

**SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ON BULLYING IN SOUTH AFRICAN
SCHOOL CHILDREN**

by

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Abstract

Objective: Bullying is a major problem in South African schools that has a profound impact on student's psychological development, social behaviour and quality of education. Social Representation Theory suggests a form of social knowledge production that allows for a unique exploration of the perceived causes and effects of bullying in South African schools. The present study aimed to understand the relevance of social representational thought on the creation and perpetuation of this social issue from the perspective of primary school students. This approach attempted to understand the way in which school children socially construct ideologies with the purpose of stimulating more effective and focused intervention strategies. Recommendations for further research are provided to compliment the current body of research, as well as focused recommendations to the application of this study with the intention of promoting a higher quality of education in schools, as well as reduce the occurrence of a major crime problem in South Africa.

Method: A qualitative methodological orientation was used for the present study in the form of exploratory research. Qualitative data were collected from sixteen participants through the use of focused interviews and analyzed using the framework method of analysis.

Results: Four major themes emerged and were discussed: 1) Interview demeanour 2) Understandings of bullying 3) Perceptions of bullies and victims 4) Help-seeking behaviour.

Conclusions: The results of the present study provide an exploratory overview of the social representations of bullying by South African primary school students; through their understandings of the causes and effects of bullying and pave the way for further research guided by Social Representation theory.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Social Representations on Bullying in South African School Children

1.1 Motivation for the present study

Bullying in schools is a social epidemic. It has a profound impact on the victim's, bully's, teacher's and bystander's lives with substantial effects on development, mental health, social behavior and education for all those involved. It is also pervasive in nature, with an unclear prevalence that is obscured by poor reporting behaviour.

Bullying as a social issue is largely on the rise and not declining (Achenbach, Dumenci & Rescorla, 2002). The apparent lack of success of intervention strategies in reducing the occurrence of bullying thus far could be attributed to understandings of bullying that are not specific to the targets of the intervention. This therefore represents a gap in research that requires attention. Currently, understandings of the bully victim relationship are predominantly formulated on interactions between the bully and the victim and the intrapersonal qualities of each party. These approaches explain what causes the occurrence of bullying from the perspective of the well-educated professional. However, an exploration of subjective assumptions that contribute to children's perceptions of bullying has remained largely under-researched. In essence, children themselves are the experts on the topic.

1.2 Purpose of the present study

It has been asserted that the occurrence of bullying has severe implications on the psychological, social and academic wellbeing of victims, bullies, bystanders and teachers alike (Zequinão et al., 2017).

Research that focuses on the perceptions of those who the research aims to assist arguably provides the most effective data for creating valid intervention initiatives. By speaking to school children directly through qualitative interviews; data on their social representations suggest how they perceive the bullying relationship. This will include the influence of the environment, culture, and social subjectivities, irrational assumptions and even false

consensuses. The rationale is that even when a person is subjectively interpreting a situation, their motivations and understandings are still valid as they are motivators for cognition and behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to develop an understanding of how school children have socially constructed concepts that relate to bullying. Moreover, to allow the resultant data to assist intervention strategists in finding more effective ways to help those experiencing bullying, as well as reduce the occurrence to promote greater wellbeing for South African students.

The present study aimed to explore the perceptions and attitudes of those involved with the goal of providing usable insights into how bullying is represented within a social group. Specifically, the present study focused on grade four to grade seven students as these ages have been implicated as peak ages of bullying within the schooling system. Furthermore, the study focused on students in a prominent government primary school in the greater Durban area (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa), with the intent of finding a diverse representative sample of the population of primary school student's in Durban South Africa.

1.3 Aims of the present study

The present study aimed to:

- To determine how South African School children socially represent issues of bullying
- To explore South African School children's the attitudes towards bullying
- To determine ways to assist intervention strategists in making informed decisions to combat bullying

1.4 Importance of the present study

To understand why bullying is considered an epidemic in South Africa, it is important to analyze the conceptual makeup of the issue. Viewing how mental health, identity, development and education are impacted by different types of bullying is the first step towards understanding the scope of this problem. This provides a backdrop for which official bullying statistics can be interpreted. Therefore, it would be profitable to create a holistic understanding of why bullying needs to be better understood.

Once the creation of this backdrop was developed through a review of the literature, social representation guided research allowed meaningful insight into the causes of bullying from the

shared realities school children develop. Thereby obtaining an understanding of the bullying relationship that is most meaningful to the individuals involved. This type of research yields usable information for bullying intervention strategies that are appropriate and effective in reducing the impact of this social epidemic.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 describes the rationale for the study and provides an overview of the study's aims, objectives and relevance.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 provides a context for the current research within the existing body of knowledge through a review of the literature. The conceptual make-up of bullying will be discussed, with a particular emphasis on the relevance of perceptions and social representations.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 outlines the design process of the actual research process, encompassing methodological rationale, the research process, descriptions of the sample, and concerns about reliability and validity.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 involves the statement and discussion of the results of the study. The resultant themes and sub-themes are divided according to the analysis method utilized. The analysis explores the relevant data, as well as interprets concepts for application in a practical sense. Suggestions for further research are present in all relevant discussions.

Chapter 5

The purpose of chapter 5 is to consolidate and conclude the outcome of the study's aims and objectives and provide a summary of the major points of discussion. Implications for practice are suggested and recommendations for further research are postulated.

Chapter Two

Literature review

2.1 What is bullying?

Within the school setting bullying is defined as when “a student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1996, p. 265). Furthermore, it has been explained by several studies as definitively involving a power imbalance between the victim and the bully (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O’Brennan, 2013; Olweus, 1993). The behavior involved is generally thought of as being repetitive, i.e., a victim is targeted a number of times. “Also, the victim cannot defend himself or herself easily, for one or more reasons: He or she may be outnumbered, smaller or less physically strong, or less psychologically resilient than the person(s) doing the bullying (Smith & Brain, 2000, p, 1)”. It is in terms of the South African legislation, a form of abuse, and thus classified as a criminal offence (Laas & Boezaart, 2014) However, bullying can be further classified into different categories on the basis of its manifestation and impact. According to the literature, there are four major categorical types of bullying: physical, verbal, social and cyber bullying (Olweus, 1993; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

The different types of bullying are aptly named as they encompass the general characteristics of that specific type of bullying. For example, physical bullying involves physical abuse, verbal bullying involves verbal abuse etc. However, each different type of bullying has pervasive and complex contextual elements that motivate and perpetuate its occurrence. Bullying is anything but simple. Furthermore, each type of bullying could have differing levels of impact on the victim. For example, physical bullying could lead to physical impairment, whereas verbal bullying could lead to decreased opportunities in later life born out of diminished self-esteem (Eriyanti, 2018). Therefore, each category of bullying has its distinctions. However as with all elements of human social interaction; there are innumerable variables that can impact the individuals involved. Not only can each category of bullying be mixed with any other type in any order, but the severity, time in-between, personality type, cultural values, developmental stages, emotional reliance, education, environment, physical attributes and even socioeconomic status can have profound influence over the bullying relationship. Rather than separate the categories of bullying and dissect each one individually: bullying will be

generalized for the purposes of this paper to broaden the scope and allow the simulations focus on social representations of those involved; namely the bully, the victim and the bystander.

In order to create a framework for research, a general picture needs to be illustrated in order to examine the elements that encompass bullying at the broadest sense. This paper does not intend to be exhaustive, as it aims to describe the current state of school children's social representations surrounding bullying in South Africa. There are several areas of importance that contribute to the foundation of this research paper: the causes of bullying, bullying and development, bullying and gender relations, bullying and education, bullying and mental health, the prevalence of bullying, bullying and South African culture, bullying statistics and a critique of current bullying research.

Throughout this research paper the following terms will be used:

- Aggressor** - Individual with the intent to bully but has not necessarily engaged in bullying, or an individual who is implicated as the perpetrator for an isolated incident.
- Bully** - Individual who has intentionally caused victimization repeatedly
- Victim** - Individual who has been repeatedly victimized by a bully
- Student** - Individual within an educational environment that is between the ages of 10 and 13
- Bystander** - A neutral student who is neither a bully or a victim that witnesses the bullying interaction
- Prefect** - A grade 7 student who has been given a position of limited authority to assist teachers

2.2 CAUSES OF BULLYING

2.2.1 Theories on bullying causes

There are several frameworks in which theories on bullying could be applied to; these include the ecological systems framework, cognitive behavioural framework, social learning framework, attribution framework, and the lifestyle exposure framework (Mishna, 2012). Each of these frameworks take a different theoretical perspective in understanding human interaction and therefore are useful in developing an understanding of bullying. However, the ecological framework model will be given greater focus as it has the characteristics of an umbrella model, as it is able to categorize the influences on the bullying relationship from a very broad perspective (Espelage, Hong, Rao, & Low, 2013).

Ecological framework

Early conceptions of bullying research in the 1970s and 1980s implicated bullying as largely an individual issue: that some children with aggressive predispositions may be prone to violence, or children with maladaptivity and poor coping strategies are prone to becoming the victim (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). However according to Swearer and Doll (2001) bullying must be defined in terms of an ecological interactions that take place within a given context. In the study by Lee (2011) it was concluded that the ecological systems theory approach to research on bullying found high levels of variance in bullying behaviour, and also pointed out that all ecological systems have a significant impact on bullying. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) proposed that human development is directly determined by environmental factors that could be spread across 5 distinct levels of influence - acting upon the person at any given point in development. These have been termed the *microsystem*, the *mesosystem*, the *exosystem*, the *macrosystem* and the *chronosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Each level describes a subsequently broader element of influence that are very involved in the occurrence of bullying. This perspective categorizes elements of bullying in an observable way that could potentially direct intervention strategies towards areas of the highest validity.

The *Microsystem* involves close systems of influence that have a direct impact on the individual, such as interactions with friends, or in case of our focus, interactions with the school and with a bully. At the microsystemic level factors that involve interpersonal relationships are signified. These include interactive factors such as parent-youth relationships, peer relationships, inter-parental violence, school connectiveness and schooling environment (Hong & Espelage, 2012). To illustrate the impact of factors in the microsystem, consider the study by Baldry (2004) which found that children who witness domestic violence between parents are significantly more likely to bully their peers or become a target of bullying compared to those who did not experience parental violence. Similar findings are present for child-parent maltreatment, low levels of peer acceptance, school disconnectedness and low levels of adult supervision (Hong & Espelage, 2012). As a further example Salmivalli, Voeten and Poskiparta (2011) classified class-sizes as a determining factor of classroom bullying.

The *Mesosystem* level, which is one step broader, is characterized by relations between two or more microsystems: both of which involve the individual. For example, the microsystem of the student in the school and the microsystem of the parents and the student. This is

typically represented in the parent's involvement in the child's school life. Although these factors interact with the individual, they also interact with each other and have an indirect influence on the individual. For example, parents meeting teachers to discuss academic concerns. Hong & Espelage (2012) also assert that teacher's attitudes and involvement in student's lives has a significant impact on how students relate to themselves and one another, and that a decreased interest or involvement leads to minimal help-seeking behaviour such as the reporting of bullying (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Fekkes, Pijpers, Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). The social-ecological model suggests that teachers are uniquely situated to influence peer relationships (Bouchard & Smith, 2017) and therefore have a tremendous responsibility on the individual development of each child. Evidently it is vital at the mesosystem level of influence that each independent system harmoniously contributes towards a healthy and safe environment for the individual. However, this is not always the case. Interventions at this level would be most effective in fostering strong teacher-student relationships in an effort to positively influence peer relationships and reduce aggressive, abusive behaviour such as bullying.

The *Exosystem* includes influences that do not directly involve the individual, but the individual is still affected by its outcomes. There is very little research regarding the exosystemic influences contributing to the bullying relationship, however it is potentially a ripe area of inquiry. Situations such as parent's promotion or retrenchment exist in systems outside of the individual, but they affect the individual indirectly. Elements such as this could quite possibly impact the bully or the victim in several ways. For example, parental retrenchment could lead to pent up aggression, needs that are met through theft, or similarly parental promotion could lead to arrogance or entitlement of the aggressor. For the victim it could mean the stress of a lower quality of life or being targeted for a specific element of their life that warrants a power imbalance. I.e., being teased because of unfashionable clothing.

According to Hong & Espelage (2012) the media also presides in the exosystem level of influence and has a profound impact on bullying. Tv shows, movies, books and celebrities are often revered despite the violent or aggressive content they produce. Much evidence has been compiled supporting the hypothesis that exposure to violent television, internet content and video games increase the occurrence of deviant or aggressive behaviour and cognition (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, Eron, 2003; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Therefore, the impact of the exosystem on bullying is entirely relevant. Intervention strategies would be appropriate on this level by creating stricter regulations

regarding age appropriate restrictions, and naturally creating a greater awareness for parents on the potential consequence of viewing such content. Applied research is certainly needed on this topic, as it would lead to a greater understanding of the complex nuances of bullying causes, as well as potentially reduce unnecessary aggression and therefore bullying.

The *Macrosystem* according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) involves broad levels of influence such as ideologies, culture, religion, attitudes, values and laws. Each of these levels of influence that have an immediate influence on the microsystem. Hong & Espelage (2012) propose that the two most important elements of the macrosystem, in regard to bullying, are cultural norms and religious beliefs. However contrary to western views, in the African context it is problematic to separate cultural norms from religious beliefs (SAHO, 2011). Therefore, the correlation between cultural and religious views will differ significantly from Western ideologies. According to the principles of Social Representation theory by Moscovici (1973) culture is instrumental in the formulation and sustainance of thought, and therefore must be considered when exploring cultural principles of behaviour.

The final level of influence is the *Chronosystem*. The chronosystem represents elements of time and how elements of timing have an impact on the individual. For example, when developmental changes are experienced by an adolescent, or how an act of aggression or prolonged bullying could influence the child. The influence of chronosystemic levels will be present during the results of this paper, as 4 different age categories have been targeted, all with differing ages and differing developmental stages. How the chronosystem levels of influence affect perceptions of bullying allow greater understandings for the creation of age-based intervention strategies to reduce bullying, particularly within the school counselling environment.

However, authors who use the ecological framework model for interpretation have been criticized for unoriginality, since the model is a widely understood framework (Urdang, 2013). Therefore, repetition should be avoided, and meaningful insights should be proposed in order to create further knowledge of the topic.

Social learning model

Social learning theory developed by Bandura (1977) builds upon early psychological theories such as Pavlov (1897) and Watson's (1924) classical conditioning theories and Skinner's

(1938) work on operant conditioning. While classical conditioning implies that a person learns new behaviour through association, operant conditioning implies that behaviour is learned through behaviour and the consequence of behaviour. However, Bandura (1977) proposed through the social learning theory; that first-hand experience is not necessary, and that behaviour can be learned through observation. For the purpose of simplification, the theory asserts, as the name implies, is that humans are capable of learning behaviour based on what they have seen by others. The relevance for bullying is obvious in this perspective, as it implies that bullying or abusive behaviour are those learned from another social stimulus. Akers (2001) maintains this position, by asserting that the imitation of behaviour is “the engagement in behavior after the observation of similar behavior in others” (p. 196). Akers’ (2001) focus, in this context, was the primary instance of criminal behaviour or deviance, which fits our understanding of bullying perfectly. Therefore, the social learning theory would assert that bully’s behaviour must have been learned from some influence in their social life. Possibilities could include first hand acts of abuse in domestic settings (Corvo & deLara, 2010), history as a victim (Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016), or behaviour learned vicariously through the media. Therefore, social learning considerations where be applied when interpreting the results, as social learning should lead to differential understandings and social representations on the topic of bullying. Social learning implications arose naturally through interviews as statements regarding perceived characteristics of bullying are learned socially in and of themselves. Furthermore, if students are aware of social learning principles it will imply their level of understanding surrounding the bullying relationship.

Cognitive Behavioural Model

The cognitive behavioural model based upon the cognitive theory of psychotherapy (Beck, 1979) suggests that human beings learn how to filter information at young ages by developing ‘schemas’, and then process information through these filters to formulating a plan for behaviour. The theory further asserts that schemas filter unconscious thoughts and the resultant cognitions seem to be spontaneous. The relevance of this theory to the issue of primary school bullying is the creation of schemas, and the utilization of those schemas in forming attitudes and beliefs around bullying. For example, students who are verbally bullied with insults may end up subconsciously internalizing the material used by the bully and incorporating it into a cognitive schema. The cognitive behavioural model could also potentially gain insight into the

conception of bullying of the bystander, who may view behaviour without experiencing it, and therefore develop different cognitive schemas about bullying compared to the victim.

Attribution Model

According to Fiske & Taylor (2017) “Attribution theories describe people’s causal analyses of (attributions about) the social world. For example, an attribution can address whether someone’s behaviour seems due to the external situation or the person’s internal disposition (p, 14)”. For example, if a student is abrasive to another student, the recipient could surmise that perhaps it is due to mitigating circumstances (e.g. he recently was reprimanded by a teacher for failing to do the homework assignment) or whether it is due to an irritable disposition (he is abrasive to everyone). As a part of cognitive social psychology, Attribution Theory attempts to answer one of the most important issues faced by mankind: how people understand and explain why people behave the way that they do. According to Gideon and Rubin (1999) “Attribution theory therefore functions as a means of control; it helps explain past events and predict future ones (p, 20)”. With regards to bullying, this model of thought would be utilized as the victim attempts to understand causal relationships to determine why they are being targeted, or the bystander’s understanding of the bully’s motives. Gedeon and Rubin (1999) also warn that just because there is a desire to explain and understand behaviour does not necessarily mean that the explanations and understandings are correct. There is much room for subjective interpretations. However, not only will the Attribution Model delimit what is actually bullying and what is merely perceived to be bullying, but it will gain insight into how victims and bystanders attribute thoughts, attitudes and motivations to the perceived bully. Furthermore, the attribution model involves a resultant understanding of the individual’s perception of their control over the causal elements of behaviour, as well as how emotions play a role in behaviour (Ahles & Contento, 2006; Weiner, 1986). In a study on social representations, the attribution model should yield a fruitful mode of interpretation regarding perceptions. The literature did not yield any notable contributions on any attribution theory focused research on bullying, and research here is recommenced as social cognitive understandings are important for individual-based intervention strategies.

Lifestyle Exposure Model

The lifestyle exposure model is a criminal victimization model that emphasizes the role of an active victim, implying that actions of the victim trigger victimization (Meier & Miethe, 1993). While mere exposure to a bully is likely to be inevitable in a schooling environment the Lifestyle Exposure Theory also asserts that elements of the victim can be precipitating factors (Kokkinos & Saripandis, 2017). For example, the victim inciting the bully, the victim showing off desirable items, or the victim routinely spending time unsupervised around the school. Although elements of lifestyle on behalf of the victim seem to have an effect on victimization, it is doubtful that the victim will be overtly aware of these factors (based on the apparent lack of avoidance). Therefore, perceptions and associations will need to be interpreted from a lifestyle exposure model to form a picture of the risk factors associated with victimization.

The wealth of literature on human behaviour and thought provides ample interpretive frameworks for which data can be understood. A combination of several relevant models should yield meaningful insight into social representations on bullying.

2.2.2 Power Imbalance and bullying

Throughout the literature, the terms “power imbalance” or “power struggle” appear as vital elements of the bullying relationship. According to Smith & Sharp (1994) bullying is characterized by a “systematic abuse of power”. Rettew & Pawlowski (2016) elaborate that this abuse of power is only possible due to power imbalances between the bully and the victim. These imbalances can be present in terms of a differential physical size, age, social status or other feature. The exploitation of power imbalances by the bully is what makes bullying a possibility. For example, a student hits another student because they know there will be no retaliation, or a student teases another student for belonging to a lower socioeconomic bracket. However, power imbalances are found naturally within all human groups, and are more often than not handled without abuse, so it would be plausible to view the bully-victim relationship as normal, in the sense that this imbalance occurs throughout society (Smith & Brain, 2000). It is so normal, in fact, that it is irrational to pose that bullying does not occur in all schooling establishments. ‘Normative’, however, by no means implies social acceptability. Ma (2004) reports that studies have shown that students are aware that bullying is not socially acceptable. Yet still, bullying targets the object with weaker power to the detriment of the receiver and the benefit of the aggressor. However, the precipitating factor that elevates power imbalance to abuse remains unclear.

Power imbalance in the bullying relationship has been addressed by Chaux and Castellanos (2015) who stipulate age, physical size, strength, social status, and monetary wealth as key factors in creating asymmetrical power relationships. For example, students who are comparatively a year older than peers in a particular grade, are more likely to become bullies than those who are of the normative age (Crothers, et al., 2010). It could be naturally assumed that aggressors bully in an attempt to gain power differences. However, it has been argued that “instead of bullying as a way to create or maintain power differences, it could be that power differences create opportunities for bullying (Chaux & Castellanos, 2015, p. 281).”

The power imbalance prevalent in bullying can be best seen most clearly at the onset of puberty. Pellegrini (2002) suggests a ‘social dominance’ view of bullying and victimization in early adolescence, that asserts that social dominance is an important variable that secures a social hierarchy. Particularly in male groups, relative strength is exhibited by acts of dominance over those with less resources. Pellegrini further argues that dominance is not an end on its own, but dominance is used in order to secure priority to a specific resource (Pellegrini, 2002). For example, access to a specific area of the school, or access to heterosexual relationships (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). What makes this different from other normative instances of power imbalances, that do not result in abuse, is most likely the school child’s inability to be removed from the situation. As school children are routinely within close proximity, with fewer options to be apart from negative stimuli, bullying is more likely to occur. Pellegrini (2002) further asserts that social dominance bullying is likely to increase towards the end of secondary school, where the aggressor is at a stage of uncertainty approaching the move to a new environment (high school) and is likely to decrease after the transition to a new school or as dominance status is secured. This phenomenon was confirmed by the present study, where higher levels of dominance-based bullying was exhibited towards the older grades of the study. This same assertion also implies that bullying is likely to reduce once dominance is secured, therefore implying that bullying is not necessarily an end, but a means towards securing social dominance. Social dominance theory is consistent with this hypothesis, where social hierarchies are formed during the competition for valued resources (Pellegrini, 2002).

A study by Cuadrado-Gordillo (2012) found that victims of bullying do not identify the power imbalance within their social construction of the bully-victim relationship. This apparent ignorance could be due to confusion surrounding the victim’s role in the bullying relationship (Schaefer, 2017), or be due to a false sense of self-efficacy that the victim refuses to accept any

disparity between personal self-image and reality. The result is denial, in which the victim denies the possibility that the aggressor has the power advantage. This research attempted to focus on determining the victim's social representations of themselves and of the bully, and determine what factors contribute towards the victimization of specific students.

