially interdependent. Therefore, they say, rather than suppress or avoid it (which is the non-verbal message many adults convey to children), adults need to confront it and to teach children the skills that they need to deal with conflict, thereby empowering them in their social lives to communicate effectively, manage their anger, negotiate, and attempt to understand the perspective of the other.

2.5.2 Cognitive risk factors

Dill *et al.* (2004) propose the idea that cognitive mediators play an important role in the pathway from being a victim towards being the bully, due to the negative effect of victimization on the developing capacity of children to attribute mental states to others: "… experiencing that one's own mental states are of little concern to one's peers might contribute to the development of relational strategies that similarly pay scant regard to the subjective states of others…" (pp. 170-1). This transactional model of aggression is also supported by the work of Prinstein *et al.* (2001) and Hoffman (1970).

Van Shoiack-Edstrom, Frey and Beland (2002) state that research has found that hostile attribution biases (a tendency to interpret another's malevolent plans within an ambiguous social context) seem to be characteristic of relationally (and physically) aggressive children. Neurological factors, such as stress hormones could play an integral role here (L. Lachenicht, Personal communication, 17 November 2009). Social cognition affects the individual's choice of response in a particular scenario. More research needs to be conducted in this area with respect to relational aggression.

2.5.3 Environmental risk factors

Goffman (1967) states that society needs certain 'rules of conduct', according to which people regulate their behaviour. When the rules of conduct are adhered to, society is bound together and social order predominates. He discusses the terms 'deference' (appreciation shown to another) and 'demeanour' (an expression of self as

being desirable or undesirable), which are both components of the rules of conduct, and through which the 'self' is defined. Aggressive behaviour violates both the rules of deference and demeanour by attacking an individual's positive and/or negative face needs (the need to feel accepted/to belong and the need to be independent and in control of one's own life respectively) (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and therefore has negative implications for both victims and perpetrators in terms of the general moral order as well as self-definition.

Merrell *et al.*, (2006) argue that relational aggression can be best understood from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, as cited in Merrell *et al.*, 2006) ecological theory. They believe that it is essential to consider this phenomenon within the context and interaction of the microsystems most significant to the functioning of children, such as families, peer-groups and schools. In the limited studies conducted on cultural and family risk factors for relational aggression thus far, it has emerged that the patterns are similar to those found in studies on physical aggression. Various variables such as parenting (for example, inconsistent supervision, harsh punishment/intimidating style, failure to set limits, neglecting to reward prosocial behaviour), social factors (for example poverty), the nature of the institutions within which children interact as 'closed' (e.g. boarding schools and prisons) or 'open' (where there are more outside relationships) and biological factors (for example, innate temperament, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) may be considered risk factors, especially in interaction with each other (Merrell *et al.*, 2006).

Rodkin and Hodges (2003) have also investigated the peer ecology of bullies and victims in an attempt to understand the nature of children's social relations within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, as cited in Rodkin & Hodges, 2003) ecological model. They argue that the social structures in peer ecologies (the microsystems within which children interact, socialize and influence each other) determines children's behaviour horizontally (across social relationships of friendships, peer groups and mutual enemies, that are relatively equal in power) and vertically (within relationships of differing social power, social status and social influence). These authors identify different categories of bullies; some are low status, hostile and are often victims of abuse themselves. Others, however, may experience high social status, being perceived as "cool" by their peers. Popular-aggressive

children are therefore more likely to be supported by their peers, according to Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl and Acker (2006), than are non-popular but aggressive children. The fact that such children enjoy such support is an important factor to be taken into consideration in intervention strategies (ibid).

2.5.4 Friendships

Interpersonal characteristics are also crucial in determining whether or not a child becomes chronically victimized by his/her peers (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003) or the perpetrator of relational aggression. Duncan and Owen-Smith (2006) posit a social contextual explanation for the use of indirect aggression; they assert that in both males and females: "...lack of power in same gender friendships (defined as anxiety about one's status in friendships) was associated with greater use of indirect aggression strategies" (p. 493).

Friendships can provide a protective function, but do not necessarily do so, state Rodkin and Hodges (2003). A victim's friends may also be victimized or categorized as 'low status', due to their own personal characteristics that make them more vulnerable, and therefore fail to be supportive. Alternatively, friendship with a child who is well-adjusted may serve to model healthy and protective ways of interacting. Therefore, both the **quantity and quality** of friendships is crucial in determining whether peer relationships are protective against victimization (ibid). According to these authors: "Nothing can be as powerful an obstacle or as effective a tool in preventing bullying as the forces children create by socializing one another" (p. 396). Harris (1995) holds the firm opinion that peers are the most essential social force in shaping a child, saying that socialization effects are realized via the peer group **rather** than the parents. Harris and Tseng (1957) concur with this view indicating through their research that children are increasingly influenced by the peer group as they reach adolescence, whilst parental influence decreases accordingly.

2.5.4.1 Hierarchy and social status

It is important to be aware warn Rodkin and Hodges (2003), that popular children are not necessarily pro-social and non-aggressive, and rejected children are not necessarily all aggressive. The determining factor in this equation is the variable of social status which is tightly linked to factors such as likeability, influence,

dominance and control over others. Therefore bullies may have two possible positions within the peer ecology: that of disconnection or that of engagement, depending on their social status within the group. On the other hand, victims clearly experience disconnection and poor relationships within the peer ecology. As such it is clear that all the different role-players need positive intervention in order to enable them to develop into healthy adults. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) say:

> The peer ecology approach brings attention to all children, not just those who are bullies or victims. Children who are neither bullies nor victims can be part of the solution or part of the problem. Non-aggressive children can contribute to the social success of some bullies, fail to intervene against bullying when they could, contribute to victim blame, and become more aggressive themselves if aggression seems normative to them (p. 395).

2.6 Aggression and culture

There is an enormous variation across cultures with regard to the expected norms of behaviour, particularly with regard to the issues of cooperation, competition and social responsibility (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Cultural socialization through the medium of family and peers in society is therefore a predominant factor in shaping the orientation of individuals towards prosocial and aggressive behaviours.

Osterman, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, Landau, Fraczek and Caprara (1998) reported that although the many studies of aggression seem to suggest that there is a preference amongst females for indirect methods in a variety of cultural contexts, there had not yet been a study in which cross-cultural evidence had been gathered, using the same methodology, but from different cultures. These authors therefore conducted a study which would address this gap in the literature. The results confirmed that females across different cultures utilize up to twice the amount of indirect aggression than males (41%-55%, compared to 20-26%, respectively) and that the developmental trend in both males and females is for physical aggression to decrease with age.

Rubin (1998, as cited in Underwood *et al.*, 2001) argues that cultural context probably influences the social development of our children at the level of individuals, interactions and relationships. Different cultures, particularly with respect to gender

socialization practices, therefore possibly cultivate and encourage different forms of aggression. We need therefore to understand the interplay between gender, different behaviours and the social environment if we are to truly understand the nature and functions of aggression. Leadbeater *et al.* (2006) studied sex differences in the functions (such as social goals) and consequences (victimization, emotional distress) of physical and relational aggression. They found that the 'benefits' of aggression are limited by the associated 'costs', which may differ across gender and culture. In cultures where the 'cost' of physical aggression is high for girls (it is frowned upon, as 'nice' girls do not physically fight), girls need to find other ways of expressing their dislike (L. Lachenicht, Personal Communication, 17 November 2009).

Merrell *et al.* (2006) state that certain cultural factors may play a very important role in the manifestation of relational aggression in children: "particularly cultural contexts and norms that emphasize competitiveness, individualism, and personal retribution for perceived wrongdoing" (p. 356). In addition, since 'meanness' is a socio-cultural construction states Merten (1997), the unique school culture cannot be overlooked in our understanding of aggression amongst school children. In a school culture where popularity was highly desired but could not be openly enjoyed, alternative, more 'acceptable' forms of expression (in the form of relational aggression) were brought into being. Balfour and Ralfe (2006) have also researched and highlighted the significant role that educational and home environments play in supporting, rather than challenging, the unwholesome stereotypes which are evident in children's discourse around gender and aggression.

2.7 Developmental theories and the development of aggression

2.7.1 Foundational developmental theories

Psychological development involves qualitative and quantitative psychological change associated with the passage of time and age. Development can be defined as a process of gradual unfolding and fuller working out of the details. Much of human development has been shown to be universal, but much of it is also emergent, historically and culturally contingent, according to Greene (2003).

Many theories have been advanced in past psychological literature that attempt to explain how people change over time; cognitively, emotionally, socially and morally. Child-development theories, such as the Piagetian and Eriksonian stages in the life-cycle, have been applied to the phenomenon of aggression, especially in conjunction with theories on the development of morality (e.g. Kohlbergian theory). All of this research has largely presupposed a universal set of stages through which a "normal" child hierarchically develops, inexorably heading towards the ultimate ideal of individuation, autonomy, self-actualisation and higher levels of morality. However, since males have been considered to be the primary aggressors in society, research conclusions have been largely based on studies of males and violence, and a focus on the female gender has been noticeably lacking (Besag, 2006; Gilligan, 1982).

2.7.1.2 Piagetian theories of development

Piaget (1929) developed a theory wherein he focused on cognition and the development of intentional intelligent (moral) behaviour within the child in order to obtain satisfaction of his/her needs. He theorizied that initially the child's behaviour is completely based on reflex (up to age 2 years) (Bae, 1999). Piaget's theory of development involves a movement from external (others socialize the child with regard to what is right and wrong) to internal moral conscience, wherein the child is able to take the perspective of the other and has absorbed within him/herself the 'rules' of interpersonal relationships. Finally from adolescence onwards, increasingly sophisticated cognitive development leads to the development of higher moral standards, which is ongoing throughout the life span (Bae, 1999). Piaget (1932, as cited in Youniss, 1980) postulated that the source of morality is not only through socialization by adults, but equally through interpersonal relationships between a child and his/her peers: "…children together can construct a mutually understood principled morality which puts common benefit above individual interest" (p. xiv). The key concept in the development of morality, according to Youniss (ibid) is therefore that of reciprocity.

2.7.1.3 Eriksonian theories of development

Erik Erikson, another seminal developmental theorist, focused more on social interactions in his theory of the Eight Stages of Personality Development through the life span (Bae, 1999). The resolution of each stage depends on how well the previous

ones were resolved. He believed that a personality is not pre-determined; rather a unique psycho-social personality results from the interaction of all experiences with people. Human development therefore, in Erikson's view, is strongly influenced by culture and the social structure within which a child is raised (Bae, 1999). Erikson's theory has been criticized by Gilligan (1982) for being largely based on his observation of boys. Only his first stage (*trust versus mistrust*) anchors development in the experience of relationship. Throughout the process, in this theory, development becomes synonymous with separation and other than in infancy allows no preparation for the stage of intimacy. Gilligan (1982) argues that men only begin to discover in mid-life the importance of intimacy, relationships and care – this is something that women have known from the beginning (it is 'instinctive'). Gilligan (1982) asserts that psychologists have neglected to describe the moral development of women, which is based on the expansion of this knowledge.

2.7.1.4 Early childhood development and aggression

Because of the negative impact on society when childhood aggression leads to adult psychopathology and criminal behaviour, much empirical data has been gathered on the development of aggressive behaviour in children. A consistent theme which has emerged, state Cummings, Iannotti, and Zahn-Waxler (1989), is that the patterns of aggressive behaviour change with developmental age. If we can understand the development of this phenomenon, we are more likely to detect the early markers and roots of aggressive behavioural patterns with a view to more effectively intervening. These authors therefore investigated the development of aggression in early childhood. They found that individual differences in physical aggression amongst boys tended to be relatively stable from age two to five years, whereas the findings for girls indicated **less stability**. They argue that this suggests a greater role of temperament (which could then be a predictive variable) in the continuity of aggression in boys, although they acknowledge that early socialization practices could also have an effect. On the other hand, for girls, since the expression of anger may be less acceptable to parents, they may be subjected to greater socialization pressure to curb their overt expressions of aggression. Although such data holds promise as evidence for the early appearance of sex differences, both in the stability and in the developmental trajectories of aggression, more research is needed in this area (Cummings *et al.*, 1989). Terrie Moffitt's (2003) work supplements this view; she

argues that boys tend to have more of the individual risk factors considered to be predictors for more severe antisocial tendencies, such as neurological abnormalities, difficult temperament and hyperactivity.

2.7.2 Theories of cognitive development and aggression

2.7.2.1 Social information-processing models

Crick and Werner (1998) propose that it is useful to study aggression in children from the perspective of a social information-processing model, since patterns of social information-processing are surmised to contribute to and motivate aggressive acts. Social information-processing involves encoding and interpretation of internal and external cues, setting goals, generating possible response strategies and the decision whereby a particular response is selected and enacted. Dodge (1986) advocates that strong social skills and understanding can be used for **both** aggressive, **and** prosocial (intention to help or benefit others) purposes. It would therefore seem that the relationship between social information processing skills and aggression is not at all simple and we need further research in this area. In addition, state Crick and Werner (1998), few studies have considered the association between **relational** aggression and social information-processing mechanisms, particularly amongst girls, despite the fact that such information could contribute valuable insight into our understanding of relational aggression.

2.7.2.2 Reciprocity and role taking

Piaget (1929) argued that due to a lack of cognitive maturity young children are unable to understand and infer another's feelings and emotional reactions, thoughts, perspectives, motives and intentions, and that this ability develops with age. Although, contrary to his opinion, there is no doubt that even one year olds are able to sometimes understand the emotions of another, his theory that this ability becomes more sophisticated with the development of cognitive abilities has been supported by numerous studies on the subject (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). The development of role taking and reciprocity within children's friendships has been argued by traditional developmental theory to be the vehicle through which children develop morality and prosocial behaviours. The application of reciprocal altruism is therefore the glue that holds our society together, and ensures the continued survival of the human race. Youniss (1986): "…the key to social development lies in the recognition

that there are multiple viewpoints. Once this breakthrough is made, children can begin to adopt the viewpoints of others. Thereafter, the child's own viewpoint becomes socially modified and is no longer egocentric" (p. 95). It seems likely that with increased reciprocity children **should** become more prosocial and altruistic, rather than aggressive. We obviously need further explanations as to why children utilize relational aggression even whilst (or maybe because) their ability to take the perspective of the other improves.

Hudson, Forman and Brion-Meisels (1982) investigated the correlation between the ability of a child to take on the social perspective of another, and prosocial behaviour, as they hypothesized that this ability is the basis of healthy, functional reciprocal relationships. As they had predicted, they found that such social cognition is significantly related to prosocial behaviour. However, they caution that future research needs to also investigate other factors which may contribute to the variability in children's social functioning, such as assertiveness, communicative competence, affective state and situational determinants, since ongoing interactions do not occur in isolation from their larger contexts, which often impact significantly upon their meaning. Conversely, Vaillancourt, Miller, Fagbemi, Côté and Tremblay (2007) found a positive predictive link for girls between prosocial behaviour, moral maturity and indirect aggression. They suggest that moral maturity and prosocial behaviour both represent more sophisticated social skills which **allow for** the more advanced use of indirect aggression. Staub (1986) points out that human beings are incredibly malleable, therefore: "Culture and individual personality that evolves through socialization and experience will strongly affect, increase, or decrease the likelihood of aggression and altruism" (p. 137)

2.7.2.3 Selman's theory of social perspective-taking

Selman (1980) has also offered valuable insights, through his **social-cognitive** model of how friendships develop, into the development of social perspective-taking as children grow older. He posits that social-cognitive development is an entity which is related to, but simultaneously distinct from, non-social cognitive development. Selman's (1980) theory, which outlines how children develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the self-other relationship as they mature, is considered to be extremely useful in building an understanding of the development of girls'

aggression. Truly social perspective-taking involves "changes in understanding of the relations *between* persons and changes in concepts of relations *within* persons, for example, relations among feelings, thoughts, actions…" (p. 34). According to Selman (1980):

> That the child has potential capacity for knowing and reflecting upon the human ability to look *inward* as well as *back and forth across to others* strikes us as a most powerful and most potentially adaptive of intellectual tools…there is evidence that this understanding develops steadily in the years of childhood and adolescence. And…we maintain that knowledge of the level of social understanding which *underlies behavior* can be critical to understanding and dealing with that behavior (p. 16).

Selman (1980) asserts that there is a strong link between social perspective taking and moral reasoning, in that a child structures her social environment through perspective-taking, which in turn impacts upon her moral reasoning.

Selman (1980) developed a model of five levels of social perspective taking/social understanding that develop as the cognitive capacity of the growing child increases:

- ***Level 0 (Age 3 to 6 years) (Momentary friendships)***

  The young child only notices physical differences amongst people and does not recognise that others may have a different perspective on the same situation. S/he deals with conflict through physical force or ignoring the other and only has one friend at a time.

- ***Level 1 (Age 5 to 9 years) (One-way friendship)***

  The child begins to realise that people are different psychologically. The child now recognises that persons may have different subjective perspectives, but still does not recognize the two-way reciprocity between these. Conflict is seen as unilateral (caused by one and felt by the other) so the solution is to stop the problem action or to do something nice to make the offended child feel better.

- ***Level 2 (Age 7 to 12 years) (Bilateral friendships)***

  The child has an increasing ability to step mentally outside of the self and to look at his/her own thoughts and actions from the perspective of the second-person. There is an understanding that others may have an outward appearance that does not correspond to their more truthful inner reality, and that this may

deceive others. Two-way reciprocity of not only actions, but of thoughts and feelings is recognised. 'I know that she knows that I know that she knows…' is taken into consideration in decision-making. However, the child does not yet truly comprehend the **mutual** relationship between self and other, i.e. conflict is not seen to originate within the relationship itself, but from an external cause. The child understands that both parties participate in conflict and therefore resolution requires each (independently) to be satisfied. It is not necessary to have mutual consensus.

- ***Level 3 (Age 10 to 15 years) (Stability of friendships)***

  This level encompasses the true third-person perspective. Now, rather than just taking another's perspective on the self, the child is able to simultaneously include and coordinate the perspectives of self and others, seeing the whole system from the perspective of the 'generalized other'. The child recognizes conflict as arising out of the interaction itself and believes that resolution involves both being truly satisfied with the outcome, and would be even if in the others' place. She also recognizes that conflicts may be due to personality differences and resolution may need a change in personality. She believes that conflict can be talked through, and if successful, will strengthen friendship bonds. Finally, she is able to distinguish between superficial conflict and the deeper bonds which hold friends together and are the source of resolution.

- ***Level 4 (Age 12 to adult) (In-depth level)***

  This level involves partial rejection of the mutuality of the previous level in favour of a healthy state of independence (i.e. a balance between dependence and independence). The individual begins to recognise mutuality at a deeper level of awareness (at the level of non-verbal feelings and communication). There is an understanding that intra-psychic conflicts may impact upon relationships with others and of the importance of keeping the lines of communication open between friends.

Selman's (1980) developmental model asserts that each level underlies and influences the next, and that progression occurs with the acquisition of more abstract reasoning abilities and adaptation to the social environment.

2.7.2.4 Social intelligence, empathy and ‘theory of mind’

Kaukianinen, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Österman, Salmivalli, Rothberg and Ahlbom (1999) conducted a study wherein they investigated the relationship between social intelligence, different types of aggression and empathy. Their hypotheses that greater relational aggression would be correlated with the development of greater social intelligence, and that empathy would have a moderating effect on aggression, were both verified. According to Staub (1986), empathy is different to prosocial orientation in that it does not include a feeling of responsibility for the well-being of another and is, therefore, a less reliable source of positive behaviour.

Some developmental theorists posit that the acquisition of a ‘theory of mind’ in children is essentially a maturational process that occurs with increasing age according to a universal pattern. However, more recent research shows significant cultural differences in both the rate and pattern of theory-of-mind development (Hughes & Leekam, 2004). Such findings suggest that a variety of social interactions are crucial in this process.

2.7.3 Theories on the development of moral reasoning

Morality is essential to the human condition, says Walker (2004): “…morality is a fundamental and pervasive aspect of human functioning with both interpersonal and intrapsychic components; more specifically, it refers to voluntary behaviors that have, at least potentially, some social and interpersonal implications and that are governed by internal psychological (i.e., both cognitive and affective) mechanisms” (p. 547).

Bear, Manning and Shiomi (2006) studied children’s reasoning about aggression, comparing children across two cultures; United States and Japan. Previous research had found that Japanese children tend to exhibit less aggressive behaviour than their peers in the United States. They found that although both groups of children mentioned the needs of others with regard to why aggression is wrong, the children from the United States tended to focus more on punishment (external methods of control) than the children from Japan did. They argue that children learn moral reasoning through cognitive scripts, which are embedded in the culture and learned at home, school and in broader society. It is possible that the cognitive scripts of

Japanese children are more heavily influenced by the home environment, which emphasizes the needs of others and internal attributions for responsible behaviour, whilst United States children are influenced more by the school environment, which emphasizes external control, such as punishment. These researchers therefore draw attention to the important role of schools in developing a morality that is internalized and thus promotes more responsible behaviour in children.

2.7.3.1 Kohlberg's stages of moral development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) proposed a series of moral development stages. He proposed that a very young child is motivated to right rather than wrong simply as an attempt to avoid punishment. However, as he/she grows older, the motivation changes to maximization of rewards and benefits whilst minimizing the negative consequences for him/herself. By the time the child reaches middle childhood, socially shared perspectives become important, and behaviour is based on anticipated approval or disapproval of significant others. From adolescence onwards, the child develops a respect for authority and morality in society. Ultimately, Kohlberg's (ibid) theory maintains that a highly morally developed individual has respect for human dignity, belief in fairness and equality and the ability to differentiate between group expectations and personal values (Bae, 1999).

Other theorists have described different moral value orientations that distinguish people, such as humanistic versus conventional (Hoffman, 1970) or rule-centred versus person-oriented (Gilligan, 1982). These differences impact upon the choices of behaviour made by different individuals. A more prosocial value orientation (focus on the welfare of others) is more **likely** to inhibit aggressive or harmful behaviour towards others, says Staub (1986), but does not necessarily do so. This author suggests a theory of social behaviour to explain how people select the aims of their behaviour from a choice of many, resulting in either prosocial or aggressive acts. According to this theory, the selection of aims is determined by the individual characteristics of people and their circumstances, in the light of their motivation to reach certain desired goals or to avoid aversive ones. The aims that arise from the different moral orientations (prosocial versus rule-centred) will be different and will therefore impact differently upon an individual's choice of action (ibid).

2.7.4 Evolutionary perspectives on the development of aggression

Youniss (1986) suggests: "Childhood friendships are grounded in the practice of reciprocity and follow a developmental course that covers the several conditions that enhance the opportunities for, and the understanding of, reciprocal altruism" (p. 103). Why then, do girls engage in relational aggression, the very antithesis of altruism? Youniss (1986) comments that although theorists regard reciprocity, which is the foundation of friendship, as a developmental norm, we should also consider evolutionary theory in explaining aggression. Here, development occurs through relationships, wherein self-interest and competition are central. However, we also operate according to the second law of evolution, the 'law of mutual aid', where individuals co-operate with each other in order to ensure survival. Therefore, says Youniss (ibid), social intelligence has been adapted through dealing with problems in relationships, but is still secondary to competition.

Cairns (1986) asserts that aggressive behaviours: " …persist in individuals and society because they are functional for personal and social adaptation….the distinctive human capabilities for cognitive strategies, including deception, permit the development of interpersonal aggressive patterns that are as novel as they are effective". He believes that amongst males aggression serves to facilitate mate selection, whereas for women it is around competition, particularly amongst other females, for scarce resources needed for their young, and therefore peaks around adolescence when girls become ready to reproduce. Aggression therefore occurs in humans simply because 'aggression works' (ibid).

Cairns (1986) points out:

> During the course of living, hurtful acts performed by one member of an interchange typically have the effect of producing an immediate change in the ongoing behavior of the other individual. What is hurtful or harmful to the other is highly dependent on the strength, cognitive capacity, and abilities of the aggressor as well as the vulnerability, sensitivity, and cognitive status of the victim (p. 73).

Therefore, as children grow older there is a shift in their ability to defend against interpersonal aggression as well as in the range of interpersonal options to act

aggressively. Children gain increasingly flexible cognitive and verbal techniques with which to hurt others as they move towards adolescence, states Cairns (ibid):

> Such cognitive capabilities, perfected in adolescence, open the door to a whole range of advanced social strategies whereby deception and misdirection might be employed in controlling the direction of relationships. It seems reasonable to expect that these techniques might be employed by boys and girls differently when they emerge at puberty…Because direct physical aggression is likely in most societies to be gender-biased, that is, the behavior is seen as less tolerable in girls than in boys, it follows that in adolescence and early adulthood, indirect alternatives of interpersonal control and punishment, including social ostracization and alienation, should occur with higher frequencies among girls than boys (pp. 74-75).

The following section will focus more specifically on girls than boys, in an attempt to understand what lies beneath their greater use of relational aggression, particularly as they grow older. Although it is acknowledged that there are many areas of overlap in the development and socialization of boys and girls alike, it is argued that the **degree** to which girls are raised to conceal their aggression is far greater than that for boys. In combination with gender differences in friendship and identity formation, as well as moral development, it makes sense that girls' aggression goes 'underground' where it is less easy to detect but nevertheless has a powerfully destructive effect.

2.8 The development of girls

2.8.1 The importance of affiliation and relationship

Traditional psychological theory assumes that the basis of all psychological difficulties in men, and by default women, lies in problems separating from the mother-figure. Separation is therefore the ultimate goal of child development, and if this process is not resolved in a healthy manner, psychopathology results (Bae, 1999). However, Miller and Stiver (1997) argue that a major shift in our fundamental understanding of human psychological development is necessary, wherein we acknowledge that the development of girls does not follow the same trajectory as boys. Rather, they state: "…an inner sense of connection to others is *the* central organizing feature of women's development" (p. 16). This has critical implications for

the study of the development of aggression in the different sexes. Letendre (2007) remarks:

> Girls superior social intelligence combined with the extreme importance placed on maintaining their status in the group promote sensitivity to perceived insults and slights from other girls. Fights frequently arise from these perceptions and from competition for male attention…The response of girls to these hurts will depend on the multiple ways that they have learned to deal with anger and manage differences with others (p. 360).