2.2.3 Victim Characteristics

According to the National Survey of School Health in Brazilian schools by de Oliveira et al. (2015)

The prevalence of bullying was 7.2%, most frequently affecting Afro-descendant or indigenous younger boys, whose mothers were characterized by low levels of education. In regard to the reasons/causes of bullying, 51.2% did not specify; the second highest frequency of victimization was related to body appearance (18.6%); followed by facial appearance (16.2%); race/color (6.8%); sexual orientation 2.9%; religion 2.5%; and region of origin 1.7% (p, 1)

According to the authors of the same study these results are similar to those found in other socioeconomic contexts (de Oliveira et al., 2015). Some research showed that victims are found to be socially and academically less intelligent than non-victims and can be targeted on the bases of academic inferiority in school (Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999; Sweeting & West, 2001). However, although differences in appearance and other such differentiating variables have been implicated in slightly higher incidents of bullying does not mean these factors are *responsible* for the higher incidents of bullying. There have been several studies that have illustrated that ethnicity, socioeconomic status and age are not significant predictors of bullying (Dulli, 2006; Kumpulainen, 1999; Sourander, 2000). The apparent disparity of these statistics can simply be explained by considering that common factors and causal factors are different in nature. For example, in a school census where 3 Latino children are bullied out of 300 other students bullied, it is not reliable to assert that ethnicity was the causal factor of the bullying. Although common factors may exist, it is possible that quantitative research methods may overlook this distinction, where qualitative approaches may discern the relevance of the victim's characteristics after bullying. However, through the above statistics two factors are immediately observable: there are common attributes of victims that are associated with bullying, and over half of the students did not specify their understandings of causes. This

simultaneously suggests that victimization is impacted by victim qualities, and that by and large students are unaware of how these qualities contribute towards bullying. Lack of responses by half of the respondents suggests that a differing investigative methodology could yield varying responses. Therefore, in an attempt to gain a reliable understanding of victim qualities and how they relate to bullying: perceptions on the subjective and associative assumptions of the victims must be qualitatively interpreted.

2.3 BULLYING AND DEVELOPMENT

2.3.1 Age and bullying

Understandings on the initial age of onset for bullying behaviour are inconclusive. This is because during formative socialization, behaviour is managed and mediated through parental supervision and control through verbal and non-verbal cultural values (Ellis, Lee & Petersen (1978). In this phase of primary socialization, most behaviour is observable and carries a consequence of some form, whether approval, disapproval, correction or punishment (Watson & Rayner,1920). However, as the child enters the schooling system, a large diversity of demographic variables, that are conflicting to an egocentric worldview, and coupled with lowered adult supervision means the child is able to exercise what Ellis et al. (1978) terms “self-reliance” and allows greater social and emotional expression than was possible prior to school attendance (Holmes & Holmes-Lonergan, 2004; Louw, Van Ede, Louw & Botha, 1998). While the domestic context usually holds low ratios of supervision (for example, a parent supervising 2 children), the schooling environment can often split the adult’s attention between up to 40 students and make it difficult for teachers to have meaningful impact on the student’s individual development (Jaffer, Shaheeda & Czerniewicz, 2007). Therefore, at the entry to primary school the initiation of aggressive behaviour may begin to manifest in a more unrestricted manner than before (Bouchard & Smith, 2017).

Upon viewing the literature, it became apparent that the primary ages of focus on bullying lies on the general age category between 10 and 16 years. However, the influence of adolescence is a large confounding variable in regard to bullying attitudes, perceptions and of course, social representations. Therefore the developmental stages experiences by students aged 10-13 have been selected as areas of focus, as this age bracket has been implicated as the most memorable and most severe age for bullying (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Stockdale et al., 2002; Thornberg,

2010). Within South African education system this involves grade 4, 5, 6 and 7. As the upper limits of this study include ages 12 and 13, there was the opportunity to observe perceptual and behavioural changes that occur onset of early adolescence - which has been asserted as the peak of bullying behaviour (Dulli, 2006; Nansel et al., 2001)

Furthermore, according to Rettew & Pawlowski (2016) “Longitudinal studies reveal some trends regarding bullying through childhood and adolescence. Early bullying can be readily identified in elementary school children but tends to peak in the middle school years and early adolescence. It often diminishes later in adolescence and adulthood, although there remains a minority of youth who increase their level of bullying through adolescence (p, 236)”

Therefore, it was apparent from the literature that these particular ages would be most profitable to focus on for the present study, as they are implicated as the most prevalent ages of bullying.

2.3.2 Middle Childhood Psychological development

Bullying has the potential to impact psychological well-being in both the short term and later on in life. It can lead to an array of outcomes ranging from social, emotional and educational issues to more extreme outcomes such as death (CFDCP, 2015). Therefore, students who have been bullied are subject to the risk of adjustment, emotional and mental health difficulties (Reece, 2008; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Substantial research has been done on the impact bullying has on the psychological well-being of the victim, thus amplifying the need for appropriate interventions. As the nature of bullying includes diverse contextual situations and a vast array of individual differences, the impact on the individual also has diverse outcomes. However, two broad areas of development that bullying has the potential to disrupt include social/emotional development and cognitive development.

2.3.2.1 Social/Emotional development

Bullying has been found to cause higher internalizing reactions to conflict, anxiety issues, lowered self-esteem and suicide ideation (Baldry, 2004; Baldry & Farrington, 1998; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Marttunen, Rimpelä, & Rantanen, 1999; Rigby & Slee,

1999). These mental health issues can have transverse implications on children's psychological development.

According to Swartz, Duncan, Townsend and O'Neill (2016) middle childhood represents an increase of independence and is signified by greater emotional flexibility and emotional differentiation. Louw et al., (1998) asserts that during this stage children are most capable of emotional expression, although these expressions are largely controlled by social stereotypes. For examples girls are taught not to be aggressive, and boys are taught not to cry. The outcomes of this inhibited emotional expression can contribute towards mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or even suicidal thoughts in childhood (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998).

The first element of social development is the concept of social identity. Social Identity involves the creation and sustenance of people's understandings of themselves, of others, and how they relate to one another (Macionis & Plummer, 2012). Weeks (1991) defines that "Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others (p, 8)." Weeks further asserts that social identity at its most basic form gives individuals a sense of personal position, while simultaneously creating a social position within social relationships (Weeks, 1991). Sense of self is closely linked with the emotional concept of self-esteem: which is an integral part of any conceptualization of bullying, as the influence of self-esteem transverses through most behaviour and can be drastically influenced by interactions with peers (Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian, 2008). This concept is similar to the African concept of Ubuntu that asserts that meaning, belonging and humanity are shared socially.

Ubuntu is a traditional (South) African set of norms, values and practices (Dreyer, 2015). Upon researching the concept of Ubuntu it became apparent that the concept is inextricably linked to theological and philosophical understandings of human belonging, which differs greatly from Western ideologies where the primary focus of reality is individual. According to Desmond Tutu (2004) Ubuntu could be best translated into English in the statement "my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am because I belong. It speaks about wholeness: it speaks about Compassion (p, 26)". The African Ubuntu paradigm holds many fundamental differences to western ideologies, from the formation of morality to the construction of complex gender and social roles in society (Metz & Gaie, 2010). Therefore, construction of social reality in an African setting would differ greatly from that of many Western research

studies. It can be presumed that throughout formative socialization many African children would be taught from values of harmony and morality of Ubuntu; begging the question of why bullying remains prevalent. However, South Africa holding the national title of ‘the Rainbow Nation’ due to its cultural and ethnic diversity; is anything but a homogeneous sample. While the majority of students in classes may be African, there will still be extreme variance between those students in terms of parental, individual, cultural, linguistic, social and emotional factors. Therefore, it would be wise to consider ubuntu as one of several paradigms on the topic of social/emotional development.

Classical Western theories such as Cooley’s theory of the ‘looking-glass self’ and Mead’s ‘development of self’ theory illustrate the ways in which social interactions shape the way in which the individuals construct their own identities (Mead, 1956; Scheff, 2005). More modern theories include Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development; that outlines 8 hierarchical crises that children must overcome in order to develop a healthy personality and sense of self. During the 4th psychosocial phase, Erikson theorizes that children between 5 and 12 years old will encounter the Industry vs Inferiority developmental crisis. This crisis implies that during this stage the child will use his/her competence to win the approval of his/her peer group that will become a major point of influence in self-esteem (Erikson, 1968). Success in this crisis will allow the child a sense of accomplishment and pride, whereas failure can lead to feelings of doubt, inferiority and lowered self-esteem. This has implications for both the victim and the bully, where both will assert ‘industry’ do win approval of peers, albeit in different directions. However, in the case where one student wins approval by the subjugation of another student, the weaker student will experience ‘inferiority’. The reactions and influence of teachers and peers are important factors on the child’s life during this stage (Goldstein, 1994; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010).

Furthermore, the fifth developmental crisis mentioned by Erikson, the Identity vs Role Confusion crisis (Erikson, 1968), could also be implicated within late middle childhood. At this stage adolescents aged between 12 and 18 years, the individual seeks a society to which they can belong. If, such as the bullying context, the individual is unable to develop a strong identity, or is pressured into an identity, role confusion could occur - as well as the possibility of a negative personality and general feelings of unhappiness (McLeod, 2008, 2012). One of the interesting factors of Erikson’s theory, that sets it apart from Freud and many others, is the epigenetic nature of his personality development theory. What this means is that personality is

formed out of the accomplishment or failure of these developmental crises. If one fails to succeed in early stages, it will negatively impact the ability to accomplish further stages and is more likely to result in an unhealthy personality or self of self (Erikson, 1963; McLeod, 2008, 2012). This emphasizes the pervasive nature of bullying, and how it could have negative long-term implications for the victim and the bully alike (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008; Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

Therefore, in light of the above literature the most prominent ages of investigation are those of 10 to 13 years of age, or in the South African schooling system, those in grades 4 to 7. Age related factors of bullying became more apparent when viewing the varying age categories.

2.3.2.2 Cognitive Development

There has been some dissension among notable writers on the development of cognitive functioning. For example, Pavlov deemed learning as a passive activity, whereas Piaget and Vygotsky both saw learning as an ongoing, active construction (Oakley, Flanagan, Banyard, 2004). Piaget and Vygotski have been two of the most influential theorists on cognitive development, particularly on the education system (Swartz et al., 2016), and therefore demand to be included in the discussion of cognitive development and bullying.

Cognitive development refers to the age-specific milestones of cognitive functioning. For example, according to Cole and Cole (2001) during middle childhood the cognitive ability to perceive, learn and think in ways that involve comparisons, value judgement and logical mental coordination is achieved and strengthened. Compared to the single-dimensional cognition exemplified in the pre-school stage of childhood, during this developmental age children will have a greater ability to understand the thoughts and actions of their peers (Piaget, 1970). Piaget's theory of cognitive development was based on four age-related categories of development during which children actively construct learning; the Sensorimotor (0-2 years), Preoperational (2-7 years), Concrete Operational (7-11 years), and Formal Operational (11-15 years) (Piaget, 1964). Middle childhood, as delimited by Swartz et, al (2016) "generally refers to the developmental period between 6 and 12 years of age (p, 75)". Therefore, both Piaget's concrete operational and formal operational stages are relevant to this study's parameters.

The Concrete Operational phase as termed by Piaget (1964) describes the phase of cognitive development whereby "the limitations in thinking that characterized the preoperational stage

are overcome and thinking becomes less egocentric and more logical (Swartz et al., 2016, p, 79)". During this transition thought shifts away from abstraction and the child is able to comprehend concepts such as compensation, conservation, reversibility, decentration and several others (Swartz, 2016). Children who are at this phase are likely to have the ability to formulate empathetic attitudes, take the position of another, and make assumptions based upon what they have witnessed (Markus & Nurius, 1984). In the study by Olweus and Endresen (2001) it was found that empathy had a direct correlation bullying, as those who have greater empathetic understandings of their peers had more negative view of bullying and was less likely to engage in bullying behaviour. Empathy has also been linked to pro-social behaviour, which has been found to reduce the probability of bullying (Swearer & Espelage, 2004).

During the Formal Operational phase termed by Piaget (1964) children are capable of forming what is called 'hypothetico-deductive thinking' and refers to hypothetical thought and the capability of controlling variables to achieve a desired effect (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). This implies that students experiencing the Formal Operational Phase should be able to deduce causes of bullying, or possibly to assert operational ways in dealing with bullying in a hypothetical sense. Considering this developmental level, it would be useful to compare responses between those in the concrete operational, and the formal operational phases, to illustrate the differences in cognition. Another element of the Formal Operational Phase is the acquisition of the ability to understand concepts (Ahmad, Hussain, Batool, Sittar & Malik, 2016). According to Gilbert (2011)" people use the term *concept* to refer to a mental category that classifies objects, events, processes or abstract ideas (p, 247)". For example, if I say "bullying" to a student, the concept will be structured to include pre-determined ideas regarding bullying - perhaps a specific person comes to mind, or a specific act of bullying, or consequence. Conceptual thinking like this signifies a more mature understanding of abstract thought compared to prior stages (Pillsbury, 1949), and it is therefore to be expected that as age increases, so too will the complexity of responses. Another characteristic of cognition illustrated by Piaget's theory during this stage of development is the return of an egocentric world-view that can cause children to develop an insecure sense of self (Elkind, 1976), that could be born out of the physical fluctuation during early adolescence (Newcombe, 1996). Therefore, towards the older age categories it could be found that bullying behaviour and bullying coping strategies would be confounded by the insecurities common among this stage of development. Furthermore, the perspective of a bystander with an egocentric worldview

could yield some fruitful data on how those who perceive that they are not involved feel regarding the problem of bullying.

Lev Vygotski's theory of cognitive development, more accurately known as his Cultural-Historical theory, differs greatly in its assumptions to that of Piaget's theory. While Piaget's theory rested on the assumption of individual construction of knowledge, Vygotski's theory asserted that development can only occur through social interaction with others (Bruner, 1966; Vygotski, 1987). What this means is that Piaget proposes cognitive development as individuals making isolated discoveries, whereas Vygotski asserts that social and cultural processes shape the way in which children learn.

Vygotski's theory proposes that higher mental functions are gradually learned through the social instruction of more experienced people in their environment (Bukatko & Daehler, 2012; Townsend, Mayekiso & Ntshangase, 2016). For example, when a teacher decides to break down a complex concept into more manageable, logical parts, the student is able to learn how to do the same when attempting to explain something to his peers. According to Swartz et, al (2016) once external elements are observed by the learner, they are then internalized. This poses an interesting factor for the current study: if during cognitive development learners experience the same situation, will they then internalize the situation in the same way? The Russian term "*perezhivainie*" was used by Vygotski (1972) to describe this question and was translated "...[*perezhivainie*] serves to express the idea that one and the same objective situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived through by different children in different ways (p, 354)." Therefore, the when children internalize that which they have learned certain individual subjectivities are capable of distorting the objective. Regarding bullying it is entirely probable that different students who witness the same incident of bullying will provide different accounts of the incident, and differing perceptions of the surrounding context.

2.4 BULLYING AND EDUCATION

Since bullying in school is specific to its ecological environment, bullying is expected to have a unique reciprocal influence between the school and the student (Bouchard & Smith, 2017).

The influence naturally is always negative. Bullying can affect the victim's education directly and indirectly.

The direct impact of bullying on education is evident in several studies that suggested that the way school children view their schooling environment may positively or negatively impact concentration and motivation (Ames, 1992; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). According to Cohen, Pickeral and McCloskey (2009) the schooling environment has the capacity through its norms, values and expectations to support students in a way that encourages emotional, physical and socially safe. Consistent with social ecological theories of bullying, this feeling of safety can be mediated by social elements such as teacher's involvement in student's lives leading to decreased feelings of unsafety (Hong & Eamon, 2011), and conversely be upset by the lack thereof. Therefore, a hostile schooling environment, such as where a student is faced with bullying, is likely to decrease the victim's positive outlook on opportunities, as well as decrease concentration and motivation (Angold & Costello, 2013; Wolke, Copeland).

Motivation has been asserted as one of the most significant predictors of academic success, and the social behavioural learning of students (Fairchild, Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2005). Motivation, which is frequently measured by researchers with the "Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire" (MSLQ) is measured on the basis of 6 key motivational factors (Alkış & Temizel, 2018): 'Intrinsic goal', 'extrinsic goal', 'task value', 'control of learning beliefs', 'self-efficacy', and 'test anxiety' (p, 37). Bullying has the capacity to disrupt each of these motivational factors in a different way. For example, intrinsic goals can be disrupted by lowered self-efficacy, extrinsic goals can be disrupted by feelings of inadequacy to peers, task value can be disrupted by the confusion born out of victimization, control of learning beliefs can be disrupted by lowered sense of volition in the schooling environment, self-efficacy can be disrupted in conjunction to lowered self-esteem, and test anxiety can be evident in the physical sense of anxiety present in the schooling environment. It is likely in all of these examples that lowered motivation towards school work will result in poor academic performance (Alkış & Temizel, 2018). Furthermore the paper by Wolke & Lereya (2015) implicates anxiety disorder, depression, general health problems and poor social adjustment as common consequences of bullying that could potentially impact educational and academic quality. The results of the study by Mundy et al. (2017) concluded the issue rather succinctly:

Children who were physically victimized were 6 to 9 months behind their non-victimized peers on measures of academic performance. There are growing reasons for education systems to invest in the prevention of bullying and promotion of positive peer relationships from the earliest years of school (p, 830).

However, beyond the academic elements of education lies social learning, which not only directly impacts perceptions of academic learning, but also indirectly impacts the ability to deal with the social elements of learning. This is apparent through the child's attachment to the school. Both Jenkins (1997) and Hirschi (1999) have independently compiled similar constructs around a 'school social bond' that has 4 distinctive elements. These elements include commitment, attachment, involvement and belief in school rules (Jenkins, 1997; Hirschi, 1999). Bullying has the capacity to disrupt all 4 of these elements and develop a poor school social bond. However, school social bond can be applied to the behaviour of either the victim or the bully. Where victims experience poor social bonds at school as a consequence of bullying, bullies are provoked to deviance by poor social bonds in the same respect (Dulli, 2006). Studies such as Olweus (1997) have made similar conclusions and have proposed intervention strategies that promote teacher and parental involvement and develop clear rules regarding bullying in schools to reduce poor social bonds at school. School social bonds should be of prime concern to researchers to determine the extent to which social bonds in school affect the prevalence of bullying (Pintado, 2006), and the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Research conducted by Eriyanti (2018) suggested that verbal abuse negatively impact's learning in a more serious manner than physical abuse. This claim has been justified by the more long-term implications of psychological harm (Eriyanti, 2018).

The secondary impact of bullying exists in implications of the social or educational issues that may arise due to social exclusion, maladaptivity or resultant problems at home. These can indirectly impact the child's experience of schooling and even encourage unemployment in later life (Kokko, Katja, Pulkkinen, & Lea, 2000; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). The study by Calero, Gomez-perez, & Sierra (2017) concluded that children subjected to social exclusion exhibited significantly lower academic performance compared to students who are not, however in this study the parameters of social exclusion were not clearly defined. In a study dealing specifically with bullying and academic performance, it was suggested that bullying can affect the academic performance of the victim, the bully and even the bystander (Zequinão et al., 2017). While victims may be impacted directly by anxiety, bystanders may

experience guilt and evasion as a result of witnessing violence. Furthermore, the correlation between poor academic performance and aggression has been noted by Zequinão et al. (2017) as a potential factor in bullying; however, without a clear causal variable. It is surmised by the authors that poor academic performance may be caused by truancy or vice versa (Zequinão et al., 2017).

Several studies have concluded that physical and verbal bullying could affect academic performance of male and female students differently, as well as across different ages (Mundy et al., 2017; Zequinão et al., 2017)

According to the study by Wolke & Lereya (2015) “Victims were also reported to have more trouble making or keeping friends and to be less likely to live with a partner and have social support (p, 880).” With such longitudinal consequences it is therefore imperative that research is able to equip intervention strategies with appropriate and effective information.

2.5 THE ROLE OF PEERS AND TEACHERS

Bullying has been defined as a social issue, and therefore is social in nature. It has been implicated as having bidirectional influence with each party involved (Zequinão et al., 2017). For example the way in which bullying affects friends, bystanders or even teachers, and the way that friends, bystanders and teachers affect bullying. These concepts will be discussed in this section.

While the literature focuses predominantly on the relationship between the victim and the aggressor, the impact of the bystander and the impact on the bystander has not received adequate focus. During most incidents of bullying the number of bystanders far exceed the number of those involved, therefore implicate more widespread impact of this social phenomenon (Zequinão et al., 2017). Bystanders can be both directly and indirectly affected by situations of bullying. Directly, bystanders could be affected by “the emotional stress caused, as they may feel guilty for not helping the victim or abandoned by the school authorities” (Zequinão et al., 2017, p, 24) and as a result experience an environment that not conducive to learning, and likely to lead to poorer academic achievement (Kohut, 2007). Indirectly, bystanders could experience an array of social and cognitive consequences, such as victim-

blaming, succumbing to ideologies that violence is effective for the resolution of conflict and avoidant behaviour (Mrug & Windle, 2009). Gopal and Collings (2017) note that in terms of actual and vicarious threats to personal resources, vicarious threats such as witnessing violence can be equally traumagenic as actual threats.

The role of the bystander is quite complex. Not only does bullying have direct and indirect impact on the bystander, but the bystander's presence can even reinforce and encourage bullying behaviour (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). According to the study by Hawkins, Pepler and Craig (2001) bystanders were implicated as major factors in the intervention of bullying incidents, where although intervention only occurs in few cases, it is most often effective.

During school years, students spend the majority of their time in the schooling environment, and often surrounded by the same peers, making it likely that friendships will develop (Hartup, 1996; Pellegrini, 2002). Children seek acceptance and social support from their peers (Hong & Espelage, 2012). This dyadic relationship has been implicated as a predictive factor in bullying occurrence to some extent (Nelson, Burns, Kendall, & Kimberly, 2018; Perry, Hodges, & Egan, 2001). This is because friendships as a social resource limit the likelihood of a power imbalance (Nelson, et al., 2018). However the scientific community has contributed substantial research to suggest that larger social networks, such as friend groups, have a more profound impact on reducing bullying (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Norwalk, Hamm, Farmer, & Barnes, 2016) It has been suggested that larger group number could deter bullies, as victimizing a student who is considered popular could cause the bully to lose social status with peers (Pellegrini, 2002). However good quality social support in general has frequently been associated with greater coping behaviour, and greater outlooks on bullying for victims (Espelage et al., 2013). For example, positive friendship experiences can be effective for the victim in counteracting the negative experiences of bullying (Rettew & Powlowski, 2016). Conversely, the lack of friendships or peer rejection has been positively linked as a contributory factor in the prevalence of bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Pellegrini, 2002).

However, the quality of friendship is a vital element on understanding the role of friends on bullying. While meaningful friendships can act as a buffer against bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012), superficial friendships can be adversely effective (Kokkinos & Saripanidis, 2017). The same is true regarding bullies in their attempts to make meaningful friendships, where they inevitably struggle (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). This seems to be a rather controversial area for

bullies, as popularity is sometimes obtained, by those with antisocial personalities, by breaking rules in front of peers (Merritt, LaQuea, Cromwell & Ferguson, 2016). However, according to Nelson et al. (2018) having a “best friend” is a useful coping mechanism, as friends based on a mutual trust, will not provide judgement if a confession of victimization is shared (p, 286).

An interesting element regarding the role of friends in bullying is the surprising inclusion of bullying within friendships or friendship groups (Mishna, 2012). The particular type of bullying becomes difficult to identify (as the power imbalance usually visible becomes is obscure) and has presented nomenclature and definition confusion. This phenomenon has been termed “relational bullying” and pose the example of students intentionally leaving others out of social activities or spreading rumours with the intent of harming the victims social standing within the group (Wolke & Lereya, 2015, p, 880; Sullivan, 2000; Rigby, 2003). Rettew and Powlowski (2016) note a gender difference in the manifestation of friendship group bullying: “boys tend to be more likely to bully those outside of their core group of friends, whereas girls are more likely to bully individuals within their social network (p, 236).” There appears to be some dissonance between the perceived and the actual image of friends, where some children have not accepted that they are being bullied by a friend (Nelson, Burns, Kendall & Kimberly, 2015). The study by Wei and Jonson-Reid (2011) titled “Friends can hurt you” found that as many as 8% of victims nominate their aggressors as a friend, and 9 - 12% of aggressors nominate victims as friends. These troubling statistics suggest that there is a large amount of confusion within the dyadic bullying relationship on behalf of both the victim and the aggressor. As this particular study is about social representations, the perceptions of students are also an important area of inquiry. It has been found that up to 90% of students who were bullied perceived that their victimization caused them adverse social issues, such as isolation, and loss of friendships (Hazler, Hoover, & Oliver, 1992).

Furthermore, within friend groups the definition of bullying can become somewhat unclear. While our initial definition of bullying stated: when “a student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1996, p. 265)”, this definition is limited as fails to recognize or distinguish discreet behaviour, that could be termed physical horseplay and friendly verbal insults (Pintado, 2006). However, within friend groups children will tolerate, and even create mock conflicts with each other to promote social cohesion (McConnell & Odom, 1986; Pellegrini & Boyd, 1993). Pintado (2006) suggests that the ecological context of the bullying determines whether it is considered abusive or not, and

that within these friendly interactions neither a power struggle nor an intention to hurt is present. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) suggest that peer victimization may promote the creation of hierarchies within a group and be a useful tool in establishing autonomy.

According to De Wet (2011) bullying has a negative impact on both students and teachers alike. However, teachers are uniquely positioned to be extremely influential in the development of students, due to their ability to witness multiple social contexts simultaneously (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, teachers are able to play a protective role within the schooling environment for those who are at risk and provide the appropriate context for the development of important social, emotional and academic competencies (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). It is therefore clear that teachers have the potential to impact student's overall development, however this involves the direct influence of an involved teacher. Social support in general involves the individual's perception of safety or belonging to that support (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005). It would be assumed that teachers would be included in the perceived category of support, however research has found that this is not the case. While students who have been victimized place a greater importance for social support by peers, teachers and family than uninvolved students: students more frequently rely on peers and family for reporting than for teachers (Margraf & Martin, 2016). The apparent disparity between the actual influence of teachers on development, and the unwillingness to utilize that resource as a form of support points to an inconsistency in the perceptions of the student. The study by Nelson et al. (2018) dealt with this issue directly by revealing that bully manipulation could potentially damage the victim's trust in the teacher and visa versa. There are several elements that could contribute to the breakdown of that trust, from rumours and deceit, to teacher favouritism. For example, one of the students in the above-mentioned study reported "that smart children could get away with bullying because "the teacher wouldn't exactly expect one of them to do it;" for this reason, the teacher would be most likely to believe "the smarter kid." (Nelson, et al., 2018, p, 286)". It is apparent that children create social representations around teachers that allow them to predict behaviour and project motivations. However, whether or not these assumptions are accurate, children are likely to act upon them. This in turn can lead to a breakdown in trust between the student and the teacher that simultaneously impacts the power imbalance the victim is subject to and reduce the likelihood of the student seeking help. It has even been posed that the power imbalance between teachers and students can lead to abuse (Eriyanti, 2018), making the teacher a far less likely trusted source of support.

Teacher's also form their own social representations of bullying that are governed by their cultural, subjective ideologies, that can directly impact the way students see them in regard to bullying. For example, they may not see the act of bullying as serious and dismiss it, for example Nelson et al. (2018) revealed that students sometimes feel as though the teacher may dismiss the issue or blame the victim. Nelson et al. (2015) even suggest further harm when adults dismiss or are insensitive to the child's victimization. Eslea and Smith (1998) suggested that teachers may present an openness to bullying, based on the opinion that it is a common occurrence and students need to learn how to deal with it. This is an attitude frequently displayed in South Africa regarding bullying. According Meyer (2014) the author of the popular online blog *Psychology Today*: the phrase "boys will be boys" is a common attitude employed by many teachers and adults today with regards to aggressive behaviour. While this phrase simultaneously reinforces gender stereotypes and unconscious bias (Moule, 2009), it also excuses aggressive tendencies as natural or acceptable. Pellegrini (2004) confirms this when discussing that teacher-reports on school bullying prevalence is likely to include a subjective bias, for example gender role differences. In the exact demographic context of the present study, Bhana, de Lange, & Mitchell (2009) discuss how Zulu cultural norms (the dominant culture in KwaZulu-Natal) such as patriarchal gender roles, and social-cultural ideologies surrounding masculinity, could impact the occurrence of aggressive behaviour. For example, seeing bullying as a natural rite of passage. Further research should focus on the extent to which cultural representations surrounding aggressive behaviour impact conceptions of bullying.

The apparent connection between these social elements surrounding bullying (the bystander, the friend and the teacher) all show different levels of trust from the victim that relate directly to the confession or reporting of bullying incidents (Nelson et al., 2018; Oliver & Candappa 2007). While the literature above postulate that teachers should be the most effective person to report to, most do not report at all (Bjereld, 2016). Olweus (1993) noted that the reporting of bullying declined as age increased in certain countries. This was confirmed by Pellegrini's (2004) study that found a marked decrease in reporting behaviour at the onset of puberty. It was expected that students will express varying representations about the effectiveness or necessity for reporting between the different ages of the present study, especially comparing the grade 7s with the lower grade groups. This difference could be attributed to the increase of insecurities, or the increase in self-dependence that is common in early puberty. Nelson et al. (2018) found that students would prefer to confide in a "best friend" rather than a teacher, for

the fear of negative consequences by the teacher (p, 286). The actual or perceived ineffectiveness of teacher's ability to solve bullying problems at school is an area that needs to be addressed through appropriate intervention strategies. The reporting of bullying will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

2.6 SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The human world is indeed a social one. From the moment we interact with each other we develop certain social behaviour and cognition (Macionis & Plummer, 2012).

The concept of social representations originates from Moscovici; who defines it as

System(s) of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii).

Moscovici's development of social representation theory speaks of the way in which knowledge is created and distributed. Science attempts to explain epistemology in a way that is free of our desires and consciousness, but social representations do not. He explains "[Social representation] stimulates and shapes our collective consciousness, explaining things and events so as to be accessible to each of us and relevant to our immediate concerns" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 187). Therefore the manner in which this creation of knowledge is formed is not governed by empirical observations, but rather by two interdependent functions: *anchoring*, whereby the unfamiliar is culminated with the current categories of cognition (Schmitz, Filippone, & Edelman, 2003), and *objectification* whereby representations are projected into the world to transform what was abstract into concrete (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990; Moscovici, 1984). Through this social representations about the world are created. For example, when the media portrays a social issue in a particular manner, this new information is culminated into pre-existing understandings of that issue, and then are objectified when observing the social issue in the real world (Young, Subramanian, Miles, Hinnant, & Andsager, 2017). Bullying is the perfect example.

Children's social representations govern every element of interaction. Social representation theory, symbolic interpretations and social cognitive approaches all argue that the way people define situations and interpret other people's actions influences their own behavior and actions (Blumer, 1969; Charon & Cahill, 1979; Thornberg, 2010). In other words, people who belong to any system of interaction develop a "shared meaning". This allows people to make sense of the world and communicate this sense to one another in a meaningful way. It also determines the manner in which people relate to each other as well as their approaches towards one another. As children are often participants in social interactions on a daily basis within the schooling environment, they are co-constructors of social representations. Naturally this impacts how children understand bullying, as well as how they relate to it.

The study by Thornberg shows the qualitative analysis of the social representations of school children in certain Swedish schools (Thornberg, 2010). This study shows the importance of research guided by social representation theories, as well as the need to understand children from their own subjective understandings. The results show that 7 categories emerged of social representations for the causes of bullying; reaction to deviance, social positioning, work of a disturbed bully, revengeful activity, amusing game, social contamination and thoughtless happening (Thornberg, 2010). Furthermore, the study's results show that there is a dynamic relationship between social representations on bullying causes and the general process of social categorization. Thornberg explains that children categorize the instances of bullying that they have seen, or heard of, in order to organize their situations. Social representation is then used in order to make sense of these categories and are used in order to make sense of a more predictable and understood social world.

Children, who are not considered rational beings (Lee, Hallberg & Haase, 1979), are subject to many conflicting elements in the process of social categorization. Culture, the perceptions of parents, friends, peer pressure, environmental forces, or even cognitive distortions all culminate to develop how children categorize bullying, in a manner that is imposed from birth (Moscovici, 1984; Fiske, 1996). This perspective supposes the learning human as a passenger, as opposed to the driver, and as Moscovici (1984) implies, it is not only about how we understand the world, but also about how the world understands us. Arguably this theoretical position fails to account for agency or conflict within social representations. However, Howarth (2006) suggests that resistance provides an arena where previously held representations can be questioned, reined or transformed. Young et al. (2017) postulates that the emphasis in social

representation theory is the “shared” development and redefinition of schemas. Therefore, in the context of bullying, students who have social representations that do not conform with empirical observations, such as the invincibility myth, bullying may become an environment for re-representation in several ways. Furthermore, social hierarchical statuses have an impact on the way students represent one another. Munuera (2018) illustrates a parallel by explaining that stimuli that are perceived as negative can stimulate a fear reaction that can inhibit learning or pro-social interactions.

According to Wachelke (2012) not all social interactions falls under the category of social representation, as the structure requires three conditions: the social construct should be dubiously defined, the construct needs to be prominent to different groups, and there needs to be some form of discussion surrounding it. For example, a grade 4 learner witnesses a fight, the cause of the fight is unknown, different groups may all witness the fight, and social discussion may take place. If the student is then told that fighting is an element of bullying this becomes fertile ground for social representation. Aligning with Moscovici (1988) the new notion of bullying is *anchored* to the previously held notion of fighting. The student may then *objectify* the concept of bullying to a certain individual or any such element that is perceived to surround that interaction. Therefore, some students may incorrectly represent fighting as a form of bullying, but according Moscovici (1973) the construct being represented becomes replaced by the representation itself to the person or group that represents it. Therefore, constructions of reality end up being socially represented rather than empirically constructed.

Through email communication, Robert Thornberg has provided the interview schedule used for the purpose of the replication of his 2010 study. It is included in **Appendix A**. However, the interview schedule used in this study has been amended during the evolution of this study in order to broaden the scope from exclusive interest on causes, to general perceptions of bullying. Furthermore, the schedule was amended to reduce open-ended questions and encourage parsimony. The final interview schedule is included in **Appendix B**.

As this particular research paper is focused primarily on the perceptions of school children on bullying, it is important to consider research done by Cuadrado-Gordillo (2012) that analyses how repetition, power imbalance and intentionality conform with teenager’s perceptions of bullying. According to the study:

The results show that none of these three groups considered the criterion of repetition to be important to define bullying. A further conclusion was that both aggressors and witnesses

used the criteria of 'power imbalance' and 'intent to hurt' to identify a situation of bullying, although the aggressors placed especial emphasis on the superiority of power over the victim, while the witnesses emphasized the intent to hurt the victim. One noteworthy finding was that victims do not consider the factor 'power imbalance'. The factor that determined their perceptions was the 'intent to hurt' (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012, p01)

The differing perceptions between the witness, the aggressor and the victim exemplify the different social representations towards the idea of bullying. Witnesses and aggressors are aware of the power imbalance that allows for bullying to occur. While the aggressors were specifically interested in causing subjugation - the victim was apparently unconvinced that power imbalances were present. One noteworthy element of this point is that if victim is the only person unaware of an objective and visible factor, then victims are clearly subject to irrational subjective representations surrounding their relationship to the aggressor. Regardless of the objective validity of children's social representations, they are valid in the sense that children act upon them, and therefore they should be taken seriously.

Howarth (2006) investigates the nature of Social Representation Theory as a tool for research, and questions whether it is "to support or to criticize the social order? Is it to consolidate or transform it? (p, 65)". While Howarth's concern is largely focused on the theoretical construction of knowledge, this paper aims to witness these knowledge systems practically, in the real world, in a critical exploratory manner. Whether or not the results consolidate or transform the social order depends largely on the results.

2.6.1 South Africa and Social Representations:

South Africa is culturally and socially diverse, and therefore has socially diverse social representations. Transitioning out of the Apartheid regime in 1994, South Africa has made massive changes in its national representation of race, culture and political ideologies, shaped primarily through the media (Baines, 1998). The true extent of social representation, and re-representation has not been captured by scientific literature. As the country has undergone massive social transformation, social representational research could provide meaningful insight into the difficulties faced by the population today. All social representations are context specific and endemic to particular populations and therefore should differ between groups. Currently social representation research has taken a western ideological perspective and has

failed to account for the confounding variable of cultural differences within studies. It would then be extremely useful to conduct a study specifically investigating the phenomena in South Africa.

Within the culturally vast context of South Africa, this research aimed to make that comparison by obtaining insight into the social representations school children create regarding bullying. Consequentially the use of this new information can encourage a quality improvement in school education, as well as reduce the occurrence of a major crime problem in South Africa.

2.7 The Prevalence of Bullying

It is difficult to determine the prevalence of bullying as it is not only culturally subjective in its construction and definition (leading to under-reporting), but it is also a delicate subject for children (Thornberg, 2011). The onus is placed on the victim to report, however shame, guilt, fear of victimization and a lack of understanding of their own bullying can lead to a reduced number of reported incidences (Eslea & Rees, 2001; Petrosino, Guckenbug, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010). Children feel intimidated when questioned, and in some cases, may hold back due to threats of further abuse by the perpetrator. Consequentially it is difficult to get children to speak about it when they are involved, and even more so to get them to tell the truth about the matter. Similarly to adults in traumatic circumstances, children have been known to lie or distort their memories regarding the trauma (Christensen & James, 2008). Mac Donald and Swart (2004) also suggest that where bullying remains prevalent, it can be perceived by students that the school tolerates bullying, and therefore does not see the point in reporting. Therefore, bullying statistics in themselves lack substantially in validity.

Bullying statistics, however, have been diligently sought after through regular censuses in the USA and Europe with incidence rates between 56 and 22% (Olweus 1996). However, in South Africa such statistics are not readily available. The study by Liang, Flisher and Lombard (2007) revealed that up to to 41% of school children are bullied within their schooling career, however, the the reliability of the study is unclear due to the age of the study. However, although the prevalence of bullying is not explicitly known, South Africa boasts one of the highest crime rates in the world, with a notorious reputation for violence. According a popular statistics website, South Africa currently occupies the 5th highest Crime Index globally (Numbeo, 2017). As bullying has been correlated with adult violence and criminal potential, we can treat the issue of bullying as substantial, even without official statistics (Wolke et al., 2013).

2.8 Limitations of Current Literature

Quantitative research does not give children the opportunity to “speak for themselves”. It simplifies the information into numerical form, which can often omit certain subjectivities. Therefore, in this instance, quantitative research would not be appropriate, as it will likely limit the aspect in which the respondents will express themselves. Aspects such as hesitation when answering, in-depth explanations of feelings or experiences and non-verbal language all contribute towards understanding the individual, and therefore should be considered relevant data. Therefore, through the use of multiple sources of qualitative observation, this research aimed to determine a holistic picture of what the participant feels regarding the issue.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Study aims and objectives

The aims of the study are:

- To determine South African School children socially represent issues of bullying
- To determine South African School children’s the attitudes towards bullying
- To determine ways to assist intervention strategists in making informed decisions.

3.2 Paradigm

Rather than hypothesize the social and cognitive explanations for bullying, it seems obvious that it would be more useful to ask those involved what they think about the matter. This

research aims to do exactly that by determining the way in which children themselves create social representations around bullying. In other words, to determine how they create understandings within each other, and how they understand why what happens actually happens (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990).

This study was structured with the intent to speak directly to those involved: The children. As children are the creators of their own specific social representations, finding out exactly what they think about bullying in schools was necessary to provide the necessary data. This information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with the children themselves. A critical exploratory qualitative interview approach was the selected method due to their ability to provide in-depth meaning and explanations to responses. Quantitative methods may exclude the understanding of emotional responses, a child's inability to find the correct words, as well as complex non-verbal behavior and speech. Qualitative research embraces these elements, and also allows the interviewer an opportunity to provide clarification on questions to provide accurate responses and avoid misinterpretation and under-reporting. This consequentially increases the validity and reliability of the study drastically. Furthermore, adolescents are less likely to open up to strangers regarding sensitive issues for fear of repercussions or general insecurities. A skilled interviewer would be able to work around these obstacles and find useful data within them. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen in an attempt to control the tangents that were expected to arise when interviewing children. Short-span interviews also reduced boredom and limited attention issues. A semi-structured interview schedule also allowed the responses to remain on topic and useful. This also delimited the data and encouraged parsimony. The data were then analyzed and interpreted with the framework method in order to understand the results.

3.3 Location

The study took place in a central Durban school, as to increase the diversity of participants (ie. Not belonging to a class-specific geographical area such as Durban North, Umhalanga or Westville). This enabled a sample to best representative of the general schooling situation in urban South Africa. This also allowed the results to be endemic to South Africa, thus verifying the title of the study. The study took place at a well-known Primary School in Durban after ethical clearance from the university ethics committee was obtained.

3.4 Dataset

The data set included participants within the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grade, as shown by the literature, are key psychological development phases, as well as the most prevalent ages of bullying. The sample included 4 children from each of the mentioned grades. This ensured some variability between age groups, as well as allowed the potential for differences in perceptions between the age groups. The sample resulted in 8 male participants, and 8 female participants, and included a diverse set of cultural representation. There was at least one participant from English, Afrikaans, Shona Xhosa and Zulu cultural groups, where Zulu participants made up more than half of the sample.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

Participants were sampled at random from class lists, in order to prevent any selection bias. Participants were contacted out of the public eye in an effort to promote anonymity, and reduce the possibility of social impact, or victimization. Children were then given a confidentiality and participation agreement with a clause for parental permission, with explicit emphasis on voluntary participation, as well as confidence. It was made clear to those involved that the study does not encourage them to give out any incriminating or jeopardizing information (such as classmate's names, and/or to point towards any offenders) and merely deals with opinions and attitudes.

3.6 Interview procedure

Once the sampling framework was obtained, students were called randomly from classes by a neutral student that agreed to assist. Interviews were conducted in a spacious and comfortable waiting area in the school hall's foyer, where the student would feel comfortable and safe. The students were then greeted and reminded of the informed consent and confidentiality agreements that were sent to parents prior to the interviews. The child was then given an on-site choice whether or not to participate in the interview. Please see **Appendix C** for the informed consent document.

The prospective 17* participants were then individually administered semi-structured interviews with a general time frame of 30 minutes. This time frame was chosen in order to keep the participant focused and undistracted, giving clear and present responses. Semi-structured approaches were used in order to prevent the digression that is natural in an immature mind and help the participant stay on track. As this research deals with understanding subjectively created patterns of thought endemic to a particular context – no other form of data collection would be appropriate.

*One interview was disqualified due to the participant's unwillingness to contribute to the interview beyond 'yes/no' responses.

A voice recorder was used in order to capture accurate responses from participants, as well as for greater familiarization with the data after the interviews are concluded. Hand written notes were also taken to capture the manner of responses as well as non-verbal cues. These instruments were all collectively compiled to create an accurate and holistic account of the responses given. This will represent the complete data set.

After each interview the participant was asked to discreetly summon the following student on the sampling framework. Each grade group was interviewed on different days of the same week.

3.7 Data analytic Procedure

The data obtained through interviews underwent familiarization, and summaries were created immediately after the conclusion of each interview. Summaries and code names were created for familiarization outside of the interview context to protect the anonymity of the participants. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim, followed by the coding of data. The data were categorized according to the respective grade groups and analysed separately.

The data were then applied to the framework method of analysis, where several concepts emerged: grade and age, gender, language, culture, openness to discuss, tendency to be led by interviewer, awareness of the interview process, descriptions of family members, descriptions of friends, parental marital status, amount of time at the school, awareness of bullying, definition of bullying, specific types of bullying, prevalence of bullying, causes of bullying,

victim status, discussion of specific incidents, the respondents view of the victim, view of the bully, tendency to feel sympathy towards the bully, the importance of reporting bullying, hypothetical action, and further linguistic investigations. From these concepts further categorization was used and five major themes, encompassing the concepts were formed, namely; interview demeanour, understandings of bullying, perceptions of bullies and victims and help-seeking behaviour.

The results are stated, interpreted and discussed simultaneously to encourage succinct content and avoid recurrent results across multiple age categories.

3.8 Threats to validity and reliability & limitations

While social representations are vital aspects to consider when analyzing interactions within a population, it is also imperative to consider that the social representations of a population are heavily dependent on the population. South African results are expected to differ from other contexts. This means that the results of this study should be generalized with careful consideration that the study was designed to accentuate how social differences yield different social representations. Therefore, this study is limited in its application to the global field.

This research is limited by the relatively small sample size of this study. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized to larger groups or as a representation of the population. This study took place in only one school and in a sense excludes the diversity of social and economic class differences. The situation of bullying in private schools is in need of a completely separate investigation. Validity was prospectively controlled by selecting a sample from four separate age groups.

Conversely, as variance in age groups is a benefit to validity, it can also be considered a potential threat to validity. The age set chosen contains ages 10-13. During these ages, there is considerable variability of maturity with the onset of puberty. Care was given to structuring interviews in a way that caters for all age groups regardless of educational and emotional maturity.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the framework method of analysis, the interview data were familiarized, a thematic framework was then selected, and the data were then indexed, charted and mapped. The a priori categories that initially arose were refined into the following five themes: Interview demeanour, understanding of bullying, perceptions of bullies and victims and help-seeking behaviour.

4.1 Interview demeanour

During the course of an interview it is imperative that the participant feels comfortable and relaxed, to ensure honest and open responses to questions. Precautions must be made to avoid any conceptualization that results in insecurity, guilt, or discomfort, as these all inhibit the likelihood of valid responses. Since bullying is a sensitive topic that may cause many people to feel anxious or guilty, the issue of comfort was treated with utmost care to ensure that children would not feel any negative inhibitions, whether perceived or real.

The subjects showed a variety of different responses to the interview itself. One student was guarded and did not open up throughout the interview. However, most students were initially guarded but gradually opened up after interviewer prompts. Two students initially showed elements of paranoia as if they felt they were being accused of bullying and opened up once it was clear the focus was not on them. 12 out of 16 participants laughed at some point in the interview, signifying the successful creation of a comfortable interview environment. Interviews were held in neutral environments to prevent intimidation factors.