It is argued that since girls are more oriented towards relationships they tend to display the types of aggressive behaviours which harm those relationships (Crick *et al.*, 2006; Owens *et al.*, 2000a). Murray-Close and Crick (2006b) believe that school-based interventions need much more information regarding the relationships girls have with others at school, both dyadic and in groups, that may influence their involvement in aggressive behaviour. They found in their study that negative dyadic relationships with peers at school is significantly associated with aggression and maladjustment in general, although they failed to find any significant differences between the genders.

2.8.2 The nature of girls' friendships and relational aggression

Many authors have researched the developmental significance of friendships, and findings have shown that friendships are an important source of social support; they allow children to explore and develop emotionally and are an important context for moral development and the development of social perspective-taking (Laursen & Mooney, 2005). Having stable friendships and the ability to make new friends have been found to be positively linked to many facets of psychosocial well-being (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007). In the light of this, studies have been conducted in an attempt to identify the factors underlying friendship stability versus volatility, but thus far the findings have been limited and inconclusive (ibid).

Hartup, French, Laursen, Johnston and Ogawa (1993) conducted a study wherein they found that conflicts between children who are friends differ both in quantity and quality to those between acquaintances. Disagreements between friends were more common and more intense. They found that the nature of the conflict talk between the

genders supported previous research findings; girls show more concern for relationships and social well-being than boys in the way they try to reason, rather than just try to dominate the other in the relationship.

There has also been much interest in the gender differences in boys' and girls' friendships and the impact of these differences in relationship processes on the psychological adjustment of children. Underwood *et al.*, (2004) provide a discussion of the 'two cultures model' of the social development of aggression in males and females, whereby the gender groups constitute two different peer cultures within which children grow up and are socialized, with different rules, expectations and social processes:

> …girls value close relationships more than status and dominance; therefore, when girls seek to hurt one another, it is only logical that they seek to harm each others' friendships and that social exclusion can be powerfully effective. Girls' friendships are portrayed as higher in intimacy and self-disclosure; thus, girls may be more vulnerable to malicious gossip and friendship manipulation. Girls are described as interacting in smaller groups than do boys, and best friendships and alliances are described as shifting; thus, girls may be understandably concerned about fitting in and may seek to exclude others as a way of protecting their close relationships (pp. 1539-1540).

However, these authors state that this model has been criticized because it does not acknowledge the similarities in males and females in certain contexts, as well as the significance of males' social power in the development of these subcultures.

The 'emotional trade-offs' perspective (Green, Richardson & Lago, 1996; Underwood, 2007) supplements the two cultures approach; girls are understood to value relationships and connection more and to invest more deeply in relationships, engaging in more self-disclosure of fears and weaknesses which in turn renders them more vulnerable to the gossip of former friends. Therefore the 'special' features of girls' relationships which are often advantageous for social development render them more vulnerable to internalizing problems (such as anxiety and depression) when friendships fail. In addition, since friendships are so important in the social world of girls, girls are often judged according to their affiliations. A popular girl who associates with a victimized girl (perceived as unpopular) is likely to find her status

diminishing rapidly amongst her peer group. Victimized girls are therefore very likely to be abandoned by their non-victimized friends, in order for the latter to avoid a similar fate (Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007). This has been found less likely to occur amongst boys, as their social status is tied more closely to their physical prowess than to their friendships (ibid).

Underwood and Buhrmester (2007) found that several features of friendship have been found to be linked to social exclusion – degree of intimacy, exclusiveness of the friendship and overall aggression displayed towards others. Since these authors propose that girls are socialized to refrain from the direct expression of anger, they will therefore work hard to 'be nice' and to maintain harmony on the surface, using aggression in a surreptitious way, in order to not violate the 'be nice' norm, but sadly causing even greater problems. Grotpeter and Crick (1996) found that the friendships of relationally aggressive children (who are not widely accepted within the peer group) were characterized by higher intimacy, exclusivity/jealousy and incidences of relational aggression within the friendship than those of non-relationally aggressive children (i.e. the quality of their close friendships is different).

Klima and Repetti (2008) identify two different components of children's peer networks; friendships in the form of dyadic bonds, and relationships within the larger peer group, saying: "…friendships are a unique source of affection, intimacy, and nurturance, whereas the peer group provides a sense of inclusion and belonging…Given these distinct functions, it stands to reason that friendships and peer acceptance might be related to psychological adjustment in different ways" (p. 152). They suggest that evidence shows that support from a close friend is psychologically protective against internalizing and externalizing symptoms and predictive of higher overall self-worth. Therefore, lack of friendship support is likely to be associated with poor adjustment. However, they also point out that the effect is bi-directional; a child who has adjustment difficulties is less likely to make and keep friends due to her socially inappropriate behaviour and a child who is not well accepted by peers in earlier childhood may experience an increasingly poor quality of friendship networks in late childhood and adolescent. Furthermore, since intimacy and self-disclosure become more important with the advent of adolescence, low peer acceptance in the earlier years of childhood could be predictive of later

maladjustment. However, no link was found in this study between children who do not develop close dyadic friendships in earlier childhood and later maladjustment. A sense of inclusion and belonging seems therefore to be more closely tied to later maladjustment (Klima & Repetti, 2008).

It is argued in this current study that 'friendship' is a different construct to 'popularity' and as such serve different functions with regard to the emotional well-being of girls. Merten (2004) argues that the concepts 'popularity' and 'friendship' are based on different images of femininity: "Popularity was grounded in, and produced, a feminine image that emphasized the male gaze, self-aggrandizement, and invidious comparisons. By contrast, friendship was grounded in a femininity that located its strength in knowing oneself and in instantiating equality between girls through sharing and validating their experiences" (p. 364)

Stauffacher and deHart (2006) provide evidence in their study that 'intimacy' is closely tied to relational aggression. In preschool, state these authors, when children spend most of their time at home with siblings, relational aggression between siblings is more salient than amongst peers. However, as early childhood approaches, and friendships become more significant, influential and intimate, relational aggression between siblings decreases and it increases amongst peers/friends.

2.8.3 The development of morality in girls

Murray-Close and Crick (2006a) believe that, since much research has shown that social information processing relates to aggressive behaviour, it is important to explore whether children's values and moral reasoning are similarly linked to aggression. In addition, they explored gender differences in moral reasoning:

> …gender role socialization may make girls more likely than boys to believe that aggression is wrong and harmful. Specifically, the relative interpersonal orientation of girls…the emphasis on caring for the traditional female gender role…and negative reactions to girls' involvement in overtly aggressive conduct…may lead girls, more so than boys, to attend to the moral implications of aggression. In contrast, the relative focus on physical play and instrumentality among boys…may lead boys to believe that aggression is relatively acceptable (p. 348).

They predicted that girls may be especially aware of the moral consequences of relationship manipulation, as they have been shown by research to be extremely sensitive to such experiences. Their findings were consistent with their predictions.

Gilligan (1982) calls Kohlberg's (1981) theory a paradox, saying that what defines the 'goodness' of women is precisely the quality which marks them as deficient in moral development! She therefore argues that we need a different conception of morality in order to encompass women, wherein we describe moral development as the understanding of responsibility and relationships, rather than as the understanding of rights and rules. In Kohlberg's (ibid) study, morality was described by his male participants as 'understanding human rights and not interfering with them' (ethic of justice), whereas Gilligan's (1982) study of women found that they described morality as 'what promotes the right to a better life, better relationships and personal fulfillment' (ethic of care). Women's morality provides an alternative conception of maturity, and in Gilligan's (ibid) view theory needs to embrace both points of view – neither is better or worse. Girls, says Gilligan (ibid), see aggression as tied to the loss of human connection. Activities of caring therefore make the social world safe for girls, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression. Boys, on the other hand, tend to simply seek rules to limit the extent of aggression.

Walker (2004) asserts that Kohlberg's (1981) cognitive-developmental model, which frames morality as pertaining only to interpersonal conflicts, with rationality, absolute impartiality and universalisability at the core of moral judgment, seems to be deficient in ignoring other aspects of moral functioning, such as emotions, empathy, prosocial behaviour, personality, goals, religion/spirituality, etc. As such, other researchers have argued that Kohlberg's (ibid) vision of moral maturity is unrealistic, considering the fact that it requires morally mature individuals to divorce themselves from their own personalities and interests in order to unerringly follow the universal principles of justice.

Morality, according to Walker (2004) regulates and orders our relationships and locates our fundamental goals and values in life, as well as our identity. It is multifaceted, involving a complex interconnection between thought, emotion and behaviour. Hardy and Carlo (2005) assert that there is increasing validity for the

concept that identity may play an important role in moral functioning, by motivating moral action: "…when morality is important and central to one's sense of self and identity, it heightens one's sense of obligation and responsibility to live consistent with one's moral concerns" (p. 234). This proposes a way in which to close the gap between moral understanding and moral action left by Kohlberg's theory. With increasing maturation in identity, explain Hardy and Carlo (2005), develops an: "…increasing desire for one's life to remain consistent with one's inner sense of self…and when this inner self is centered on moral concerns, it can provide powerful moral motivation" (p. 237). Some theorists have suggested that interaction in positive peer relationships (characterized by equality and cooperation) facilitates moral identity development, by providing children with the opportunity to interact according to the reciprocity norm (ibid). Therefore, development in morality and identity is interconnected, and significantly affected by early peer relationships.

Hart (2005) adds to the above, saying that it is necessary not just to see moral identity as another component of individual differences, but as socially constructed. The implication of this view, he states, is that even individuals who do not inherently possess healthy psychological skills could benefit from learning acceptable moral identities and functioning from others in their social networks.

2.8.4 Identity formation and the socialization of girls

Identity formation, as defined by Erikson (1963), is a psychosocial task which is attempted at adolescence, and links the individual to society. Josselson (1990) states that women define their identity in more complex ways than men, with connections to others being paramount. Traditionally, men are supposed to be 'active' and women 'passive'. Women therefore are often more receptive, they listen and process information in a more complex way than men, but they are unable to react directly and honestly; they avoid direct expression (Miller, 1986). Crothers, Field and Kolbert (2005) found support for the theory that adolescent girls who identify more with the traditional feminine gender role are more likely to utilize relational aggression:

> …the use of more indirect forms of conflict management seems to allow these adolescent girls to pursue power and assert control in relationships and yet still meet the prevailing expectations of adults that girls are not supposed to contribute to conflict or to have wants and needs within a relationship what

> would result in emotional intensity and confrontation…this sample of adolescent girls seemed to believe that femininity restricts options for conflict management either to the use of relational aggression or to the suppression of wants and feelings (p. 353).

In Erikson's (1963) theory: "Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one's meaning to oneself and one's meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life" (p. 10). Our identity is fundamentally interwoven with the experiences of others – we often learn who we are by contrasting ourselves to others and working out what makes us unique, says Josselson (1990). As a result of such meaningful engagements, identity is continually refined and modified through the course of life. Josselson (1990) concludes: "Identity, then, is a dynamic fitting together of parts of the personality with the realities of the social world so that a person has a sense both of internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the real world" (pp. 12-13). If these do not match (e.g., a woman's need to express anger, versus the societal message about what is acceptable), she says, a crisis results. Hadley (2004) agrees, saying: "When personal needs to assert, be autonomous, be vital, and be creative are repressed, negated or unrecognized, there is a threat to the self. The aggression in response to this kind of threat often takes the form of envious and mean behavior" (p. 346).

Is identity-formation therefore different for boys versus girls? Carol Gilligan (1982) argues that through gender socialization women come to conceptualize and experience the world 'in a different voice' to men; **in relative terms**, a women's voice is more person-centred, empathic and emotionally connected than the male voice. Women are more concerned about interconnectedness, whereas men are socialized to be more concerned about autonomy, goal-directed behaviour, hierarchy and competition (Letendre, 2007). The main fear for women is isolation, whereas for men their main fear is that others will 'catch up' and thereby diminish their superior status. These authors are not stating that men do not value connection, but rather that for women, this is **central** to their psychological functioning. As Miller (1986) points out:

> …women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of connections is perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self (p. 83).

This lays the groundwork for many problems. The socialisation of girls leads them to a deep conviction that they are not worthwhile unless a significant other person affirms them and confirms them.

Cummings, Hollenbeck, Iannotti, Radke-Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler (1986) conducted a study on altruism and aggression amongst young children. One of their significant findings was that: "…young girls, more than boys, may attempt to undo their aggression with good behavior" (p. 180). They add:

> …parents are likely to intervene and respond differentially to aggression in their boys and girls, even during the first years of life….overt aggression has traditionally been more strongly frowned upon in the behavior of girls. Although the definitive research on the differential socialization of emotions in boys and girls remains to be done, there are many hints and suggestions in the literature that anger and aggression in girls faces a different fate than does hostility in boys…there is some evidence from experimental studies to indicate that sex stereotyping of boys and girls with regard to affect begins at the moment of birth…If anger in girls is clearly not sanctioned, hence redirected and reinterpreted, this is just one of many mechanisms that could suppress their aggressivity and create different patterns of organization of prosocial and antisocial behaviors in boys and girls (p. 185).

In their study, Underwood *et al.* (2004) found that: "…girls are socialized to refrain from overt expressions of anger and to be nice above all else" (p. 1550).

Bowie (2007) describes other means by which gender socialization in the domain of aggression occurs, such as stories and the media, peer groups (their reactions to different types of aggression as well as the type of aggression they use) and teachers. She asserts that girls are reinforced for masking their anger and building relationships: "…as girls are socialized in the expectations of the female gender, they are also socialized in acceptable approaches and management of their relationships with others and a part of this process includes the management of aggression" (p. 112).

2.9 Girls and relational aggression

Owens, Shute and Slee (2000b) conducted a study which aimed, through qualitative methods, to provide more in-depth explanations for girls' use of indirect aggression than has been offered in the past. They found that there are two main types of explanations (which are not mutually exclusive) for relational aggression amongst girls; firstly, the behaviour serves to alleviate boredom or create excitement (gossiping is interesting) and secondly, it results from friendship and group processes (such as "in" and "out" group status, revenge, self-protection, inclusion and attention-seeking). Reynolds and Repetti (2010) found a salient connection in their study on teenage girls between 'ignoring' (the "silent treatment", p. 293) and the motive of revenge, suggesting that girls use this form of aggression almost exclusively as a method of punishment when they really want the victim to suffer. They believe that deliberately ignoring someone is perceived in a different light to the other forms of relational aggression, including group social exclusion.

2.9.1 The meaning of 'meanness'

Merten (1997) concluded from his study that the phenomenon of 'meanness' is socially constructed through both interpersonal interaction and cultural meaning. He states that studies have shown that westernized cultural socialization teaches girls to value harmony and intimacy and avoid conflict, thereby discouraging open competition amongst them. He found that popularity, which was highly valued by the adolescent girls in his study, faced girls with a major dilemma; popular girls could not openly express this status, for fear of becoming labeled self-important: "…these girls faced a cultural dilemma that is common for women: They were being implicitly asked to encompass both aspects of a cultural dichotomy – to seek popularity, but when they were successful, to pretend they were not popular" (p. 187). Popular girls in this study learnt that their popularity can be transformed into power (a sense of invulnerability). Therefore in order to solve this dilemma they could express meanness, without fear of retaliation, to preserve their powerful status in the hierarchy: "When popularity was indirectly expressed as meanness, it allowed a girl to experience her popularity, to protect it against competitors, and to minimize the risk of losing it by being labeled stuck-up" (p. 189). Merten (1997) therefore argued

that the desire to be seen and treated as special led girls to use their power in a different, more indirect way, in order to preserve that specialness: "When something highly valued cannot be openly expressed, alternative forms of expression are often invoked. At this level, it can be said that meanness resulted from the failure of the culture to allow hierarchy to be explicitly celebrated" (p. 189). Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2007) agree with this, stating that 'double standards' are imposed by society on girls, and that therefore relational aggression in girls is not maladaptive, but rather reflects the dominant culture, and as such may be far more complex to deal with than researchers have originally considered.

Because the term 'bully' is understood in terms of the image of an enemy, girls battle to identify emotional abuse within friendships. When meanness becomes enmeshed with friendship, girls lose their capacity to tell the difference – relational violations are not identified as such by them. In addition, the perpetrators are often unaware that their bossiness or possessiveness is abusive, because they are deeply attached to their victims. However, says Simmons (2002): "The purposeful control over the terms of a relationship is a signal aspect of relational aggression" (p. 54).

2.9.2 Normative beliefs

Underwood *et al.* (2001) point out that most aggressive behaviour serves multiple goals and may hurt in more than one way. In addition, however, they say relational aggression may serve certain positive developmental functions, such as testing issues of identity and social norms, preserving a feeling of belonging or safe-guarding the integrity of one's social group. Indirect forms of aggression often require great skill and social intelligence, and therefore may have positive developmental consequences in certain domains.

Crick, Bigbee and Howes (1996) investigated what the gender-normative beliefs were in children regarding aggression. They found that relationally aggressive behaviours were seen more as a normative expression of anger by older girls (pre-adolescents and adolescents) than by younger girls. Such findings are consistent with the theory that forms of relational aggression, particularly around the theme of social exclusion, become more common and frequent as girls grow older. However, they also found that children see such behaviours as aggressive, recognizing the intent to harm, even

whilst they regard them as normative. Herein lies the challenge for intervention, state Underwood, *et al.* (2001):

> Indirect/relational/social aggression hurts children, and we cannot afford to waste time in observing and explaining these very worrisome behaviors, so that we have the best chance of reducing or perhaps even preventing them. However, if it is true that children hurt others by harming relationships or social exclusion out of a developmentally normative need to feel included and accepted themselves, reducing these behaviors may be all the more challenging (p. 263).

2.9.3. Alliance building

Ultimate relational aggression, says Simmons (2002) is the practice of alliance building or ‘ganging up’. A girl begins a careful underground campaign to form an alliance of girls who will support her (usually those who have been involved in past conflicts with the target). Group aggression ensures no one girl can be held directly responsible, and each girl on her own can preserve her ‘nice girl’ image. Several studies have shown that guilt experienced by girls aggressing in a group is significantly lowered by the fact that they share responsibility (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Frodi, Macaulay & Thorne, 1977). Group aggression ensures that girls remain connected to others whilst displacing their anger. For those joining in to the alliance, it gives an opportunity to ‘belong’ even if this is short-lived. Effective alliance building may encourage rumour spreading and secret telling and has a devastating effect, often long-term, on the victim, says Simmons (2002):

> The phenomenon of alliance building evokes the image of a daily relational minefield for girls. Each and every day presents the possibility of a relationship’s endangerment. Friendships must be consistently charted, tallied, and negotiated. In waging these underground campaigns, the features of friendship become corrupted (p. 87).

The practice of alliance building validates the experience of aggression for girls, because they know that overt one-on-one aggression is unacceptable, but when it occurs as a group, it is not questioned. Clique expulsions, whereby with little or no warning a group may expel one of its members and subject her to terrible cruelty or pretend she does not exist, is a common form of relational aggression amongst girls (ibid). Eder and Enke (1991) found in their research that activities such as gossip

strengthen group bonds, through creating an 'us versus them' mentality, and that 'group' evaluations of others which occur in the process of gossip are never challenged by individual members. These authors also point out that the social and structural nature of gossip make it a powerful reinforcer of traditional gender norms, and a prime example of how meaning is constructed through social interaction.

2.9.4 Popularity and power

In Miller's (1986) discussion of the social structuring of relationships, she argues that often there are assumptions, which are not explicit, that determine the structure of equality versus inequality, and power is a major part of all these relationships. Simmons (2002) believes that popularity is a negative force in aggression:

> There is a movement within feminism that believes the female orientation to relationship and connection – to nurturing and caregiving – gives women a uniquely wise approach to their world. Popularity, however, turns this phenomenon on its head. In the race to be cool, some girls transform friendship into a series of deals and calculations, using relationship as much to destroy as to build. Relationship is no longer simply an end; it is also a means (p. 172).

A girl often loses her sense of self when she sacrifices so much to become part of the popular group. She sacrifices her connection to her true feelings so that she can remain in less authentic relationships with others, and becomes disconnected from herself in this process, asserts Simmons (2002).

2.9.5 The loss of self

Brown and Gilligan (1992) conducted extensive research on the psychological development of girls between childhood and adolescence (seven to 18 years old) at a private school in USA. They reported with concern that although women view themselves as primarily in connection with others, yet they: "…described a relational crisis: a giving up of voice, an abandonment of self, for the sake of becoming a good woman and having relationships…" (p. 2). In their research, Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that these girls followed the traditional developmental patterns of becoming more self-controlled (rather than controlled by external authority), less egocentric, more differentiated from others in terms of thoughts and feelings, more autonomous and able to take responsibility for themselves, more appreciative of

complexity and multi-voicedness of relationships and more aware of cultural/societal diversity, *yet:*

> If we consider responding to oneself, knowing one's feelings and thoughts, clarity, courage, openness and free-flowing connections with others and the world as signs of psychological health, as we do, then these girls are in fact not developing, but are showing evidence of loss and struggle and signs of an impasse in their ability to act in the face of conflict (p. 6).

The paradox uncovered by this study - and of which girls are actually aware – is that they give up relationship for the sake of "relationships". Although this can be seen as adaptive, it is also deeply psychologically wounding.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that although the younger girls (around seven to eight years old) were much more real in their relationships, and ready to acknowledge that sometimes they did not feel like being nice, already they were agonizingly aware of what others may think if they were disruptive, outspoken or resistant. They knew that in order to be accepted and liked they must be nice, and that 'nice girls' make more friends. When their peers were overtly aggressive, the news would spread fast on the underground network, note Brown and Gilligan (1992):

> …revealing the dark underside of their relationships. Indeed, the demand for nice and kind can be oppressive, a means of controlling and being controlled. 'Whispering', 'telling secrets', 'making fun of', and 'laughing at' others are ways to prevent girls from risking too much or acting in ways that are too threatening, too different (p. 45).

2.9.6 Going 'underground' in girls' aggression

'The underground', aptly named due to the secrecy that exists around girls' aggression, is a world of which girls are fully conscious; however, they will strongly deny being capable of such meanness to an adult. As a result, says Simmons (2002), victimized girls are offered little protection, since many adults will dismiss reports of relational aggression as unbelievable:

> …I was reminded of scary movies in which only children can see the ghost. The adults pass through the same rooms and live the same moments, yet they are unable to see a whole world of action around them. So, too, in classrooms

> of covertly aggressing girls, victims are desperately alone even though a teacher is just steps away (p. 25).

Simmons (2002) asserts that girls resort to 'non-verbal gesturing' (mean looks, certain forms of exclusion and silent treatment) because they are denied their voices by cultural rules about girls' anger: "Silence throws up an impenetrable wall, shutting down the chance for self-expression and more importantly, the opportunity to play a proactive role in one's conflicts" (p. 46). Girls often deny they are angry, when confronted by a friend, even though the friend knows that this is not true. In order to survive, they learn to doubt what they see and hear – they have to search for the real feeling underneath the false exterior. Girls' relationships can become defined by this unspoken and extremely anxiety-provoking reality. Additionally, teachers themselves find the exposure of non-verbal gesturing very difficult since, for example, how can a girl prove an evil look?

Brown and Gilligan (1992) assert that this process of learning not to trust their own feelings and the tendency to idealize their relationships on a surface level is dangerous, since: "… [it] leaves girls in danger of losing their relational reality, a reality that is crucial for them to hold onto, since once girls lose their ability to name relational violations they become, in new ways, vulnerable to abuse – both psychological and physical" (p. 106).

There are an increasing number of authors, such as Ringrose (2006), who in reaction to the recent explosion of interest around the nature of girls' aggression, have begun to warn against pathologizing girls' aggressive behaviour: "Relational aggression takes on the guise of a pathological feminine behavior, a disease even that must be treated to prevent peer rejection, depression, loneliness and much worse" (p. 411). It is argued in the current study, however, that irrespective of whether it is pathological or adaptive, aggression in girls is as **harmful** (if not more so) than aggression in boys, and therefore it needs to be fully explored and understood, and definitely no longer suppressed or ignored.

2.10 Rationale, aims and goals for the study

2.10.1 Rationale

Despite the plethora of research on bullying and aggression amongst children over the past few decades, comparatively little attention has been paid to girls in this arena. Besag (2006) argues that:

> The paucity of interest and research directed towards girls' aggression in the past may stem from boys' more visible manner of interaction, their behaviour being louder, more boisterous and energetic than girls…Unlike the bullying of boys, most of the quarrels and conflicts among girls appear related to their friendship groups. This means that the victims are unable to escape the mesh of social relationships within which the bullies lurk…The delay in recognizing these behaviours as bullying interactions has been partly due to the difficulty in identifying and tracking these negative, subtle social behaviours used by girls in disputes (p. 537).

The study of relational aggression amongst girls and its' impact on the development of psychopathology in women, has been ignored long enough. Only recently, have theorists such as Brown and Gilligan (1992), Miller (1986) and Simmons (2002) begun to investigate women's need for attachment and connection to others in explaining their development (Josselson, 1990). These authors have proposed alternative theories in which the feminine voice is added, offering a different perspective on relationships (as central to the development of girls), the sense of self (wherein girls are socially constructed to be "nice"), moral reasoning (highlighting the 'care' perspective in women) and how these are intertwined with female aggression (which is not acceptable in society in its overt form). Understanding why girls aggress in the manner they do will provide us with crucial information on how to resolve this possibly significant root of psychological illness amongst our female population. Once we develop a greater understanding of the underlying issues involved, we will be in a better position to develop and implement effective strategies for intervention amongst those girls who are most at risk.