Children were called out of class by a fellow classmate and directed towards the interview room where the children were encouraged to sit on a couch. They were initially asked if they knew who the interviewer was and what the interviewer's purpose was. 15 out of 16 students immediately recognized the interviewer as regarding bullying research. The younger age brackets responded with "the bullying thing", whereas the older age bracket responded with the more specific "the bullying research". Since informed consent documents were sent home the previous week, students had had the opportunity to reflect on their opinions and ideas surrounding bullying. The single student who was unaware of the intentions of the interviewer

was immediately reminded before giving the interviewer consent to continue. One interview was disqualified as the student was completely unwilling to answer any questions, despite giving consent. This interview was replaced by selecting another participant from the sampling framework of that grade.

Level of comfort was gauged by the respondent's willingness to give information about their personal lives once the interviewer took personal interest. Participants were asked about their hobbies, friends and families; giving them time to find their confidence responding to topics on which they are the experts on, with the purpose of supplanting that confidence into proceeding answers.

Knowledge of the interview, while functionally useful in preparation, did pose an unexpected setback. Two students in the older age bracket seemed eager to present overzealous attitudes about their school experiences and eager to seem like good students. However, one of them while initially claiming "I really love this place" contradicted this attitude through later discussion and testimony. To ensure that accurate responses were given the interview schedule was structured so that all answers would be verified through other subtle questions. For example: One student was asked for a definition of bullying and claimed to be unaware. Later on, in the interview the student was asked to give examples of bullying, and the student was able to give an unofficial definition through those subsequent answers. Inconsistencies were noted and analyzed.

Since social representations are largely endemic to a particular group with shared experiences, the manner in which students were able to convey meaning to the interviewer was evidence of specific social representations. According to Thornberg (2010) "Any interaction, between individuals as well as groups, presupposes social representations (i.e., shared meanings), which enable the individuals to understand the various aspects of their social reality, to make sense of the world and communicate that sense to each other (p, 312)." This perspective is in stark contrast to the individual-focused paradigm of knowledge that is popular in psychological research today, and suggests knowledge as community focused phenomenon (O'Connor, 2012; Jovchelovitch, 2007). To approach students from a quantitative or impersonal way, would hinder the student's supposition that we are able to share meaning. Therefore, creating a rapport with the student allowed the interviewer to become a co-constructer of that social reality, and

simultaneously give the student confidence that the interviewer understands, and ensure meaningful responses. This was achieved by discussing the student's familial and friendship connections and finding a point of similarity to encourage some cohesion.

4.2 Understanding of bullying

4.2.1 Awareness of bullying

13 out of the 16 participants confidently agreed that bullying is present at school, and that it is a social problem. Awareness of bullying was gauged through the student's ability to provide any definition of what they think bullying is. Of the students that were able to provide a definition, there was significant variance in the understanding of what bullying is.

Two of the remaining three students who did not confidently assert a definition of bullying were able to provide their awareness of bullying through examples and illustrations in a very indirect way. For example, when the word "bullying" was substituted with "teasing" one student responded with "that happens a lot!". One student did not have a focused understanding of bullying at all and referred to bullying as "fighting". This common misconception in the lowest age group shows an inability to differentiate between cause and effect. Whereas several students were able to explain that fighting can be a result of bullying, one student saw it as an element of bullying.

However, although only one student was unable to provide a confident understanding of bullying separate from mere fighting, the majority of students in grade 4 all showed a similar pattern of thought on the concept of bullying. Although the other 3 students from that group were able to show their understanding of other elements of bullying, they too asserted that fighting was a type of bullying. This lack of differentiation between cause and consequence is an interesting area for further investigation. From a social representation theory perspective, it is likely that students assimilated ideas of 'bullying' to the pre-existing construct of fighting (O'Connor, 2012), thus representing them as equally categorized terms. Students at this age evidently need to be educated on the topic of bullying in a way that is specifically meaningful to them to ensure that the concepts are well understood. Understanding how to recognize bullying at an earlier age will help students manage this social issue more effectively and encourage a more mature approach to seeking help. Children at this age therefore also showed

a very limited understanding of the consequences of bullying that is congruous with the previous point. Conceptions of the consequences of bullying will be investigated further later in this chapter.

An age comparison of understandings of bullying confirmed the logical assumption that as student's ages increased, more refined understandings of bullying are exhibited. Categorized by their ability to see bullying as having the following characteristics: a) bullying involves exposing the victim to negative actions b) bullying is repeated c) bullying can be physical or mental d) bullying involves a power imbalance (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2013; Olweus, 1993; Olweus, 1996; Smith & Brain, 2000). Students in grade 4 had largely confused understandings of bullying, only expressing one of the above characteristics of bullying. Students in grade 5 had half confident, half confused understandings of bullying with some confident understandings including at least two of the above characteristics. Students in grade 6 had confident understandings of bullying including all four of the above characteristics. Students in grade 7 had very confident understandings of bullying including all four of the above characteristics and were able to articulate them.

The apparent increase of understanding with time in this latitudinal study could be attributed towards the Life Orientation curriculum of the student's grades (Nel, 2014). Students in the higher grades may have been exposed to more direct methods of education regarding bullying, accompanied by their more advanced cognitive development (Swartz et al., 2016), and therefore have a more refined understanding of the issue. Students in the lower grades may not be as well-educated and merely rely on personal experience or the communicated meaning distributed by students of a similar age. One would argue that this method of communication is distinctively flawed, since the students in question are more or less at the same developmental stage. However, Central Core theory, regarding social representation, argues that core elements of a representation can be shared between individuals in a group, and define that particular type of knowledge; however, the peripheral elements of a representation, a more flexible structure, is responsible for protecting the core from contradictions (Wachelke, 2012). The inclusion of contradictions posed by new information, such as education or general reflection, could lead to changes in the core representation, thus re-categorizing bullying in a different, or more specific category.

Several of the grade 4 and 5 students were also more prone to provide creative responses to gaps in their knowledge. For example, one student who reported complete dissociation from bullying presumed what it would be like to be bullied and gave somewhat detailed responses. For example: “I’m not sure, maybe he did something to him, yes he did something to him and it made him angry for what he did to him”. Literature has suggested that it is common for children to be unable to gauge the full extent of their own knowledge and may fill those gaps in their knowledge when there is no available expert to consult (Aguilar, Stoess, & Taylor, 2012). One grade 7 student expressed an unusual attitude to a situation she claimed she was foreign to. The student claimed she had never been a victim of bullying, but when discussing the factors inhibiting the reporting of incidents, such as bully threatening she responded with “No, they do not.” and proceeded to vehemently deny its occurrence a further two times. The reason for this almost aggressive denial was perplexing to the researcher, as it both contradicted the population’s reports, as well as denied common assumptions, especially since the student was taking a strong stance on a topic outside of her knowledge. From a social representational perspective, it is possible that her core assumptions around bullying were threatened, so her reaction was to deny or ignore the conflicting information (Wachelke, 2012). Another potential explanation is that it was a coping mechanism employed when a construct threatened to bring suppressed trauma to current thought.

4.2.2 Definition of bullying

Students from the different grade groups had varying conceptions of bullying in terms of how to define it. These definitions will be discussed according to the separate groups in order to create a comprehensive understanding of their social representations.

Bullying according to the grade 4s includes the following concepts: Hitting, stealing, teasing, touching, personal insults, name calling, gossip and fighting. The general understanding of bullying is present to most, however the manner in which the students articulate their understanding is simplistic. Bullying is seen as an uncomfortable, unrequited exploitation of the victim. One participant explained that “Bullying is something that, uh, that, not kind children like to do to other people, and that do, and that makes someone, the person that you are bullying uncomfortable”. Another student reported “bullying is when someone does a thing that you don’t like him or her to do to you... Like fighting and being nasty.” These definitions suggest that grade 4 students see bullying as a personal attack that is motivated primarily out

of “dislike” of the victim’s characteristics. For example, socioeconomic status was reported by one student as grounds for bullying: “They say their parents are poor” was an insult strategy used by a bully. Grade 4s also do not seem to have any sense of bullying as a relationship between a victim and a bully and represent bullying as something the victim gets caught in the cross-fire of. Furthermore, these definitions of bullying as previously mentioned, do not encompass other major definitive characteristics of bullying, such as power imbalance or repetition. After the definitions were given, students were given an opportunity to give examples of bullying. Three of the grade 4 students expressed fighting as examples of bullying. This inconsistency is congruous with the previous sub section in which it was evident that grade 4 students have a limited ability to differentiate between cause and consequence and represent bullying and fighting in the same category. This issue requires a psycholinguistic investigation.

In grade 5 the collective definition of bullying could be as follows: Bullying is when someone mentally or physically abuses somebody else unnecessarily, that can be seen through theft, violence or personal insults - possibly because you are new.

For the first time bullying is understood here as a relationship between the bully and the victim. Compared to that of grade 4, the grade 5 students have a heightened awareness of the victim as possessing particular characteristics. Here we can see that the victim can be new: “Bullying is a kind of thing when like, um, people don’t kind of like you when you are new to the school”. The victim can have something the bully wants: “like if you, if a family does not, cannot afford you money or give you money then you decide to go to other children and take the other children’s money”. The victim can be weak while the bully is strong: “I cannot fight back, I am not able to defend myself”. Awareness of the relationship present shows an understanding that there can be a power struggle between the bully and the victim that results in negative actions towards the victim. Students in grade 5 still have trace elements of confusion that fighting is an element of bullying. One student was able to recognize that there are different ways in which bullying can affect a person: “Oh, bullying is like, being like physical or mentally abusive to the other kids. Like, like, physically I’d say punching or kicking. Mentally would be making fun of the person, calling them words, and swearing”. In comparison to the grade 4 students, the grade 5 students were able to recognize more elements of bullying. While Grade 4s were unaware of the power imbalance, most grade 5 students are aware of how they relate to others. In terms of social representation, students are likely to discuss elements of bullying with one

another and co-construct the necessary elements for bullying. During grade 4 students seem to represent every other student as a potential friend, including the bullies. This attitude seems to shift by grade 5 as the previously held notion of trust necessary for friendship is challenged by negative behaviour. Furthermore, this student uses the word “abuse” that suggests an awareness of constitutional rights that are available to the student, and that bullying is a violation of those rights. This is a conceptual approach to bullying not considered by the younger grades. It is also interesting to note that one student in grade 5 suggests an extreme consequence of bullying: "Bullying is like when someone punches you or tries to stab you, that's a part of bullying". While serious bodily harm such as a stabbing is usually not part of bullying, it shows that this grade 5 student is beginning to represent bullying as a serious issue with potentially devastating consequences.

The grade 6 students express an even deeper understanding of the bullying relationship. It is defined as involving physical violence, name calling, gossip, social exclusion, theft, manipulation, and trickery. Seemingly the conception of bullying has become more complex, either due to maturing bullies, or a greater insight into bullying as a concept. One student expressed social manipulation as an element of bullying, where the bully exploited personal issues to cause the victim anxiety: “Bullying is when people tell you horrible things, like when something bad happens at home then the children know, and they know about it then they do something bad to make you feel anxious of that”. This quote, along with some suggestions by the other students imply that the students have an understanding of the motivation or knowledge of others. Where younger grades express understandings of bullying that are purely experiential, grade 6 students appear to propose explanations that encompass bully motives.

Another definition of bullying included the possibility of ‘friend-bullies’, a type of bully that Wei and Jonson-Reid (2011) term in their paper *Friends can hurt you*. “When people hit, call names, whisper about you to other people or chase you away when they are your friends”. This student appears to be encountering social exclusion from a group of ‘friends’ and is classifying it as bullying. This response was surprising since the same student had earlier expressed the importance of trust in friendships. Perhaps in a way to protect notions of friendship within her schemas, the student does not allow the conflicting information to change her conception of ‘friends’. This evidence of friend-bullies somewhat suggests unhealthy psychological coping,

as students appear to remain in ‘friendships’ that are abusive. Similarly, another student also defined bullying as betraying trust, and “tricking you” with the purpose of humiliating you.

Three of the four grade 6 students were able to define bullying as separate to fighting. This was evident through statements such as “he kept teasing the boy until one day he just snapped and stood up for himself, then they were fighting on the stairs”. This hints at the idea that behaviour observed by students allowed them to distinguish that fighting and bullying can happen independently and re-represent their conception of bullying. However, the remaining student, who did not separate fighting and bullying, when asked what the most common form of bullying was, responded with “probably fighting. Fighting happens a lot”. In order to make sense of this outlying response the interview was scrutinized to see if there was a linguistic suggestion that this was a poor choice of words, however the student consistently responded with above average English for a grade 6 student.

Grade 7 students, as expected expressed the most comprehensive definitions of bullying. “Well... bullying is when someone discriminates you about your religion your race or your height or size or anything about that” was one student’s definition, that brought in the conception that bullying is due to individual characteristics. Another student concurred by reporting: “...bullying is when someone actually makes someone feel bad about themselves... verbal or physical, but things that will actually hurt someone else, and make them feel bad about themselves.” Both of these definitions focus on the idea that bullies target individuals for specific reasons, and not at random. Race, gender, and physical appearance are areas these students feel that a bully can and will exploit. The inclusion of the bully’s intention to deteriorate self-image is expressed. The other two students defined bullying in terms of theft and suggested that it is “taking something without their permission, in front of them or you”. This heightened awareness of the bully’s intention to hurt seems to be a shared representation across all the grade 7 students. This therefore impacts the way they view bullies and victims respectively.

The differences in social representations across the four different grades suggests a process of learning that is expected during development. Specifically, the gradual increase in awareness of the different elements of bullying was present. Students in the younger grades appeared to represent bullying and fighting as mutually inclusive, whereas students in the older grades

represented fighting as an outcome of bullying. The intention of the bully was also considered more relevant to the older age groups, consistent with Aguiar et al. (2012). These differences should be noted for age-specific intervention procedures and are evidence that ‘blanket intervention strategies’ may not be appropriate.

4.2.3 Perceived Prevalence of Bullying

The conditions in which bullying occurs paints a broad picture of the problem. The how, when, where, extent and the impact of reduction strategies are illustrated here.

The grade 4 learners asserted that bullying “happens a lot”. Fighting, hitting and teasing are perceived as the most common forms of bullying. It is seen during breaks but most commonly after school. Students report that it happens even when prefects and teachers are present - as they do not have the ability to watch everything. Incidents occur out in the open while other students are often around. Theft however, is assumed to happen when students are not present.

According to responses by the grade 4 students it seems as though bullies are perceived to take advantage of a lack of present authority or supervision. They further perceive that bullies are not completely cautious and initiate incidents out in the open without measures to protect themselves. The bully is therefore seen as someone without an understanding of consequence. Theft however, is seen as a negative experience that is done in secret. In this regard it is unclear if theft is actual bullying, or merely a negative act that the students represent along with bullying. Similarly, to the manner that grade 4 students perceive fighting is a part of bullying, perhaps isolated incidents of theft are too.

Perhaps the apparent contrast between overt and discreet incidents represent a difference in perspective on the seriousness of bullying and theft. Bullying seems to be less serious, as it is based on subjective experience, whereas theft is objectively seen as a criminal offence. This could be a comment on how societal values and norms are translated to children during early development: an emphasis on keeping legal parameters, and a lack of emphasis on keeping within interpersonal parameters.

Grade 4 understandings of bullying prevalence are formed primarily on personal experience and what they have seen. There is a limited attempt at understanding what has been happening outside of personal experience.

The majority of grade 5 students claim that bullying is on the decline. When it does happen, it happens most frequently during break and after school. According to students it sometimes occurs in the presence of teachers who do not notice it. Nelson et al. (2015) had a similar finding, where students reported a perception of bullying as a risk-based game that bullies attempted to get away with and that keeping it a secret from the teacher was a motivational force. Learners in grade 5 also report that teasing and mockery are the most common forms of bullying although physical incidents do occur, and frequently lead to fighting. Although fighting is seen, the cause is seldom known, so most students assume that it is due to some form of bullying. However, most of the grade 5 students report that knowledge of bullying is conveyed through gossip, as not everybody is always around to see it. This means that the true prevalence of bullying could be exaggerated, distorted, or even underestimated. If knowledge is socially conferred without empirical evidence, it can lead to false conceptions.

The grade 5s differ from the grade 4s as they are aware of issues that are separate from their own personal experiences. Gossip and regaled stories form subjective understandings of what is happening to the people in the social groups around them. These subjective constructions make their experiences and understandings unique to their specific context. Grade 5 students seem to have a higher sense of empathy for what others are experiencing compared to grade 4 students.

Just like the grade 4s it seems the grade 5s also believe that bullying will go unnoticed by teachers and prefects. However, despite the subjective nature of grade 5s understanding of bullying prevalence, they unanimously agree that bullying is on the decline.

The Grade 6 students reported that bullying is a common occurrence. They also agree with the grade 5 students that it occurs even in the presence of teachers.

Sometimes when there is a teacher, but the teacher is not watching you and the person takes you in a corner and then they hit you, something like that, then that threaten you if you tell the teacher they will do extra of that (Participant 11)

This student points out bully preservation, where the bully is cautious to avoid consequences and therefore takes measures to remain unseen by authority. It also shows an attitude of an unsafe environment that a teacher is not effective in deterring. For example, a grade 6 learner mentioned "...its around during class time like when teachers are marking". Another of the grade 6 students also reported a lack of faith in the teacher's ability to rectify the situation: "I

was told my teacher, she said she couldn't do nothing". In the same situation the student asserted that when the teacher did try to rectify the problem, the frequency of the incidents decreased only temporarily: as it later resurfaced. Within these two reports a lack of trust in a teacher's ability to deter bullying is present.

Two students in grade 6 also claim that bullying is on the decline. This may be due to physical development where students are slowly reaching the apex of the schooling system. As illustrated by the literature, bullying is most frequently the result of a power imbalance either physically or sociologically (Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016; Smith & Sharp, 1994), and as with normative development many physical or social resources may increase during these ages and reduce the likelihood of power imbalances (Chaux & Castellanos, 2015). However, it is important to notice that both of these participants are male. During the ages of 12 and 13, boys start experiencing the early onset of puberty (Swartz et al., 2016), and therefore grow in their physical maturity in relation to formative grades. This could explain a perceived decline in the bullying rates. However, according to the other two participants, bullying has not declined at all.

Of the grade 7 students, half agreed that bullying is a common occurrence, and takes place despite the presence of authoritative figures, such as teachers or prefects. Furthermore, they assert that bullying continues despite action being taken; for example, repeat offenses. Conversely the other half of the grade 7 sample claimed that bullying does not occur often. Both surmise that bullying is on the decline due to school management taking the issue seriously. According to these students, school management has made reporting very accessible and has therefore led to the decline of incidents. Theft was labeled as the most common form of bullying; however, discrimination and manipulation were also reported as common types.

The grade 7s' view on the prevalence of bullying is dichotomous. The apparent contradiction in perceptions may be due to subjective understandings. As students are not witness to all cases of bullying (especially not ones in the numerous formative grades) their ability to assess the full prevalence of bullying is limited. Furthermore, specific students' understanding of bullying relies largely on their personal experience with bullying. Some students may have experienced bullying several years in the past and not recently, therefore creating the false consensus that bullying has declined, compared to a student who has experienced bullying recently, and assume that bullying is rife. This was the case with the four students sampled here. Students

who had been victims in the distant past illustrated bullying as rare, and students who had been victims recently illustrated bullying as common. This poses an interesting social representational question: If grade 5 and 6 students showed greater understandings of knowledge external to their own experiences, why then do grade 7's appear to hold to subjective experiences as the basis of their understanding? Unfortunately, this question is beyond the scope of this paper, yet it poses an interesting gap to be investigated by further research. To get a full understanding on the changes in perception over time, a longitudinal study would be required. The sample size for each respective grade is also too small to accurately represent the perceptions of each respective grade's sub-populations, however, cross-sectionally, some observations about the gross school population can be made:

There is an apparent lack of faith in the presence of teachers or prefects to make a significant impact on reducing bullying. 6 students expressed that bullying incidents frequently take place in the presence of teachers or prefects. This emphasizes a number of issues: a) supervision is not effective in school b) bullies are aware of how to exploit the teacher's attention c) bullies do not fear or do not see the consequence as sufficient to deter deviant behaviour d) a lack of faith in teachers' and prefects' presence in deterring bullying can lead to guilt on behalf of the victim. I.e. Indirectly accusing a teacher of inadequate supervision when reporting an incident. For example, one student expressed concern that reporting bullying as it could imply "...the teachers are not there, and then not responsible for the children being bullied". This could lead to guilt or fear and perpetuate under-reporting and repeat victimization.

There is dissension between the participants about the true prevalence of bullying. Roughly half of the students report that bullying is on the decline. However, it is unclear to what the students attribute this decline. Students mere attempt to answer this question illustrate a socially subjective understanding of the school environment. Since the ability to know whether or not bullying is on the rise or decline is based on personal experience and socially derived information, the reliability of this assertion is not high. It is apparent that the prevalence of bullying is a perceived notion that differs between individuals based on their social constructions surrounding bullying. However, this socially constructed idea of the prevalence of bullying is not collective as it is not shared within the respective age groups. It can therefore be concluded that the ideas regarding the prevalence of bullying are constructed according to cognitive experiences.

It is important to note that there is no guarantee that the students' answers were telling of their true understandings. As noted previously it is probable that some students simply assume behaviour and outcomes without a real knowledge on the topic. For example, the student who claimed was never bullied outright denied that some students may be intimidated into silence by bullies.

4.2.4 Causes of bullying

In Grade 4 the representations on the causes of bullying were diverse. Bully arrogance and a lack of respect for the victim were common explanations for causing bullying.

I think they like to do this because they think they are better than others around them. And they think that if you bully someone that makes you better. But it doesn't even make you better, you are making the other people around you miserable. (Participant 03)

This attitude, shared by most of the grade 4s, shows a shared understanding that equality between peers is a normal and expected behaviour based on respect: and the bullying is therefore caused by a lack of that mutual respect. Since all of the participants in grade 4 were from African cultural backgrounds, it can be theorized that this shared respect asserted by the grade 4s could be based on the African principle of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is a philosophy of shared meaning between people in the sense where members of a system formulate their identities based on social connection (Metz & Gaie, 2010). However, this theory cannot be tested without a more comprehensive view of the bully. Cultural principles are not valid predictors of behaviour, since deviance and anomie can still occur within a homogeneous cultural group.

One student in grade 4 attributed the act of theft as a crime of need. Saying that the theft of lunch could be due to the family's inability to provide food for the child, and they are compelled then to take food from those in proximity. One student in grade 4 blatantly denied any understanding of what may cause bullying. Repeated "I am not really sure" was chalked up to interviewee fatigue and another topic was then selected.