2.10.2 Aims and goals

Despite the large volumes of literature available on bullying, little research has been done to specifically investigate the prevalence, types and developmental sequelae of

relational aggression amongst girls in South Africa. This research study aims to fill this gap, by exploring how the types of aggression experienced by the girls in this sample change in accordance with their cognitive and social development from the first year of school to the last. It is vital to establish guidelines for psychological practice that take cognizance of such issues. The contributions from different developmental perspectives can enrich our psychological understanding of the phenomenon of aggression; they not only acknowledge the importance of the development of healthy interpersonal relationships, but also allow for an integration of the previously-ignored perspectives of women into theories of aggression.

This research will therefore constitute an exploratory attempt to build towards an improved understanding of how the nature of aggression develops and changes as girls grow older, how these changes affect girls psychologically, why relational bullies use this form of aggression, why some children seem to stay uninvolved in these interactions even when the victim is desperate for support, and also why the victims of this type of aggression seem to accept the abuse and even return for more. The emphasis of this study is not on quantitative statistics, although these will be included, but rather on enriching and expanding upon our current knowledge of relational aggression in girls. This information could prove to be useful in the early identification of girls who are at risk for abuse by their spouses, and also of those who are likely to experience social-psychological adjustment difficulties and adult psychopathology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research into the negative emotional experiences of learners in school-settings potentially provides important information on causal factors as well as intervention strategies that may be effectively employed. In today's rapidly shifting school environment, which is a necessary response to the changes in South African society, children are often victimized and unable to cope with the psychological aftermath. This research endeavours to investigate relational bullying amongst girls within the environment of the school, in an attempt to understand how best to make our schools 'safe' places, rather than ones of misery. The methodology used for this research will be presented in this chapter. This will include a discussion around the quantitative nature of the research, the aims and questions asked by the researcher, the questionnaire/survey method as a means of research, a description of the research sample, ethical issues, research procedures and analysis of the data. A separate chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the coding of data in this study, since this is a central issue to the validity of the findings.

3.2 Research aims

The fundamental aim of this study was to gather information on bullying experiences amongst a sample of South African school children, with a particular focus on relational aggression. This aim can be further broken down into three sections:

1) To ascertain the approximate prevalence rate of bullying victimization amongst girls in a South African school;
2) To investigate what kinds of bullying are utilized by girls, and whether or not this behaviour follows a general developmental trajectory with an increase in age; and
3) To explore and understand more clearly why girls use relational aggression and what psychological effects are most pertinent in contributing to the initial stages of maladjustment, abusive relationships and psychopathology.

3.3Research Questions

The study therefore asked the following research questions:

1) What is the approximate prevalence rate of bullying victimization amongst girls in a South African school?
2) What kinds of bullying are utilized by girls in different age groups?
3) Does this behaviour seem to follow a general developmental trajectory with an increase in age?
4) Is this trend related to the cognitive, social or moral development of girls?
5) Why do girls use relational aggression?
6) What are the psychological effects, which may contribute to adjustment difficulties, a continuing cycle of abusive relationships and psychopathology?

3.4Research design

A research design is a plan which is developed in order to collect and analyse data in such a way that the researcher's question will be answered (Holsti, 1969). A good research design ensures that the theory, data gathering and analysis and the interpretation of the results are fully integrated. This research utilized a cross-sectional questionnaire survey to derive comparisons between the different messages produced by different age groups of girls and to test the relationship between certain variables across these groups. Blum and Foos (1986) point out that surveys are a useful method to use when the researcher is looking to reveal associations or relationships between variables. In addition to gathering fact, the research was intended to contribute to the construction and testing of theories around aggression in girls.

3.4.1 Quantitative research approach

Empirical research is conducted by researchers in the hope that the findings will result in real and measurable benefits for the population being studied (Fraser, 2004). This author states: "If research is empirical, it means that any knowledge that is derived has been developed not merely from thinking or theory but from observations or experiment which requires us to accept sensory experience as valid" (p. 18). Since all human beings experience the world in a different way, with different perspectives, such a definition poses a problem. However, in order to minimize this issue, empirical

research should be a *systematic investigation of experience,* which is *skeptical* about what is said to be true and *ethical* in nature (Fraser, 2004). A positivistic paradigm was adopted by the researcher in order to generate probability estimates that are useful in understanding, and possibly predicting in future, the phenomenon of aggression in girls. Tredoux (2002) states that the interpretation of statistical inferential methods needs to be made with caution, as researchers have increasingly tended to treat this method as infallible. Therefore, since one of the fundamental limitations in 'pure' empirical research, arises due to its inability to explain 'why', this research study involved an additional component, content analysis, which encompasses a degree of interpretation to the data, thereby allowing for deeper explanations.

Within the blanket term 'quantitative research' there are two methodologically related but very different approaches: survey research and experimental research. In this project, survey research was conducted, with a view to obtaining findings that describe and interpret aspects of current psycho-social reality. There are many ways to assess the nature and severity of bullying, such as peer nominations, teacher ratings, anonymous self-report questionnaires, individual interviews, systematic observation and school records (Olweus, 1993). This study utilized a questionnaire format which was completed anonymously by the participants.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Provisional consent was firstly obtained from the School Principal to conduct the study, subject to the researcher following the correct procedures for informed consent. Before the sample was drawn, an informed consent letter was sent to all the parents/guardians of potential participants (Appendix A). Gaining informed consent from parents of the younger children proved to be difficult. Many parents sent the informed consent letter back to the school specifically stating that their child would **not** participate in the study. However, such a reaction needed to be respected by the researcher, despite the fact that the sample size for the younger age group of children was smaller due to these reluctant parents. The participants were assured of absolute anonymity and confidentiality (their names did not appear on the questionnaires and their peers and teachers did not know what answers they had given) and they were

informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without fear of negative consequences. They were also told that they may choose not to answer certain questions should they feel so inclined. In line with the ethical principle of beneficence, the girls were offered follow-up therapy with the school psychologist, should their answers to the questionnaire result in any emotional distress and/or bad memories (as may well be the case in a study of this topic). However, it was realized that requesting such action on the part of the participants presented a certain ethical dilemma, since by doing so their anonymity would be compromised, possibly resulting in victimization from other girls for 'telling on' them. In addition, the researcher offered feedback, in the form of a seminar or workshops, to the teachers, parents and children in the school so that their community will have an opportunity to benefit from the knowledge gained as a result of their participation in this research. The researcher will also attempt to publish the results of this study should they be deemed to be of sufficient use in adding to the existing body of knowledge, which will then ensure that both academics and practitioners will have access to the findings.

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) highlight the importance of 'mindful' enquiry, which moves beyond traditional research ethics saying:

> [we need to prepare]… a place for communication that is not distorted by power relations in order for truth to be discovered in a discourse community. The researcher is watchful of herself or himself alongside the participants of the study…Mindfulness requires care for the lifeworld in which the enquiry occurs. It questions the manner in which the inquirer enters the lifeworlds involved in the inquiry, taking care that they are left in a better state than they were before, and certainly not in worse state. The mindful researcher will look at the possible effects of the inquiry not only on the lifeworld by also on persons in the lifeworld, on the self of the researcher, on the lifeworld of the researcher, and on potential future lifeworlds (p. 55).

3.5.1 Doing research with children

It is crucial to do research with children, because it can advance understanding of how they develop and experience their lives (since they are the 'experts' of their own lives), and thereby allow us to intervene positively in the lives of children experiencing difficulties (Lewis, 2004). However, children are a special research

population and as such should be treated accordingly, with application of the ethical principle of non-maleficence as paramount. Researchers differ in opinions on whether it is wrong or right to engage children within the process of research say Greig and Taylor (1999), who assert that children have specific rights and are uniquely vulnerable, and therefore should be consulted in matters which affect them. If child research is to be in the best interests of the children involved, it is critical to be aware of the potential dangers. All researchers are by default in a position of power, which carries with it the potential for abuse. In addition, researchers, as adults, are also powerful relative to children, making this a "double-edged sword" (p. 148). The issue of informed consent (including the knowledge of freedom of choice in participation, their role and the possible consequences of their participation) presents a unique challenge in researching young children. In addition, the researcher needs to consider very carefully if it is necessary to directly involve children in the study in order to answer the research questions. She also needs to consider the implications of the sampling method (will some children be harmed by virtue of exclusion?) and the potential psychological, social or emotional risks posed by the research instrument (Ibid). Children are very different to adults; they perceive and understand the world in a different way from adults and the researcher therefore cannot see issues from the exact perspective of the child. It is an important starting point, therefore, to acknowledge this reality (Ibid). Greig and Taylor (1999) state: "Undertaking research with children requires special tools just as it requires special skills…" (p. 159). It is only when we understand children within their own context that we can begin to make sense of their worlds (Ibid).

Although research with children presents some unique methodological challenges, Kellett and Ding (2004) point out that: "Children are themselves the best source of information about matters that concern them, so collecting data directly from children is preferred…" (p.165). It is important to ensure that the methods used are suitable for this population, such as pictorial vignettes and ranking exercises. Spencer and Flin (1990, cited in Kellett & Ding, 2004) make four recommendations for gaining optimal responses from children in quantitative research:

- Instructions before the interview begins should be unambiguous and comprehensive

- Leading questions must be avoided
- Ensure that children are given the 'don't know' option in order to avoid guessing
- Interviewing children on their home territory is ideal.

3.6 Data gathering

3.6.1 Selection and description of the sample

The sample for this study consisted of 169 girls attending an independent school in Kwazulu-Natal, ranging in age from seven years to 18 years old (Grade one to Grade twelve). The sample was drawn purposively from the entire school-girl population, and consisted of those children who obtained parental consent and who, in addition, indicated a personal willingness to participate (i.e. gave verbal assent). The sample was designed to approximate the three age-levels used by Brown and Gilligan (1992) in their research, namely; childhood (six to nine years old), pre-adolescence (10 to 14 years old) and adolescence (15 to 18 years old). It was ensured that each age level consisted of a minimum of 20 participants, which was important for the validity of the findings.

The demographic characteristics of the learners who participated in this study were as follows: The age groups represented by the sample were rather unequal in size, with the six to nine year old group being the smallest (13%, n = 22), 10 to 14 year olds second largest (39.6%, n = 67) and the 15 to 18 year age group the largest (47.3%, n = 80). The majority of the sample were whites (52.7%, n = 88), followed by black learners (30.5%, n = 51), and Indians (9%, n = 15). Coloured participants (7.8%, n = 13) were decidedly in the minority. This distribution followed a similar pattern across the age groups. When grouped according to Grade, only six learners (3.6% of the sample) were from Grades One to Three. Most of the sample, therefore, was drawn from Grades Four to Seven (34.9%, n = 59) and Grades Eight to 12 (61.5%, n = 104). The majority of the learners had been at this school from between one and five years (58.6%, n = 99), whilst 39 (23.1% of the sample) had been attending the school for six to 10 years and 31 (18.3% of the sample) had attended for less than one year. The implications of these demographics will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

3.6.2 Measures used

3.6.2.1 Self-report questionnaire

Two age-based anonymous self-report questionnaires were designed by the researcher, due to copyright and financial constraints (See Appendix B and C). A combination of ideas from Olweus' studies on bullying (1993), Kohlberg's (1981) moral dilemmas and Selman's (1980) social perspective-taking vignettes were used, based on the theory that social perspective-taking is likely to influence moral reasoning and thereby bullying behaviour. The questions were designed after a thorough review of the literature on what kinds of inquiry would elicit appropriate answers to the research questions. The first few questions were based on pictorial vignettes and briefly described scenarios in order to evoke an emotional (and hopefully more honest) response from the participants. They were open-ended and intended to reveal the emotions projected by the participants onto the characters in the picture. Such questions were balanced with closed-ended ones, in order to minimize analytical confusion. A rating scale section was also included in order to allow quantification of certain bully/victim experiences.

In designing the questionnaire the following were considered important (Davies, 2007):

- Each question was essential and constructed to be comprehensible and well thought out
- Ambiguous words and leading questions were avoided
- Words that were familiar and appropriate to the sample were used (two different questionnaires were accordingly designed to cater for the wide range in ages). Such words were also considered to have the same meaning for both the researcher and the participants.
- The length of the questionnaires was adapted to the age groups, being slightly shorter for the younger children.
- In closed-ended questions, all potential responses were considered.
- The scaled questions used words (sometimes, often, etc.) in order to aid understanding for the participants and to allow quantification of some of the findings.

- Questions around sensitive areas were designed to minimize possible negative reactions from the participants (for example, by using projective techniques).

3.6.2.2 Validity and reliability

There are certain disadvantages inherent in using a questionnaire format (Owens, Daly & Slee, 2005): Participants may limit their responses to those which are socially desirable; they may feel uncomfortable with self-reporting and problems with interpretation may occur. More specifically in the case of pen and paper questionnaires: the participants may not be familiar with questionnaires (test-wiseness); forced choice answers usually give no chance for the participant's reasons behind their response or may not cover the answer the respondent would like to give; and finally, errors in marking the incorrect choice through carelessness are more possible.

The analysis was not based on an existing test instrument and therefore the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was tested by means of a pilot study before the large-scale data collection commenced. The questionnaire was administered to a few girls from each age-level, and their answers were examined in order to ensure that the questions were measuring the correct construct, that they were understood by the participants and that they were capable of answering the research questions. The pilot study also revealed whether the questionnaires were an appropriate length, as especially in the case of the younger children a lengthy questionnaire may lead to a lack of concentration towards the end, therefore resulting in hasty, invalid answers. If the pilot study had highlighted any potential problems in the methods of data collection or the instruments, these could be attended to before the full-scale study commenced. No problems, however, were encountered.

Content validity can be deemed to be reasonable if the research adequately samples and represents the phenomenon being investigated. Face validity relates to whether or not the research *appears* to measure the appropriate domain. Construct validity requires the theoretical soundness of the results in order that they can be generalizable to other settings. The issues around the validity of this questionnaire will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

3.6.2.3 Inter-rater reliability for codes

Another researcher also coded the raw data to determine if the final codes developed by the researcher satisfied the criteria for individual reliability. Cohen's Kappa was utilized to determine inter-rater reliability. This process is reported in the next chapter.

3.6.3 Administration procedure

All the participants were briefed before the questionnaire was administered. The following issues were clarified with the participants at this stage of the data-gathering:

1) The definition of 'bullying' was discussed, in order to ensure that all the participants had a common understanding of the concepts involved. The concepts involved in both physical and non-physical bullying were included in the definition to ensure that participants had clarity, and an awareness of the range of actions which could fall under the topic.
2) It was emphasized that the answers should be from their own perspective, and that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.
3) The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality with regard to their answers
4) The participants were requested to try and answer all of the questions, so as to ensure that the questionnaire would not have too many missing values which would invalidate it. However, they were also reminded that participation was voluntary, and that they were not forced to answer any question they found too distressing.
5) The participants were assured that the researcher could be approached at any time during the process for clarity or to answer any questions regarding their understanding of the questionnaire items.
6) The participants were encouraged to approach the researcher should they have difficulties with regard to being bullied, with the understanding that they would be referred to either the school psychologist or another mental health professional for ongoing support.

After the briefing, pen-and-paper questionnaires were administered to older girls (Grades Five to Twelve). In the case of the younger participants (Grades One to Four) who might be less able to reliably complete a questionnaire independently, the researcher conducted individual briefings followed by structured interviews.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS version 15 for windows), and content analysis. The results are reported in detail in Chapter Five.

3.7.1 Coding the data

Much of the data gathered by the questionnaire consisted of wide-ranging responses to open-ended questions. Since the correct coding of this data is considered a vital element of validity in this research study, the process of developing and checking these codes for validity and reliability will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. The forced-choice and rating scale responses were not open to any debate and were therefore not subjected to the same rigorous process as the open-ended responses. However, the rating scale section of the questionnaire, which was utilized to obtain a measurement of the prevalence of victimization and of bullying-behaviour in this sample, was subjected to an inter-item reliability analysis to determine how consistently the items measured these constructs. Cronbach's Alpha statistics were obtained: 0.804 for the 'victimized' sub-scale (seven items) and 0.645 for the 'bully' sub-scale (six items). Although the usual criteria for reliability coefficients is a minimum of 0.8, Loewenthal (2001) suggests that a score of 0.6 and above can be considered satisfactory if the scale consists of less than ten items and the scale is based on solid theory, with good evidence for validity.

3.7.2 Chi-square Analysis

Nominal data was generated by many of the questions in the questionnaire. In order to prevent violation of the assumption of 'independence of observations' the researcher decided on a 'primary code' for each question-response to be included in the Chi-square analysis (L. Lachenicht, Personal Communication, 17 November 2009). Although many respondents gave detailed and varied responses to the open-ended questions, only one response to the question (in this study, the first mentioned) can be counted for each participant for the purposes of chi-square. The reasoning behind this rule was that in psychoanalytic theory, 'free association' is the gateway to the most prominent unconscious processes, and the first thought that comes to mind is likely to be most relevant to the individual. Based on the frequency counts obtained from the

data, the Chi-square test was utilized to explore the data for statistically significant associations between the variables. Due to the interest of the researcher in developmental issues in this study, much of this section of the analysis focused on categorical changes in particular variables in association with different ages.

3.7.3 Content Analysis

Since simple analyses of associations cannot establish causation, or the underlying reasons for these associations, the in-depth answers given to the open-ended questions needed further interpretation. A content analysis was therefore conducted on this written data. As Krippendorff (1980) notes, it is useful to use this tool because it is a practical, objective (quantitative) and systematic method of describing the content of what the children communicated in their answers to the questions.

Content analysis can be defined as a way to rigorously and systematically analyse the symbolic communications within data (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980). It involves a way of understanding data as a collection of symbolic phenomena, rather than physical events. It has a history in ‘counting’ and ‘numbers’ , stemming from the belief in the natural sciences that quantitative statements are more convincing than qualitative ones. However, it goes one step further, tracing the social role, effects, messages and meanings of symbolic phenomena. Krippendorff (1980) calls it an “open-minded empirical orientation” (p. 9). It is therefore, says this author, fundamentally empirical, but “specializing, however, in symbolic events to which other methods are generally insensitive” (p. 10).

In analyzing qualitative data gained through open-ended questions, content analysis is useful in situations where the researcher does not want to impose too much structure on the participants, and can be used to cross-validate findings obtained through other techniques. Possible problems which are inherent in this technique include, according to Krippendorff (1980), the complexity of language, especially where non-verbal communications are not recorded, the need for standardized categories, the problem of drawing inferences and the role of theoretical constructs in the analysis. Therefore, existing literature/theory should, in some way, back up the conclusions drawn. It is important that the kind of evidence which is needed to validate the results of the content analysis is specified in advance or at least must be reasonably clear. This

enables future research to systematically validate the findings, indicating sufficient category reliability (Ibid).

3.7.4 Logistic Regression

Although logistic regression is technically a large sample statistical test, binary logistic regression was utilized to obtain a broad quantification of the relationship between changes in the variable ‘age in years’ and the presence or absence of other variables of interest. Dascalu, Carausu and Manuc (2008) argue that this technique is a useful one in studying and predicting risk factors in a particular situation, and is used: “…when we want to make a prediction about the presence/absence of a certain parameter based on the values of a set of independent predictor variables” (p. 278). The aim was to build an understanding of the likelihood of certain features occurring within girls’ aggression as they grow older and thereby to obtain a rough predictive measure of the general developmental trends existing in the data.

3.7.5 Kruskal-Wallis test for unrelated samples

In addition, the rating-scale section of the questionnaire, which was designed to measure the extent to which the respondents in the study were experiencing victimization or were the perpetrators of bullying, was analysed. The data violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance which is required to conduct a parametric test (such as a one-way Analysis of Variance, or ANOVA) on the differences in means across the age groups. Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis (non-parametric) test for unrelated samples was conducted. The ‘bully’ score and ‘victimised’ scores means for each age group were ranked and tested for significant differences between the groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

CODING, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

4.1Introduction

Coding of the responses gained from the questionnaires presented a serious challenge to the researcher, since the findings would not be valid if the coding system and themes were not valid. As Krippendorf (1980) points out: “The importance of validation lies in the assurance that it provides that research findings have to be taken seriously in constructing scientific theories or in making decisions on practical issues” (p. 155). In ensuring the greatest degree of external validity possible, the researcher used a combination of theoretical concepts from the research literature, together with a thorough understanding of the semantic meaning of children’s slang and their use of colloquial phrases, to develop the codes.

4.2 Coding the data

The response-data was coded according to themes that had been extracted from the literature on this broad area of research and which would validly answer the research questions. A similar format to that used by Youniss (1980) in his research on the Sullivan-Piaget perspective on social development was used. Originally every different response was read and classified using a descriptive label. Thereafter, the wide variety of responses were grouped together into main subject-matter themes based on their similarities (such as physical, social exclusion, betrayal of friendship, etc., with respect to types of bullying). The researcher believed that these themes validly represented the concepts being measured and that they were sufficiently precise that they would guide the production of reliable judgments. Youniss (1980) notes that although children may give unique content in their responses, at the same time they tend to be quite similar in generating themes, which are based on their shared understanding of social reality.

According to Hosti (1969): “Coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics” (p. 94). Coding occurs according to the

researcher's assumptions about the data and the inferences that she expects to draw from them, as well as theory and hypotheses. Holsti (1969) points out that:

> A central problem in any research design is selection and definition of categories, the "pigeonholes" into which content units are to be classified. Content analysis stands or falls by its categories…categories should *reflect the purposes of the research*, be *exhaustive*, be *mutually exclusive*, *independent*, and be derived from a *single classification principle* (p. 95).

Each code was then tested by the researcher across a range of responses to ensure that all responses could legitimately be grouped into one of the available categories. Once the researcher was satisfied that the codes accurately covered all of the written material provided by the girls in the questionnaires, the coded data for the entire sample was captured, ready for statistical analysis.

4.3 Inter-rater reliability

Another researcher was given detailed theoretical information on the subject matter with regard to the codes which had been developed. The material was discussed and debated until the researcher was satisfied that her co-rater had a good understanding of the themes that have occurred consistently in the literature on aggression, particularly in relation to the female gender. This process was problematic initially, as the co-rater did not have any working knowledge of the theories on aggression, morality, perspective-taking and gender stereotypes, and therefore needed extensive training before she was ready to tackle the daunting task of coding the open-ended question-responses.

The co-rater was then given a sample of questionnaires from each age group, together with a detailed list of criteria that was needed in order to allocate each code. Only the questions which were not forced-choice answers were treated to this process. The codes allocated by the co-rater were recorded and entered into the SPSS data base as a separate variable which could then be correlated with the original codes assigned by the researcher to the data in order to determine the level of agreement between the two raters. At this point, Cohen's Kappa was calculated to determine inter-rater reliability, obtaining satisfactory results overall, as reported in Table 1 below:

Cohen's Kappa measure of agreement	Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Significance (P)
Question 6	0.954	0.045	9.493	0.000
Question 7	0.827	0.111	5.432	0.000
Question 8	0.915	0.084	5.676	0.000
Question 9	0.939	0.060	6.272	0.000
Question 10	0.889	0.076	6.642	0.000
Question 11	0.935	0.063	6.390	0.000
Question 12	0.956	0.043	10.134	0.000
Question 14	1.000	0.000	6.846	0.000
Question 17	0.844	0.095	6.155	0.000
Question 18	0.919	0.078	5.619	0.000
Question 19	1.000	0.000	5.477	0.000
Question 21	0.946	0.053	7.805	0.000
Question 40	0.933	0.065	5.123	0.000
Question 49	1.000	0.000	3.873	0.000
Selman's levels	0.952	0.048	8.517	0.000

Table 1 : Cohen's Kappa results for inter-rater coded questions

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

5.1Introduction

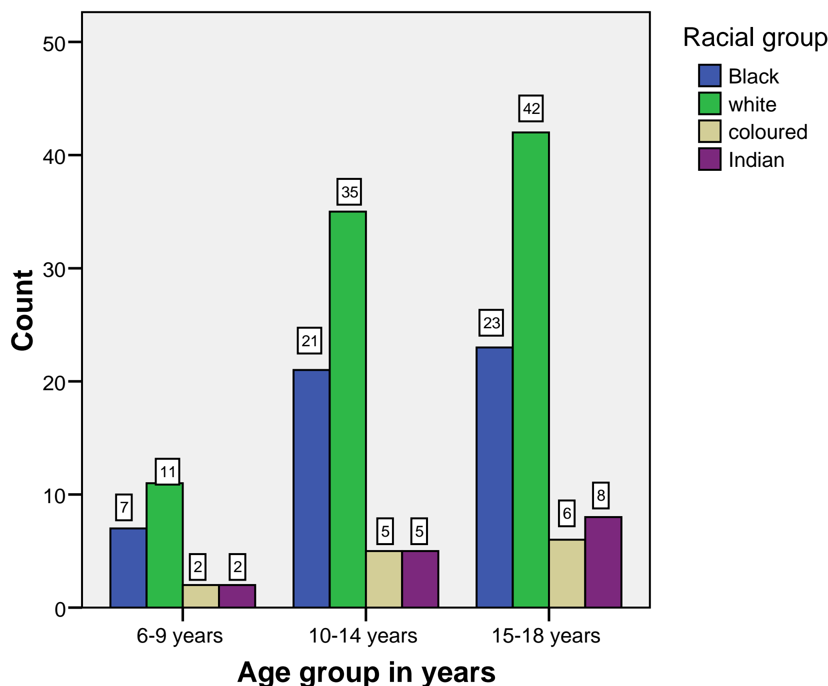
This chapter aims to outline the major research findings of this study. A description of the demographic profile of the participants will be provided. In addition, a summary report on the themes extracted from the responses to the research questionnaire and their statistical analysis, as guided by the research questions, will be presented. It should be noted at this point that a large number of statistical tests were conducted on the data. As a result, there is an increased likelihood that some of the significant results may have occurred purely by chance. However, the focus of this study was exploratory, and explanations behind the results were often of more importance than the exact quantitative representations. Therefore, the researcher is aware of the fact that the quantitative results of this study should only be considered as general **developmental trends**, rather than accurate measurements of the phenomena of interest. In addition, due to the number of significant associations found in the analysis, only Chi-square results at the 1% level of significance will be reported in this section. Those found at the 5% level of significance are simply noted as trends in the data.