Grade 5 students had differing ideas on the causes of bullying. Some students offered multiple possible causes for multiple types of bullying. Crimes of need were again attributed as the cause for theft. "That family maybe cannot afford food for them, yes, and so they decided to take on other children's food" was one student's explanation of the theft of school lunches. The exploitation of new or weaker students was reported by one student to be his understanding for

what causes bullying. It was clear from his report that this was a direct personal experience, and his understanding of what caused it. This boy was admittedly extremely small for his age, younger than his classmates by a year, and new to the school. These attributes made him a very different person within the culture of the school, and perhaps a cultural outsider. "I think the reason why they do that is because they think that, like, you are shorter than that person, people think you are 'nerds' and stuff like that, and they think you are scared of them" was his explanation for why bullies feel the need to act negatively towards the victim. He hinted at the presence of a power struggle in the previous quote, one confirmed by another student from this same group: Bullies are seen to thrive off of power imbalances and act in a negative way towards the victim. One student expressed that bullying is caused when the bully "... does not get what he wants and then he gets angry". This idea suggests a perception that any person who has less power of any form could be subject to bullying. This is consistent with most bullying research that examines the power struggle (Chaux & Castellanos, 2015; Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Pellegrini, 2002; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001; Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Another student hypothesized that "Maybe it's their family. Maybe the family also teases the children". The same student further stated that this type of behaviour is learned from older children and is then passed around. This perspective suggests that this student is aware of how the family and early development could lead to changes in behaviour. This perspective is consistent with Thornberg (2010) who found *social learning* as a perceived cause of bullying by grade 5 students.

Group initiation was also suggested as a cause of bullying. Students who wish to belong to a specific group hope to show their commitment in the form of initiation by asserting dominance over another. One student reported this occurred from a group of friends who, in an attempt to join a social group, decided to resort to "proving yourself worthy to be in this group". Social positioning is a commonly presumed cause of bullying (Thornberg, 2010; Nelson et al., 2018).

Gender role stereotypes were also implicated as possible causes for bullying in schools. One student reported that his inability to find friends with his male classmates led to him making close friends with the girls in his grade. According to the student this gender disparity was seen as a weakness that the bully was able to exploit. The student reported being excluded on this basis, with the bullies implying that he was a homosexual. He reported "So they use to just

tease me and tell that “you’re gay” and stuff like that. And say, “why do you play with girls, come and play with boys”. Gender representations on bullying are a ripe area of inquiry, as gender representations heavily impact daily interactions. Gender issues will be discussed further in the following theme; however, further research is recommended for social representations of gender in primary school students. For the scope of this study; sexual and gender discrimination were perceived as possible causes of bullying.

Grade 5 students continued to suggest that bullying is caused when the bully expects something and does not receive it. Examples of which include when a bully demands lunch, attention or respect. Students assert that failing to provide that expectation sufficiently causes the bully to act in anger towards the victim. As with the grade 4s, one student refused to give any account of bullying causes. “I really can’t say”.

Several grade 6 students had similar ideas regarding bullying as the grade 5 students did. A power imbalance was suggested by two students who saw bullying as born out of an interaction. “They did because, they were older than me” is a phrase common to many students who have experienced bullying. Students who are older, wealthier, more popular or more physically or emotionally mature have more resources than students who lack in that area, and therefore create a power imbalance (Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016). For example, one student reports: “they will ask me for money, if I don't give them money they will say “go away from us you don't have money you are poor””. Similarly, as mentioned by the grade 5 students, when a bully expects something and is not satisfied, the bully may become angry, and this according to students can lead to either bullying or fighting. In a situation where a bully was expecting respect, the student showed the following example “...then the child just keep quiet and face the other way like going - then the other one gets angry because he's thinking that someone is turning it their back on him”. The outcome of this interaction seems to be governed by the resources at the disposal of the two parties involved: the ‘bully’ and the ‘victim’ - both of which are not necessarily termed correctly unless the outcome is imbalanced. If the ‘victim’ does not have the resources to match the ‘bully’ during this power struggle, bullying can ensue, as the bully will have dominance in some way. However, if the ‘victim’ does have the resources to match or attempt to match the ‘bully’ during the power struggle a fight may ensue . The outcome of the initial interaction where a power balance is tested will determine the bully-victim relationship. However, a power imbalance does not directly ensure a power struggle.

The strong does not always prey on the weak. However, when the strong does, we are able to understand why.

The power imbalance present here is particularly prevalent as some students in grade 6 are beginning to experience the early onset of puberty. This will lead to imbalances in physical and emotional differences, that could contribute to the bullying problem (Pellegrini, 2004; Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016). For example, male students may grow taller, stronger and have a more intimidating presence on students who have not reached that developmental stage yet. This would make it easier for this student to take advantage of the power imbalance. Female students may differ in emotional maturity, belittling another for 'childish' behaviour (Besag, 2006). These attributes can also be seen as resources that determine the power balance between two students.

Similar to grade 5 ideas of entitlement, the word "respect" was used by a student to explain what a bully wants from the victim. The student further expressed that failure to show that respect leads to negative outcomes for the victim. The Oxford dictionary has multiple definitions for the idea of respect. As a noun it is defined as "A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements", and as a verb defined as "have due regard for (someone's feelings, wishes, or rights)" (Oxford, 2010). These definitions directly imply that the bully feels as though they are deserving of admiration for their qualities or achievements, or that their feelings, wishes or rights are to be regarded. These definitions for respect do not justify an act of oppression; pointedly, they do the opposite. People seeking true respect do not pose a threat to receive it, it is a reaction to existing qualities. Therefore, either the bully has an inflated sense of self, or they feel as though they deserve to be revered because of their accomplishments/resources. This is a social representation on respect. During the ages in question it seems as though students have created an idea of respect that is not consistent with its classical definition. Respect in their minds could be associated more correctly with the words "fear" or "reverence". These words signify a different type of relationship compared to "respect". Fear and reverence both illustrate attitudes of humility or inadequacy on behalf of the subject, and qualities worthy of fear and reverence on behalf of the subject. The expectation of the bully to be respected by the victim is an expectation of submission.

Another student posed that bullies act this way because it is what they have learned by being victims in the home. Similar to previous research a student suggested "I think they bully us

because they are bullied, maybe by their parents, or by other friends or other strangers and they take it out on us" (Sutherland & Cressey, 1999; Thornberg, 2010). This perspective shows that this grade 6 student has an understanding of the far-reaching impact of social learning. The influence of family, friends or strangers could all be attributed as possible precipitous factors. This assertion shows the student's understanding that bullying is not an isolated incident, and that many factors could be responsible for making it happen. This attitude sees the bully as a victim in another context, and not solely responsible for the outcome that is bullying. However, this perspective does not place the entire onus on social learning. The main focus of this statement is "... they take it out on us". This suggests frustration that the bully is supposedly experiencing from being a victim. Frustration is a very normal quality of victimization according to the results of this study, however the outlet for this frustration is governed by the resources discussed above. According to this student the primary cause of this frustration is a power imbalance being abused in other areas of the bully's life. "...parents, or by other friends or other strangers" shows the student's understanding of how different entities can impact the bullying relationship. Frustration born out of abuse by a parent may make a child feel powerless and without much volition and cause that child to seek power and control in other social settings (Hazler, Carney, Green, Powell, & Jolly, 1997; Sanders & Pbye, 2004). Frustration born out of abuse by friends show that the victim has desires for close personal relationships, as the assailants are still called 'friends'. This can give way to confusion and frustration that may lead to an outlet of that frustration in other settings. The phrase "or other strangers" shows an incorrect understanding of the definition of bullying. For bullying to be confirmed the interaction must be repeated over time (Sanders, 2004). Therefore, the bully cannot be a stranger to the victim - this student's understanding of bullying in this context is abuse. Interestingly students represent the issue of bullying as a violation of one's rights, and therefore seem to correlate bullying and abuse as mutually exclusive. Although bullying is abuse, abuse however, is not endemic to bullying.

The understanding that the bully may experience frustration as a result of being victimized is a clear indication of a more mature sense of empathy that was not found in the younger grades. According to the literature empathetic understandings and perceptions of other people's knowledge systems is a trait that grows and matures along with normative development (Aguar et al., 2012; Thompson & Gullone, 2003). However, the relationship between different grades and age development is not a reliable relationship, as there is age diversity within grades, and developmental diversity within ages. Therefore, a weak correlation can be made between age

and matured sense of empathetic attitudes and perception of other people's knowledge systems. Although this study cannot cover the complexities of early pubescent development and how it impacts bullying, it does tell us that this is a fertile area for further research.

Cultural religious understandings of bullying were also mentioned by a grade 6 learner. When asked what the cause of bullying may be the response was as follows: "You see what my mother told me; that if somebody bullies you it's just like the devil telling you something to do that to that person and that person has a demon inside of them". This cultural understanding of bullying has not been overt in any other student's responses up until now. Firstly, it is important to note that this child's mother has passed down cultural wisdom to her son, as in many African cultures it is the mother's responsibility to teach children about cultural practices and beliefs (Kapff, 2003). This point may signify that the student is unsure or unconvinced of his own representations, since he offers it as her understanding and not his, or it could show his reverence to his mother's teaching as a form of citation. Culture is passed down during formative development, social learning and instruction (Macionis & Plummer 2012). At the outset it must be noted that culture and religion are not exclusive terms - religion and culture can differ significantly in some cases. However, in many African traditional religions, culture and religion are symbiotic in the sense that religion subsides and is fleshed out through cultural practices and values (Ilogu, 1963). Secondly cultural understandings of religion and superstition, by definition deal with the supernatural. This student, in an attempt to give a cause for bullying, says that the bully is possessed to do evil by the devil or a demon inside of him. This idea gives the direct implication that bullying is not exclusively the will or action of the bully, and that the bully is merely a pawn utilized by the spirit/demon. Furthermore, the idea suggests that the resultant action of the bully must then be evil. This ideology represents an interesting perspective on the bully, and the causes of bullying itself, that differ from social scientific knowledge. As the supernatural lies outside of the boundaries of the scientific method, the phenomenon is impossible to measure or study accurately and can only be described, and not quantified. This is why religious views on bullying has not been adequately covered by past research. However, cultural religious understandings are still a pertinent area of inquiry especially in the South African context, where culture and religion are often inextricable and therefore shape all understanding.

One grade 6 student hinted at gender differences as a cause for bullying. Emasculation was pointed as a precipitous factor in causing bullying from both male and female students. The student regaled

Girls were teasing me about my sexual body... They were teasing my bum, even when we were swimming, they were saying I was wearing a panty. But then all the boys had to laugh at me then I stopped, I even wanted to stop (Participant - 09)

Masculinity and femininity are also a socio-culturally constructed concepts that differ between cultural groups and over time. As mentioned previously, these cultural values are learned socially through primary socialization, and according to social representation theory, through *assimilation* and *operationalisation* of new experiences. The presence of adversity on the basis of a lack of masculinity from both male and female students in the school show a shared understanding of gender roles within that population. Since this age represents a time of social learning, students may have confused ideas about gender roles in a cultural context as they come into contact with different cultures in the schooling environment. Section 4.3.1 of this paper will further discuss children's social representations on bullying and how it relates to gender.

All of the grade 7 participants unanimously agreed that the primary cause of bullying lies in the home of the bully. For example, one student suggests "Um, I think, ummm they do that because um maybe they have issues at home". The students speculate that the bully may be subject to attention deprivation, abuse, confusion, grief or poverty that lead to an outcome of aggression. For example, one female student regaled "Sometimes there are problems at home sometimes they don't think that they are good enough". These suggestions imply an understanding that the bully may develop a low sense of self-esteem from issues in the home that they compensate for in the schooling environment. One student's explanation was that "...maybe they have issues at home that they can't deal with and are not happy about. So, they take their anger out on everyone else". Another student expressed that "Ok well, maybe the person doesn't get enough attention at home and maybe at home they don't make that good lunch, or she gets beaten every day for something she doesn't know it doesn't understand". These statements make a case that the bully is subject to negative influences in their lives that lead to confusion and therefore frustration. As discussed previously, this frustration may be

due to an inability to find control in a confused and powerless situation. Therefore, according to the grade 7 student's understanding; frustration results in causing bullying.

The issue of domestic violence as a perceived cause for bullying shows an awareness of several factors: a) that domestic violence against children does occur b) that abuse is likely to reduce self-esteem c) that what happens to children at home has some manifestation in attitudes or behaviour. This student's response about perceptions of household abuse is congruous to previous research (Lucas, Jernbro, Tindberg, & Janson, 2016).

The power struggle mentioned above was also suggested by one student as a motivator for bullying: "they are bigger, and they have the power to just bully anyone". This response shows the socially represented idea that size is proportionate to strength and carries the connotation of more power. Size is seen as a resource that makes the bully capable of asserting dominance, and according to this quote, bullies are able to bully *anyone*. This idea suggests that students who have witnessed or experienced bully dominance make the assumption that other students have the same experiences and perspective. The likelihood of a bully being capable of bullying *anyone* on the basis of size and power makes this assumption unrealistic. This false consensus is confirmed by other students in this same grade who report that they have not been victims before. This representation therefore holds the idea that many peers are subject to the same experiences and attitudes that may be contrary to empirical observations.

One grade 7 student also suggested need as a possible cause for bullying. This is reported by several grade groups as a type of bullying, as the victim is receiving negative actions on behalf of a perceived bully repeatedly (as per our definition this is classified as bullying), However, the context of the incident is more complicated than following a mere definition. The theft of food may be exclusively theft unless it is the bully's express objective to subjugate the victim. For example, one grade 7 student explains "Taking things without permission in front of them", as a perfect example of bullying theft as the bully has the intention to hurt (Wolke & Lereya, 2015; Zequinão et al., 2017). This has been reported amid the subjects where bullies purposefully demand food or take it in sight of the victim. In such cases it is clear that the purpose of bullying could be two-fold. Partially to fulfil a need, and partially to encourage subjugation. Therefore, theft of food on its own could be removed as a type of bullying in the dogmatic sense. As if the act includes only fulfilling a need as one of the above purposes: it is merely theft. However, social representations are not always constructed from objective rationality and students may fail to see or understand the context of the action. Consequently,

any act of theft could be seen as an act of bullying, regardless of whether or not it included an intentional consequence of subjugation. Furthermore, any act could be perceived as an act of subjugation, where it is merely the subject's assumptions that bring them under the category of victimization. What this means is; students can become victims according to their own perceptions, regardless of whether victimization was the intention of the actor.

Discrimination was pointed at by one student who explained that discrimination was the primary cause for bullying. This student expressed that discrimination on the basis of size, height, or race is a factor that contributes towards bullying. She defined Well... bullying is when someone discriminates you about your religion your race or your height or size or anything about that". Common in the paradigm of discrimination exists a majority and a minority: "Well... there's not a lot of white children at the school, and some think, it was last month there was a grade 7 boy who teased a white boy because he was white". What causes discrimination between the majority and the minority is a sense of power that one party has and the other lacks. In cases of majority and minority, the majority has numeric or popularity power while the minority lacks in both. This creates a power struggle that makes it possible for discrimination to occur.

Another student suggested that "peer pressure" is to blame for bullying. When discussing the bully as an objective person the student responded, "she's doing a lot of bad things cos she's disrespectful to teachers, she does a lot of bad things, and my grandmother just says its peer pressure". Throughout the interview this student draws upon several sources for her understanding of what causes the bully to act. Firstly, the student draws upon contextual experience: The bully does not exclusively exhibit delinquently through bullying, but in other areas of school life as well, such as disrespect to teachers, betrayal of friends and manipulation of authority. The holistic approach to understanding another person's motives shows a heightened sense of empathy for a person outside of the self. Secondly, the student draws on the knowledge provided to her by education or instruction, in this case, from her grandmother. As mentioned previously, African cultures place a high emphasis on the extended family, and the wisdom of an elder is highly respected. Therefore, the recognition that the bully's motivation is out of peer pressure is assimilated into this student's representations of the bullying relationship.

Peer pressure is seen as a powerful driving force for behaviour across all areas of social psychology. Desire for acceptance within a group leads to actions of initiation or perceived acts

of proof. However, it is interesting that the bully is reported as subject to peer pressure, where in other areas of conversation suggest that the bully is the apex figure. Why then does a bully succumb to peer pressure? The answer is pervasive. The understanding of the bully from this perspective asserts that the bully desires group affiliation or acceptance. This represents an apparent contradiction - in cases of peer pressure it seems as though the bully does not have the secure resource of social power. This means that the bully may seem more powerful than they are in reality. It is also likely that when pursuits of social acceptance from peers are unsuccessful outcomes can include diminished self-esteem and sense of belonging. Consequently, the drive for social acceptance can be perpetuated by the lack thereof.

Across all age-grade categories there is an increasing sense of empathetic understanding of the motivational forces surrounding the bully with increasing ages. Where the younger students exhibited understandings of bullying that are directly observable such as bullying as a consequence of a negative attitude, the older students showed understandings that were based on subjective assumptions such as the impact of domestic abuse, self-esteem and peer pressure. The social representations present in this section illustrate how important empathetic understandings can be to understand bullying in a healthy way. It was also found that student's with increased empathy for bullies perceived a more positive prognosis for their situation. This suggests that more empathetic understandings of the bullying relationship have an impact on coping with bullying. Further research is recommended for a comprehensive analysis of empathy and coping in school children who have been bullied.

4.2.5 Consequences of bullying

The consequences of bullying can occupy several different perspectives in the minds of primary school children. There are the consequences for the bully, consequences for the victim, and even consequence for the school.

Grade 4 learners unanimously suggested that the consequence of bullying is that the bully will be reported to or sent to the principal's office and get punished in a manner proportional to the severity of the action. This narrow view of the consequences for the bully show that bullying is not considered a serious crime in their eyes. Merely being punished by the principle suggests a slap on the wrist, as opposed to serious intervention. On the behalf of the victim, students

reported that an incident of bullying “broke their feelings”. This understanding shows that the world is seen through physical representations. The word “broke” is a word commonly applied to material objects that have reached the maximum tension before breaking. This phrase suggests that the subject sees feelings in the same way as a material object in the same way that the expressive phrase ‘broken heart’ refers to emotional hurt.

Two of the grade 4 student’s however, had some semblance of the physical consequences of bullying. While one student suggested that a victim of bullying could get sent to the hospital for injuries, the other student regaled how a peer was actually sent to the hospital. When explaining an altercation, the result was as follows: “then someone took a stone and hurt him here. And then there was coming blood and he have to go to the hospital.” This student’s experience shows that there is a very real understanding of how physical bullying can result in extreme harm on behalf of the victim. However, this student’s true understanding of the consequence was later found to be quite superficial. When asked why it’s important to tell a grown up when an incident is seen the student explained “because maybe something big will happen, busy fighting, and don’t want to sit together.” The grand consequence of a serious incident is that the students may no longer wish to remain on friendly terms with one another. While to grade 4 students this may seem like a serious consequence, to many others this would not be considered a serious consequence. This illustrates how much students in this age category value the closeness of those around them. Even those who exhibit negative behaviour are valued as potential friends. This naive attitude could explain why distrust is so common in the later grades. The poor outcome of objective trust during this age could lead to the increase of guarded mentalities in the future.

Several grade 5 students expressed that retaliation is a possible consequence of bullying. When a victim reacts to a bully’s actions fighting is seen as a common result. To several of the grade 4 learners fighting was seen as a type of bullying, however, grade 5 students seem to understand that fighting is a product of bullying rather than an aspect of it. Fighting, naturally has physical consequences that are unfavorable for the victim. It is interesting to notice that even in examples of fighting the student still retains the constructs of ‘bully’ and ‘victim’ for the respective characters. These labels could suggest several possible attitudes: a) the bully is the one who started the conflict b) the bully is considered the likely victor of the conflict c) the bully who was attributed this title by reputation, and not this specific situation. Regarding instances of fighting is can be difficult to distinguish power differences as the outcome is

usually the only part to be seen. As discussed by several grade 6 learners, sometimes you only see the fight, not what caused it. However, the consequences of bullying related fighting remain largely physical.

Because you would hurt somebody very badly and then would damage a lot of places, like maybe the spinal cord and yes. And it might hurt the person's future, yes, and if for example, if I want to be a model and I got into a fight then I hurt my leg, I would not be able to walk on the stage again, yes, and I won't have a brighter future - (Participant 07)

This student's understanding of how retaliation can lead to adverse consequences for the victim. Physical damage like spinal cord damage, or damage that could potentially inhibit future success. This student's outlook on the consequence of actions is far reaching, as the student notices how situations that occur now in grade 5 could affect the gross future of the individual. According to this student, career opportunities, and other potential opportunities could be jeopardized by fighting. Further understandings of physical elements of bullying included "... he could give you a bruise", which illustrates the apparent consequence of bullying. 'Bruise' is a term that represents any form of physical bodily harm.

Another consequence according to the grade 5 learners is the involvement of prefects, teachers and parents where punishment or resolution is the expected outcome. "Then like our principal would give them demerits or they would call the parents. And the parents or the teacher will sort this out". The involvement of teachers implies consequences within the school, whereas the involvement of parents implies consequences that are beyond the school. However, the grade 5 students do not illustrate what form of punishment could expect a bully at these levels of intervention. It is possible that these assumptions lie outside the boundaries of past experience and "... our principal will give them demerits", is the most serious consequence imagined.

One student expressed the adverse consequences bullying may have on the victim:

Because if they do they'll end up, um, like when they come to school every day, and the bully says, "what do you have for me" and then after that eventually you will bow to them and give them your money and then you don't have lunch - (participant 06).

This student illustrates how the continual receipt of bullying can lead to hunger and poverty at school, but more importantly this student shows an understanding of the subjugation of the victim. In this scenario the student asserts that bullying is a continuous act and not an isolated

event, which is consistent with the definition of the term, and therefore has effects that will change over time. Multiple incidents of bullying according to this student results in stark similarities with slavery. The victim “bows” to the bully and provides all the resources possible to appease that bully in an attempt to protect himself. This shows total submission of the victim to the bully. While this example appears to be a hypothetical extreme it shows this student’s representations on the bullying relationship: repeated bullying leads to decreased power of the victim and results in total subjugation.

A final consequence of bullying as illustrated by the grade 5 students the resultant mental state of the victim. During a personal recount of the student’s own victimization, the student expressed the following consequence: “I felt sad and I didn't know what to do, so, and I don't know why she did it, so that's why I felt so upset and I felt what she was doing what she did wrong was actually wrong.” Confusion and unhappiness are the result of bullying without an explicit cause or reason. In situations where it is not clear why the bully acts this way towards the victim, it is possible for any number of conclusions to be made. This could be potentially detrimental to the victim’s self-esteem and overall self-worth and leave them with an inexplicable sense of guilt. Guilt that can reduce the likelihood of help-seeking behaviour. The topic of guilt will be further discussed in 4.4.2.

In grade 6 the understanding of bullying consequences gradually increases. In situations of bullying where the perpetrator is or once was a friend of the victim the sense of betrayal was reported to lead to a lack of trust. Poor trust among friends during school years could potentially lead to poor attachment styles later on in life (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). With the onset of puberty and fluctuating hormones, the complexities of social interaction only get more complicated as the student grows up, therefore a lack of trust now could lead to reduced opportunity for meaningful personal relationships later in life. Several students also reported that bullying can lead to an angry victim. One particular student reacted to bullying by learning how to fight in an effort to gain self-defense, however, the student’s attitudes were illustrated by the statement "now they respect me because they know". It seems that this student has become hardened through anger towards those who have caused offence. In such situation’s retaliation could be possible but not guaranteed. Many students would not have the physical resources, or the demeanor to fight, however, anger exists, and it has the potential to fester. Payne and Gotteredson (2004) assert that bullying in school is strongly associated with aggressive behaviour for victims, possibly due to frustration, confusion or repression.