5.2Description of the sample

The research sample, consisting of only female participants due to the nature of the research question, was drawn from an independent school located within the Greater Durban area, in Kwazulu-Natal. This English-medium co-educational school is run according to a Christian ethos, and is populated by multi-racial Grade One to Grade Twelve learners, largely from relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds, although there are some sponsored learners who come from disadvantaged circumstances. This school is well resourced, with fairly small class sizes and well qualified teachers. The name of the school is not mentioned in this dissertation, thereby ensuring anonymity.

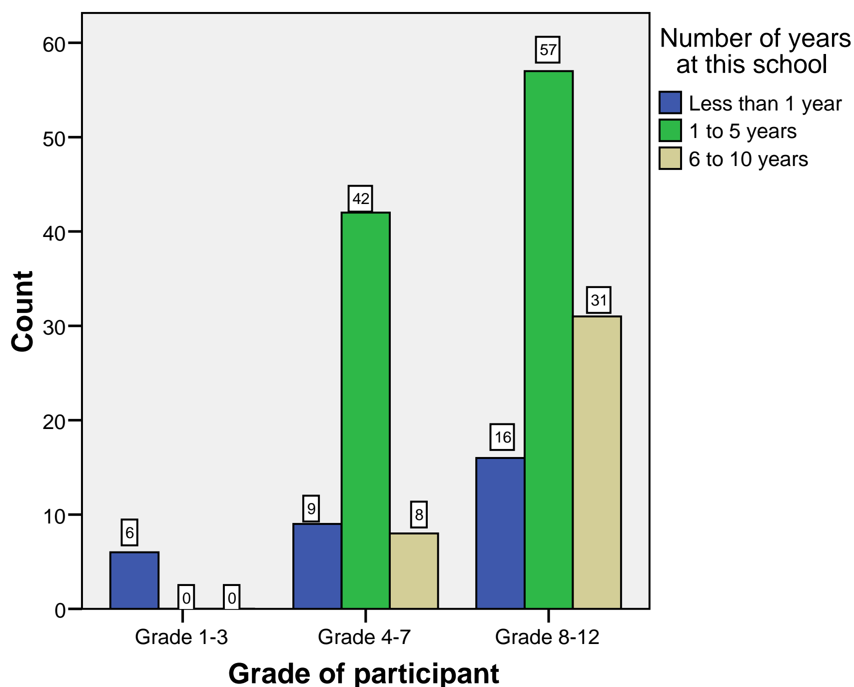
5.2.1 Demographics of the sample

The demographic characteristics of the learners who participated in this study appear in Graph 1 and Graph 2 below. The age groups represented by the sample were rather unequal in size, with the six to nine year old group being the smallest (n = 22), 10 to 14 year olds second largest (n = 67) and the 15 to 18 year age group the largest (n = 80). White learners comprised the majority in each age group, followed by black learners, Indians and then Coloureds. This distribution followed a similar pattern across the age groups.



Graph 1: Racial composition per age group

Only six learners were from Grades one to three. Most of the sample, therefore, was drawn from Grades four to seven (n = 59) and Grades eight to 12 (n = 104). As a result of this extreme variability, it was decided not to analyse the data according to Grade, but rather to use the age-groups, each of which had enough representation for some validity in the results. The majority of the learners (n = 99) had been at this school from between one and five years, whilst 39 had been attending the school for six to 10 years and 31 had attended for less than one year.



Graph 2: Number of years at school per grade

5.3 Inferential Statistics

It should firstly be noted that the frequency statistics displayed in this chapter are all based upon the **first** response given by each respondent, which was the 'primary' code utilized in the chi-square analyses. Secondly, the **full** response of each participant was also examined, and the presence (yes or no) of the main themes of interest (as determined by the available literature on the subject) was noted. This process served to create binary variables upon which the researcher conducted binary logistical regression analysis, looking for the relationship between the occurrence of various themes within the sample and the age in years of the respondent. In order to do so, the variable 'age in years' was coded as a continuous variable, as opposed to the nominal data of 'age groups' which was used in the chi-square analysis.

5.3.1 How prevalent are 'bullies', 'victims' and 'bystanders' and are there significant differences across the age groups?

The girls were asked with whom they would identify in the bullying scenario that they had described in the questionnaire, in order to obtain an indirect measurement of their bully/victim status and an indication of the prevalence of bullies and victims in this sample. This was considered a fairly 'safe' way for the participants to disclose this

information. The majority of the respondents in this sample (60.9%, n = 98) seemed to identify with the by-stander. However, about a third of them (33.5%, n = 54) felt that they would be the victim, suggesting that a significant proportion of girls in this sample have had enough experience of being bullied that they identify with this role. Only a few (5.6%, n = 9) respondents identified with the bully in the scenario, a result which is not surprising given the limitations of self-report format questionnaires.

The rating-scale section of the questionnaire, which was designed to measure the extent to which the respondents in the study were experiencing victimization or were the perpetrators of bullying was analysed using the Kruskal-Wallis test for unrelated samples (a non-parametric test). This test was appropriate since the data violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance which is necessary for parametric tests to yield valid results. Significant differences were found to exist between the age groups with respect to the degree of bullying and victimization occurring ($\chi2 = 17.730$, df = 2, p = 0.000), suggesting that the two older age groups of girls are statistically more likely to be involved in perpetrating bullying than the younger age group of girls. In addition, significant differences were found to exist between the age groups with respect to the degree of victimisation occurring ($\chi2 = 7.878$, df = 2, p = 0.019), suggesting that 10 to 14 year age group is statistically more likely to be victimised to a greater degree than the oldest and youngest age groups.

5.3.2 What different types of bullying are prevalent and are there significant differences across the age groups?

A total of 167 learners responded to the first bullying vignette, and 165 gave a response to the second bullying vignette (Table 2). It is interesting to note that in the first scenario relational bullying in the form of betrayal (back-stabbing, gossiping, telling of secrets) did not feature highly, whereas in the second scenario this type of aggression accounted for over a quarter of the primary responses counted. A similar trend was noted with the responses counted for relational bullying in the form of social exclusion/ostracism, which was much more prevalent in the second scenario. Contrary to this, the two most frequently cited aggression-types in the first scenario, namely emotional (teasing, playing tricks) and non-physical/verbal reduced substantially in the second. Counts for physical aggression were the only category to

remain stable across the vignettes. It is possible that the respondents were unconsciously influenced by the two different pictures, as the first scenario depicted only the victim, whereas the second scenario depicted the victim in the foreground and the bullies in the background. This latter photograph may therefore have elicited more interpersonal emotions from the respondents, thereby increasing the frequency of social types of aggression being named first.

Across the age groups, the distribution of different types of bullying is extremely skewed. The percentage of physical bullying responses decreased substantially as the girls' age-group increased. Conversely, the percentages of the categories of social exclusion and emotional bullying increased consistently from the younger to the older age groups. The category of betrayal increased substantially within the older age groups in the first scenario, but seemed to peak in the 10 to 14 year age group in the second scenario. Bullying in the form of verbal abuse also seemed to peak in the 10 to 14 year age group.

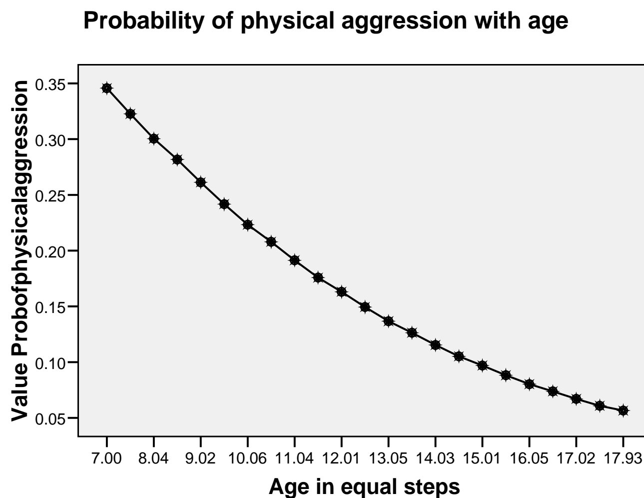
Type of aggression	**Scenario 1 n = 167** *** 2 missing cases**				**Scenario 2 n = 165** *** 4 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Physical	10 (47.6%)	6 (9%)	2 (2.5%)	12 (7.2%)	9 (42.9%)	6 (9.2%)	4 (5.1%)	11 (6.7%)
Social exclusion/ ostracism	0 (0%)	3 (4.5%)	11 (13.9%)	14 (8.4%)	0 (0%)	8 (12.3%)	20 (25.3%)	34 (20.6%)
Betrayal (backstab, gossip)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	8 (10.1%)	10 (6%)	5 (23.8%)	18 (27.7%)	18 (22.8%)	42 (25.5%)
Emotional/ teasing	2 (9.5%)	32 (47.8%)	44 (55.7%)	80 (47.9%)	1 (4.8%)	16 (24.6%)	20 (25.3%)	58 (35.2%)
Non-physical/ verbal	9 (42.9%)	24 (35.8%)	14 (17.7%)	51 (30.5%)	6 (28.6%)	17 (26.2%)	17 (21.5%)	20 (12.1%)

Table 2: Types of aggression cited in response to bullying scenarios

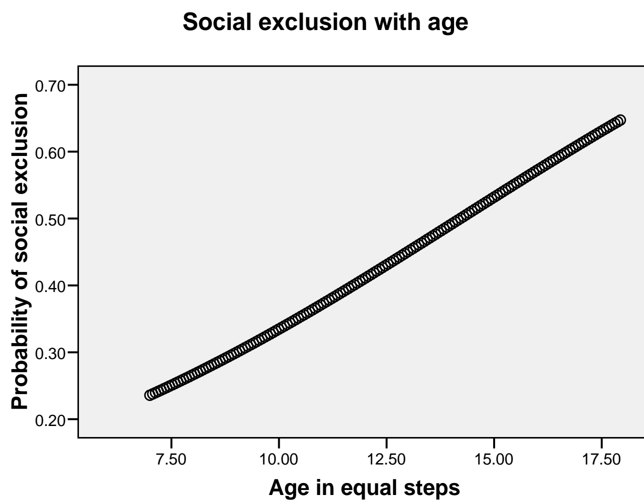
The chi-square test found a statistically significant association between 'age group' and 'type of aggression' in this sample ($\chi 2 = 3.918$, df = 8, p = 0.000) An analysis of

the adjusted residuals (Appendix D, Table 3) show that, at the 1% level, the six to nine year age group is significantly more likely than expected to name incidents of ‘physical’ bullying and the 15 to 18 year age group is significantly more likely than expected to name incidents of ‘social exclusion’.

The logistic regression of the specific types of aggression named by the girls, displayed in Graph 3 and Graph 4 below, found statistically significant relationships between the presence of physical types of aggression and age in years (Wald = 8.200, df = 1, p = .004) as well as between social exclusion and age in years (Wald = 9.546, df = 1, p = .002). The probability of physical aggression decreases from 30.3% in an eight year old, to 16.3% in a 12 year old and 8.1% in a 16 year old. The probability of social exclusion increases from 26.6% in an eight year old, to 41.1% in a 12 year old and 57.2% in a 16 year old. No significant relationship was found between years of age and the odds of the respondent citing ‘betrayal’, ‘emotional abuse’ or ‘verbal abuse’ in response to the bullying vignette.



Graph 3: The probability of physical aggression occurring with increasing age



Graph 4: The probability of social exclusion occurring with increasing age

5.3.3 Why do bullies behave the way they do?

5.3.3.1 Where can we place the blame?

The respondents were asked to explain why girls bully (Appendix D, Table 4). The main themes identified were 'characteristics of the victim' (different, too clever, ugly, irritating, nasty etc)(named by 66.9%, n = 107 of the respondents), 'characteristics of the bully' (such as emotional problems, problems at home, need for power etc) (named by 23.8%, n = 38 of the respondents), and 'peer pressure/in-group status' (to be cool, to get more popular/stay popular, new girl etc) (named by 9.4%, n = 15 of the respondents). It should be noted that a large proportion of the explanation category 'characteristics of the victim' focused on **differences** between the victim and others, including positive and negative physical differences, as well as differences in racial group and religion. A chi-square statistical test conducted on this data indicates that the association between age group and reasons for bullying does not reach significance ($\chi2 = 9.291$, df = 4, p = 0.054).

However, logistic regression analyses found significant relationships between 'characteristics of the victim' as an explanation for why girls bully, and age in years, (Wald = 5.330, df = 1, p = .021) as well as between 'peer pressure' and age in years (Wald = 5.359, df = 1, p = .021). The probability of a girl placing the blame for bullying on certain 'characteristics of the victim' increases from 53.9% in an eight

year old, to 65.7% in a 12 year old and 75.7% in a 16 year old. In addition, the probability of a girl placing the blame for bullying on peer pressure increases from 7.9% in an eight year old, to 14.4% in a 12 year old, to 24.5% in a 16 year old. No significant relationship was found between 'characteristics of the bully' as a reason for bullying and age in years.

5.3.4 Girls' opinions on showing their anger

A large majority (68.8%, n = 108) of the sample felt that when a girl is angry she should be 'nice/contain/hide' her anger and 16.8% (n = 27), indicating that most girls do not believe that a negative emotion like anger should be visible to others. It was the opinion of 15.3% (n = 24) of the sample that she should 'talk about' her angry feelings, either to her friends, the target of her anger, or someone who can help her to process them. Only 15.9% (n = 25) of the sample indicated that she should 'be authentic' in the way she expresses her anger. When analysed by age group, the data shows that almost all of the six to nine year olds stated that girls should still try to 'be nice/hide/contain' their anger (95.5%, n = 21), whilst 75.8% (n = 50) of the 10 to 14 year olds and 53.6% (n = 37) of the 15 to 18 year olds concurred with this opinion. The incidence of suggestions that girls should 'talk about the angry feelings' and that they should 'be authentic' increased with age. It should be pointed out that the 'be authentic' category did not occur **at all** in the youngest age group, even when all responses, rather than just the first, were examined.

The chi-square analysis shows a significant association between age and attitude about girls' anger ($\chi 2 = 18.560$, df = 4, p = 0.000), although this should be interpreted with caution as the 'rule of thumb' assumption is slightly violated (22.2% of the cells have an expected count of less than 5). An analysis of the residuals (Appendix D, Table 5) reveals that, at the 1% level, six to nine year olds are significantly more likely than expected to believe that girls should be nice, hide or contain their anger, whereas 15 to 18 year olds are significantly more likely to hold the opinion that an angry girl should behave in an authentic manner.

These results were confirmed by logistic regression analyses, which found significant relationships between the opinion that girls should 'be nice' and age in years (Wald = 11.694, df = 1, p = .001) as well as between the opinion that they should be authentic

and age in years (Wald = 15.227, df = 1, p = .000). The probability that a girl will hold the opinion that they should still 'be nice' when angry decreases from 93.9% in an eight year old, to 84.4% in a 12 year old, to 66.1% in a 16 year old. On the other hand, the probability that a girl believes that angry girls should be authentic increases from 2.3% in an eight year old, to 9.5% in a 12 year old, to 31.2% in a 16 year old. No significant relationship was found between the opinion that an angry girl should 'talk about it' and 'age in years'.

In explaining the above opinions (Appendix D, Table 6) many girls, 46.7% (n = 56), used the reasoning that 'girls should not hurt others' as opposed to proportionately less than half this number (21.6%, n = 26) who felt that girls are 'entitled to be real'. Almost a third, 31.7% (n = 38) of the sample focused on the 'negative consequences' that usually arise as a result of girls showing their anger, such as punishment, suspension from school, getting a bad reputation, creating even more fighting and angry feelings, and making God angry. Responses according to age group reveal that more of the youngest group (62.5%, n = 10) tended to focus on themes of punishment and the negative consequences and the reactions of others, although the 10 to 14 year age group also showed a fair degree of concern around this theme (31.4%, n = 16). The normative socialization belief that 'girls should not hurt others' was the largest occurring category across all three age groups. It be noted here that this question had a much higher number of missing responses (39.6%, n = 48) across the entire sample than did any other, indicating that girls struggled to give a reason for their opinions.

A chi-square analysis reveals a significant association between age and reasoning about why girls should behave in certain ways when they are angry ($\chi2$ = 15.015, df = 4, p = 0.005). The adjusted residuals suggest that at the 1% level, six to nine year olds are significantly more likely than expected to base their reasoning upon the 'fear of negative consequences'. Conversely, the 15 to 18 year olds are significantly more likely than expected to reason that girls have the right to behave in a way that authentically expresses the way they feel.

5.3.5 Why some girls remain uninvolved, as 'by-standers'

The respondents across the sample were equally divided as to whether a by-stander from the popular group would protect the victim. However, in the six to nine year age group, a much higher proportion (71.4%, n = 15) of girls stated that the by-stander **would** protect the victim compared to those who felt she would not. The 10 to 14 year olds did not lean either way, whilst the majority of 15 to 18 year olds (62.3%, n = 48) were more convinced that the by-stander **would not** protect the victim. Such a trend suggests that as girls grow older they become more aware, and fearful, of the costs of standing up for someone who is ostracized by the 'popular' group. A chi-square test of this data shows a significant association between age and the likelihood that the by-stander would protect the victim ($\chi2 = 7.862$, df = 2, p = 0.020), with six to nine year olds being significantly more likely, at the 1% level, to say she would protect the victim, whilst 15 to 18 year olds were significantly more likely (although only at the 5% level) to say she would not (Appendix D, Table 7). A logistic regression of this data also found a significant negative relationship between the likelihood of protecting the victim and 'age in years' (Wald = 11.478, df = 1, p = .001). The probability that an eight year old would protect the victim is therefore 70.4%, whereas this probability decreases substantially to 53.5% in a 12 year old and to 35.9% in a 16 year old.

Most of the sample (68.5%, n = 113) stated that the by-stander might **not** protect the victim because she 'fears losing popularity/is loyal to the group' (Appendix D, Table 8). A fairly large proportion of respondents (22.4%, n = 37) argued that she fears she 'may get bullied too', and therefore should not get involved. According to age group, it can be seen that the by-stander's 'fear of losing popularity/loyalty to her group' was most commonly cited as a reason for her lack of action by the older two groups (72.7%, n = 48 and , 72.2%, n = 57, respectively). The six to nine year olds, on the other hand, were more concerned with the possibility that she could get bullied too if she protected the victim (45%, n = 9). A chi-square test of the association between age and reasons why the bystander would not protect the victim did not reach significance ($\chi2 = 8.818$, df = 4, p = 0.066).

However, when a logistic regression of the variables 'afraid of losing popularity' as a reason for not protecting the victim and 'age in years' was conducted, a significant

result was obtained (Wald = 8.996, df = 1, p = .003). The probability of an eight year old using this as the reason why she would not protect the victim is 44.6%. This probability increases to 60.3% in a 12 year old and to 74% in a 16 year old. A logistic regression of the variables 'fears she will be bullied too' and 'age in years', showed no significant relationship.

5.3.6 Why victims often seem to 'accept' the abuse

Girls often desperately try to remain 'in favour' with the bullies, even though they are so abusive. In order to address the reason behind this, the two older groups of girls in this sample were given a vignette wherein they were asked how hard it would be for a girl to confront her friends, who are ignoring her and leaving her out of social events, by telling them how hurt she is feeling. The responses for the whole sample (Appendix D, Table 9) confirmed that 48% (n = 59) of girls would find it 'very hard' to tell them she feels hurt and 38.2% (n = 47) felt it would be 'hard'. Those who felt it would be 'quite easy' (12.2%, n = 15) and 'very easy' (1.6%, n = 2) were decidedly in the minority. The responses of the two age groups were very comparable, and a chi-square analysis of the association between age and response chosen did not reach significance.

These two groups of respondents were then asked to choose from three options, how much they felt the bullies (who are supposedly friends) would like her if she did confront them (Appendix D, Table 10). The choice 'only a little' obtained the highest percentage of responses (63.4%, n = 78), followed by the choice 'not at all' (24.4%, n = 30). Only 12.2% (n = 15) of the girls felt that the victim's friends would still like her 'very much', of which only 4.5% (n = 2) were from the 11 to 14 year old age group. In this age group an overwhelming 72.7% (n = 32) believed that the victim would be liked 'only a little' after telling the bullies how she felt. However, a chi-square test revealed no significant associations between age and opinion on how much the victim's friends would still like her. Since, generally in this study, most significant differences were found to exist between the youngest and the oldest age groups, the fact that these comparisons of the two older groups only, did not reach significance, is not surprising.

5.3.7 The nature of girls' friendships and fights

5.3.7.1 What girls value in their friendships

A diverse range of responses was obtained from the girls with respect to the qualities they would look for in a "perfect" friend (Appendix D, Table 11). Overall, the majority of responses fell under the theme of 'nice qualities' (39.6%, n = 65) (nice, sweet, loving, helpful, funny, etc.). The next most important quality was 'loyal/trustworthy' (28.7%, n = 47) (always there for me, does not backstab or spread rumours, etc.) and thereafter 'respectful/accepting'(20.7%, n = 34) (listens, does not judge, understands, shares values, etc.), and finally 'honest'(11%, n = 18) (truthful, not afraid to tell me when I am wrong, etc.)

With respect to the six to nine year old age group, 'nice qualities' (68.2%, n = 15) occurred far more consistently than any other theme. Although 'nice qualities' was important to the two older groups as well, another key ingredient in the 10 to 14 year olds (32.3%, n = 21) and 15 to 18 year olds (29.9%, n = 23) was 'loyal/trustworthy'. The theme 'truthful/honest' was most cited by the 15 to 18 year olds (18.2%, n = 14). It would seem, therefore, that girls in general value a friend who has 'nice' qualities from an early age. However, as girls grow older, this progressively loses its relative importance whilst the qualities of 'loyal/trustworthy' and 'truthful/honest' become increasingly valued aspects of friendship.

A chi-square analysis of the association between the qualities girls look for in perfect friend and age group shows a significant result ($\chi 2 = 20.341$, df = 6, p = 0.002). An analysis of the residuals shows that at the 1% level, six to nine year olds are significantly more likely than expected to value 'nice qualities' in a perfect friend, whereas 15 to 18 year olds are significantly more likely than expected to value 'honesty' in a friendship.

A logistic regression found significant relationships between three qualities considered necessary to a friendship and age in years; 'loyal/trustworthy' (Wald = 4.389, df = 1, p = .036), 'honest' (Wald = 23.808, df = 1, p = .000) and 'respectful/accepting' (Wald = 21.923, df = 1, p = .000). There is a 51.6% probability that an eight year old would most value loyalty/trustworthiness, which increases to 62.2% in a 12 year old and to 71.7% in a 16 year old. In an eight year old there is an

8.1% probability that she would most value honesty, which increases to 25% in a 12 year old and to 55% in a 16 year old. Finally the probability of respect/acceptance being most valued by an eight year old is 26.5%, and this increases to 51.7% in a 12 year old and 75.7% in a 16 year old.

In order to explore the nature of conflict and bullying amongst friends, the participants were asked what causes fights between friends (Appendix D, Table 12). The most important reasons cited in the overall sample included 'betrayal' (such as gossiping, back-stabbing and telling friends' secrets) (36.1%, n = 61) and 'jealousy' (over possessions, physical attractiveness, boys etc) (33.1%, n = 56). Within the six to nine year age group, 'verbal abuse' was the most common reason for fights between friends (27.3%, n = 6), followed by 'jealousy' and 'betrayal' (both 18.2%, n = 4). In the two older age groups, 'betrayal' and 'jealousy' were the most commonly cited reasons for fights between friends, with the former occurring proportionately more highly in the 10 to 14 year old group (37.3%, n = 25) whilst the latter featured more highly in the 15 to 18 year old group (46.3%, n = 37). A trend was noticed within the 'jealousy' category, whereby the younger girls tended to describe jealousy over possessions, as opposed to the older girls who largely mentioned jealousy over boys. To further investigate, this category was divided into 'boy-issues' and 'other jealousy' and was then analysed using logistic regression.

A significant relationship was uncovered in a logistic regression between age in years and certain reasons for fights, namely 'betrayal' (Wald = 12.686, df = 1, p = .000) and 'boy-issues' (Wald = 24.102, df = 1, p = .000). An eight year old has a 35.2% probability of naming betrayal in this instance, which increases to 53.9% in a 12 year old and 71.3% in a 16 year old. In the case of an eight year old, there is a 6.2% chance that boy-issues will be cited as the reason for fights amongst friends, which increases to 21.3% in a 12 year old and 52.2% in a 16 year old. There was no significant relationship between 'other jealousy' issues causing fights and age in years.

5.3.8 Popularity, status and bullying amongst girls

Some literature on bullying amongst girls has referred to the issue of 'popularity' as integral to this phenomenon. In order to investigate, the two older groups were asked to describe what makes a girl popular (Appendix D, Table 13). 'Cool attributes' (such

as being physically attractive, lots of money, designer clothes, going to parties/drinking/smoking, many friends, cute boyfriends and being well known for some reason, etc.) (39.2%, n = 47) were found to be the key ingredients to popularity. 'Negative personality traits'(14.2%, n = 17) (being mean, bitchy, snobby, show-off, flirt etc) also seem to contribute somewhat to this status, whereas 'positive personality traits' (really nice, friendly, humble etc) (4.2%, n = 5) do not seem to contribute much at all.

It would seem that since 'positive personality traits' do not feature highly in determining popularity, there is fair reason to suspect that there could be a link between "popularity" and "bullying". As a result, in order to gain evidence to support this suspicion, the older two groups of girls were then asked for their opinion on whether or not popular girls are nice people (Appendix D, Table 14). A majority of 67.7% (n = 84) replied 'no'. A further 19.4% (n = 24) felt that they could not really say either 'yes' or 'no' (many clarified their indecision with statements such as "it depends on what they are popular for", and "some are, but most of them are really mean"). A much smaller 12.9% (n = 16) indicated that 'yes', popular girls are nice people. Across the two age groups there were no significant differences in their opinions on the phenomenon of popularity and the nature of popular girls.

5.3.9 The psychological effect of girl-bullying on its victims

5.3.9.1 The effect on feelings about self and others

The primary feelings of the victim of bullying, as identified by this sample of respondents (Appendix D, Table 15), were divided into 'sad' (73.8%, n = 121), 'angry' (1.8%, n = 3), and 'bad' (24.4%, n = 40). These themes can be related to the different types of psychological consequences of bullying upon the victim; i.e. 'depression', 'aggression' and 'self-hate/self-blame'.

When the distribution of responses across the age groups is examined, it can be seen that all three age groups identified feeling 'sad' most commonly, including feelings such as depressed and heart-broken. The 15 to 18 year old group showed a greater tendency than the other two groups to name the more complex negative feelings towards the self, which made up the category 'bad', such as rejected, betrayed,

worthless and ashamed. Very few girls mentioned feelings of anger (1.8%, n = 3) as a consequence of victimization.

A logistic regression on the relationship of feelings of self-hate/self-blame as a result of victimization and age in years yielded a significant result (Wald = 10.200, df = 1, p = .001). This result would suggest that as girls grow older, they become more likely to develop negative feelings about the self as a result of bullying, internalizing this victimization as relating to something wrong within themselves, rather than as a problem with the bullies. An eight year old has a 30% probability of feeling 'bad' as a result of bullying, which increases to 46% in a 12 year old and 63% in a 16 year old. No similar significant relationship between 'feeling sad' and 'feeling angry' and age in years was revealed through the process of logistic regression.

5.3.9.2 The effect on how victims react

The reactions of the victim to bullying (Appendix D, Table 16) were grouped into three main themes; namely, 'retaliate/confront' (which included standing up to the bullies, getting even, etc.), 'tell someone' who can help (generally relating to someone older or wiser, such as parents, teachers, school counselor, peer counselors etc, as well as finding new friends) and 'self-destructive behaviour' (which included more serious issues such as self-mutilation, suicide, severe withdrawal and desperate attempts to change oneself **as well as less severe**, but nevertheless psychologically unhealthy reactions, such as moving to another school). The results show that 47.8% (n = 77) of the sample believes that the victim is likely to react in self-destructive ways.

In a chi-square analysis of age and psychological reactions, although interpretations should be cautious as the 'rule of thumb' assumption is slightly violated (22.2% of cells have expected count of less than 5) a significant association is noted ($\chi 2$ = 29.198, df = 4, p = .000). The adjusted residual values reveal several significant associations at the 1% level; six to nine year olds and 10 to 14 year olds are significantly more likely than expected to seek help from others, whereas 15 to 18 year olds are significantly less likely to do so. In addition, six to nine year olds and 10 to 14 year olds are significantly less likely than expected to engage in self-destructive behaviours in reaction to bullying, whereas 15 to 18 year olds are significantly more likely than expected to do so.

The logistic regression analyses conducted on the relationships between 'self-destructive' (Wald = 27.468, df = 1, p = .000) and 'help-seeking' (Wald = 15.826, df = 1, p = .000) reactions to bullying and age in years, revealed significant relationships between these variables and age in years. An eight year old girl has an 18% likelihood of reacting to bullying in a self-destructive way, which increases to 45% in a 12 year old and to 76% in a 16 year old. On the other hand, an eight year old has an 82% likelihood of seeking help in reaction to bullying, which decreases to 64% in a 12 year old and to 41% in a 16 year old. It must be re-iterated here that the category 'self-destructive' was not intended to depict only physically self-destructive behaviours, but also included emotionally unhealthy or self-defeating reactions such as escapism.

5.3.9.3 Factors underlying the psychological pain and damage?

In response to the question 'why does it hurt so much to be bullied?' (Appendix D, Table 17) the most frequent responses occurred around the theme of 'betrayal of trust and betrayal of the values of friendship' (50.4%, n = 67). References to the fact that bullying is 'emotionally painful' (hurts feelings, rejection by friends is unbearable, emotional pain is worse than physical, etc.) were the second most commonly cited category of responses (26.3%, n = 35). Thirdly, 23.3 % (n = 31) of the sample made reference to the way bullying 'devalues' a girl (humiliates, embarrasses, lowers self-esteem, etc.).

The youngest age group (87.5%, n = 14) largely stated various elements of the theme 'emotionally painful' as the reason why bullying hurts. The 15 to 18 year old group, on the other hand, were far **less** likely to provide loosely defined reasons within the 'emotionally painful' category, and rather focused on the specific fact that it 'betrays trust' and 'devalues' them. The 10 to 14 year olds were a little more evenly distributed across the themes, although betrayal was decidedly the most frequently cited category (47.2%, n = 25).

With regard to this data, the significant chi-square ($\chi 2$ = 45.156, df = 4, p = .000) should again be interpreted with caution as it slightly violates the 'rule of thumb' assumption (22.2% of cells have expected count of less than 5). However, an analysis of the adjusted residuals suggests that there are strong associations between age and

certain types of explanation given for why bullying hurts so much; At the 1% level, 15 to 18 year olds are significantly more likely than expected to explain the hurt as a result of betrayal of trust/friendship whereas the six to nine year age group is significantly more likely than expected to attribute the hurt to general 'emotional pain'.

A logistic regression of the explanation 'betrayal of trust' as the reason why bullying hurts, and age in years, indicates a significant relationship (Wald = 25.990, df = 1, p = .000). An eight year old has a 17% likelihood of stating that bullying hurts due to the fact that her trust has been betrayed, increasing to 50% in a 12 year old and to 82% in a 16 year old. A similar analysis conducted on the explanation that bullying 'devalues' and age in years did not reveal any significant relationship.

5.3.10 Relational bullying as more painful than other forms

The girls' identification of the worst kinds of bullying fell within three main categories (Appendix D, Table 18), in order of prominence; 'betrayal (relational)' (112, n = 66.7%), (gossip, backstab, tell secrets, spread rumours, etc.) 'non-relational'(18.5%, n = 31), (physical, verbal, teasing, taking things, etc.) and 'social exclusion (relational)' (14.9%, n = 25) (will not be friend, excludes, will not talk, leaves her out, etc.).

When divided into age groups, it becomes apparent that the six to nine year old group largely views 'non-relational' types of bullying as the worst, whereas both the 10 to 14 year age group and the 15 to 18 year old age group increasingly regarded 'relational' types (betrayal and social exclusion) as the worst. A chi-square analysis of this contingency table reveals a significant association between 'age' and 'worst' type of bullying ($\chi 2$ = 47.748, df = 4, p = .000), although this result should be interpreted cautiously since the 'rule of thumb' assumption is slightly violated (22.2% of cells have an expected value of less than 5). An analysis of the adjusted residuals indicates that at the 1% level, the age group six to nine years is significantly more likely to cite 'non-relational' forms of aggression as the worst type, and the age group 15 to 18 years is significantly more likely to cite 'betrayal' as the worst type. There were no significant associations within the 10 to 14 year old group.

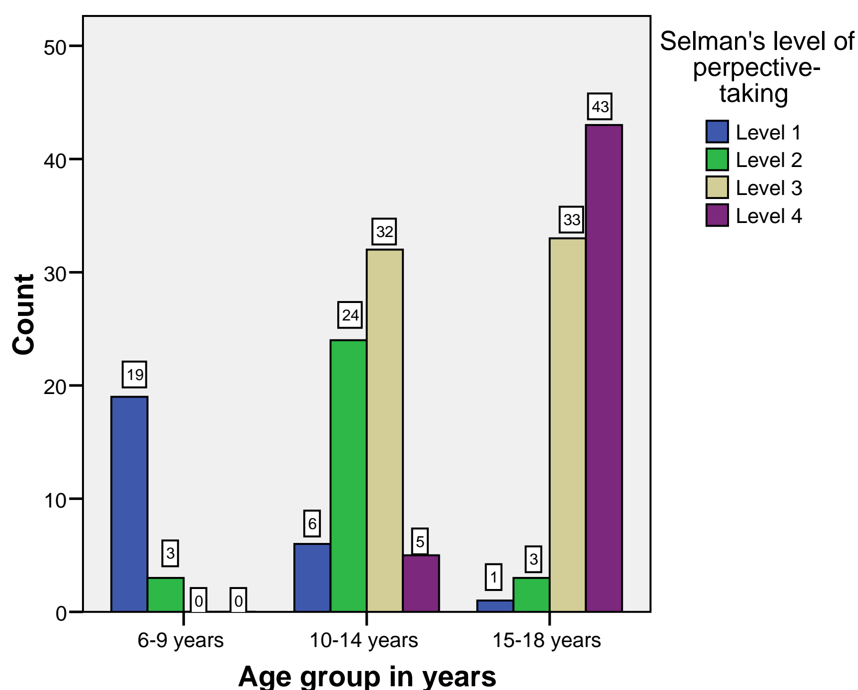
A logistic regression conducted on the relationship between the tendency to cite 'relational' types of bullying as the worst and 'years in age' revealed a significant relationship (Wald = 23.274, df = 1, p = .000). Therefore, the probability of an eight year old stating that relational aggression is the worst type is 51%, which increases to 83% in a 12 year old and to 96% in a 16 year old.

5.3.11 Social, moral and cognitive development of girls in relation to friendships and bullying

From the results obtained thus far in this study, it is obvious that certain types of bullying are significantly associated with certain age groups. Since bullying in girls might be linked to their cognitive sophistication, social perspective-taking abilities in friendships and what their moral beliefs are with respect to these relationships, an attempt was made to estimate the moral reasoning and perspective-taking levels in this sample of girls. The questionnaire included a dilemna wherein the respondent was asked to choose between possible actions a girl might take when faced with a friendship problem, i.e., what should she do when she has a choice between a new budding friendship, versus spending time (long pre-arranged), with an existing childhood friend? She was then asked to give a reason for her choice, from which an indication of both moral reasoning and social perspective-taking could be gathered.

5.3.11.1 Selman's levels of social perspective-taking across the age groups

The girls' responses were coded using Selman's (1980) guidelines (inspecting aspects of friendship formation, closeness, trust and reciprocity, jealousy and conflict resolution) for the four levels of interpersonal understanding relating to friendship (Appendix D, Table 21). The frequency results are depicted in Graph 3 below, and indicate a clear movement from Level One to Level Four with increasing age.



Graph 5: Selman's level of perspective-taking per age group

A chi-square analysis of the association between Selman's level of perspective-taking and age group was conducted and the result was found to be significant ($\chi2$ = 150.420, df = 6, p = .000). Adjusted residuals show that at the 1% level, six to nine year olds are significantly more likely than expected to be functioning on Level One, 10-14 year olds are significantly more likely to be at Level Two and 15-18 year olds are significantly more likely to be functioning on Level Four.

5.3.11.2 Loyalty, morality and moral reasoning

The girls' responses to the dilemma were also coded into the categories 'loyalty to existing friend' versus 'pursue new relationship' (Appendix D, Table 19). For the majority of girls in the sample, 'loyalty to existing friend' was the first choice (54%, n = 87) but a large number (45.9%, n = 71) felt that it would be better to 'pursue the new relationship' (and either try to explain that she would like new friends, or lie about it to the existing friend). When the different age groups are examined, it would seem that the six to nine year olds were most inclined to choose 'pursue new relationship' (63.6%, n = 14). Within this age group **none** of the respondents indicated that it would be a good option to lie about it. The older two groups were more inclined to feel that 'loyalty to the existing friend' is more important, with 59.4% (n = 38) of the 10 to 14 year olds choosing this option and 54.7% (n = 41) of

the 15 to 18 year olds doing so. Out of the few respondents that suggested ‘pursue the new relationship’, several claimed that perhaps it would be best to lie about it to the existing friend in order to ‘keep the peace’, or to ‘not hurt her feelings’. These results seem to suggest that as girls grow older, peaking in the early adolescent/preadolescent phase, they tend to increasingly value the concept of loyalty (an aspect of morality) within social relationships, and the importance of keeping others happy, **even if this necessitates deceit**.

A chi-square test conducted on the association between age group and the choice between ‘loyalty’ and ‘pursuing a new relationship’ however, obtained a non-significant result ($\chi 2 = 3.513$, df = 2, p = .173). Logistic regression conducted on the relationship between ‘loyalty’ and age in years also failed to produce a significant result (Wald = 1.065, df = 1, p = .302).

The girls were then asked to explain their reasoning for their choice of action in the above-mentioned moral dilemma (Appendix D, Table 20). The responses were captured within two general themes: Firstly, ‘reasoning based on morality’ with regards to a relationship, accounted for more than half (55.9%, n = 90) of the reasons given. Reasons given that were not related to moral reasoning amounted to 44.1% (n = 71) of the sample. The majority of the explanations given by the six to nine year old group (66.7%, n = 17) fell within the category ‘reasoning not based on moral grounds’. On the other hand, the 10 to 14 year olds most frequently cited reasons based on ‘moral’ grounds rather than non-moral grounds (59.4%, n = 38). The 15 to 18 year olds also primarily used moral reasoning (59.2%, n = 45).

It would seem that there is a general trend towards more consistent reasoning of a ‘moral’ nature as age increases, although this association was found to be statistically non-significant in a chi-square analysis of the overall sample data ($\chi 2 = 4.990$, df = 2, p = .083). Logistic regression on the relationship between ‘moral reasoning’ and ‘age in years’ also failed to produce a significant result (Wald = 3.584, df = 1, p = .058).

The researcher further analysed the category ‘moral reasoning’ and coded the responses therein in terms of the moral ‘ethic of justice’ and the moral ‘ethic of care’ proposed by Kohlberg (1981) and Gilligan (1982). Responses based on logical

reasoning and fairness were classified under the ethic of justice and those based on concerns around hurting others and the importance of relationship were classified under the ethic of care. The distribution was very evenly spread across these categories for all three age groups, showing that the girls tended to use equal amounts of both forms of moral reasoning in their decisions regarding the friendship triangle vignette.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The key aim of this exploratory research was to determine the nature of bullying amongst a sample of school girls and to develop an improved understanding of how and why this changes along a developmental trajectory as girls move through the stages of middle childhood, pre-adolescence and adolescence. Ostrov and Crick (2007) argue strongly for the importance of studying aggressive behaviour in the context of gender roles. They believe that gender schemas and gender role identity need to be fully understood in investigating the development of subtypes of aggressive behaviour. They identify the developmental precursors to aggressive behaviour as being the child's understanding of their own gender membership as well as of the social characteristics of this gender group. This research therefore sought to be **primarily exploratory**, and although relationships were uncovered through statistical analysis, the **meaning** behind these relationships was of principal concern to the researcher. Although a vast amount of valuable information was obtained, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all of the insights achieved. As a result, particular themes have been selected for discussion, since they add to our understanding of the phenomenon of girl-bullying within a developmental framework and it is this perspective that is lacking thus far in the available literature.

The research questions in this study asked how prevalent girl-bullying is, why girls bully and what psychological effect it has on them. They also asked whether girls at different ages would be likely to engage in different types of bullying behaviour, and if so, could these differences be related to their particular developmental stage in the domains of cognition, social-skills and morality. Through the research process, many of the girls in this study openly revealed their thoughts and emotions, and in some cases, their pain and despair. A number of them stated to the researcher that they really wanted adults to understand their world in order to help them to resolve their issues. In the light of their explanations and opinions an attempt was made to build a deeper understanding of aggression in girls, utilising a developmental framework that takes into consideration those features which are distinctive to the female gender.

6.2 Demographics

As indicated in Chapter three, the sample was drawn from a co-educational private school in KwaZulu-Natal, catering for Grades One to Twelve. The only constant variable in this sample was gender, since all 169 participants were female. The girls were divided into three age groups in accordance with Brown and Gilligan's (1992) study, namely; six to nine years (middle childhood), 10 to 14 years (pre-adolescence), and 15 to 18 years (adolescence). Although four racial groups were represented in the sample, 52.7% of the sample were white learners, whilst 30.5% were black learners. Indian and Coloured learners were therefore relatively under-represented. In addition, the six to nine year old group was decidedly smaller than the older two groups, since many parents of the younger children refused to give consent for their children to participate in the study. This resulted in the Grades One to Three group being considered too small for comparison purposes. In addition, analysis according to the grouping variable 'Teacher' suffered the same problem. Instead, all developmental progression was measured in terms of age groups which showed less variance in numbers, although they were still rather unequal. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the unequal age group sizes were not considered a serious hindrance to obtaining a great deal of useful information on the general trends of aggression presenting within this sample of young girls.

6.3 Discussion of the findings

6.3.1 The prevalence of 'bullies', 'victims' and 'bystanders' across the age groups

Solberg and Olweus (2003) point out that prevalence rates across studies can vary considerably depending on the definition and operationalization of the term 'prevalence'. The percentages reported in this study are not based on a definitive time period or frequency of occurrences, but rather on a subjective choice by the participants to identify with a particular role-player in a bullying scenario. In comparison to some studies amongst school children (Forero *et al.*, 1999) the rate of identification with the 'bully' was fairly low (only 6% of the sample), although this rate is consistent with other studies (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). In general, low self-reports of bullying behaviour could be explained either by the reluctance of the

participants to disclose their own inclination to bully (an anticipated difficulty presented by self-disclosure interviews and questionnaires), ignorance or denial. In this study, many girls may have experienced all three roles in the bullying scenario, either simultaneously according to the social stratification amongst their peers, or at different times, and may therefore subconsciously choose the most socially acceptable one in this case (Holt *et al.*, 2007).

The prevalence rate of overall victimization (34% of the total sample), as measured by the number of girls who identified with the victim, is consistent with much of the literature on physical and verbal bullying (Forero *et al.*, 1999; Wolke *et al.*, 2000), as well as with South African studies of non-physical bullying amongst girls (De Wet, 2005b; Smit, 2003a). Many girls in the current study commented that the questions, and the responses they gave, were emotionally ‘close to home’:

> I no [sic] her pain…I would probably be [the victim] – I’m not cool at school (11 yrs)
> I’ve been through it…and I don’t ever want to see anyone else going through this (16 yrs)

However, the overwhelming majority of girls in the sample (61%) identified with the bystander (a popular girl who could choose to help the victim or not) in the bullying vignette. Firstly, this is understandable since this would be the most socially acceptable role in this scenario. Secondly, since bullying amongst girls tends to be primarily social, occurring in the presence of peers (Owens *et al*., 2000b, Ostrov & Crick, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2005), who either directly or indirectly provide reinforcement to the bullies (as described by Smith *et al.*, 2005), this high prevalence rate of those involved, but as neither victims or bullies *per se*, is not at all surprising. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) point out that those children who support the bullies (either actively or as passive by-standers) are often non-aggressive themselves, but in their role are extremely influential in enabling or alternatively, preventing, bullying. They conclude from their study that bullying is a group activity: “…in which group members had different, distinct roles (e.g., leading the attack, assisting, reinforcing) and where bullies relied on their network of supporters, subordinates, and scapegoats to establish and exercise influence” (p. 387). By-standers often feel helpless or afraid to intervene; as in the words of respondents:

> She just goes with the flow even though she knows it's wrong…[she does not interfere because] she's afraid they'll do the same to her (14 yrs)

The findings in this study, that a significantly greater number of younger girls identified themselves more frequently as victims, and older girls significantly more frequently admitted to being the perpetrators of bullying, supports previous research findings (Scheithauer, *et al., 2*006). This also supports the view of evolutionary psychological theories, which argue that aggression amongst girls peaks in adolescence at the time they become ready to find a partner and reproduce (Cairns, 1986).

6.3.2 Bullying sub-types across the age groups

The statistically significant association between 'age group' and 'type of aggression' found in this study provides some evidence for the theory that the predominant types of aggression utilized amongst girls may follow a developmental trajectory according to a combination of innate temperament, cognitive/social development and socialization (Cairns, 1986; Crick, 2006; Cummings *et al.*, 1989; Owens *et al.*, 2000a; Vaillancourt *et al.,* 2007). Coyne *et al.* (2006) state: "When children develop the social intelligence to successfully manipulate the social circle for their gain, aggression becomes even more covert" (p. 305).The statistically higher prevalence of physical bullying amongst the youngest group, as compared to the oldest group where social exclusion was significantly more prevalent, is evidenced by the girls own words:

> They have been punching and kicking her, hitting her…trip her up and then they laugh (7yrs)
> When she's alone, gang up on her and hit her (9 yrs)
> [They would] ignore her, leave her out of the group (18 yrs).

The general trend in this study, whereby increasingly sophisticated forms of relational aggression and increasing levels of social perspective-taking occurred with increases in age, shows support for Selman's (1980) social-cognitive model of perspective-taking which identified the link between the limited social perspective-taking skills inherent in younger children and their use of less refined forms of aggression. It is also in line with the findings of Bjorkzvist *et al.* (1992) and Kaukianinen *et al.* (1999),

who concluded that more sophisticated forms of bullying (such as social exclusion and betrayal) require greater social skills, and are therefore more prevalent in older children than younger. Kaukianinen *et al.* (1999) concluded that:

> Efficient use of indirect aggression presupposes understanding of human relations and skills, which are applied in social settings. To use indirect aggression, the individual must be able to put his/her intentions to harm another person in a favourable light. At the same time, s(he) has to interpret the reactions of others and accommodate his/her behavior for the social manipulation not to backfire. These are all demanding skills, and obviously they are not yet fully developed among young children (p. 88).

Typical responses of older children illustrate these relationship-damaging acts, which as Ostrov and Crick (2007) point out, comprise the definition of relational aggression:

> They have probably excluded her from the group or publicly humiliated her. They could also have backstabbed her (14 yrs)
>
> Become friends with her and earn her trust to tell them her greatest secret, then tell everyone…when she tries to talk to them they say 'no one cares', or just walk away leaving her by herself…make her feel worthless (16 yrs)
>
> Spread bad rumours about her, which could ruin her reputation…expose her secrets…reject her from their group as a friend…make her feel not wanted by ignoring her (17 yrs)

Cairns (1986) reports in his direct observation study of a group of children and adolescents, findings of an age-related increase amongst girls in the use of the social network (cliques) as an instrument of aggression, as opposed to direct confrontation methods. Murray-Close *et al.*, (2007) also assert that relational aggression is likely to be more salient amongst adolescents than younger children; adolescent development includes the formation of more selective friendships, and cliques with sharply defined boundaries which are kept in place through techniques of relational aggression such as ostracism and exclusion. Prinstein *et al.*, (2001) agree, and point out that adolescents may begin to realize that relational aggression is a safer way of expressing their anger than physical aggression, and that the cognitive development of adolescents involves an increased capacity for the more refined and hurtful use of relational aggression.

Despite the developmental trends indicated by the data in this study, it is also obvious that even the younger girls are no stranger to relational aggression, confirming the

observations of Besag (2006) and Young and Sweeting (2004) that school-aged girls **in general** seem to favour non-physical forms of bullying: Younger participants suggested the bullies would:

> Go up to her and say we want to be your friend, and then hear what she says and go tell everyone else her very bad secret…say you can't sit with us, you're not popular, you're not nice, you can't do stuff like we do (8 yrs).

Overall, the prevalence of non-physical and indirect forms of aggression in this sample of girls was far higher than the prevalence of physical aggression. As Gilligan (1992) asserts, it is necessary to study girls' aggression in its' own right. The primary importance of relationship would suggest a different experience and expression of aggression amongst girls. A striking feature of girls' relationships with each other is their passion and intimacy, yet these are the central characteristics of girls' aggression – secrets and an intimate knowledge of a best friend's weaknesses provide the weapons for the most agonizing harassment (Gilligan, 1992). The findings in this study are also consistent with those of Scheithauer, *et al*. (2006), who concluded that: "relational-aggressive behaviour patterns have a special value for girls in the context of their psychosocial development within their smaller same-sex peer group. With the help of relational forms of bullying, girls may influence social relationships within their peer group effectively…" (p. 271). It would seem that relational aggression is a normative practice (as is consistent with previous literature) across all ages of girls, since 76% of all the respondents cited at least one form of relational bullying (such as social exclusion and betrayal) in response to the bullying vignettes (Crick *et al.*, 1996). In addition, this study has shown some forms of relational aggression to increase in both quantity and quality with increasing age in years.

6.3.3 Reasons for the behaviour of bullies, victims and by-standers

6.3.3.1 Placing the blame

The results of this study show that the most common explanation given by all the girls for bullying, but which also increases significantly in frequency with age, centres around the out-of-the-ordinary 'characteristics of the victim', a trend observed and reported by Olweus (1993) and Owens *et al.*, (2000c). As Olweus (ibid) observes,

these ‘deviant’ features may be positive (strengths) or negative (weaknesses). The participants gave many examples:

> She’s short, tall, skinny, different to them (8 yrs)
> She might be a new girl or maybe there is something wrong with her…she is pretty or clever…she has a different colour skin (13yrs)
> She is the ‘different’ one in the group…fat or ugly…clever in class…a little bit of a nerd…wierd (15 yrs)
> She is smarter than them. She looks beautiful, she has qualities and knows people that they wish were their friends outside school…appearance, the way she acts, her speech, IQ, or about family, boyfriends or other friends she has (17 yrs).