In terms of the perceived consequence for the bully students suggested superficial punishments. Several students asserted that being called into the principal's office is the primary response, whereas detention is the main consequence. According to a student who has been the victim of repeated bullying the consequence is usually just a warning. When asked if anyone has been expelled from the school the student responded with "Hmm, not most of the time, but if they tell you that if you do that one more time you are going to get kicked out". According to this student the consequence is a warning, followed by more serious warnings with repeated instances. However, this particular student has expressed multiple situations where the bully has been confronted by authority and has not received any notable punishment. The contradiction between this student's statements and the context of bullying implies that the student has a false sense of trust in the schooling system despite the apparent contradiction. "If they tell you that if you do that one more time you are going to get kicked out" suggests that the authorities of the school must be made aware of the incidents in order to provide any form of help. However, according to this student that action is never made despite repeated instances and repeated reporting of the issue. The school's administration may be making efforts to rehabilitate the bully, or perhaps protect the image of the school, or merely turning 'a blind eye'. Regardless of why, the student sees the school's unwillingness to expel a bully who is in repeated violation of school rules. In an interview with another grade 6 student the importance of the school's reaction to delinquency was exemplified. In a situation where the student attempted to report an act of bullying and "she said she couldn't do nothing". In a separate incident the same student reported an act of bullying "she told me that I must believe in myself". Although the promotion of self-belief is a useful tool in counteracting the effects of bullying, it needs to be done in conjunction with a firm distinction of the school rules and consequences. For in this specific situation where the intervention by authority figures did not occur the student decided to take the matter upon himself and developed an attitude of retaliation with a striking vigil-anti philosophy.

In this situation it becomes apparent that the actions and reactions of teachers to bullying have a profound impact on the victim's perception of justice. It is imperative that authority figures in the school take all efforts to foster a safe environment for reporting, as well as clear and explicit reaction on issues of bullying.

When conducting interviews; every student was asked about particular students or groups of students labeled as "bullies", and 75% stated that they would take steps in order to avoid

coming into contact with those students. Students suggest that a constant state of paranoia and anxiety plague the victim for the duration of the bullying. These reactions lead to some maladjustment within the school, for example interrupting one's schedule to avoid the bully. When discussing bully avoidance, one student explained that during lunch breaks "...we go slowly and finish our food then then we go to the field so they're going threaten us and all of that" in an attempt to minimize the potential for victimization. In this situation it is apparent that the student sees food or money as a resource that impacts the likelihood of victimization. By removing food and money from the equation the student feels that they are less likely to be bothered. This social representation suggests that the bully's desires are not always personal vendettas, and therefore requires little introspection. The student has concluded that removing a catalyzing variable like money or food could prevent a reaction from the bully. Although this stance is likely to produce poor adjustment and is born out of avoidance; this strategy shows the internal volition of the student. In many other instances of bullying the victim feels powerless and subdued, however, in this case it seems as though the student has some form of subconscious control over the situation. Although this may be an isolated situation, it exemplifies that the consequence of bullying leads to strategies of avoidance, and anxiety overshadows the student's own sense of volition. It can also be noted that several of the students who reported avoidance and anxiety also referred to strong bonds to a close friend. This suggests that another side effect of bullying is that friendships can be strengthened. However, if the friend is receiving the same, or different bullying: the type of friendship strengthened could be of interest. Shared trauma can be a powerful motivator for the development of friendships, however, this could also lead to superficial friendship and poor attachment styles later in life (Lenoff, 2014).

As an extended consequence of paranoia and anxiety was the report that a student left the school because he was being severely bullied. It was reported "and one boy even came here, and he left the school he was only here for one year". Similarly, several grade 7 students also reported that some students have left the school because of bullying. However, the information circulated about why a particular student left the school could be very subjective. The assumptions made could be based only on small elements of the victim's situation. For example, if a student who is being bullied moves away because of parental job exchanges, students tend to assimilate the information they already know in order to assume the elements that they are uncertain about. Therefore, they could assume that the student left the school due to bullying. It is highly unlikely that a victim of severe bullying would take the time to explain

that they are leaving due to repeated bullying, since victims tend to be very selective of who they tell about their situation (Margraf et al., 2016). In this study several student's outright denied questions in the beginning of the interviews about any past experiences with bullying: only to contradict themselves later on once they felt as though they were understood. However, this was revealed again later on in the interviews through discussions on the reporting of bullying. Most victims are extremely selective about who they confide in and it is unlikely that information in a severe case such as leaving the school would be reliably obtained. Therefore, students may socially construct ideas and convince themselves that they are true.

Grade 7 students also assert that the victim may also experience some emotional difficulties as a consequence of bullying. However, according to one student these emotional difficulties are not as a direct consequence of the bullying itself. After the incident has already occurred and the victim has reported the issue; the proceedings that follow can produce some secondary influence on the victim. For example, receiving unwanted attention from parents, receiving costly therapies and guilt.

You can end up people asking you questions, and you don't have answers for them. Asking you "Why? What happened?", and maybe they even go to expensive places for you to go and being asked "what's happening with you?", but you know that's what is happening with you, and you don't wanna tell those people - (participant 15).

This student's experience shows that there can be negative experiences for the victim outside of the bullying relationship. According to this student these perceived negative factors can be an inhibitor for reporting. Furthermore, other students also reported that guilt was a powerful factor in past experiences with bullying. Many also expressed a lack of explanation for the guilt that they felt. "I was scared to tell someone cos I am scared I'm gonna get shouted at, or something" is a common attitude that signifies the false sense of guilt that occurs after bullying. It is possible that students who are unaware of why they are victims may internalize their negative situations and feel as though there is something wrong with them. Therefore, the manner in which teachers, parents and professionals handle victims of bullying has a significant impact on the victim's internal prognosis. The long-term effects of diminished self-esteem in children has a severe and long-lasting effects on development, such as depression later in life (Park & Yang, 2017).

One grade 7 student briefly mentioned a concern for the wellbeing of the school. When discussing methods of reporting the student responded with the following:

Because after all we must start telling her teacher first because after all, when you tell your parents they will start blaming the school and saying “no, the schools not looking after the children. My child is being bullied and they can't even see that”, but the teachers are not there, and then not responsible for the children being bullied - (Participant 14).

This illustrates a particular perspective of thought that transcends the immediate concern of the student's personal wellbeing. An awareness that the actions taken may have implications for the many other individuals around the student shows the type of forward thinking of a more developed prefrontal cortex compared to the formative grade groups. This student's concern is that reporting the occurrence of bullying will adversely affect the well-being of the school itself. At first this perspective seems strange, as the consequence of this situation apparently do not affect the student directly, however, further considerations delimit three ways in which the student may feel will create negative personal repercussions. Firstly, all students in this study's grade 7 group have been attending this particular school for all 7 years of their schooling career and share a common school culture with those around them. As the school environment makes up a large portion of the student's social exposure on a daily basis, the shared understandings and meanings of the group create a subconscious sense of affiliation. It could even be asserted that school affiliation can be associated with identity, as during formative years where students experience Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, the schooling environment makes up part of their context as identity is being formed (Erikson, 1963; 1968). Therefore, the student may feel a subconscious sense of patriotism that makes the well-being of the school a personal concern. This may be due to perceived reputation values such as 'I don't want people to think I go to a bad school' in that it appears to be a reflection of the student's identity. Secondly the student may feel as though reporting issues to the school teachers will create negative experiences for them as the teachers are implicated as ineffective. As mentioned in the quote above "...the teachers are not there, and then not responsible for the children being bullied", the teachers are retrospectively blamed for their lack of presence after an incident of bullying. Student's may feel as though the teacher will blame them for the trouble that has been caused, and therefore are less willing to implicate the school by reporting bullying. The student-teacher relationship can be complex during primary school, as teachers become the secondary source of authority in the student's lives after their parents. It is common then for students to become emotionally invested in their teachers and develop internal attachments to them (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). It can be hypothesized then, that student feel as though this may jeopardize their relationship with teachers and would prefer non-confrontation of their bullying problem.

Thirdly, it is possible that students perceive that their victimization may become public knowledge if the school is implicated for ineffective bullying prevention. Coupled with already lowered self-esteem students may feel as though they are unable to cope with the added attention, as added attention could lead to further victimization by the bully, or secondary victimization by perpetual self-esteem deprivation. Therefore, on whole some students may be concerned about the potential negative impact that reporting their own victimization could precipitate. It is useful to note that in situations where bullying is not reported, the victim creates social representations of bullying consequences where the above-mentioned consequences are feared more than the consequences of the bullying itself. In a situation where reporting does indeed occur it could be theorized that the consequences of the bullying itself were greater than the perceived impact of reporting. One grade 7 student concurred with this idea when suggesting students will report bullying "if it's bothering them enough".

The final mentioned consequence by grade 7 learners was given by a student who reported severe suicidal ideation as a consequence of bullying.

You keep thinking about the negative things, and it just brings your self-esteem down like, myself I have experienced that. I didn't know why but I keep playing in my head that I thought that I couldn't fit in, I thought that everyone hates me, I thought like bad things about myself. And it comes to this point where you actually don't want to live anymore. And some people do actually get themselves killed, some people will try to, because some of the people in our group have actually experienced that. And we all just talk together and express our feelings and how we've actually tried to kill ourselves. Some people have tried to drink pills, some people have tried to drink bleach and all that stuff... - (Participant 16).

As mentioned previously, the consequences of bullying have the potential to transcend past the relationship between the victim and the bully. The victim can experience negative consequences as a result of their lowered self-esteem. This particular student clearly exemplifies the thoughts and feelings associated with diminished self-esteem. Repetitive negative thoughts and fixations culminate to reduce the victim's self-image. Once the self-image has been weakened insecurities emerge and create false assumptions about the perceptions of others. As mentioned in the previous discussion, students who have long histories at particular institutions can develop a sense of identity within that institutional system, and therefore become concerned about those who are surrounding the student. "I thought that everyone hates me", is not merely a perceived rejection from a particular social

group, it is a perceived rejection of an element of their own identity. Since students spend most of their time in the schooling environment negative situations within that environment are projected as affection their entire lives. “I thought like bad things about myself. And it comes to this point where you actually don’t want to live anymore”. The impact of bullying could not be more clearly presented as serious than in a case of suicide ideation in a 13-year-old student. However, according to this student it is not just an individual. The student speaks using possessive pronouns such as “our group” or “we’ve actually tried” suggesting that it is not the experience of one isolated individual but a shared consciousness within a group. From this quote it seems apparent that the experiences of this group are shared, and that it could be assumed that bullying is the shared primary motivator. It is interesting to notice that the student who previously said “ and I didn’t know where to fit in. So, you feel alone in this corner...” now speaks about a group of like-minded individuals. This could suggest the irrationality of self-esteem, as the student believes that they are socially isolated are actually accepted into a like-minded group, or it could suggest that the qualities of this particular group are not sufficient to feel belonging. The prior option is more compelling, as issues of bullying and suicide are deeply personal topics and are not frivolously shared. This further shows that bullying consequences include an irrational sense of self-esteem that is not based in reality. The student is retrospectively aware of this irrationality and asserts that reporting the incidents leads to rational guidance that is positive and effective:

I really don’t understand what gets us to this situation because if I were to look at it, I’m like ‘but I would have done that, I would have done that, why would I freak out so much that I actually wanted to kill myself?’ - (Participant 16).

However, regardless of whether issues of self-esteem are rational or not, the student within this mentioned group are considered high risk individuals and need the guidance of a skilled counsellor. As bullying is a largely invisible issue due to under-reporting, confidential and welcoming sources of help, such as a dedicated counsellor for at risk students, should be stationed in schools to reduce the likelihood of irrational action born out of irrational self-esteem. Failing to do the above leads to student’s trying to rationalize from undeveloped perspectives. “And I actually told her [close friend] and we actually had the same situation. So, it was easy to like, tell each other and give each other advice. Even though we knew we were kids, we might not give each other right advice, so we had to tell an adult”. Social representation guided research on suicide could be immensely useful in reducing teen suicide, and inversely

provide the knowledge necessary to improve the quality of life, and education for student's suffering from self-esteem difficulties in primary school.

4.3 Perceptions of Bullies and Victims

4.3.1 Perceptions of Gender

Throughout interviews the participants were encouraged to describe the characteristics or common traits that they perceived belonged to students who were considered bullies or victims.

The first concept of interest was gender differences in bullying conceptions. According to all four students in grade 4, who were made up of 2 male and 2 female students, agreed that the predominant image of a bully is that of a boy. According to the female students the boys "...are too rough", and "fight all the time at breaks", illustrating a fear for the boy's physical shows of strength. During this age there is not much separation in understanding between bullying and fighting, and students comprehend them as equal terms. Therefore, it is expected that understandings of bullies would be based primarily on physical and observable elements. Such as witnessing the fighting of boys and associating that with bullying.

Furthermore, at this particular age student's understanding of the subtleties of gender differences is limited to exposure. Therefore, it was found that students who belonged to mixed gender social groups had a higher amount of empathy for the actions and understandings of the other gender. For example, one male student regaling the incident where "... a grade 4 boy teasing another girl on valentine's day how they wear their clothes" is an understanding that there is a difference in the bullying of boys and girls. However, another male student who reported having only male friends showed that he had very little understanding of the type of bullying that could involve girls. However, the female students although not having much social exposure to the male students assumed that boys were the culprits of fighting. The difference in gender representations illustrated here is due to the different ways in which male and female students create understandings of those around them. While male students exhibit more overt elements of bullying, such as the incorrect inclusion of fighting, it is easy for the male and female students alike to associate that type of behaviour with the boys. Conversely the female students exhibit more discreet elements of bullying (those that are not physical) and are therefore not seen by the boys or associated to the girls. This lack of understanding could lead to different types of bullying between the different genders. For example, all elements of bullying reported by the grade 4 students towards males, included physical or verbal abuse,

whereas the only type of bullying towards females was that of verbal abuse. This phenomenon is consistent with the archaic philosophy of chivalry in which a real man would never hurt a woman. For example, one Zulu boy in grade 6 stated that in reaction to being teased “then I did nothing so because I know if I hit a girl it's not something that I'd like to do. It's against my family rule: you must not hit a girl”. The cultural relevance of such notions is constantly changing in current times, and therefore this phenomenon could potentially be grounded in cultural philosophies of gender. Coincidentally, all of the participants for grade 4 are Zulu, so it is important to consider gender roles in the Zulu cultural paradigm (Kapff, 2003). Broader study parameters that target larger population samples would be necessary to examine the differences in cultural representations of gender roles and bullying within a specific age category. Regarding elements of victimization, the grade 4 students suggested no gender related description of a bullying victim. This suggests that there is a greater focus on the presence of a bully than a victim, due to targeting multiple victims.

In grade 5 understandings of gender in regard to bullying included divided responses. Two participants felt as though bullying was equally split between boys and girls, whereas the other two participants felt as though bullying is most commonly by boys. In the first category it was apparent that inter-gender bullying is a rare occurrence to these students. In the second category boys were implicated as the common perpetrator. One Xhosa male student reported repeated victimization due to his friendships with the female students in his grade. Discrimination, exclusion and harassment were used as a response to his choice of social companionship.

So, they use to just tease me and tell that “you’re gay” and stuff like that. And say, “why do you play with girls, come and play with boys” and stuff like that. And then I say “no, I don’t want to play with boys” because sometimes boys just get me into trouble and I don’t like trouble that much - (Participant 05)

Therefore, it seems as though bullies are intolerable of perceived social abnormalities, such as a student being friends with the opposite gender. These norms that govern what is considered normal or abnormal are largely determined by the dominant culture present. However, it is possible that the bully’s own ideologies may be asserted as the dominant paradigm. In this particular case the aggressor was a Zulu student. Those who oppose the bully’s paradigm of gender roles are implemented as victims. This seems to occur despite self-preservation tactics, such as avoiding trouble. This student concludes that “They [boys] are very mean”. In society, deviance from sociocultural norms is often considered abnormal - however what defines this

particular instance as bullying - is the bully's assertion of ideology onto the victim. In this situation the bully challenges the victim on his deviance and treats the victim differently because of it. The victim's resultant experience of this reaction encouraged a dissonance within his conception of gender roles. As he avoided playing with boys, he was targeted by the boys for the exact reason he initially avoided them. This self-fulfilling attitude shows that sociocultural values and norms still exist in the dynamic and fluid society of today. Although personal expression is encouraged through gender liberation movements publicized by the media, resistance still occurs as cultural norms prevail, even at a primary school level. Boys are encouraged to be physical and rough, while girls are encouraged to be passive and gentle. Although these norms may not be transferred to student's overtly, they are learned socially through verbal and non-verbal cues within and without the schooling system. Another example exists in the same grade where a particular Zulu male was repeated victimized. In response to his assault he stated, "I wouldn't tell because this guy, he is like strong, and I can't defend myself, I can't defend myself". The victim in this case has received aggression on multiple occasions from a particular bully on the basis of his gender-related character, such as his choice in friends, unwillingness to participate in sport and his enjoyment of academic activities such as reading at school. These attitudes may be in conflict with the bully's ideology of maleness. This victim attributes his own victimization to being unable to fit in with the dominant culture of the school and therefore feels ostracized. In both cases there seemed to be a cultural conception of gender relevant in inter-culture and intra-cultural bullying. The relevance of cultural and gender-based conflict requires further study, as Zulu is the dominant culture in KwaZulu Natal, whereas Xhosa less common.

In grade 6 and 7 understandings of bullying regarding gender presented conceptions that were largely more diverse. Student's understand that a bully could be either a boy or a girl and the way the bully behaves to the opposite gender differs from how the bully behaves towards victims of the same gender. According to one student boys tend to be more direct and physical "but the girls were whispering". A discussion about how inter-gender bullying occurs revealed that sometimes male students are emasculated intentionally by the female students by the use of insults. For example: "They were teasing me about my sexual body". During the ages of 12 and 13, the approximate age of learners in grade 6 and 7, students will be beginning to experience the early onset of puberty. While girls tend to develop physically and emotionally faster than boys, it is probable that disparity in maturity will lead to power imbalances that make bullying a possibility (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). During this stage of

development insecurities are also expected to arise, making students more sensitive to comments regarding their development than before, for example: “she said I am ugly and everything”. However, gender maturity differences are not the only element involved when it comes to inter-gender bullying. “They were teasing my bum, even when we were swimming, they were saying I was wearing a panty. But then all the boys had to laugh at me then I stopped, I even wanted to stop”. In this example, it is apparent that the student is the victim of both genders attempts at humiliation. And confirmed by another student, this is congruous with the idea that girls are more likely to ‘tease’ than any other type of bullying. During interviews with some grade 7 girls, it became apparent that manipulation is a powerful tool of the female bullies. According these students the bully is often a part of a social group to which the victim belongs. Bullying then occurs when the bully manipulates the members of the group to the detriment of the victim.

Furthermore, while the type of bullying between boys and girls may differ, the reaction to bullying from the opposite gender is largely unknown. One student made a comment that suggests the need for further research on the topic. As a reaction to verbal abuse from a female learner “I did nothing so because I know if I hit a girl it's not something that I'd like to do. It's against my family rule: you must not hit a girl.” In a time where gender equality movements are at their prime, attitudes such as this are quickly becoming archaic. However, this attitude is something that has been passed down to the student by the family system and is therefore at odds with the contemporary attitude towards gender equality. As mentioned previously, cultural constructions of gender roles are powerful forces in governing behaviour, however the full extent of these cultural constructions of gender and how they manifest in primary school students remains largely unknown. Gender, as a social construct, is undergoing rapid change and has the potential to impact many of the social phenomena within the social world. As it has the potential to impact the current state of bullying, further research is recommended on the topic of cultural gender roles and how they impact bullying.

It is interesting to note that grade 6 and 7 students report that bullies could be boys or girls, whereas the former grades indict the boys as the common culprit. This difference could be due to an increased awareness of the other gender as students develop and become more empathetic of other groups, or it could be due to larger amounts of female bullying in the older grade groups. Since gender roles and gender norms are an integral part of social construction and social representations about the world those in it, it is important to understand why differences

in gender representations impact attitudes and behaviour. This phenomenon requires a more detailed cross-sectional study to determine prevalence of female bullying in these particular grades, or a longitudinal study to analyze how perceptions and empathy change over time.

4.3.2 Perceptions of Age

Student's perceptions of the bully include an understanding of differences. One of these differences is age. In all grade groups students report that the bully is usually somebody older or somebody bigger than they are. This is consistent with the earlier assertion that bullying is perceived as due to a power imbalance between the bully and the victim, where the bully has greater resources than the victim in a specific area. In terms of age the bully has the resource of maturity and a perceived prestige that is associated with being an "older kid". In terms of size, bullies that are bigger are also assumed to be stronger and have a greater potential to inflict bodily harm: "It's mostly, not mostly grade sevens, but it's mostly bigger children picking on small children." The combination of the two seems logical, as when children age they most often simultaneously increase in size. Therefore, it is common that an older student is bigger. One student even made an anecdote that suggested the idea of a smaller or younger kid bullying an older kid was ludicrous. This is a common perception across most grades, however regarding the grade 6's and 7's students more frequently report bullies that are the same age or grade, particularly since grade 7's typically represent the oldest category in the primary school. "Um, it's mainly grade 7's cos they feel like they are bigger, and they have the power to just bully anyone." - reports one in a lower grade. However, to those in the upper grades the predominant factor influencing the power struggle is the student's pubescent development. As mentioned in the previous section, this can lead to imbalances that make bullying a possibility.

It was brought up by students that bullying can even be seen in the early grades of 1, 2 and 3. It was suggested that bullying was something learned. While Thornberg (2010) found evidence of perceptions of social learning of bullying, the correlation between early bullying and the victim becoming a bully later on in their schooling career is an area of interest that has not yet been adequately researched.

4.3.3 Perceived Characteristics

Across the sample there are extremely subjective perceptions of what a bully looks like, how a bully behaves and how a bully thinks. Each student has seemingly different constructions of their subjective pictures of the bully. However, a groups comparison may yield some similarities.

In grade 4 bullies were described as “always a different person”, often a different person and often the same person. It seems as though to grade 4 students the bully is not commonly one distinct and repeated offender but rather several offenders. Whether or not these offenders belong to the same group was not overtly stated but based on the responses the students imply that bullying is an occurrence rather than a relationship between two individuals. However, the students were still able to signify specific people who they identify as bullies and provide their perceptions on the individuals. Two students reported bullies as “trouble makers” or “naughty” in areas that extend beyond the bullying relationship. For example, deviance in school, disrespect towards the teachers or dishonesty.