Secondly, the chance that girls attribute ‘peer pressure’ to bullying behaviour also increases significantly with age in years, as described by the participants’ comments:

> So other people can see they are strong and so they get more friends…some of the girls think it is cool and everyone will then support them (10 yrs)
> They do it out of peer pressure (13 yrs)
> They may find her as a threat to them. To make them seem better and more popular (17 yrs).

This increasing use of an external locus of control may possibly be linked to gender socialization and a growing sense of morality in the older girls, who then feel the need to justify their actions as the fault of ‘others’, thereby shifting the blame (and guilt) away from themselves, as noted by Owens *et al.* (2000c). In addition, pre-adolescent girls are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of social approval from their peers, which may influence them to act in ways that they believe will gain this acceptance (Galen & Underwood, 1997).

6.3.3.2 Boredom

Owens *et al.*, (2000b) reported that they had an unexpected finding in their study, when some of the girls explained their use of relational aggression as simply ‘because they are bored and need something to do’. Similarly in the current study, girls stated:

> They probably have nothing better to do in their lives…maybe they are bored with their life (12 yrs)
> For fun…because they can (13 yrs and 18 yrs).

Owens *et al.* (ibid) regard this as highly concerning, since it complicates intervention strategies, which have never been designed with such an explanation in mind. However, in Hadley's (2004) opinion, and as supported by the findings of this current study: "There is surely more at stake than the alleviation of boredom" (p. 345).

6.3.3.3 Friendship and group processes

In the Owens' *et al*. study (2000b) a more predictable category relating to friendship and group processes was found, which they further divided into several sub-categories. Their findings were supported by those in the current study (as illustrated by the words of the participants), namely, issues of:

1) Attention-seeking and the power that social knowledge brings to a girl:

> Probably the main girl is doing it to make the other girls laugh, so she feels better about herself (14 years)

2) Inclusion in the group:

> They think that she doesn't fit in their group (12 yrs)

3) Belonging to the 'right' (popular, high status) group (a finding supported by Duncan and Owen-Smith, 2006):

> Because they feel insecure about themselves, or want to prove their dominance over others. She is possibly a popularity threat to them (15 yrs)

4) Self-protection (join in the victimization in order to avoid being excluded):

> Others are just glad it's not them while some find it very funny. It's better to watch it being done to someone than to have it done to yourself (14 yrs)
> They want to be part of the popular group. They have their own insecurities and don't wanna [sic] seem like they are weak (18 yrs)

5) Jealousy:

> They're jealous of her. There's something in her that they envy and because they can't stand the idea of her being better than them, they choose to bring her down (16 yrs)

6) Revenge/retaliation (also identified by Cullerton-Sen *et al.*, 2008):

> They have also been bullied and want to do it to others (9 yrs)
> She might have told their secret or a lie about them (10 yrs)

> Because they were probly [sic] in a bullying situation when they were younger. They were teased so they do it to others to show their pain (11 yrs).

The findings in the current study are also consistent with Duncan and Owen-Smith's (2006) contention that indirect aggression is directly related to the degree of anxiety about status in a friendship, which is different for boys and girls. Simmons (2002) and Eder and Enke (1991) discuss 'alliance building' as one of the aims of relational aggression. It creates an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, reinforcing traditional gender norms and allows group aggression whilst each girl maintains her façade of being a 'nice' girl. Alliance building could also serve to reduce the anxiety that girls feel over the possible "loss" of friendship or status resulting from their aggression, since the group is united against the victim, as Duncan and Owen-Smith (2006) hypothesize: "…if girls' friendship networks are tighter, and/or their status depends more heavily upon friendships than does boys, then girls may have greater motivation than boys to engage in indirect aggression because direct aggression is so potentially damaging to these very important relationships" (p. 500).

6.3.4 Anger and girls

The majority of girls in this study indicated that they do not believe that girls should show their anger openly. This finding is to be expected, say authors such as Leadbeater *et al.* (2006), Letendre (2007) and Underwood (2004), who advise that we need to end gender socialization practices which serve to perpetuate the stereotype that the exhibition of aggression and anger are unacceptable amongst females. Simmons (2002) agrees:

> Scuffles between boys, though met with swift punishment, are nevertheless seen as a predictable side effect of male adolescence. Yet when girls fight physically, their aggression is seen as a sign of deviant behavior. This double standard has grave consequences, suggesting to girls that their aggression will be more acceptable if only they keep it indirect or covert (p. 200).

However, this belief decreased significantly with increasing age in years, and was increasingly replaced with a view held by the older girls that they are entitled to be authentic and that a girl should talk to someone about her anger, rather than suppress it completely according to this participant:

Talking with someone should be how people vent anger (15 yrs)

Generally, however, these comments were tempered with the warning (referred to in the literature by Bowie, 2007) that despite being allowed to express their anger, girls should still be 'nice' about it, and above all else should manage their aggression and not hurt other girls. These participants suggested that an angry girl should:

Go some place quiet to avoid hurting someone (11 yrs)
Try to be a bit nice even if they are angry because it's wrong to take your anger out on people…girls shouldn't go and hit and shout at people (14 year old)
I think they should express their anger but try not to hurt other people when doing this. This shows that…they really are nice girls…No one has the right to hurt anyone no matter what mood their [sic] in (15 yrs)
They should not bottle their feelings up but they shouldn't have an anger outburst like a savage (16 yrs).

Consistent with the available literature (Gilligan, 1982; Simmons, 2002; Underwood, *et al*., 2004), the majority of girls in the sample (46.7%) cited the fact that girls 'should not hurt others' as the reason why they should keep their anger hidden. However, a greater 'fear of negative consequences' as the reason for hiding aggression was significantly related to being younger in age:

She does not want to get into trouble…if you show your anger it causes trouble and some people could get suspended (10 yrs);

In contrast, a greater belief that girls are entitled to be authentic (as long as they do not cause harm) was significantly related to being older in age. This latter result is contrary to the work of Brown and Gilligan (1982), and may suggest that South African girls are in fact being socialized to value their own voices to a greater degree than the girls in the 1982 study. Evidence of such is shown in the participants' words:

I think they should be honest with themselves! If you're angry – be angry! (15 yrs)
Let everyone know why they are angry, so people know not to do it again (16 yrs)
I think that a person has the right to express her feelings (17 yrs)
They should express how they feel so that they do not get walked over (18 yrs)

The idea of being ‘mean’, says Simmons (2002): “…undermines the core of the feminine identity: to be nice, to nurture, to say yes” (p. 150). Yet, she warns, we need to break this cycle of denying the existence of meanness amongst girls:

> By washing our hands of our own capacity to injure, we perpetuate the stereotype that females are nonaggressive. We become accomplices in the culture’s repression of assertive women and girls by making aggression pathological, private, and hidden. We also help silence the public discussion of the ways and reasons girls are mean to each other…because to put it out there would mean we have to admit to ourselves that inside we are all mean, that inside we are all aggressive (p. 151).

Despite the trend discussed above, many girls of all ages still believed that anger in girls is wrong:

> Stop being angry and be good…calm yourself down, because you could get too angry and hurt someone…be nice and kind…she musn’t hurt others…rather walk away (7 yrs).
> They should not show they are angry, rather cover it up and pretend everything is fine…normally nice girls do not show they are upset…they hide their feelings (18 yrs)

Simmons (2002) argues that that girls do not feel anger differently to boys, but the way they express it is different, according to socialization rules of how girls and boys are *supposed* to behave, saying: “Aggression may be biological but the face of anger is learned” (p. 11). As a result, girls tend to repress anger and avoid confrontation because they fear direct conflict – instead they use indirect acts to express themselves, often inflicting severe pain on their so-called ‘friends’. Our culture socializes girls to be caretakers; that is, their main value lies in their relationships with others, being loving, caring, ‘sweet’ and ‘nice’. Such a role is completely incompatible with aggression. It is also taught that nice girls have lots of good friends, with ‘perfect’ relationships. According to the girls in this study, friends:

> Should not bring their problems into other people’s lives and situations because then they would not be loyal and nice…true friendship never hurts (15 yrs)

They are taught to value ‘niceness’ and peacefulness over honesty and conflict. An angry girl should be:

Nice, because it is always good to smile and be kind (11 yrs)

Calm – because they are nice people (15 yrs).

Therefore 'good girls' should not experience anger, because this endangers relationships and impacts negatively on their ability to be 'nice' (Simmons, 2002). Teachers and parents of young children repeatedly remind girls to speak softly, to be quiet or be "nicer", whereas they either encourage or dismiss the physical aggression in boys. Peers continue this socialization process, endorsing 'tough' boys and 'nice' girls according to the values in their social groups, as pointed out by the respondents:

They shouldn't throw tantrums or shout otherwise their reputation will die (13 yrs)

Nice girls don't show the anger, I think… as they uphold their image (15 yrs)

They should not show it because people are watching and you are the example setter (17 yrs)

In short, our culture sees aggression in girls as unfeminine, and punishes it with social rejection (ibid):

They should hide their anger so that other people can't see it and use it against her (15 yrs)

In the society of today, confidence and competition are critical characteristics for success, yet they break the rules of femininity. Such conflict results in a silent battle. As they do with aggression, girls learn to suppress open feelings of jealousy and competition, which then become transformed into different, more 'acceptable' behaviours, according to Simmons (2002). She says:

> When we can agree that nice girls get really angry, and that good girls are sometime quite bad, we will have plowed the social desert between "nice" and "bitch". When we have built a positive vocabulary for girls to tell each other their truths, more girls will raise their voices. They will pose and answer their own questions and solve their own mysteries of relationship (p. 270).

6.3.5 The fears of 'by-standers'

Since relational bullying is often intended to enhance the social position of the bully (through dominance or by removing competition), by definition it needs to have an audience and must be 'social'. The girls' opinions on whether a by-stander from the popular group would protect the victim or not were very mixed in this study.

However, the tendency to say she would protect her significantly decreased as girls grew older, particularly because the bystander was afraid of losing popularity, a trend noted by Ellis and Zarbatany (2007). A participant stated that the bystander should not protect the victim because:

> The 'cool girls' will kick her out and you have to keep your mouth shut to be cool sometimes (11 yrs).

Olweus (1993) identified the process of 'social contagion', whereby bystanders join in with the victimization, either actively or by virtue of their silence. In doing so, they both support the bully and provide "an audience for the theatre of bullying" (p. 41). De Wet (2005a) calls this: "passive bullying – the… [bystander] shows empathy for the victim, but is not prepared (or able) to stop the bullying, and she experiences guilt feelings regarding her passivity" (p. 84). The girls' words show ample evidence of such a dilemna:

> She won't [protect the victim] because she is afraid they will kick her out of the group and start… thinking that she is a loser! But that feeling will haunt her inside (14yrs)
> She will feel confusion, scared, unhappy, as she knows it is wrong but she also doesn't want the other girls to bully her. So she has all these feelings going on around in her head and she doesn't know what to do (17 yrs).

Brown and Gilligan (1992) describe this confusion as: "…caught in a paradox between wanting relationship and feeling that in order to have relationships she must muffle or bury her voice. Although she sees the impasse clearly, she cannot see a way out" (p. 41). As the participants in this study clearly stated:

> Due to the peer pressure she will be too scared to take a stand and say it is wrong for she doesn't want to be kicked out of the popular group…They might gossip about her as well and try ruin any chances of getting other friends…she likes the perks of being popular, she cares about what other people think about her…she would loose [sic] them and be left with nothing at all so she should just keep quiet (17 yrs)
> They will disown her and make her high school or primary school life a living hell…She [keeps quiet] to protect herself so that she stays in the group and is not excluded like [the victim]…They would turn against her, be mean, more nasty. Because I have experienced a similar situation which was not good at all (15 yrs)

6.3.6 To be abused is better than to be alone

Although statistical significance was not reached, this study shows a clear trend in girls experiencing difficulties confronting other girl friends who are bullying them. In addition, the overwhelming majority of the participants in the two older age groups believed that if they were to confront the bullies they would become less, if at all, liked by them. These findings suggest support for Josselson (1990) and Miller (1986), who argue that women define their identity in terms of connections to others. For these girls, therefore, confronting their friends who are bullying them is tantamount to the loss of self, for without their so-called 'friendship', they would not have a sense of who they are.

Whereas men see aggression as means of controlling their environment, Simmons (2002) found in her study that girls are convinced that it will result in the loss of those they love most. The most common theme amongst girls in Simmons' (2002) study who had been bullied was the impact of their experience of loneliness during this time, far more so than the actual cruelty and abuse. Simmons (2002) comments: "It was as though the absence of bodies nearby with whom to whisper and share triggered in girls a sorrow and fear so profound as to nearly extinguish them" (p. 32). This author argues that this fear results in many girls refusing to abandon an abusive 'friendship'. She believes that although boys also prefer not to be alone, for girls, friendship is as necessary as oxygen:

> My friends are everything to me (16 yrs)
> She will change the way she is…she will probably just still be friends with the people who bullied her because they're acting like nothing happened and she probably doesn't have any other friends (18 yrs)

Remillard and Lamb (2005) state: "…girls may be preserving a relationship over other goals and even at the expense of themselves. Future researchers might examine what brings a girl to continue a relationship which is harmful to her…" (p. 228). The term "bullying" does not seem to adequately capture the intense emotional abuse that girls can endure at the hands of their closest friends, struggling to remain connected at any cost, in a relationship to their persecutors that they still call 'friendship'.

The participants in this study admitted the following about the victim of bullying:

> She would still love them (9 yrs)
> She would pretend as though everything is okay and continue to tolerate the people who are hurting her, just so that she can be accepted into the group, she will even try to change her personality (14 yrs)
> She probably knows why she is being bullied and she wants to change herself in order to be accepted…She would probably try to do something so she is liked…She would probably try change who she is to fit in with society and lose herself in the process (15 yrs)

When girl victims are asked why they stay with people who are hurting them so badly, says Simmons (2002), their responses sound very similar to those of battered women, stating they are scared to be alone, the bully will be nice again tomorrow, the bully said she was sorry, etc. Simmons (2002) believes that the intimacy of girls' friendships is central to relational aggression and therefore it can bear a powerful resemblance to intimate partner abuse:

> If we care about teaching girls to choose healthy relationships of all kinds, it is vital that we promote awareness of submissive and aggressive behaviors in girls' relationships. When abusive dynamics are without a language, and when anger cannot be properly voiced, girls may not develop the ability to name what is happening or extract themselves from destructive situations. As a result, girls may be learning submissive behavior they will import, uninterrupted, into intimate adult relationships…Consciousness of these behaviors is absolutely critical to stopping vulnerability to abuse at the earliest possible ages (pp. 267-8).

6.3.7 Girls' friendships and fights – the link to relational bullying

6.3.7.1 The central values of friendship and relationship

In this study, when girls were asked what qualities are important to them in a 'perfect' friend, consistent with the findings of Underwood *et al.*, (2004), issues of loyalty, trust, respect, acceptance and honesty were vital to girls' relationships:

> Stand up for me when I'm in trouble…sit with you when you are sad (8 yrs)
> Keeps promises (9 yrs)

> Be my friend no matter what…A person I can trust, someone who is always there for me, someone who will back me up and help me when I am going through tuff times…like me for who I am (11 yrs)
>
> Respect me for who I am…not judgmental and very honest (12 yrs)
>
> Loves me exactly as I am…always there for me…never lies to me (13 yrs)
>
> Doesn't talk behind my back (14 yrs)
>
> Never tell a lie (16 yrs)
>
> Someone I can talk to and tell secrets knowing that no one will hear about it…knows how to lift me up when I'm down…we know we are there for each other no matter what (17 yrs)
>
> Trustworthy…honest…loves me for my flaws not my strong points…loyal (18 yrs)

The statistics suggest that although important to girls of all ages, the increasing value of the above characteristics in the friendship of older girls is noteworthy.

It is proposed that the nature of girls' friendships provide greater opportunities for relational aggression, since a girl may be emotionally harmed simply by being ignored by her friends, as found by Reynolds and Repetti (2010). Social manipulation therefore becomes tempting as a means for control and punishment amongst girls (Owens et al, 2000a). The participants voiced this strongly:

> No one likes to be not liked, especially girls (13 yrs)
>
> It hurts because…this [ostracism] is the absolute worst feeling ever, knowing you aren't wanted by them (15 yrs)
>
> Everybody wants to be accepted, feel worth something and have someone to trust…my friends are everything to me (16 yrs)

In addition, girls are more likely to form relationships wherein intimacy and self-disclosure is high, resulting in greater opportunities for girls to use sensitive personal information as an aggressive weapon (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004; Murray-Close *et al.*, 2007), as so succinctly put by two of the older girls:

> This would hurt because I'd have trusted her through ways of opening myself to her and revealing certain things that I wouldn't to a normal person…I trusted her and she knows how to bring me down (16 and 17 yrs)

Simmons (2002) remarks: "Events of unexplained aggression and loss mark some girls forever. The worry that there is always a hidden layer of truth beneath a façade

of "niceness" can leave girls permanently unsure about what they can trust in others and in themselves…" (p. 270). As Neser (2006) warns, one major effect is a reluctance on the part of the victim to continue attending school. One participant described her emotional turmoil clearly:

> She probably feels worthless, scared or like she doesn't belong, unwanted. Probably is scared of coming back to school in fear that she may get emotionally hurt again. Can't concentrate in class. Thinking about it constantly, looking for the fault in herself to say sorry and to escape…to relieve the emotional stress (15 yrs)

Brown and Gilligan (1992) note that it is not surprising that girls feel really confused by the relational environment in which they exist: "…her feelings of confusion seem a realistic response to a truly perplexing relational scene, a scene in which things are not what they are called: friends are not really friends since they will spread rumours; relationships are not really relationships since one false move will jeopardize them" (p. 66). Ironically, in this world of 'nice girls', the widespread betrayal of each other and abuse of friendships results in psychological pain which is often not even acknowledged by adults (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Girls in the current study felt that one of the worst aspects of girl bullying is the failure of adults to either see it or appreciate the seriousness of it, and the way that girls use this knowledge to their advantage. Gomes (2007) has pointed to this aspect as one of the central elements in relational aggression: "…the natural observer is often times naïve to the existence of relational aggression. This is because relational aggression appears to lie just beneath the radar to an individual who is not enmeshed in the culture within which it exists…" (p. 513). In the words of participants:

> [They are]…most likely to be emotionally abusing her because you cannot show it or have proof (15 yrs)
>
> Snicker about her and make sure she knows that they're talking about her; spread rumours about how irritating she is and exclude her from all group activities. And of course, they'll act all nice to her in front of her face so that people think she's crazy for saying that they don't like her (17 yrs).

Simmons (2002) asserts that only once we acknowledge the hidden culture of aggression amongst girls, can we offer them genuine assistance: "…girls who are victimized would know they are not alone. They would have a language to assign meaning to what happened to them" (p. 262).

Many psychological theorists view relational aggression as related to various social skills deficits in both victims and perpetrators (Craig & Pepler, 2007; Staub, 1986); they argue that the victim needs to be less sensitive, to learn skills of social integration, to learn more appropriate social responses, to be more fashionable and to be less 'needy'. Bullies may be seen as having delays in social development, and therefore needing patience and understanding by their victims, especially since most often relational aggression happens within friendship networks. Unfortunately, this 'social skills' argument does not question meanness, but rather explains and justifies it, thereby perpetuating it.

Such forms of aggression cause confusion in relationships – girls learn not to trust their own feelings or those that others profess to have. Sometimes they are even overcome with doubt as to what is **really** happening, because the actions are so covert. In order to help girls, we need to identify these behaviours, name them and describe them, so that girls can start to recognize them for what they really are. We need a language with which girls can communicate about their victimization; as such we can take away the helplessness and the feeling that since no-one else sees the victimization, it only exists in *their* perception (Simmons, 2002).

When the participants in the current study were asked to explain the reasons why girls fight, the statistics indicated, once again, that with increasing age conflicts tend to centre more around relational issues, including the issues of sexuality and the 'survival of the fittest' (Cairns, 1986). Very importantly, conflict between girls becomes increasingly related to issues of broken trust and loss of relationship (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) as the participants pointed out:

> Boys, status within a group…one hurts the other emotionally, spreading rumours…judging people…when friends aren't honest…secrets that have been told, promises that have been broken…misunderstandings and the other friend changing or finding a new friend (15 yrs)

> New friendships…ignoring a person because of what you heard from another person…betrayal, liars…they don't tell you how they feel about something that you might do so they talk behind your back (16 yrs)

6.3.8 Popularity, status and power – the link to bully/victim status

Social status and popularity are issues of major importance within children's peer groups (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Adler and Adler (1988, as cited in Rodkin & Hodges, 2003) state that:

> Children are acutely aware of their own and others' placement on the status hierarchy, often deferring to higher status classmates and ridiculing lower status ones. Children in popular and/or dominant groups form an exclusive social circle and have disproportionate influence over the classroom as a whole… conversely, children in low status groups suffer degradation, exclusion, rejection and ostracism (p. 388).

In the current study, it was clear, as noted by Klima and Repetti (2008) that there are important differences between real friendships (often dyadic) and relationships within the larger social circle.

In addition, the current study findings support Simmons' (2002) assertion that popularity is a negative force in the aggression of girls. The girls' definitions of popularity in the current study also showed their understanding to be in line with that of Merten (2004) who pointed out the differences between 'friendship' and 'popularity': Relationships inherent in 'friendship' (as defined by the girls in this study as closely connected to loyalty, respect, trustworthiness, etc.) are very different to those that exist in the phenomenon of 'popularity', which was tied to a wide range of, often negative, characteristics. The girls described popularity as synonymous with 'coolness' (a developmentally appropriate index of status) as well as with negative personality traits, whilst very few connected popularity to positive personality features. This finding is in line with those of Rodkin *et al.* (2006) who argued that: "coolness is a dynamic social construction built by children who actively negotiate its meaning" (p. 197). These authors found that 'cool' (or popular) aggressive children are often socially acceptable, thereby strengthening their position of power and influence over their peers, whereas 'un-cool' aggressive children are more likely to be rejected by their peers. As Currie, *et al.* (2007) state, popular girls are those who

epitomize the 'feminine ideal' in a particular culture: "Within this context, power comes from an ability to invoke the unspoken 'rules' that police the boundaries of acceptable, middle-class femininity" (p. 33).

Andreou's (2006) study found that relational aggression was positively associated with perceived popularity. A distinct majority of the girls in the current study stated that popular girls are **not nice** people, despite the fact that they are socially endorsed:

> Looks and being loud mouthed in most cases. The really good honest people are hardly ever popular because they don't step on others to gain that status…pretty, good figure, usually makes fun of people who might be below her/not as good as her (15 yrs)
> Most popular girls are mean and have the ability of manipulating people into believing they like them…over confident, funny, friendly girl, that secretly puts people down to make herself feel superior (16 yrs)

Andreou (2006) discusses the link between popularity and relational aggression:

> Relational aggression displayed by perceived popular children is embedded in the larger peer context in that peers likely sanction and perhaps assist with aggression displayed by high-status peers…Children socially construct who among them are perceived as popular and what behaviours will be tolerated by peers with that status. Consequently, altering the behaviour of individual perceived popular children may require altering what behaviours are rewarded with high status within the peer culture (p. 349).

It would seem that popularity, which is tied to the ability to attract and influence other people, results in a position of power over others, together with the potential to abuse this power. The art of popularity requires excellent social skills. By deduction, therefore, good social skills may lead to an enhanced ability to successfully use relational aggression to hurt others, particularly from the point of view of the deliberate, successful attack made by a popular girl on the social standing or 'positive face' of a lower status victim (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967).

Whether or not a girl chooses to use her cognitive abilities to this end depends on numerous other factors, including: her need for dominance and/or prestige, feelings of hostility towards the environment (Olweus, 1993), parenting inadequacies (Smith *et al.*, 2005), social cognition, such as hostile attribution biases (Van Shoiack-Edstrom *et*

al., 2002), social information processing processes (Crick & Werner, 1998), social status within the peer ecology (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003), empathy and prosocial orientation (Staub, 1986) and socialization and cultural factors specific to girls (Gilligan, 1982; Cummings, *et al.*, 1989). It is obvious that much more in-depth research is needed in order to develop an understanding of the factors contributing to the differential use of high levels of relational aggression amongst different girls.

On the other hand, points out Simmons (2002), the world of popular girls is really a minefield; girls who think they are "all that" (p. 104) are sometimes also ostracized because girls believe that they should not brag about their beauty, but should behave like 'normal' girls do:

> She thinks she's beta than everyone else so people react with harsh words to put her back in her place (16 yrs)

However, in many cases such girls may not even be boastful; everyone secretly hates the prettiest, most popular, smartest, thinnest, sexiest or best dressed girls. Such a girl may have no idea what she has done wrong to become socially isolated, resulting in very deep wounds, namely; a loss of self-esteem and an inability to trust others.

It would seem that much of girls' conflict occurs around the issues of sexuality, attractiveness and the primitive urge to compete for a mate (Cairns, 1986). As pointed out by participants in this study, boys are central to the lives of older girls:

> [The reason for conflict between girls is usually around the issues of]…boyfriends and girls competing to be the most popular (17 yrs);
> Guys decide mainly on who's popular especially in high school (14 yrs);

Concurrent with this competition, girls feel the need to affirm their femininity by being covert in their aggression (Hadley, 2004). Enhanced social skills therefore would be important in this scenario, since those who are talented in this area are able to attract others, whilst keeping their aggression hidden, and thereby become the centre of power.