Most students also assert that bullies have a sense of arrogance that motivate their behaviour. One student went as far as to suggest that bullies are attempting to assert that they are superior to others: “they think they are better than others around them. And they think that if you bully someone that makes you better.” Furthermore, it was also suggested that bullies feel as though they are beyond reach of authority. “He thinks he is king of the school” suggests the bully has an attitude of perceived invincibility, however the perception of the onlooker is that it is clearly not the case. “But it doesn’t even make you better, you are making the other people around you miserable” was one student’s attitude towards the bully. It was also reported that bullies have the intention of provoking people through obnoxious behaviour and manipulation of authority. One student reported that a particular bully has the tendency to annoy other students into retaliation in an effort to get them into trouble. Another student tells the tale where a student and her friend were bullied by two boys, and “He told his friend to lie, and when we told the teacher they lied, but they were laughing behind her back.” The same student expressed that bullies are “tricky”, presumably referring to their manipulative ability. Previous research has shown that bullies can be manipulative towards teachers in an effort to avoid retribution (Nelson, et al., 2018).

The students in grade 4 reported mixed feelings regarding the bully. Confusion or lack of understanding of the bully’s motives, frustration with the bully’s attitudes, and sadness towards the bully’s actions.

In contrast with the responses of the grade 4 learners, the grade 5 students assert an image of the bully that suggests specific identifiable people. It was reported by multiple subjects that the bully often belongs to a gang or social group. This group represents like-minded individuals in the eyes of the subject and therefore all carry the stigma of being a bully. “One person comes

and another person and then eventually the whole group”. According to the responses of one student the bully is motivated out of peer pressure from that social group.

It's mostly because sometimes, like when you are in a group and you want to go into that group and be one of them. Mostly, um, the controller of the group pushes you and says go and do something, so that you can prove yourself worthy of being in this group - (Participant 05).

This particular student implied that the bully was actually submissive to the thoughts and attitudes of others and not acting in isolation. Interestingly this is not a common perspective amid primary school learners. The idea that the bullying relationship represents a paradox is not an obvious one: students frequently report about how bully's inflict submission, but rarely suggest that bullies are socially subjected to forces of submission. This student suggests that bullies act or behave according to the social values or norms within that group or act deviantly in an effort to attain favour of those around. It was also reported that the bully may behave differently in different social contexts; for example, being friendly with the victim in isolation, and being hostile in the presence of others. For example, “I think the person in the group will act differently than they will act as the person themselves”. Social psychological influences can be powerful motivators on behaviour, and cause people to act in unpredictable ways. Furthermore, the bully paradox could include the bully's pursuit of attention/acceptance. "Sometimes they come to you as like a friend and then sometime around they start threatening you and starting to take your food, they hurting you". Why it is deemed a paradox is due to its apparent contradiction: the bully seeks close interpersonal relationships, while simultaneously rejecting those who provide it. One particular student expressed much vexation on this topic “After that when that person is gone that person carries on talking behind your back, and that makes you so angry, that you want to come back and hit that person”.

Another student stated that the bully is a person who is in a constant state of anger. Although there may be many potential causes for this anger, the student suggested that this anger is shown in a reactive way. The illustrated a clear understanding that anger is not a predictor of bullying in his statement that criticizes the bully's reaction to anger:

Uh, well, well if this person shoves you, you have to be angry for some known reason, you have to be angry in some situation, but I won't think you would have to hit, I think you would have to have an argument and just walk away, just leave him like that - (Participant 08)

During some form of conflict, the student recognizes that there are two ways to react: peaceably or through violence. According to the student the bully has a tendency to react through violence in a situation that could have been resolved by another means. According to a different student this type of reaction signifies a poor perception of consequence; and that bullies persistently act negatively towards victims despite the potential consequences. This shows a possible lapse in logic on behalf of the bully. All four students in grade 4 exhibited some form of confusion or frustration regarding the logic of a bully. For example one student expressed sympathy towards the bully as a reaction to the perceived inconsiderate behaviour, and suggests that students would be more receptive to provide help if the bully was more reasonable: “No, but they don't think about other children, I would understand if they take half a slice, or if they ask but if you just digging in the bag and take like all of the food what will the other child have?”. According to this student it is completely unreasonable for a bully to behave this way towards another student. Another student expressed that violence is not a good way to solve conflict, but the bully “should use his words”. These comments strike a stark difference between perceptions of bullies and victims, as all of the above quotes are from students were previously victims, it seems as though the victims approach the motives and actions of bullies in a more calculated and rational way than the bully does. However, this could be due to reflection, conversations with adults, and a path of learning as a consequence of that interaction.

Students also see the bully as self-preserved. Roughly half of the students across the sample reported situations in which a bully prevented the victim from reporting the bullying to an adult or authority figure through threats of violence and intimidation. This suggests that the bully is concerned about the consequences of their actions and is aware that the actions are a violation of regulations. Students who report that they were threatened admit that they failed to report the issue because of the intimidation. The victims therefore see the bully as oppressive, and an obstacle between them and assistance. This perceived obstacle exists even when the bully is not present, as the victim is intimidated into silence, regardless of whether or not the bully has any actual power over the victim. Therefore, the perception victims have about the power of the bully is exaggerated by fear and intimidation, and the obstacle seems insurmountable. Ironically, almost all of the students who reported this obstacle claimed that they would expect others to report despite the apparent obstacle. This oddly suggests a minor incongruency in student's representations about themselves. While bold words are spoken, meek actions are taken. Perceptions of the self are in nature very subjective and are constantly tested by the world around us through interactions. While the inability to surmount the obstacle of bully

threats should have corrected perceptions of the self to realistic state, it seems as though students remain in a state of high self-efficacy. Possibly efficacy and esteem do not decrease proportionally, and victims still believe they have the power or potential to be in control of their situation. It is also plausible that these reports are retrospective, where students look back and see their reactions to bullying as irrational, and now in an un-threatening situation feel as though they are able to act rationally.

One grade 5 student asserted that bullies are immoral. With the use of language such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘evil’ and ‘good’, a student in grade 6 and another in grade 7 agreed that the bully is an individual that subscribes to morals or values that are incongruous with the onlooker. Cultural values and moral relativity present a complex social representation of the bully. Unfortunately, the moral diversity found within a culture, even at the individual level, makes it impossible to determine precisely how culture impacts morality, and therefore how morality impacts perception. However, it is clear through these responses that moralistic modes of thinking are part of the way these students create social representations about the world as they experience it and are therefore valid elements of thought. In this context bullying is neither seen as having positive moral elements, or neutral moral elements, and only negative moral elements. These negative elements place negative values to the behaviour and attitudes of the bullies. For example, “I felt what she was doing what she did wrong was actually wrong”, or “but we always try to help her and show her things that are wrong and things that are right”. In this sense it seems as though the students are not referring to religious values, but to values of common decency, where it is wrong to violate and good to uphold. Further research on school children’s value of common decency and morality is recommend as they are powerful motivators for intrapersonal reasoning, social representations and overt behaviour.

One grade 6 students report that a bully is someone who is unfaithful. When elaborating it was discovered that in this particular case the bully was previously the victim’s close friend, before the bully decided to take advantage of the student when a power struggle was present. For example, ‘...some of my friends, are my best friends, and then they started bullying me and then I stopped having fun with them”, or "Sometimes they come to you as like a friend and then sometime around they start threatening you and starting to take your food, they hurting you". The students express that the bully could be a close friend of the victim, and that bullying arose despite that close relationship. It is possible that bully antics could be more effective with a greater knowledge of the victim and their characteristics. For example, one student reported

a bully exploiting personal family issues that troubled the victim such as “home matters, ok, and private things yes”. In this situation the victim valued personal well-being and happiness above the relationship with the bully or social group and terminated the interaction on the basis of negative experiences. However, this is not always the case. Another victim implied that instances where students are bullied by ‘friends’ was due to the bully’s desire for social affiliation to a group and termed “peer pressure”. Therefore, from the perspective of the victim, the bully has a desire for affiliation and meaningful social interactions, however does not always act appropriately towards those who intend to provide it. Several other participants throughout the sample report incidents where bullies remain part of the victim’s social group before, during and after the incident(s) of bullying. This was seen particularly amid female students and more frequently in the older age categories and shows the complexity of attachment styles as students create friendships during primary school years. For example, one grade 7 student stated the following:

Well, I don’t know, I really don’t know but, she’s doing a lot of bad things cos she’s disrespectful to teachers, she does a lot of bad things, and my grandmother just says its peer pressure. Her friends, I’m actually caught up in a group with her, funny story, there is a group. So now some of the people in our group know her, so now she’s part of the group now, so I have to say it counts that I am still her friend - (Participant 16)

Although in this situation the student was currently being victimized by the bully while the bully was part of the same social group, the student appears to choose the affiliation to the group over the negative effects of being in close proximity to the bully. It could be surmised that to this student acceptance within the group is more important. However, each instance of bullying is accompanied by a unique set of variables and contexts. As mentioned later on by the same student, the bully attacked the victim’s self-esteem and caused severe negative self-talk. Accompanied by a limited understanding of why the victim is being targeted, the diminished self-esteem could potentially lead to a pursuit of recognition by the bully. No literature was found on the possibility of a co-dependent relationship between bullies and victims, where bullies become attached to victims, and victims desire peace with or acceptance from the bully. Further research is also strongly recommended to investigate the complexities of the victim’s social representations surrounding the inclusion of a bully to the victim’s social group. Further investigation is also needed on the variance on attachment styles after bullying

between male and female students; as within this sample set the female students reported several instances of post-bullying attachment, where males reported none.

Several students also report that bullies are seen as dishonest, rebellious and disrespectful. These characteristics were found through the victim's perception of the bully's interactions with students, teachers and victims. Rebellion was reported by several students as a common characteristic of a bully, which is best signified by the ignorance of school rules. As mentioned in previous sections, the students asserted that bullies seek the approval and acceptance of others, and therefore this rebellious behaviour could be in an effort to impress or to attain the attention of other students. This is often done through acts that are overtly observable as daring or counter the norm: for example, disrespecting a teacher, or asserting dominance within the school. It seems from the social representations on the bully from these students that incidents of bullying do not occur in isolation - other elements of deviant behaviour accompany the student's record that imply a troubled psychology.

Another suggestion of the bully's troubled psychology is two student's suggestion that the bully is manipulative. Although never using the word itself, these students report instances where the bully intentionally manipulates the emotions of the authority figure to avoid the consequences of the deviant behaviour. For example, one student expresses "she does wrong things, and then she cries about her father and expects people to feel guilty for her" (Grade 7 girl). What signifies this behaviour as manipulative is intention. A grade 6 student reported a bully committing an act, blatantly denying it to authority, implying somebody else, and then afterwards laughing about it. This behaviour betrays an attitude that was termed by one student as "inconsiderate", implying that the bully does not consider the impact of actions, or does not consider the impact of those actions on another as a deterrent of behaviour. Theories of law of effect by Thorndike (1898) and operant conditioning by Skinner (1938) asserts that behaviour occurs after the subject has determined the perceived consequences of that behaviour. In this situation it can be concluded that either students in this age category do not successfully weigh up the perceived consequences and therefore acts irrationally, or the bully ignores the consequences with an attitude of indifference towards the consequences. This phenomenon cannot however to attributed to developmental phases, as bullying behaviour still continue, even in the workplace (Li et al., 2018; Raja, Javed, & Abbas, 2018). The responses by participants during this study imply that students perceive that bully intentions are decisive and intentional and not accidental reflections to social situations.

Bullies were also implicated as holding to an attitude of entitlement. Two participants in grade 6 discuss that bullying often occurs when the victim refuses to release information requested by the bully. For example

if somebody hits you and let's say they want to know the truth and they're forcing you and they hit you, but you still don't tell the truth and they going to blame you about things you haven't done and all that - (Participant 11)

To provide some context to this quote, the “truth” referred to here was information regarding personal or private information. It seems to this student that the bully covets information that is beyond the boundaries of personal comfort. One grade 6 student explained that they often want to know about “home matters, ok, and private things yes”. According to this student two negative outcomes can arise as a result of withholding information to an inquisitive bully: the bully could persist with physical acts to encourage compliance (hitting) or create false accusations. According to one specific student the idea of false accusations from a bully causes significant stress on behalf of the victim, creating an environment of uncertainty. One student in grade 4 attributes this as a desire “to make you uncomfortable”. One victim even suggested that she eats an abnormal amount because of this specific type of stress. The bully is therefore represented as a person who oversteps social boundaries and reacts in a negative way when such steps are met with resistance.

Grade 7 students’ responses towards the bully shows a greater perception into the context surrounding the bully. Students suggest several different representations regarding their concept of the bully. The bully frequently assumed to be a victim in the domestic sphere and the student concludes that bullying results out of pent up frustration that emerges in the form of anger. This presumption is consistent with previous responses that suggest that bullies react in inappropriate ways towards the victim. If frustration and anger are the catalysts for bullying, the students show an understanding of its cause, however the mode of frustration release is seen as inappropriate and unacceptable.

Other students suggest that the bully is also just showing a facade, and that the acts of strength associated with bullying are superficial. “a bully is somebody who is scared too. Maybe you can even hit that bully and they won't do anything because they always have their problems too”. This comment is contrary to the responses of many other students experiences throughout the sample, as the vast majority of other students report timid attitudes after instances of bullying if they have been threatened into silence by that bully. Although this statement shows

a more mature insight into the character of a bully, thoughts and actions at the time are significantly less rational. Therefore, it can be suggested that insight into bullying dynamics is more rational in hindsight than during the experience itself. Students who speak of past instances of bullying had a tendency to over-compensate their sense of self-efficacy when discussing hypothetical situations in present time. For example, when the same student who had previously reported avoidance of the bully, in the schooling environment during bullying, suggests that the bully merely puts on a facade of strength. A further analysis on the difference in attitudes victims experience during and after bullying could provide insight into coping strategies, as well as how self-efficacy changes with time. Further research is recommended in this area.

Although some characteristics of the victims have been discussed relative to the bullies to which they are being compared to; the perceptions of victims according to the students paint a picture of how they represent victimization.

One grade 4 student reported that victims are probably "...from poor families that cannot give them a lot". Another student explained that victims are "miserable" although "they have done nothing to deserve that". Individual characteristics were suggested by one student as reasons for being targeted:

They... they like to come up to you and say nasty things to you. Like, when you. Like when, they like to call you fat when you don't like to be called fat. And also, they like to say you so skinny like a toothpick, some of them - (Participant 03)

The remaining two grade 4 students reported that the victim is in some way to blame for victimization. While the one student implied that the bullying could be avoided by the victim, the other suggested that the victim did something to anger the bully and brought it upon themselves. These interesting perspectives suggest representations about conflict that punishment follows disobedience or poor behaviour, similar to parenting styles of discipline.

Three of the grade 5 students reported that victims are often smaller in size than bullies and are usually helpless in defending themselves. Grade 5 students also suggest that victims resultantly become those who are in perpetual states of confusion ("I didn't know what to do") or anger ("and I got so mad I wanted to hurt them") as a result of their victimization.

One grade 6 student described physical differences as grounds for bullying "your head is so big", "your foot is like Bigfoot". These are mostly considered fuel for insults or verbal bullying

and were not reported as a reason for physical bullying. Another two grade 6 student reported that the victim is often helpless, stressed out and intimidated. It was posed by a male student "It makes them really deep inside - heartbreak. Like it makes them feel small, but there's something inside of them that is big".

To one grade 7 student victims were only seen as younger children (those in grades lower than grade 7), particularly students who are physically small. Another student recommended that "it's because they are different", when discussing reasons for racial, ethnic and religious discrimination as a type of bullying. Two other grade 7 students explained that victims are constantly scared and avoidant. The final student in grade 7 reported that victims may experience severe confusion by the bully's apparent desire for affiliation proximal to the negative experiences. The resultant psychological and emotional strain put on the student lead to the following quote:

I didn't know why but I keep playing in my head that I thought that I couldn't fit in, I thought that everyone hates me, I thought like bad things about myself. And it comes to this point where you actually don't want to live anymore - (Participant 16)

According to the attitudes of this student, all victims share something with other victims and allows a greater empathetic understanding between them.

4.3.4 Sympathetic attitudes towards bullies

This a priori section arose based on individuals own suggestions, and not due to the framework of the interview. It appears that many of the students had some attitude towards the victim in terms of sympathy or resentment towards the bully. Ten out of the sixteen students discussed this without being prompted, and therefore must be part of the social representations held by this population.

Seven of the ten students reported high levels of sympathy towards the bully. These attitudes were gauged according to statements such as "I feel sorry for them", and "a bully is someone who is scared too". Of these students the primary area of sympathetic attitudes lay in assumptions about bullies' domestic circumstances. One student expressed an unusual approach to bullying suggesting "you have to be angry for some unknown reason, you have to be angry in some situation, but I won't think you would have to hit, I think you would have to have an argument and just walk away, just leave him like that". In this quote the student appears to understand the motivation behind bullying antics but does not justify manifestation of those

motivations. The same student expresses an understanding that bullying without a cause is not acceptable, however he conversely takes the position that the bully's actions are understandable when the cause is acceptable. However, when the causes are 'acceptable', for example, provocation, this student understands the aggressor's actions.

The three students that reported bully resentment were not interested in providing details. These attitudes were gauged by the way students spoke about the punishment of bullying. "They must get a detention", and "they must go to the principle and their parents must come and see what my child is doing" were responses that suggested the student's desire for the bully to receive retribution. One student was clear in her position "I hate bullying, I HATE it, and those that bully."

The attitudes of those towards bullies was surprising, with a greater number of students expressing sympathy than resentment. This shows a warming humanitarian view of the bully, that should be investigated further by social psychological research.

4.4 help-seeking behaviour

4.4.1 Hypothetical reaction to bullying

In every interview the students were asked a hypothetical question: "What would you do if you saw an act of bullying take place?" This question was aimed at providing insight into the confidence or lack thereof while the student is not actually in the position itself. Simply, to see if their self-efficacy correlates to the other answers they had given.

In grade 4, three out of the four students exclaimed that they would go directly to the teacher, where one suggested that intervention attempts would be made before seeking help. This attitude suggests both a rule-abiding mentality and a dependence on adult intervention. These students present social representations surrounding bullying, as something they can, or should not attempt to solve on their own. On the extreme end of this scale one student expressed a desire to intervene, however failing which, did not propose going to the teacher at all. Here is an excerpt from that conversation:

Student: "They busy fighting, now when I say they must stop they busy try to hit me, then ... just says we must, because they try to hit me too."

Interviewer: "They will try to hit you when you tried to stop them?"

Student: "Yes"

Interviewer: “And then would you tell the teacher, or did just leave them?”

Student: “I just leave them”.

(Interview 04)

It appears that grade 4’s experience has led them to regard their ability to make a difference as quite ineffective, where most would attempt to seek help of somebody more capable, and the other desires to stay out of the crossfire.

It is interesting to note that all students that suggested help-seeking behaviour reported their own victimization during the interview, and speak from personal experience, as they may realize what is effective. However, the student who does not desire to pursue the same method is the only grade 4 student who has not experienced victimization. Throughout the interview that same student expresses a passive disassociation with bullying, implying that ‘it is something that affects *other* people’.

One male grade 5 student expressed a desire to intervene directly and defend the victim. This particular student expressed a zealotness for justice throughout the interview, as a victim himself. He reported “I mostly defend them”, expressing an ongoing state of intervention on behalf of the victim. Another boy from grade 5 was a bit more cautious, explaining that in the absence of an authority figure he would attempt to help; however, his main focus was to get the teacher involved: “If there were no prefects I would have retaliated and went up to, and I would have told the teacher”. In this context the word “retaliated” was used to mean “reacted”. A female student from the same group shared this idea, suggesting her reaction would be to “tell the teacher very quick and also I stop the fight, because what happens if somebody gets hurt”. This student appears to have a concern that the responsibility of intervention and protecting the victim from harm lies with the bystander. Furthermore, an attitude that places the victim’s safety above one’s own safety is hinted during this student’s statement. This is consistent with literature that suggests bystanders frequently have the desire to help and become *protectors*, however they seldom act (Nelson et al., 2018; Smith & Brain, 2000). It is probable that the factor that causes the student to act or to remain neutral is an evaluation of the negative consequences for the bystander. The final student embodies this assertion

If somebody is being bullied and we have teachers on duty, so if I see a fight I quickly go to the teacher the teacher will come and stop the fight because they told us not to come and jump in fight because they might hurt you - (Participant 07)

Although self-preservation appears to be present this student acknowledges the rules and regulations regarding bullying resolution and recognizes that seeking the help of a capable figure of authority is the best tactic. The responses of grade 5 students had an interesting correlation to their victimization history. The student who reported distanced reporting had not experienced victimization. The student who reported intervention in conjunction with reporting had experienced victimization in the distant past. The student who expressed a desire to prevent the victim's harm was previously the victim of physical harm. The student who expressed direct and physical intervention is an ongoing victim, possibly suggesting an ideal way to terminate his own victimization. For the most part these responses are easy to understand, given the student's history with victimization; however, the single student that expressed direct intervention represents an interesting psychological phenomenon. This student appears to have heightened self-efficacy, despite being the victim of severe bullying over an extended period. While this attitude of *toughness* could be compensation for the lack thereof, it is possible that this student has not experienced lowered self-efficacy as the result of bullying. Immediately this appears to be a false sense of invincibility, however another student in the same grade suggested a coping strategy to deal with the victim's internal battle of self-efficacy: "...you must leave them because whatever they say to you, you must believe in yourself". Possibly attitudes promoting self-belief have provided this student with a source of internal resilience.

Grade 6 students presented hypothetical action that was largely more comprehensive than formative grades. One student suggested that in order to avoid implication or blame for getting involved "We'll rather go and call a bully monitor or a prefect." Another student suggested that "I would go and tell the teacher because they can actually do something about it". Both of these students suggest avoiding direct contact with the situation with the focus of helping the victim while still maintaining self-preservation. One other student suggested a similar approach to that of the lower grades suggesting an attempt at intervention followed immediately by reporting to authority "I go to them and I sort it out. If I can't sort it out I go tell the teacher and the teacher will sort it out between the two". The remaining student expressed hypothetical intervention strategies that not only deal with the symptoms of the bullying relationship but focus on targeting the cause:

It's just stop them. Sit with them down and then chat and then calm themselves before letting them be friends again. And it's not it's not nice to our world that seeing people fighting. A lot of people are dying because of fighting so I tell them "stop fighting and just be friends

for now”, solved the problem and there's a lot of them who just forget about it in one day - (Participant 09)

This student implies that the fundamental cause for bullying is irrational or situational and requires a mediator to cause the two parties to take a moment and calm down. Offering himself as a mediator this student takes the responsibility of promoting peace between the two parties as a way to solve the issue, rather than merely stopping it. The student suggests that the aggressive nature of fighting in this situation is something fleeting and temporary that they will “just forget about it in one day”. It is possible that the media has influenced this student’s social representation, as ideas of violence are conveyed in a broad sense, correlating bullying with acts of aggression or violence “in the world”. Another student expressed a similar perspective, possibly caused by media representation, by associating bullying with serious crime later in life. For example, he said:

You must tell because the person will either get badly injured, and that could lead to next time, you will just rob someone or something and then after that the person will end up maybe hitting you – putting pepper spray in your eyes - (Participant 05)

This student apparently represents issues of severe violence as a consequence of bullying attitudes. In the circumstance mentioned above, after clarification, the student expressed the consequence of leaving bullying unreported and unpunished. According to this example the student represents a lack of retribution with incrementally more severe acts of aggression or violence, and that reporting the issue is a possible mode of prevention.