Girls generally do not want other girls to be confident because they feel threatened by them, says Simmons (2002): "There are the rules of femininity: girls must be modest, self-abnegating, and demure; girls must be nice and put others before themselves; girls get power by who likes them, who approves, who they know, but not by their own hand." (p. 115). If a girl breaks these rules, she is asking for trouble, as this participant stated:

> She is different and they are threatened by this…they don't know how to treat her…she refuses to conform to the norms (14 yrs)

6.3.9 The psychological effect of girl-bullying on its victims

Many researchers are of the opinion that because 'relationship' is fundamental to the emotional stability of girls, they not only use aggressive strategies intended to hurt each other in the area of relationship, but as a result their predominant form of bullying has significant negative implications for their psychological well-being (Owens *et al.*, 2000a; Crick, 2006). Since all the participants in this study, without fail, identified negative feelings such as sadness, depression and anxiety resulting from the experience of being victimized, the negative psychological effect of bullying on girls seems obvious, confirming much of the previous literature on this subject (Bond *et al.*, 2001; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). The results of this study are consistent with the Owens *et al.* (2000c) study of 15 year old girls, wherein they reported the following effects of relational aggression on victims:

1) Confusion and surprise that this is happening to her:

> She might even think 'why they bullying me coz I didn't do anything?' (8yrs)
> She can't understand what is wrong with her (14 yrs)

2) Denial and pretending that it had not occurred. The participants reported that she does not want to reward the bullies by showing them how much they have hurt her:

> She'll simply keep it to herself and pretend it never happened (12 yrs)
> She won't do anything about it because she still wants to seem strong and happy and that she isn't getting effected by the bullying (14 yrs).

3) Following this initial reaction is psychological pain, including hurt, loss of confidence and fear or paranoia with regard to future relationships:

> For someone to make fun of me kills me inside (11yrs)
> She feels hurt and broken inside…words can hurt more than physical abuse (12 yrs).
> Worried that when she goes up to bigger grades she will get bullied even more (8 yrs)

4) Finally, the victim may desire to escape the situation, through leaving school or through more serious suicidal ideation:

> She feels depressed…become suicidal (12 yrs)
> Homoside [sic], sueside [sic] or take it out on other people (13 yrs)
> Perform a type of self mutilation…maybe separate herself from society for a while…doesn't want to go to that school anymore…I think she might commit suicide (14 yrs)
> Feels like leaving or committing suicide…have mood swings, cut herself (15 yrs)
> Become depressed…think about or commit suicide…or lock herself away from the world…questioning why she is alive (16 yrs)
> She may eventually be suicidal (18 yrs).

6.3.9.1 Feelings about self and others

When the girls' responses were grouped into themes, it is not surprising that the theme 'sad' (reflecting general emotional pain) occurred most frequently across all three age groups in this study, although the older girls tended to qualify and expand upon the feeling of sadness with more sophisticated vocabulary:

> This hurts my feelings and I feel really sad (7 yrs)
> Makes you feel very, very sad and out of the whole game and stuff…it hurts inside your heart (8 yrs)
> Hurt, sad...unhappy…depressed (15 yrs)
> Devastated (17 yrs)
> Heartbroken…alienated (18 yrs)

Additionally, considering Simmons' (2002) assertion that girls tend to lose their ability to recognize and name relational violations and to openly express feelings of hurt and anger towards another it is not altogether unexpected that very few girls identified feeling 'angry' (reflecting aggressiveness) in response to bullying. Of grave concern, however, is the finding that, particularly as girls grow older, they are

statistically more likely to internalize their reaction to bullying into a status of ‘bad’ (reflecting self-defeating talk, feelings of helplessness, self-blame and the desire to escape the situation through a variety of mechanisms) as identified by Dill *et al*. (2004). Such feelings about the self hinder recovery, warn Owens *et al*. (2000c). In addition, there is often the belief that they are less worthy because they are being bullied, a psychological consequence identified by such researchers as Storch and Masia-Warner (2004), Baldry and Winkel (2003) and Besag (2006). Thirion (2007) outlines several effects of peer-based abuse on adolescents, including:

1) Low self-esteem (especially at a time when healthy identity formation is the primary developmental task), guilt, shame and anger, as one participant wrote:

> Not wanted, depressed, ashamed, left out (16 yrs)

2) The above feelings can result in social isolation, feelings of worthlessness, self-injury, substance-abuse, questioning their faith in a higher power, poor interpersonal relationships and often an ongoing cycle of abuse of others, as illustrated by the following responses from the participants:

> Feels like she’s always different (8 yrs)
> Embarrassed (10 yrs)
> She feels bad about herself (13 yrs)
> Confidence destroyed…ugly, not welcome, not wanted…worthless…judged…very bad about herself…ashamed of herself and who she is (15 yrs)
> I would feel ashamed of myself and want to hide away…she probably feels useless, lonely, uncared for, with on one to turn to. She could be questioning why she has been made like this that people don’t like her…stupid, worthless…bad…self esteem distoried [sic] (16 yrs)
> Embarrassed… ashamed, not worthy (17 yrs)
> Doesn’t feel good enough for anyone (18 yrs)

Scheithauer, *et al.* (2006) explain the increasingly negative effect of relational aggression by peers on the older girls:

> Due to the increasing importance of the same-sex peer group in early adolescence and to gender-role development, girls more often behave in a socially manipulative manner and therefore display indirect- or relational-aggressive behaviour. Seen in the context of the intention to cause harm,

indirect- or relational-aggressive behaviour is particularly negative for female peers (p. 272).

6.3.9.2 Ways of reacting to bullying

Consistent with the above findings, this study found that as girls grow older and increasingly internalize bullying experiences into feelings of self-blame, their tendency to react to the bullying in a way that is not considered emotionally healthy increased significantly. Older girls, as predicted by Baldry and Winkel (2003) frequently reported reactions such as self-mutilation, suicide, complete withdrawal and isolation:

> Kill herself, hurt herself…run away (15 yrs)
> Leave school…feels like she should kill herself (16 yrs)
> Will do drugs…take some alcohol…slit her wrists…move schools (18 yrs)

Other reactions, such as moving to another school is also not considered a healthy option, since it represents failure to address the problem by 'escaping'. In addition, the concurrent reduction in 'help-seeking' types of bullying in older girls is a serious problem identified in South African schools by de Wet (2005a), which is exacerbated by the lack of educator empathy and their poor understanding of the serious nature of girl bullying. Remillard and Lamb (2005) found in their study that the more hurt a girl is by the aggression, the more likely she is to use passive and avoidant coping strategies and the less likely she is to seek social support as a means to coping. Such findings seem to indicate that, according to their reactions, the older girls in this current study are increasingly emotionally hurt by being bullied by their girl-peers.

6.3.9.3 Factors underlying the psychological pain

Bullying amongst girls is obviously destructive, but why exactly does it cause so much pain? The girls in this study were asked to explain why bullying hurts so much. Since girls tend to invest heavily emotionally in their friendships, as Werner and Crick (2004) assert, when these relationships break down, the pain is centred around the loss of emotional closeness and violation of trust, and reactivates for many children their unresolved issues from Erikson's (1963) earliest stage of 'trust versus mistrust'. The findings in this study confirm those of Bond *et al*. (2001) who argue

that this issue is increasingly relevant for older girls since they not only tend to use a greater quantity of more sophisticated relational aggression than boys and younger girls, but they also find this form of aggression more distressing because of the emotional importance of close relationships to them (Phillips, 2003; Underwood *et al.*, 2004). The girls' explanations show strong evidence for this argument, with the issue of 'trust' appearing increasingly with age:

> You thought you could trust them (9 yrs)
> You've trusted her and she destroyed that trust and even though you may forgive her that trust is lost forever and can never be regained (12 yrs)
> It hurts because you supposed to trust friends…a friend is someone who you'd expect to trust…I least expect this coming from them…it would hurt because I trusted that person so much!...you trusted her with your life…friends are ment [sic] to be here for you not lie and hurt you…that's not what a true friend does (14 yrs)
> It hurts because you have trusted that friend to be there for you and now they have gone against that…no friend should do that to another friend it's morily [sic] wrong…I trusted them and they're supposed to be loyal (16 yrs)
> You thought they were your friend but they weren't, they just used you (17 yrs)
> Once they have broken my trust I would never be able to confide in them again (18 yrs)

Younger girls seemed to struggle to clearly identify what causes them pain. In terms of cognitive development, this makes sense, as younger children are less able to conceptualise the exact reason why it hurts. In addition, they are more likely to experience physical bullying, which clearly hurts physically, and have less experience of the more subtle relational varieties. On the other hand, the older girls, who we not only expect to be more cognitively sophisticated, possessing more finely honed skills of reasoning and an improved ability to explain/define emotions, also experience a greater frequency of relational types of bullying, becoming very familiar with what causes the pain as they struggle to make sense of it.

6.3.10 Relational bullying - more painful for girls

The current study found that overall, betrayal was reported by the majority of girls as the worst type of bullying:

> Betrayal because you become the fool because what you thought you knew is all a lie (16 yrs)

> I think the worst thing a friend could do is lie about you because one you loose [sic] trust in someone you also loose [sic] a sense of security and it really makes you think about how true your friendship is and what it is/was based on (15 yrs)

The younger age group, however, more consistently named physical and verbal forms of aggression as the worst:

> Slap her across her face…break her arm (7 yrs)
> When the teacher is not looking call her names (9 yrs)

The results of this study show that older girls are not only increasingly subjected to relational types of aggression, but as Hadley (2004) and Galen and Underwood (1997) found in their studies, they also find them to increasingly be the most painful. It is hypothesized that they are possibly more emotionally vulnerable to them due to their enhanced cognitive understanding of the underlying messages (Felix & McMahon, 2006) and the threat to their self-esteem (Willer & Cupach, 2008), the threat to their positive and negative face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the threat these types of aggression pose to the relationships they find so important for their existence (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In addition, as Underwood (2004) states, girls struggle with knowing how best to respond, or cope, with relational aggression:

> It…hurts you as a person, as who you are, it goes beyond your moral standings and 'breaks' you… It hurts a lot because you don't know what you did or why you are not good enough anymore (17 yrs)

Besag (2006) points out, that emotional and psychological scars do not heal quickly like physical scars, and therefore non-physical aggression can possibly cause more potent and long-term damage than physical aggression, as stated by a participant:

> A sore will heal but hurtful words will never go away (11 yrs)

Galen and Underwood's (1997) study also found that girls across different age groups do not perceive the harm resulting from relational and physical aggression in the same light as each other. However, they found that girls in Grade 4 and 10 viewed physical aggression as more hurtful than relational aggression whilst the middle portion of the

age distribution reported that relational aggression was more hurtful. They suggest that since social relationships and social status are more important to girls in the middle-school years, aggression targeting these areas may have a greater impact upon them. This finding was not supported in this current study, which showed clearly the trend towards a greater impact of relational aggression with increasing age. However, some of the girls' answers from this middle age group did evidence their concern with social exclusion:

> [The worst thing another girl could do would be] to take my friend away because my friends are the best…a friend could say that they don't like you and it would hurt because you thought they were your best friend and you told them everything (11 yrs).

Simmons (2002) points out the effects of relational aggression, particularly social exclusion, on girls:

> The salience of relationship in girls' lives makes their practice of imposing isolation worthy of our attention…girls experience isolation as especially terrifying. Since girls earn social capital by their relationship with others, isolation cuts to the core of their identities…These girls [survivors of bullying] described feeling unfamiliar with the most basic rules of relationship, things taken for granted by any socially adjusted person. They no longer feel certain of what makes people angry or upset, not to mention how to tell when someone is feeling that way. Their emotional radar is incapacitated. This can turn a girl into a cautious ghost of her former self, stifled and silenced by fear (p. 101).

Underwood and Buhrmester (2007) add:

> Girls who exchange mean stares and roll their eyes when perturbed with others but who wait to malign and exclude newcomers in ways that are consistent with their ongoing relationships only behind the victim's back could cause worry and confusion among their female peers. Girls who engage in surreptitious social exclusion could make it difficult for victims to understand the dynamics of their social world… (p. 435).

The explanations given by the girls in this study show support for these views:

> Friends are special people. So I think that…when a FRIEND rejects you and stops excepting [sic] all the faults that come with being a friend it is hard to handle (15 yrs)
>
> You usually can't understand what on earth you did, for them to treat you like this (17 yrs)
>
> You don't know what you did nor why you are not good enough anymore (18 yrs)

In addition, as noted by de Wet (2005a), these girls often feel that there is no support forthcoming from the adults in their world:

> She will probably do nothing [about being bullied] because she feels like no one even wants to hear her or see her (11yrs).

6.3.11 Social, moral and cognitive development of girls – the link to friendships and bullying

6.3.11.1 Social perspective-taking levels

The girls in the current study showed a clear increase in Selman's (1980) level of social perspective-taking from the younger to the older age groups. According to Selman (1980), progression through the levels, whereby the child develops a greater social and moral understanding and the ability to utilize reciprocity (and prosocial behaviour) in relationships, is related to a growing cognitive capacity in the child. These findings therefore suggest that the girls in this study were following the developmental patterns as would be expected of them, according to a wide variety of influential child development theorists (Piaget, 1929; Erikson, 1963; Kohlberg, 1981; Selman, 1980). Since the older girls also show a clear increase in the use of more sophisticated relational aggression in this study, these findings support the claims made by Dodge (1986) and Vaillancourt *et al.*, (2007), that enhanced social skills and understanding can be utilized for **either** aggressive **or** prosocial purposes.

6.3.11.2 Morality and moral reasoning

In comparison to the boys studied by Kohlberg (1981) girls could be regarded as deficient in moral development, says Gilligan (1982), since they seem stuck on his third stage, where morality is perceived in terms of helping and pleasing others. Gilligan (ibid) calls this the principle of 'care' and Hoffman (1970) refers to it as a 'humanistic' orientation to morality. Men, on the other hand, states Kohlberg (1981), progress to higher stages where relationships are subordinated to rules and eventually rules are subordinated to universal principles of fairness. Gilligan (1982) calls this the

principle of ‘justice’ whilst Hoffman (1970) named it a ‘conventional’ orientation to morality.

The current study showed a general developmental trend towards more consistent reasoning of a moral nature (as identified by Piaget, 1929) in the participants, suggesting that girls certainly do not fail to develop in this area. Although the majority suggested that loyalty is of utmost importance in the friendship-dilemna, slightly less than half the participants displayed a humanistic moral orientation (or ethic of ‘care’) in their reasoning for their decision, whilst the rest utilized a conventional moral orientation (or ethic of ‘justice’) in their reasoning. Such evidence that these girls are **equally** capable of utilizing either approach to moral reasoning is contrary to Gilligan’s (1982) theory. Although Gilligan (1982) concedes that both genders are capable of using the alternative perspective, she firmly believes that women tend to operate according to the ethic of care in moral decision-making.

Gilligan (1988) asserts that the ultimate moral maturity is the ability to see **both** perspectives – justice and care - and that the latter should not be seen as inferior as it has in the past. Such maturity is illustrated in the girls’ responses below:

> She has already made plans, she should not change them… (10 yrs)
> You already had something planned so you must stick to your word (13 yrs)
> You can’t betray your best friend…NO MATTER WHAT! (15 yrs)
> Honesty is key in a successful friendship…it’s important to keep promises…this would not hurt anyone’s feelings (17 yrs)
> She’ll do this [be calm and kind when angry] because she is a nice person and cares for other people’s feelings…no one has the right to hurt anyone…because no one gets hurt (15 yrs)

Gilligan (ibid) argues that the choice of perspective in moral decision-making is closely intertwined with an individual’s definition of self. The girls in this sample therefore provide evidence for Gilligan’s (1982) assertion that there is more than one kind of moral orientation, although they did not support her claim that women are **more** likely to utilize the moral orientation of care.

According to the responses given in this study, it would seem to be true that girls try to connect others to one another (i.e. maintain relationships) in their decisions on how

to handle conflict; they try not to hurt others, to be loyal and not to make others feel lonely. However, such an orientation may render them more vulnerable to potential abuse and mental health problems if the existing relationship is not a healthy one for them.

From this perspective, it seems incomprehensible that girls, who largely operate according to moral principles of 'care' and 'justice', should use relational aggression as their predominant weapon of attack, unless one considers the arguments put forward by feminist theorists such as Gilligan (1982), Brown (1992), Besag (2006), Miller and Stiver (1997) and Simmons (2002). As Hadley (2004) elaborates, understanding this phenomenon requires intensive investigations:

> Each of these acts has "eliciting factors" and "predisposing factors" that provide the context in which aggression can be understood. The social meanings of girls' aggression in contemporary cultural and interpersonal contexts requires access to interactions that can be understood in a particular, ongoing social process. The intrapsychic significance of girls' aggression requires access to their stories, fantasies and dreams, their music, heroines, and heroes (pp. 347-348).

It is logical to consider that, although girls develop in their cognitive, social and moral capabilities as they grow older, and although they consider relationship to be fundamental to their existence, they are just as capable of feeling anger as are boys. Since, in the sense of 'natural selection' and 'survival of the fittest', girls are likely to aim to maximize their competitive edge (particularly in the realm of relationship) in their race through life, even ' nice' girls will sometimes use their cognitive talents in ways that are less than sweet and kind (Cairns, 1986). And since outright physical aggression in girls is frowned upon by our society, the older, more cognitively sophisticated they are, the more likely it will be that they use methods that cannot be easily observed or recognized, attacking at the very core of their vulnerability - relationship. As Crothers, *et al.* (2005) state:

> Traditional gender role stereotyping has created a narrow range of behavioral options that allow young women to be angry while remaining visibly "nice" in their overt behavior. Socialization and societal practices that foster freedom

> from external validation will be helpful in placing the power to develop as unique individuals into the hands and hearts of young women (p. 353).

Relational aggression can therefore occur both amongst well-balanced girls and those who are experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties. As Bowie (2007) points out: “At least some form of relational aggression is a normal response by the majority of girls to social interactions where there is a degree of conflict. But at what level is relational aggression considered to be outside normally accepted parameters of social interactions or perhaps predictive of deviant behaviors?” (p. 113). At this stage there is no clear-cut answer in this regard, but it is very important that we begin to acknowledge the capacity of **all** girls to be aggressive, and their tendency to manifest this aggression in sometimes alternative, but equally destructive, ways to boys. Only then, will a movement be possible towards understanding what extent and features of girls’ aggression might be utilized to predict their future psychopathology.

6.4 Major findings from the current study in relation to the literature

The current study confirms reports in the existing literature regarding the high prevalence rate of bullying victimization in South Africa. It also corroborates with the evidence that **relational** aggression in particular, is widely used by girls, as well as with the theoretical argument that the nature of their aggression changes with developmental age in accordance with their level of cognitive, social and moral functioning. As girls grow older, it has been illustrated that they utilize the types of aggression that will bring them the social power they desire, in order to maintain their relational position and status in society.

It is clear from the findings of this study that the relational forms of bullying that girls use amongst their own gender are psychologically damaging and that girls follow a developmental trend towards increasing internalization and self-blame in reaction to victimization. As a result, ongoing relational aggression places girls at risk for future victimization in other domains, and possible psychopathology as adults. The study found, in accordance with the existing feminist literature, that girls are socialized to suppress their aggression (despite the fact that biologically they are wired to feel

anger just as much as boys), and that the maintenance of intimate relationships is a fundamental necessity for them, causing a conflict between nature and socialization. The reasons therefore why girls use aggression in the relational sphere are often related to their concerns around inclusion, exclusion, their sense of 'belonging' and status in the group (i.e. around the issue of relationships) and their concurrent desire to keep their aggression hidden. Finally, aspects of some feminist theories on the issue of morality were not fully supported by this study, in that it was found that girls do not **only** use a moral orientation of 'care' but seem to equally use the moral orientation of 'justice' in their reasoning about relationships.

6.5 Limitations of the current study

The construction of a completely new questionnaire to measure the constructs in this study posed a significant limitation with regard to the generalisability of these results to the broader population, since the psychometric properties of this measure have not yet been established by prior studies. As a result, the researcher regards this study as largely exploratory, and only a starting point in understanding the development of aggression in girls. In addition, the phenomena of relational aggression and gender are extremely complex, and as such, associations may be confounded by many other variables of which the researcher is not even aware. The self-report nature of this study, despite assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, may have caused girls to be reticent in giving honest responses to some of the questions relating to their own experiences of bullying and being victimized. Such a problem has been identified as a common area of concern in related research studies (Owens *et al.*, 2005). This issue is further complicated by the fact that the younger girls were interviewed face-to-face by the researcher, a factor which could prove intimidating for a perpetrator of bullying, thereby reducing the chances that she would answer honestly.

The fact that the sample was not very large, and that the groups within the sample were extremely unequal in size also posed a severe limitation to the predictive power of this study (Loewenthal, 2001). Regression analysis, in particular, is traditionally considered to be a 'large sample' technique. In addition, the cohort of interest was sampled from only one school, which is run according to a Christian ethos, an orientation which may have skewed the results in a particular direction. The

socioeconomic status of the learners at this school is largely privileged, so the sample cannot be taken as an accurate representation of school-going children in South Africa The fact that many statistical tests were conducted on the data also increases the chances of the researcher making errors in accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis, which must be taken into consideration (Durrheim, 2002).

This study was also limited in that it did not gather any information from the girls with regard to the psychological impact of girl-bullying on the perpetrators. Such research would be very useful in developing insight from the opposite perspective, into the processes involved in this phenomenon.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

Although this study is considered a very useful investigation into the nature and development of relational aggression in girls, further studies need to be conducted using a larger sample from several schools which adequately represent the school-going population in South Africa. Further longitudinal-design research is needed to examine more closely the progression and effects of relational aggression in a cohort of girls over time. Crick *et al.* (2006) state that future research needs to investigate the particular types of psychopathology that are known to be more common in girls (such as Borderline Personality Disorder and Major Depression) in order to increase our understanding of the relationship between adult mental illness and aggression in girls. They also recommend that such research is conducted on girls across the developmental life-span, in order to more fully investigate the adjustment trajectories of relationally aggressive children, as well as of the victims. Many other researchers agree that future research needs to include and specifically investigate the nature of adjustment difficulties associated with the phenomenon of relational aggression (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005; Dill, *et al.*, 2004). Related to this, the study of resilience and coping in the area of girls' aggression will be useful in elucidating why some girls are able to withstand the effects whilst others crumble under the strain.

Prinstein *et al.* (2001) suggest that future research should attend in more depth to the theoretical models which could explain the manner in which relational forms of aggression and victimization develop, the process by which they lead to subsequent

adjustment difficulties, and the associated psychosocial factors that contribute in this regard. Research into how relationships develop into ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ones (the latter being the focus of the current study) is also necessary to enhance our understanding of aggression in girls. This study has provided a starting point; further research needs to ask many more questions on ‘why’ girls use and respond to relational aggression in the ways they do. The study of the origins of deviance and anti-social behaviour would contribute greatly to our understanding in this regard, as well as studies applying the theoretical principles of ‘theory of mind’ to girls’ aggression. In addition, further research also needs to focus on how to effectively intervene in girls’ aggression in such a way that we can validate their experiences and channel them towards healthier ways of expressing their negative emotions in relationships.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Relational aggression amongst girls needs to be taken seriously. Yet the damage resulting from negative peer relationships amongst girls, in the form of relational bullying, and the widespread nature of this problem, has only recently begun to be acknowledged by researchers. In South Africa, the history of apartheid has left our country with alarming escalations in crime, rates of teenage suicide and many other forms of abuse, including bullying in varying forms. Bullying impacts upon a child's basic rights to human dignity, privacy, freedom and security and as such has a profound influence on the victim's physical, social, emotional and educational well being. The very fact that relational forms of aggression are hidden, and thereby go largely undetected in our schools and homes, only makes bullying amongst girls more dangerous and insidious.

The general conclusions drawn in the bullying research, which were supported by this study, point to the greater use of indirect methods of aggression by girls. Researchers hypothesise that this is due to the intimate nature of their peer relations, which gives them both the means and the motive to attack where it hurts the most. In-depth research into the differential development of relationships in both genders is necessary to validate such theories. Although there is no doubt that girls have the ability to experience aggressive feelings as much as boys, it would seem that the sexes have very different perceptions of aggression, largely as a result of socialization forces, and therefore display this emotion in different ways . There has been much debate in the literature over whether there really are major gender differences in cognitive, social and moral development and whether such differences could be responsible for girls' *perceived* lower levels of aggression.

Amongst those who have recently acknowledged the use of relational aggression amongst girls as harmful, theorists have pondered and discussed the reasons behind this behaviour. Feminists have postulated that through socialization girls are taught that the expression of overt aggression is not 'feminine' or 'nice'. As a result, they

learn to channel their anger 'underground' where it cannot easily be observed by those outside of the peer-group; that is, girls are trained to express aggression covertly, by damaging relationships, self-esteem and the confidence of their peers. This research study set out to test some of these ideas, by asking the girls themselves to speak out about what happens and why.

A sample of 169 learners, aged seven to eighteen years, from an independent school in Kwazulu-Natal, participated in the questionnaire survey. The researcher used a structured interview format (using the survey questionnaire) with participants from Grade One to Grade Four, whilst girls from Grade Five upwards completed a self-report questionnaire, without assistance from the researcher unless they requested it. The findings of the current study painted a rich portrait of relational aggression amongst girls, within a netherworld of non-verbal communication, intensely painful emotions and taken-for-granted rules for ‘acceptable’ behaviour. The prevalence of general victimization amongst this sample was found to be similar to that found in previous research, whilst relational aggression was shown to be a normative practice, even across the age groups. In addition, statistically significant relationships were found to exist between an increase in years of age and a number of variables of interest, including the type and sophistication of aggression used, the psychological impact of girl-bullying, the tendency to step in and ‘help’ a victim (or not), the level of social, moral and cognitive skills in these girls (which was synchronized with the use of relational aggression), and the qualities most valued in a friendship. On the whole, relational types of aggression involving some form of *betrayal* were found to be the most hurtful to the girls in this sample, confirming that issues of ‘relationship’ constitute their primary concern, and the most likely source of psychological break-down and illness, in life.