Although the results for grade 5 students are similar to grade 6, all of the students sampled out of grade 6 students were previously victimized. This suggests that representations about self-efficacy and bullying are more complicated than previously presumed - as a victim could have the same perceptions as a non-victim.

Grade 7 students express the most rational hypothetical steps. One student reported the responsibility for grade 7 prefects to try and rectify the issue before involving a teacher. This places the responsibility on students to deter and correct bullying, although according to this assertion it is not always effective, and a teacher is consulted. This is an excerpt from an interview with a prefect:

Interviewer: “so when you see somebody being bullied and for example there is a fight, and somebody is getting aggressive with somebody else, what is your first plan of action?”

- Student:* “You go there, and you stop - you try to stop them fighting, that's what you first do”
- Interviewer:* “And then what? Do you then...?”
- Student:* “You try and calm them down and then you go to them and you talk to one person first, and then he when you hear that side of the story you need to go to the other person and hear the other side of the story”.
- Interviewer:* “Alright so it's your job to try and sort it out before going to the teachers?”
- Student:* “Yes”
- Interviewer:* “and then do you involve the teachers?”
- Student:* “If it is serious then we have to”
- Interviewer:* “Okay, usually if you can solve it and there's no need to tell the teachers?”
- Student:* “Yeah”

(Interview 13)

According to this student there is a high emphasis on the ability and responsibility for students to solve issues of bullying on their own. If this attitude were highly subscribed to within the population there would be a decrease in reported incidents to the school authority, and therefore an inaccurate perception of the problem among school administration.

Another student expresses a similar attitude; however, the hypothetical action is determined according to the situation at hand. The student expresses “if it’s fighting I go tell somebody, but if it comes to teasing I'll try and stop them”. This statement tells of a different type of confidence than the previous student. The same reports that physical acts of bullying are more serious than verbal ones, and consequently feels capable of intervening on the less serious type. Although this student reports never being a victim, the learned experiences of those in close proximity has given him a tenderness to help. A different student from this group expressed a similar perspective, however, an emphasis on the seriousness of bullying was given, and the perceived efficacy to help was markedly lower:

I would go and really help, because I know how it feels to be bullied. Um, if the situation is really bigger than my control, I will try to actually ask someone who's older than me, has more knowledge in me, than me. Um, like a teacher cos I have a few teachers I can speak to that I know they won't tell anyone. Who would give really good advice - (Participant 15)

This student appears to have an understanding of the limitations of her own knowledge and ability to make a difference in situations of bullying. Although several years older than the grade 4 students, this student is aware that one's attitudes of confidence could be subjective and ineffective. For example, regarding reporting she later mentions: "So it was easy to like, tell each other and give each other advice. Even though we knew we were kids, we might not give each other right advice, so we had to tell an adult".

The remaining student suggests a passive reaction to bullying that does not involve intervention, nor does it involve reporting to teachers. This student places the responsibility of seeking help in the hands of the victim: "I would just tell the person to go and tell. Then if they say they are too scared to tell then I can go and tell for them. And tell them that "I am going to tell your parents or your teacher that you are being bullied, if you don't take a step". This mirrors previously mentioned perspectives where students hypothesize that they will only take specific actions if specific conditions are met.

During the younger phases it seems as though students are more prone to either complete dependence on authority, or complete independence and self-confidence. The older phases exhibited attitudes of limited efficacy, or a combination of dependence and independence, with some students expressing efficacy in some areas and not in others. In many cases, however, students were able to propose action that is clearly due to retrospection on past events and is not likely to be a valid indicator of actual action, as many of the students contradicted their own assertions with the reported actions of their own victimization. The full validity of self-reporting on post-bullying efficacy and retrospection is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it remains an area of inquiry that could implicate the psychological coping strategies of primary school children among numerous other elements.

4.4.2 Perceived benefits to reporting

The literature review in chapter 2 emphasized the important influence teachers can have on the development (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004), and protection (Hong & Eamon, 2011) of victims. This section will deal with school children's perception of the benefits of seeking help from a figure of authority.

In grade 4 only two students felt as though there were benefits to reporting. One of whom explained "You must go and tell a teacher, and then she will sort out the problem". Another

student, although expressing no apparent benefit to reporting told the interviewer that “people tell on a lot. They tell on a lot.” However, this idea was contradicted by the student’s peers where the other three students unanimously agreed that obstacles often outweigh the benefits of reporting. It seems that in grade 4 children do not have a clear understanding of reporting procedure, or the efficacy of teachers in stopping bullying.

One grade 5 student reported that help-seeking behaviour are only sought some of the time. Conversation with this student captured the following perspective:

Interviewer: “Yeah. So, do you think people usually tell the teachers, or do you think they like to keep quiet?”

Student: “Sometimes they mostly tell the teachers.”

Interviewer: “And the other times?”

Student: “Other times they just take the matters into their own hands and after that when the child sees that this thing is wrong they go and tell the teacher.”

Interviewer: “Do you think it is important that you tell the teacher?”

Student: “Yes”.

(Interview 05)

The student explains that help-seeking behaviour should occur only after attempts to solve the problem privately have occurred. In this situation the student suggests that students sometimes “take matters into their own hands” as a reaction, in order to show the bully “that this thing is wrong”, before reporting the incident to the teacher. This attitude is a curious one, as the same student shows a heightened awareness that retaliation can lead to negative consequences from authority for the victim.

Another student suggested his faith in the reactive power of teachers by saying “the teacher will come and stop the fight because they told us not to come and jump in fight because they might hurt you.” This attitude suggests that the primary benefit to reporting is the resolution of bullying.

The other two students in grade 5 suggested help-seeking behaviour that were not aimed primarily at immediate environmental intervention but sought help from friends and family instead. One student mentions that when efforts to report bullying due to obstacles, the next solution is to tell a friend in an effort to share the burden or seek advice. Another student facing the same obstacles described:

Well, after school we leave, we will go home, so I will tell my parents because this boy doesn't live with me. So, I will tell my parents as quick as possible, we will sort out the matter, and then, she will, we will have a meeting with the teacher - (Participant 08)

This student recognizes the need for assistance from adults, however feels inhibited from seeking help within the schooling environment, and resorts to seeking help within the safety of the home. As parents are the primary source of care for the formative years of children's lives, the sense of security when bringing them into the situation may provide a higher prognosis of change. This student seems positive that a structured meeting between parents and teachers is the correct method of seeking help.

Grade 6 students report very few benefits to seeking help and offer many obstacles to reporting. One student suggests that reporting must be done immediately to avoid future harm. Another student asserts that children are more likely to seek help from friends and family than from teachers, consistent with Nelson et al., (2018).

One of the benefits of reporting bullying, inferred by the grade 6 students, was that the teacher's ability to solve, rectify or react to the issue shows the presence of authority to those around, and reinforces the effectiveness of teacher consultancy. One student implied that is nothing is done by the teachers, or nobody sees it, students may feel as though the telling a teacher is not an effective strategy.

Grade 7 students expressed some comprehensive attitudes towards help-seeking behaviour. One student suggested that help can be sought from a prefect, who should be effective in solving the issue, unless it is beyond their control. Furthermore, the student expressed that students will report issues of bullying "if it's bothering them enough". This idea surrounding the victim is a superficial representation that is unlikely to be based in personal experience. This student also vehemently denied the possibility of their being any obstacle to reporting. Therefore, it is clear that this student's social representations about bullying are unaffected by personal experience, making her perceptions clash with reality, hence her almost aggressive denial of a commonly held perception.

The second grade 7 student felt as though help-seeking is usually only necessary when it comes to physical bullying. The student also asserts that it's even easier when the process is well defined and easy to access. The student further suggests that when the teacher is involved, helping strategies such as counselling could be instituted "Well I think there should be a

counselling system for them like I think Mrs Chetty still does it, but when a teacher sees that somebody is a bully they usually to go to counseling”.

Another student expresses that there are multiple sources of help if an obstacle blocks any of the others. “I think maybe you can tell the teacher. Tell her teacher or in the school you can tell bully monitors, or you could tell the bully monitor, or you even tell your parents.”

The final student in the grade 7 category expressed that seeking help is often seriously overshadowed by the obstacles facing reporting. The obstacles and challenges facing help-seeking will be discussed in depth in the following section.

4.4.3 Perceived obstacles to reporting

When discussing help-seeking behaviour, 11 out of the 16 participants expressed the presence of obstacles to help. These obstacles ranged from physical prevention by the bully, to emotional inhibition by the victim.

In grade 4, half of the participants suggested perceived difficulties in the reporting of bullying. The first student suggested that students do not report issues of bullying, because they perceive that the teachers are already aware of the issue and have not reacted to it. This student’s attitude could rest on an assumption that the teacher’s lack of action could be due to an attitude of indifference (Nelson et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2018) or even openness to the idea of bullying (Eslea & Smith, 1998). To a child, it is assumed that when a serious issue is presented, those with the ability to resolve it would do so; however, it is seldom that simple. During normative social learning it is probable that children will create social representations regarding adults’ reactions that will allow for the prediction of future behaviour. In this circumstance the student predicts that the adult would react; and when they do not, it is assumed that the teacher does not perceive it as something necessary. From the teacher’s perspective there may be numerous reasons why intervention has not occurred, such as perceptions of innocence, patience with offenders, school politics or even an attention split between too many students (Jaffer, Shaheeda & Czerniewicz, 2007). However, this perceived attitude of teachers, whether it is valid or not, appears to act as an inhibition to help-seeking behaviour, and can lead to a deeper sense of helplessness (Delara, 2012). The second grade 4 student expressed the most commonly reported obstacle to seeking help: and that is fear of the bully. The student posed “Most people keep quiet because they are scared of what, when they tell the teacher what he’s going to do

again to them”. In a situation of subjugation, as common in the bullying relationship, the victim develops a fear of the negative actions of the bully (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998). Therefore, the fear of further victimization is present. As seeking help, in the form of reporting, would directly and negatively impact the bully through adult induced consequences, the student proposes that the bully is likely to act out of revenge upon the victim. In this proposed situation the student correlates help-seeking behaviour with the high risk of further victimization and determines that silence is a lower risk. This idea represents a paradox, in which the student faces constant negative stimulus, and where the most effective method of reducing that stimulus is perceived to increase the stimulus, and therefore decides to remain with the initial negative stimulus. This can lead to a sense of helplessness that can further exacerbate the victim’s situation. (Delara, 2012). It is interesting to note that the fear that reporting will perpetuate bullying includes a lack of faith in the effectiveness of reporting. Where reporting a breach of school rules to a teacher, students should be able to expect that the issue will be resolved and that the transgressor would receive punishment to the point of preventing further transgressions (Skinner, 1938). However, children’s social representations include the assumption that punishment will not be effective in deterring further victimization. Possibly this is due to an inflated sense of intimidation by the bully: that the student is more familiar with fearing the bully than with the power of the authority figure. This creates the foundation for a tentative theory that social representations of primary school victims elevate bullies to a seat of power above the teacher.

In grade 5, half of the participants reported perceived obstacles to reporting. The first student reported direct, physical intervention by the bully to prevent help-seeking:

Student: “They were trying to like I don't know if this counts as bullying but this person she is in my class, she was trying to, I don't know what happened, but she trying she bullied me and hit me, but I didn't go home. And I wanted to because I had jobs to do but then she actually didn't want me to go she was actually pulling me while the teacher was there, she was actually pinching me on the way, I was gonna say, but then she just...”

Interviewer: “Did she stop?”

Student: “Yes but then she went up she was carrying on, I was going to go, but she was stopping me”.

Interviewer: “Stopping you from going home?”

Student: “Yes but also stopping me from going to the teacher and tell on”.

(Interview 06)

In this situation the student, who was experiencing bullying from a peer, attempted to seek help from a teacher but was physically prevented through further physical harm. The same student further suggested, regarding other students, “Maybe they feel scared and the person says, “don't tell don't tell anyone this” but then you can't actually feel, “because if you tell I'll punch you or kick you”. This illustrates the pervasive impact of bullying, as a personal incident leads to the construction of negative representations regarding other student's experiences.

The second grade 5 student, who also reported victimization, posed the similar idea about the help-seeking behaviour of others; that “Uhhh, they wouldn't tell, because this bully is threatening, threatening the other person to not tell, otherwise he will beat him up. Yes, because bullies threaten other kids.” This student also emphasized that seeking help through parents is one solution to the difficulties of reporting to a teacher.

In the grade 6 sample, all the participants proposed perceived obstacles to seeking help. Two students in grade 6, who reported being threatened into silence by a bully, also reported a lack of faith in the teacher's effectiveness in preventing and resolving issues of bullying. One student explained that “I tell the teacher and when the teacher doesn't believe me I tell my friends or parents and they sort it out”. Literature showed that it is possible that teacher bias can become a very real obstacle to reporting (Nelson et al., 2018). The other student expressed: “When I started to tell my teacher they said then you must leave them because whatever they say to you me I must believe in myself”. According to this student the teacher's reaction to the reporting of bully was to promote the victim's internal self-belief. While psychological encouragement can reduce the negative effect of bullying, without the concurrent presence of actual intervention, it appears as superficial. In both of these situations, the teacher who is the most effective person to report bullying to (Demaray, et al., 2005) is surrounded by negative connotations that prevent students from seeking help, or turning to less effective strategies (Bjereld, 2016).

The remaining two grade 6 students shared the idea that reporting will implicate them for further victimization. While one student posed “When you try tell on when you see something

you can become like a target on your back”, the other suggested “You say Miss someone is hitting me with the ruler, that was that boy and you pointed him, that boy then that boy gets another detention and then he gets angry then he starts fighting”.

In the grade 7 sample, three of the students expressed obstacles to seeking help. One student reported that not all students have the confidence to tell other people about their problems, in conjunction to being victimized by a bully. This student’s assertion rests on the assumption that being a victim already reduces confidence, and the student may not have the social resources. The same student also focuses on bully threats as a deterrent “because maybe the other child does not like it and is afraid to talk because the other person might be older than them and threaten them”. As mentioned throughout this paper the power imbalance places the victim in a position of subjugation to the bully, and “older” children are represented as having more power. The second student reports a concern about reporting that it will negatively impact the school in some way:

Because after all we must start telling the teacher first because after all, when you tell your parents they will start blaming the school and saying “no, the schools not looking after the children. My child is being bullied and they can't even see that - (Participant 15)

As mentioned in an earlier section, this student’s concerns may be focused on avoiding negative reaction from teachers, who are implicated as ineffective through a report of bullying.

The final student reported internal obstacles to seeking help. The student reports “Well, sometimes you scared that they will judge you or something. Sometimes you I don’t know, you just scared. But there's that feeling that just stops you from going to tell those people”. According to the context of the interview this student is referring to insecurities and feelings associated with the diminished self-esteem common in victims of bullying. The student further states “It seems so easy for you to tell, but it's difficult to actually do those things”. The nature of the bullying received by this student targeted insecurities and resulted with ideas that “there’s something wrong with me”. Presumably, the idea of reporting also presents a situation where the victim would be cognitively faced with those insecurities, thus creating a perceived stressful encounter. This could be aptly termed “double victimization”, where the student is the victim of a bully, and is furthermore a victim of the negative cognition and side effects of the bullying. Past expressing difficulties reporting bullying to a teacher, this student further

expresses difficulties in reporting bullying to parents for fear of their reaction. According to Delara (2012) “Some students said they would like to tell their parents about the incidents they had experienced, but instead, they continued to put up with harassment for fear of their parents’ overreaction (p, 295)”. The current student felt the same way, with the inclusion of guilt, where the student felt as though they had done something wrong and may face the bulk of the parent’s overreaction.

The perceptions of students on the benefits of help-seeking behaviour appears to be significantly overshadowed by perceived obstacles to seeking help. This was apparent with a dominant concern over difficulties such as threats from bullies, as well as perceptions of teacher’s attitudes. It would be hugely beneficial for intervention strategies to focus on educating teachers on the social representations of students to supplement the ways in which teachers can promote help-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, institutionalized consequences and procedures for reporting of bullying may foster an inherent sense of trust in teachers and promote help-seeking behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Study limitations and recommendations

This study was limited by the small sample size that was taken from one KwaZulu Natal school. While attempts to capture a sample of various age categories were made, the results should be generalized with care, as there is large room for diversity that may have alluded this particular study. Furthermore, research on social representations are largely endemic to the population of study. While these results may be valid within South Africa, they may differ in alternate contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, social representation theory is largely a hypothetical theory, and is by nature quite a difficult theory to apply to the thoughts and behaviour of others. While inferences can be made, the possibility of error is still present.

Exploratory research often utilizes a broad scope to pave the way for more specific lines of inquiry. The use of ‘pure’ social representational theory is more appropriate for a narrow scope of investigation, and therefore could be used to investigate any of the resultant themes of this paper thoroughly. However, due to the broad nature of this study it was not possible to draw in-depth analyses of each individual topic in one research paper. These brief looks at major

issues within the South African schooling context should motivate further research as well as inform intervention strategies of some important considerations.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

According to the aims and objectives of this study, some conclusions can be made

Aim 1: To determine how South African School children socially represent issues of bullying.

South African school children create social representations around bullying that are largely impacted by personal experiences, culture, and developmental competencies. At different developmental stages students *anchor* and *objectify* new information in to create and sustain perceptions of concepts such as bullying, while culture and personal experiences guide this process.

Aim 2: To explore South African School children's the attitudes towards bullying

South African school children exhibited varying attitudes towards bullying that ranged from passive indifference to active resentment. Attitudes appeared to become more rational and empathetic as the developmental age of the student increased.

Aim 3: To determine ways to assist intervention strategists in making informed decisions to combat bullying.

Many usable suggestions for intervention strategists were posed within the discussion. These included: warnings against “blanket intervention strategies” that ignore age-specific conceptions of bullying, suggestions for culturally competent intervention theorists, the need for structured and observable reporting procedures and consequences for bullying, the importance of teacher awareness in handling situations of bullying, the necessity for gender specific intervention strategies and finally student education on the importance of help-seeking behaviour.

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Appendix A: Quote from Thornberg (via email)

“First the interviewer introduces with the following statement (not simply read from the interview schedule but learn the content and tell the kid from your memory - the important thing is not that you tell perfectly as it is written but that you deliver the message that you think that the kid know more than you about being a kid in the school and about what kids today think and experience when it comes to bullying, as well as remembering the kid about some ethical research stuff):

‘I’m trying to find out how children think about why bullying happens. I’s why I’m here. So I thought that maybe you would like to help me with that. But you don’t have to if you don’t like do. And we will talk as long as you would like to talk, and you only tell me what you would like to tell. And no one at school will know what you in particular have told me.

I read in a book that bullying is when one or more students are repeatedly mean to another student in a way that the student becomes sad and cannot defend him- or herself. It could be that you over and over again tease, hit, hold or say mean things to the students or exclude the student from the group. And I read that there is bullying in various schools. This is why I would like to find out how students themselves think about what bullying depends on.

And when we are talking here, there is nothing that I think is right or wrong, but what I’m curious about is what you think. I wonder about what students think. And I’m not a [school] student but you are, so you know so much more than I about these stuff.”

After this introduction, the interview can begin. Here is the list of the interview questions:

1. Please, tell me about a bullying incident that you have seen, heard of or been involved in, and that has taken place in your own school or in another school!
2. What do you think started the bullying? How come that the bullying took place?

Thus, first the kid tells the interviewer about a bullying case (it could be something he och she has been involved in or seen or heard of in school, seen or heard of from a TV program, a book,

a movie or from other kids), and then the interviewer asks the kid how come that this bullying happened. After that, the interviewer can go back to question 1 and ask if the kid has seen, heard of or been involved in another bullying case. If so, move on to question 2. This will be repeated until there are no more bullying cases to talk about (of if the kid wouldn't like to talk about that anymore).

So it's a rather simple interview schedule. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the interviewer uses a lot of probing, active listening and follow-up questions (e.g., How come? Could you tell me more about that? Tell me about it! What do you mean? Tell me more! How come that you think about that?), and adopt a child-friendly and nonjudgmental approach.”

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

1. Hello, my name is Tristan, what is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. Tell me a little bit about yourself?

Where are you originally from? (Background and culture)

How long have you been in this school?

4. Do you know what bullying is?

Could you explain it to me?

5. What kind of bullying do you think happens the most?

Is it through hurting, is it through teasing, is it through name calling, or is it through phones and social media?

6. Can you remember a specific instance where somebody was bullied?

What do you think caused the interaction?

Why do you think the bully acted in this way?

What do you think about the person who got bullied?

7. Do you think these reasons are okay to cause bullying?

8. How often do you see people being bullied in or around school?

Do you ever tell a teacher or a parent about what you have seen?

If not, why not?

Why do you think it is important to tell teachers or parents about what you have seen?

9. If you see someone being bullied, what do you do?

What makes you feel the need to behave this way?

(Repeat question 6 exhaustively)

Appendix C:
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Respondent

PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT: School children's social representations on the causes of bullying in South African schools

My name is Tristan Daley, and I am currently a Masters student registered with the School of Psychology, Howard Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. My supervisor is Steven Collings, in the School of Applied Human Sciences, Discipline of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Your child is being invited to consider participating in the above mentioned research project. The aim and purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of the ways in which school children develop thought and how it causes them to perceive bullying causes. The study is expected to follow a structured interview format, with the purposes of obtaining qualitative understanding of the thoughts and attitudes of the participants. Your child has been randomly selected to participate in this study

This form serves to assure you that all responses are kept completely anonymous and at no point in the study will any participant be named. The study does not aim to implicate or encourage students to accuse other students of bullying, it is merely a method of observation to determine what school children think causes bullying. Please see the attached information sheet regarding the study's focus.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. No participant should feel coerced or obligated in any way and should feel free to withdraw from the study if necessary at any point. Your input in this study is valuable as it is intended to provide intervention strategists with a rich image of what children perceive causes bullying, thus allowing the creation of more effective methods to reduce bullying in schools. It would further be a great service to the education sector, as bullying is a massive problem facing the welfare and development of South African youths.

Interviews will be recorded digitally for the sake of accurate data collection. These interviews will be encrypted and stored in secure locations to prevent the participant's identity being known.

The findings from the quantitative analysis of this data will also be used for academic purposes.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Human Social Science research Ethics Committee (approval number_____). Should you require clarification of further information regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on the contact details that are provided below.

Thank you
Tristan Daley

Contact details of Researcher

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PARTICIPANT DECLARATION

I (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project, and consent to participating in this study.

PARENT DECLARATION

I (full names of parent) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project, and I consent to my child participating in this study.

Signature of Respondent

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Signature of parent

Date