Although intervention strategies were not the focus of this study, the finding of an existing ‘culture of denial’ has nevertheless pointed to the necessity of educating and raising awareness amongst girls, educators, parents and other role-models, about the harmful nature of relational aggression. An important first step in prevention and intervention is to provide school-management with empirical data regarding bullying at their school. Thereafter, staff training and ongoing consultation with experts on identification of antisocial behaviour and coaching strategies, is crucial. Through the

process of dialogue the ‘code of silence’ can thereby be broken and such behaviour patterns would become less ‘invisible’, more tangible, and therefore more accessible to interventions. The girls themselves need to learn to speak out, but they will not be able to do so until they are assured of an attentive and supportive audience. They also need to be taught that this form of bullying is wrong rather than normative; both schools and parents should focus on developing empathic skills and respect for others in children through specific interventions and programs as well as through leadership by example. Coaching, such as prompting, reinforcement of positive social behaviour and applying context-relevant consequences for negative social behaviour could prove to be effective. Since relational aggression requires a group to be harmful, successful interventions need to involve the actual engagement of groups, through role-playing and discussion, in solving social problems of relational aggression, with an emphasis on the varied roles of peers in conflict situations. Most importantly, we need to encourage children to be part of the solution (e.g., by empathizing and reporting), rather than part of the problem (e.g., by watching and laughing), in reducing their contribution to peer aggression.

In conclusion, the current study has attempted to make a useful contribution to the current body of literature on relational aggression amongst girls in South Africa. In the face of increasing incidences of depression, anxiety and Borderline Personality psychopathology amongst women in our society, it is hoped that this exploration will add some insight and understanding, pointing a way forward in our search for effective intervention strategies. Finally, it is also anticipated that this research will highlight the need for further research on the nature, development and impact of relational aggression in girls in South Africa, particularly pertaining to such issues as resilience and coping, the development of positive and negative relationships, the impact of cognitive development and perspective-taking and the origins of anti-social behavioural patterns.

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Appendix A

Information letter and informed consent for parents

Dear parent of potential participant,

Masters Research dissertation on non-physical bullying amongst girls

I am a Masters student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, studying to become a Counselling Psychologist. I am conducting research, as part of my Masters degree, in which I aim to investigate the nature and emotional effects of non-physical bullying amongst school-aged girls. I am very interested in finding out to what extent non-physical bullying occurs amongst school-girls and in what forms this kind of behaviour occurs. I would also like to find out if this type of bullying changes in any way (in frequency or type) as girls grow older, heading towards adulthood. I have asked your daughter's teacher to give you this letter in order to see if you would be interested in allowing her to participate in my study, as I am hoping to conduct this study at your daughters' school. I would like you to understand that you are under absolutely no obligation to agree to your daughter's participation if you do not want to do so.

I will administer a structured questionnaire to the girls who have obtained parental consent and who themselves are willing to assist me with my research, during school hours, in a venue at school where the participants' responses are able to be kept private and confidential. Should your daughter decide to participate in my research, I will assure her that she is free to withdraw for any reason, at any time, and that there will be no negative consequences or questions asked. I understand that the material in the questionnaire may bring up unpleasant memories or feelings in her if she has experienced bullying or other forms of trauma. If she experiences emotional distress as a result of the questionnaire, please either contact the school psychologist, myself or my supervisor (see contact details below) and we will arrange assistance for your daughter in dealing with this.

The questionnaire will require written responses from your daughter. In the case of the younger girls, I will write their answers down verbatim onto the relevant sections in the questionnaire. The names of the participants in my research will not be revealed at all on the questionnaires or in my written dissertation, ensuring their anonymity and privacy. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to at all times, unless in the unlikely event of extreme circumstances, wherein I may come to believe that your daughter is at risk of harming herself or others. The completed questionnaires will be kept in a locked cupboard once the responses have been captured onto a statistical computer program for analysis. Once the dissertation is complete, I will be available to conduct a seminar at the school, based on my findings, for the staff and any interested parents. The focus here will be on planning any interventions that could be of assistance in the school. The results of my research will also be disseminated to my academic supervisor, other university staff members and students.

My name and contact details are: Helen Anderson, Cellphone number 083-7780772
My supervisor, Dr. Lance Lachenicht at the School of Psychology, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, can be contacted on (033) 260 5588 should you require further information.

If you agree for your daughter to participate in this research project, please complete the declaration below:

1………………………………………………..(full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to ……………………………………………… (full names of child) participating in this project. My relationship to the above child is………………………………….(father/mother/guardian etc).

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN DATE

……………………………………… ….………

Appendix B

Questionnaire on bullying amongst girls (Grade 6 – 12)

Demographic Details

1. Age (date of birth)________________________________
2. Grade____
3. Teacher____
4. Racial group____________________________________
5. When did you come to this school? ____________________

6. Here is a picture of Tammy. She is crying because she has been bullied by other girls. What do you think they have been doing to her?

____
____
____
____
____
____

6.1 Why do you think the other girls are bullying her?

____
____
____
____

6.2 How do you think Tammy feels and what do you think she will do about it?

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

7. What is the worst thing a friend can do to hurt you? Why do you think this would hurt so much?

___

___

___

8. Here are Nondo, Kim and Melissa. Nondo and Kim are part of the popular group. They have just been talking with their group about how irritating Melissa is. They think of something to do to her. What will they do?

___

___

___

___

___

___

___

8.1 Thandi is also part of this group. She thinks it is wrong to be nasty to Melissa. Does she tell her friends what she thinks so that she can protect Melissa?

___

___

___

___

8.2 If she decides not to tell her friends how she feels, why do you think she does this?

___

___

___

8.3 What could happen if she did tell them she thinks they are wrong?

____
____
____
____

8.4 If you were one of these girls, who do you think you would be?

____

9. Who is your best friend?

____

9.1 Why do you like her? (What are some of the things that make her a good friend?)

____
____
____

10. What do you think makes a girl popular?

____
____

10.1 Do you think that popular girls are nice people?

a. Yes
b. No

10.2 How do you think that nice girls should behave around other people when they are feeling angry? Why?

____
____
____

11. What kinds of things cause fights between friends?

____
____
____

11.1 How can you get to be friends again?

____
____
____

12. Sandy tells Emma that if she does not do what she wants her to do she will no longer be her friend. She thinks that it is okay to say this because friends should always want to do things for each other. What do you think? (tick one)

I Agree ☐ I Disagree ☐

13. If you could wish for the perfect friend and have this wish come true, what would you wish for in this friend? (what would her qualities be?)

____
____
____
____
____
____

14. Please put a tick in the box that is most true for you. Have you ever:

	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Quite Often	Often
a. Refused to speak to your friend because you are angry with her					
b. Spread a rumour about someone that is not true, just because you do not like her					
c. Had a friend who does not keep arrangements with you when "something better" comes up					
d. Found that everyone else is fighting around you but you don't seem to be involved					
e. Sent an anonymous and nasty sms or letter to someone you are having a fight with					
f. Had a physical fight (e.g. hitting, kicking, scratching etc) with a girl friend.					
g. Had a physical fight with a girl who is not your friend					
h. Felt really abused by the way a friend was treating you but could not tell her					
i. Excluded someone from your group just because she is so clever/pretty and you are feeling jealous					
j. Been teased by your friends about something that is hurtful					
k. Stolen another girl's boyfriend just because you can					
l. Watched a friend being bullied by your group and said nothing because you are afraid that they will kick you out or bully you too					
m. Been physically hurt on purpose by a girl who is your friend (hit, kicked, punched, scratched, etc)					

n. Abandoned a friend just because everyone else did					
o. Been ignored by your closest friends and you don’t know why					
p. Told your friend’s secrets to some-one else, even though she asked you not to					
q. Lost a friend because she joined a more popular group and you were not welcome there					
r. Had a friend threaten to stop being friends with you if you don’t do what she is asking you to do					
s. Physically hurt a girl friend on purpose (e.g hit, kicked, scratched or punched)					
t. Had your friends all whispering behind your back and when you ask what they are talking about they say “nothing”					

15. Sarah is in the girl's bathroom during break-time. A group of her friends come in, and before they realize she is there she hears them talking about a party on the weekend. They are all going and they have not invited Sarah.

15.1 How easy or hard would it be for Sarah to tell her friends that this is hurtful? (Circle the letter of the answer you choose)

a. Very hard
b. Hard
c. Quite easy
d. Very easy

15.2 If Sarah did tell her friends that she is angry with them, how much do you think they would still like her? (circle your choice)

a. Still very much
b. Only a little
c. Not at all

16. Lungile has been best friends with Michelle since they were at pre-school together. A new girl, Candice, has just come to their school. She and Lungile like each other very much, but Michelle does not like Candice. Every Friday Lungile and Michelle go to movies together and then sleep over at each other's houses. On Thursday, Candice phones Lungile and asks her to go with her to a really cool party on Friday night.

16.1 What should Lungile do? (Circle the answer you choose)

a. Tell Candice that she cannot go because she is going out with Michelle?
b. Say "yes" to Candice and try to explain to Michelle that she needs other friends?
c. Say "yes" to Candice and tell Michelle that she is not feeling well and so cannot go out with her?

16.2 Why is this the best solution to this problem?

____

____

Appendix C

Questionnaire on bullying amongst girls (Grade 1 – 5)

Demographic Details

1. Age (date of birth)____
2. Grade____
3. Teacher ____
4. Racial group____
5. When did you come to this school? _______________________

6. Here is a picture of Tammy. She is crying because she has been bullied by other girls. What do you think they have been doing to her?

____
____
____
____
____
____

6.1 Why do you think the other girls are bullying her?

____
____
____
____

6.2 How do you think Tammy feels and what do you think she will do about it?

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

7. What is the worst thing another girl can do to hurt you? Why do you think that this would hurt so much?

8. Here are Kelly, Nondo and Kim. They are part of the popular group and they are busy talking in their group about how irritating Melissa is, behind her back. They think of something to do to her. What will they do?

8.1 Thandi is also part of this group. When the others tell her what they were talking about, she thinks it is wrong to be nasty to Melissa. Does she tell her friends what she thinks so that she can protect Melissa?

8.2 If she decides not to tell her friends how she feels, why do you think she does this?

8.3 What could happen if she did tell them she thinks they are wrong?

8.4 If you were one of these girls, who do you think you would be?

____

9. How do you think that girls should behave around other people when they are feeling angry? Why?

____
____
____

10. What kinds of things cause fights between friends?

____
____
____

11. Sandy tells Emma that if she does not give her one of her toys she will no longer be her friend, because friends should always want to do things for each other. What do you think? (circle your answer)

a. I agree
b. I do not agree

12. If you could wish for the perfect friend and have this wish come true, what would you wish for in this friend? (what would she be like and what would she do?)

____
____
____
____
____
____

13. Please put a tick in the box that is most true for you. Have you ever:

	Never	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Quite Often	Often
a. Refused to speak to your friend because you are angry with her.					
b. Told a nasty story about someone that is not true, just because you do not like her.					
c. Had a friend who does not come to play because someone else who is more popular invited her to play					
d. Had a physical fight with a girl friend (such as hitting, kicking, scratching, etc.)					
e. Had a physical fight with a girl who is not your friend.					

f. Felt really sad because a friend was being nasty to you but you could not tell her because maybe then she would never like you again					
g. Left someone out of your group just because she is so clever/pretty and you are feeling jealous					
h. Been teased by your friends about something that is hurtful					
i. Been physically hurt on purpose by a girl who is your friend (such as hit, kicked, scratched, etc)					
j. Physically hurt a girl friend on purpose (such as hit, kicked, scratched, etc)					
k. Stolen someone else's friend, just because you can					
l. Watched your friends being nasty to another friend and kept quiet in case they start being nasty to you too					
m. Stopped being friends with someone just because your other friends said you should					
n. Had your best friend not speaking to you and you don't know why					
o. Told your friend's secrets to someone else, even though she asked you not to					
p. Had your friend tell you that she will not be your friend if you do not do something she wants you to do					
q. Had your friends all whispering behind your back, and when you ask what they are saying they tell you "nothing"					

14. Lungile has been best friends with Michelle since they were at pre-school together. A new girl, Candice, has just come to their school. She and Lungile like each other very much, but Michelle does not like Candice. Every Friday Lungile and Michelle go to play and sleep at each others' houses. On Thursday, Candice's Mom phones and asks if Lungile would like to come to play and sleep over at Candice's house on Friday.

14.1 What should Lungile do? (circle your answer)

a. Tell Candice that she cannot go because she is going to Michelle's house?
b. Say "yes" to Candice and try to explain to Michelle?
c. Say "yes" to Candice and tell Michelle that she is sick and so cannot come to her house on Friday?

14.2 Why do you think that this is the best thing to do?

____

____

Appendix D

Contingency Tables used for Chi-square Analysis

*** Adjusted residuals which are significant at the 1% level of significance are in bold type**

Type of aggression (Scenario 2)	Frequency N = 160 * 9 missing cases			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Physical	9 (42.9%)	6 (9.2%)	20 (5.1%)	11 (6.7 %)
Adjusted residuals	**4.8**	-0.7	-2.5	
Social exclusion/ostracism	0 (0%)	8 (12.3%)	17 (25.3%)	34 (20.6 %)
Adjusted residuals	2.2	-1.3	**2.7**	
Betrayal (backstab, gossip, tell secrets)	5 (23.8%)	18 (27.7%)	18 (22.8%)	42 (25.5 %)
Adjusted residuals	-0.1	0.7	-0.6	
Emotional abuse, teasing	1 (4.8%)	16 (24.6%)	20 (25.3%)	58 (35.2%)
Adjusted residuals	-2.1	0.5	0.9	
Non physical, verbal	6 (28.6%)	17 (26.2%)	17 (21.5%)	20 (12.1%)
Adjusted residuals	0.5	0.5	-0.8	

Table 3: Types of aggression cited in response to bullying scenario two

Reasons for aggression	**Frequency** **N = 160** *** 9 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Characterstics of the victim (different, irritating)	11 (68.8%)	37 (57.8%)	59 (73.8%)	107 (66.9 %)
Characteristics of the bully (emotional problems, power)	5 (31.3%)	16 (25%)	17 (21.2%)	38 (23.8 %)
Peer pressure/in-group status (popularity, new girl)	0	11 (17.2%)	4 (5%)	15 (9.4 %)

Table 4: Why girls bully

How	**Frequency** **n = 161** *** 8 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Be nice/hide anger/ contain anger	21 (95.5%)	50 (75.8%)	37 (53.6%)	108 (68.8%)
Adjusted residuals	**2.9**	1.6	**-3.6**	
Talk about anger	1 (4.5%)	10 (15.2%)	13 (18.8%)	24 (15.3%)
Adjusted residuals	-1.5	0.0	1.1	
Be authentic	0	6 (9%)	19 (27.5%)	25 (15.9%)
Adjusted residuals	-2.2	-2.0	**3.5**	

Table 5: How girls should behave when they are angry

Why	**Frequency** **n = 121** *** 48 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Girls should not hurt others	6 (37.5%)	27 (52.9%)	23 (43.4%)	56 (46.7%)
Adjusted residuals	-.08	1.2	-0.6	
Focus on negative consequences (punishment, bad reputation, vicious cycle of anger)	10 (62.5%)	16 (31.4%)	12 (22.6%)	38 (31.7%)
Adjusted residuals	**-2.8**	-0.1	-1.9	
Entitled to be ‘real’	0	8 (15.7%)	18 (34%)	26 (21.6%)
Adjusted residuals	-2.3	-1.4	**2.9**	

Table 6: Why girls should behave like this

By-stander protect the victim?	**Frequency** **n = 167** *** 2 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Yes	15 (71.4%)	33 (49.3%)	29 (37.7%)	77 (46.7%)
Adjusted residual	2.4	0.6	-2.2	
No	6 (28.6%)	34 (50.7%)	48 (62.3%)	88 (53.3%)
Adjusted residual	-2.4	-0.6	2.2	

Table 7: Would a by-stander be likely to protect the victim?

	Frequency **N = 165** *** 4 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Fears losing popularity/ loyal to group	8 (40%)	48 (72.7%)	57 (72.2%)	113 (68.5%)
Fears will be bullied too	9 (45%)	13 (19.7%)	15 (19%)	37 (22.4%)
Other	3 (15%)	5 (7.6%)	7 (8.9%)	15 (9.1%)

Table 8: Why a by-stander might choose not to protect the victim

	Frequency **n = 123** *** 1 missing case**		
	10-14	15-18	Total
Very easy	1 (2.3%)	1 (1.3%)	2 (1.6%)
Quite easy	5 (11.4%)	10 (12.7%)	15 (12.2%)
Hard	16 (36.4%)	31 (39.2%)	47 (38.2%)
Very hard	22 (50%)	37 (46.8%)	59 (48%)

Table 9: How easy/difficult is it to confront a bully who has hurt you

	Frequency n = 123 * 1 missing case		
	10-14	15-18	Total
Not at all	10 (22.7%)	20 (25.3%)	30 (24.4%)
Only a little	32 (72.7%)	46 (58.2%)	78 (63.4%)
Still very much	2 (4.5%)	13 (16.5%)	15 (12.2%)

Table 10: How much the bullies would like her

Qualities	**Frequency** **n = 164** *** 5 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
'Nice' qualities	15 (68.2%)	30 (46.2%)	20 (26%)	65 (39.6%)
Adjusted residuals	**2.9**	1.4	**-3.4**	
Loyal/trustworthy	3 (13.6%)	21 (32.3%)	23 (29.9%)	47 (28.7%)
Adjusted residuals	-1.7	0.8	0.3	
Truthful/Honest	0	4 (6.1%)	14 (18.1%)	18 (11%)
Adjusted residuals	-1.8	-1.6	**2.8**	
Respectful/ accepting	4 (18.2%)	10 (15.4%)	20 (26%)	34 (20.7%)
Adjusted residuals	-0.3	-1.4	1.6	

Table 11: Valued qualities in a friend

What causes fights	**Frequency n = 169**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Physical harm	2 (9.1%)	0	0	2 (1.2%)
Relational – social exclusion	2 (9.1%)	3 (4.5%)	3 (3.8%)	8 (4.7%)
Relational – betrayal	4 (18.2%)	25 (37.3%)	32 (40%)	61 (36.1%)
Jealousy (including boy-issues)	4 (18.2%)	15 (22.4%)	37 (46.3%)	56 (33.1%)
Popularity/status	0	2 (3%)	0	2 (1.2%)
Personal problems	0	2 (3%)	0	2 (1.2%)
Emotional abuse	2 (9.1%)	7 (10.4%)	1 (1.3%)	10 (5.9%)
Verbal abuse	6 (27.3%)	6 (9%)	1 (1.3%)	13 (7.7%)
Disagreements	0	7 (10.4%)	6 (7.5%)	15 (8.9%)

Table 12: The reasons why friends fight

Reasons for popularity	**Frequency** **n = 120** *** 4 missing cases**
	Total
Negative personality traits	17 (14.2%)
"Cool" attributes	98 (81.7%)
Positive personality traits	5 (4.2%)

Table 13: Characteristics that make a girl popular

Response	**Frequency** **n = 124**		
	10-14	15-18	Total
Yes	7 (15.9%)	9 (11.3%)	16 (12.9%)
No	30 (68.2%)	54 (67.5%)	84 (67.7%)
Unsure/can be either	7 (15.9%)	17 (21.3%)	24 (19.4%)

Table 14: Are popular girls nice?

Feelings of victim	**Frequency** **n = 164** *** 5 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Sad (depressed, heart-broken)	21 (95.5%)	52 (81.3%)	48 (61.5%)	121 (73.8)
Angry	0	1 (1.6%)	2 (2.6%)	3 (1.8%)
Bad (self-blaming attributions)	1 (4.5%)	11 (17.2%)	28 (35.9%)	40 (24.4%)

Table 15: Feelings experienced by the victim

Reactions of victim	Frequency n = 161 * 8 missing cases			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Retaliate/confront	2 (9.5%)	2 (3.2%)	8 (10.4%)	12 (7.5%)
Adjusted residuals	0.4	-1.7	1.4	
Tell someone/seek help	15 (71.4%)	39 (61.9%)	18 (23.4%)	72 (44.7%)
Adjusted residuals	**2.6**	**3.5**	**-5.2**	
Self-destructive behaviour	4 (19.1%)	22 (34.9%)	51 (66.2%)	77 (47.8%)
Adjusted residuals	**-2.8**	**-2.6**	**4.5**	

Table 16: Reactions of the victim of bullying

Why it hurts so much	Frequency n = 133 * 36 missing cases			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Devalues	1 (6.3%)	11 (20.8%)	19 (29.7%)	31 (23.3%)
Adjusted residuals	-1.7	-0.6	1.7	
Betrayal of trust/friendship	1 (6.3%)	25 (47.2%)	41 (64.1%)	67 (50.4%)
Adjusted residuals	**-3.8**	-0.6	**3.0**	
Emotionally painful	14 (87.5%)	17 (32.1%)	4 (6.3%)	35 (26.3%)
Adjusted residuals	**5.9**	1.2	**-5.1**	

Table 17: Why bullying hurts so much

Type of aggression	**Worst a girl can do** **N = 168** *** 1 missing case**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Relational – social exclusion	2 (9.1%)	10 (14.9%)	13 (16.5%)	25 (14.9%)
Adjusted residual	-0.8	0.0	0.5	
Relational - betrayal	5 (22.7%)	44 (65.7%)	63 (79.7%)	112 (66.7%)
Adjusted residual	**-4.7**	-0.2	**3.4**	
Non-relational	15 (68.2%)	13 (19.4%)	3 (3.8%)	31 (18.5%)
Adjusted residual	**6.5**	0.3	**-4.6**	

Table 18: The worst kind of bullying

Action	**Frequency** **N = 161** *** 8 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Stay loyal to existing friend (say no to the new girl)	8 (36.4%)	38 (59.4%)	41 (54.7%)	87 (54%)
Pursue new relationship	14 (63.6%)	26 (40.6%)	34 (45.3%)	74 (46%)

Table 19: Choice of action in a friendship triangle scenario

Type of reasoning	**Frequency** **n = 161** *** 8 missing cases**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Moral reasoning used (Honesty, loyalty)	7 (33.3%)	38 (59.4%)	45 (59.2%)	90 (55.9%)
Reasoning not based on moral grounds (nice to make new friends, keep the peace)	17 (66.7%)	26 (40.6%)	31 (40.8%)	71 (44.1%)

Table 20: Why this action is considered best

Selman's Level of Perspective-taking	**Frequency** **n = 169**			
	6-9	10-14	15-18	Total
Level 1	19	6	1	26
Adjusted residuals	**9.9**	-1.9	**-4.8**	
Level 2	3	24	3	30
Adjusted residuals	-0.5	**5.0**	**-4.5**	
Level 3	0	32	33	62
Adjusted residuals	**-4.0**	2.0	0.7	
Level 4	0	5	43	48
Adjusted residuals	**-3.2**	**-4.9**	**6.9**	

Table 21: Selman's Level of perspective-taking

Appendix E

Logistic regression statistics

Variables in the Equation(type2 physical and age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	-.199	.070	8.200	1	.004	.819
	Constant	.755	.874	.747	1	.387	2.128

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(Type2 social exclusion and age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.163	.053	9.546	1	.002	1.176
	Constant	-2.317	.738	9.857	1	.002	.099

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (feeling bad with age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.166	.052	10.200	1	.001	1.181
	Constant	-2.142	.723	8.776	1	.003	.117

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(self-destructive behaviour reaction with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.337	.064	27.468	1	.000	1.401
	Constant	-4.238	.883	23.018	1	.000	.014

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(help-seeking reaction with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	-.236	.059	15.826	1	.000	.790
	Constant	3.426	.843	16.521	1	.000	30.747

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(hurts because of betrayal of trust with age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.385	.075	25.990	1	.000	1.469
	Constant	-4.642	1.011	21.088	1	.000	.010

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(relational worst with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.392	.081	23.274	1	.000	1.479
	Constant	-3.096	.938	10.887	1	.001	.045

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (charac of victim with age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.122	.053	5.330	1	.021	1.130
	Constant	-.815	.714	1.304	1	.254	.443

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (peer pressure with age in years)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.167	.072	5.359	1	.021	1.181
	Constant	-3.792	1.062	12.738	1	.000	.023

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(be nice, with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	-.258	.075	11.694	1	.001	.773
	Constant	4.791	1.117	18.387	1	.000	120.452

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (be authentic, with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.370	.095	15.227	1	.000	1.448
	Constant	-6.703	1.450	21.371	1	.000	.001

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (fear negative consequences with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	-.209	.067	9.903	1	.002	.811
	Constant	1.764	.868	4.134	1	.042	5.836

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(entitled to be angry with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.530	.135	15.467	1	.000	1.700
	Constant	-9.105	2.108	18.658	1	.000	.000

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(protect victim with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	-.180	.053	11.478	1	.001	.835
	Constant	2.301	.738	9.732	1	.002	9.986

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation (fear lose popularity with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.158	.053	8.996	1	.003	1.171
	Constant	-1.478	.711	4.323	1	.038	.228

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(perfect friend loyal/trust, with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.108	.052	4.389	1	.036	1.115
	Constant	-.798	.703	1.290	1	.256	.450

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(perfect friend honest, with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.328	.067	23.808	1	.000	1.389
	Constant	-5.041	.982	26.340	1	.000	.006

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(perfect friend respect/accept, with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.269	.057	21.923	1	.000	1.309
	Constant	-3.165	.778	16.554	1	.000	.042

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

. **Variables in the Equation (betrayal causes fights with age)**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.190	.053	12.686	1	.000	1.209
	Constant	-2.127	.726	8.585	1	.003	.119

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.

Variables in the Equation(boys cause fights with age)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Yearold	.351	.072	24.102	1	.000	1.421
	Constant	-5.521	1.056	27.345	1	.000	.004

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Yearold.