

**Understanding boys' play and gendered violence in school: The school  
playground as space for construction of masculinities at a primary school in  
KwaZulu-Natal**



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**A research study submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Master of Education Degree**

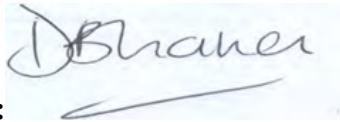
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**December 2015**

## SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

**As the candidates Supervisor I agree to the submission of this dissertation**

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature appears to be 'Deevia Bhana' written in a cursive style.

**Signed:**

**Name: Professor Deevia Bhana**

**Date: 10th December 2015**

## CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I, **Ateh, Kah Moma** declare that:

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## **DEDICATION**

**This dissertation is dedicated to:**

**My beloved parents Mr and Mrs Peter Fru Moma for their unconditional love, support and care. You allowed me to follow my dreams.**

**And to my late brother Nwana Nde Moma. You are fondly remembered.**

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## ABSTRACT

This study applies the theoretical lens of Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity theory to explore and understand the construction of masculinities and the use of violence by boys at play at the school playground. A qualitative methodological approach and an ethnographic design were used to examine school boys' experiences during break time play. The purpose of this study was to investigate how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gender cultures. Through exploring the power dynamics that play out among boys and between boys and girls at the school playground, the research study offers an in-depth examination of the school culture that manifests in the playground activities and interactions of Grade 7 boys, aged 12 to 14, at a primary school in a township in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Observation, focus group discussions and individual interviews were used to collect relevant data. The participants were purposively selected and the data was triangulated at methods level and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that break time was considered to be exciting and to be a time for boys to play and "have fun" at the school playground.

Furthermore, the study found that, whilst certain boys see girls as friends to play with, talk to and share their problems with, boys' tendency to construct themselves as 'boys' is intricately woven into their understanding of what it means to play and "have fun" at the playground. This self-construction of identity was revealed to be a certain way of doing gender which is understood as not only negating girls as "other", but as using violence to negotiate and/or legitimate enforcement of the identity, "boy." It was also found that girls are active agents in the use of violence in school. Girls' use of violence is perhaps associated with their negotiation of the masculine hegemony that is evident at school playground spaces. Hegemonic masculinity produces and replicates boys' and girls' use of violence in and around school.

The study recommends that policy interventions to end gender violence against girls in and around school should involve and evolve from a nuanced understanding of what defines boys' and girls' play in school. It also recommends gender positive approaches to enhance learners' schooling experiences.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study investigates how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures. In particular, it explores the power dynamics that play out among boys and between boys and girls at the school playground. During break-time, the school playground is a flourishing environment of unequal gender relations and violence that manifest in the ways boys play and negotiate their identities. In examining the playground cultures of a group of grade 7 boys at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, the study applies Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity theory in order to understand the construction of masculinities and the making of violence by boys at play at school playgrounds.

### **1.2 Defining Gender Violence**

Gender violence is difficult to define. The contextualised nuances and dynamics of social and historical constructs of what defines gender in terms of relations between men and women complicate attempts at definition. Understandings of gender violence have mainly centered on debating legislation and frameworks aimed at its prevention and eradication (CEDAW, 1992; Bhana, 2013). Gender violence has been understood in terms of certain manifestations of power; mainly in the power imbalance between men and women in the context of formal and informal hierarchical relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Gender violence is seen in all societies and is a significant problem given its pervasiveness and consequences and the fact that it is produced and reproduced in the negotiation of relations and power dynamics between men and women. According to Russo and Pirlott (2006), gender violence can be seen as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender, including acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or threats leading to deprivations of freedom. While women and girls remain the main victims of gender violence, it is not

exclusively a discourse of victimhood of women. It is discussed as both a cause and consequence of gender perceptions. This refers to the ways men and women perceive each other and themselves within the social order (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

### **1.3 Gender violence in school**

Gender violence in school is a global challenge (Leach, Slade & Dunne 2012). A report on violence against children by the United Nations (UN, 2006) maintains that violence affects every country in the world. In particular, the scourge of gender violence impedes children's learning (UNICEF, 2014). Children's rights are clearly set out and defined by conventions including the global UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 2006), and at the continental level, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990). In South Africa, children's rights are protected at national level by the Constitution and the Children's Act (SA Constitution, 1996; Children's Act 38 of 2005).

National and provincial interventions to stop gender violence are regarded as critical measures to protect children from violence and promote positive schooling experiences (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2014). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996), clearly spells out the right of every person to free and safe schooling. The Department of Education (DoE) also stipulates measures that schools should take to ensure the safety of learners (DoE, 2001). However, gender violence at school continues to be a major problem in South Africa (Bhana, 2012; 2013). The Child Gauge Report 2014 signals what needs to be done from a "legal, policy and programmatic perspective to protect children from violence" (Child Gauge, 2014 p.8). However, it is difficult to determine where violence at school is located and perhaps even more difficult to identify the factors and causes of gender violence in and around schools in the country.

This chapter presents the background and rationale of this study and discusses the research aims and objectives and the key research questions. The research site is briefly described as well as

the study's significance. The chapter ends with an overview of the study's five chapters and a conclusion.

#### **1.4 Background of the study**

Violence, power and gender dynamics in social settings such as schools continue to engage scholars (Bhana, 2005; Connell, 1995; Morrell, 1998). Violence affects children's growth as well as their ability to form trusting relationships with their peers and adults (Burton, 2008). This may have a significant effect on their schooling experiences. According to Burton (2008), such effects include "increased truancy and dropout rates, both risk factors for later delinquency, as the threatened child is too afraid to attend school" (p.16). Furthermore, violence impacts on children's health and has numerous effects on their well-being (Bhana, 2013; Connell 2011).

Understanding the intersection of gendered power-play and the onset of violence and how these are mediated within social spaces has motivated research studies on children geographies, learning spaces and schooling experiences (Thorne, 1993). It is important to consider the ways in which school proposition, and is thus positioned as site for gendered violence. It should not be assumed that schools are necessarily safe spaces for young children (van Ingas & Halias, 2006). As Pinheiro (2006) notes, many schools around the world are not the 'safe havens' they are often assumed to be, given that gender violence and corporal punishment are identified as the most interrelated and significant areas of abuse.

In South Africa, school has often been referred to as unsafe place, while discipline is a major problem for schools (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Besides, schools have been observed as showing lethargy and incompetence in their failure to confront issues of sexual harassment and violence (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997). Violent attacks have taken place in classrooms and playgrounds which have received sensational report in the media (Ramphal, 2009). Burton (2008) reports that, "15.3% of learners in primary and secondary schools have been victims of

some form of violence in school and outside the school gates” (p.16). Furthermore, 4.6% of learners have experienced physical assault, 5.8% sexual assault and 2.3% rape.

In particular and of interest in this study, gender violence is reported be part of school life which inadvertently contributes to the socialisation that happens at school for both boys and girls (Leach, 2002). Pinheiro maintains that, while gender violence is a problem, it is preventable if the underlying causes are identified. This claim suggests the need for timely interventions in agreement with Bhana (2009; 2013) that early interventions are critical to curb gender violence in schools.

Previous studies have shown how gender is constructed within physical spaces and at the school playground. The playground enables children to both create their own identities and regulate the construction of others’ identities (Bhana, 2008; Clark and Paechter, 2007). Clark and Paechter’s (2007) study at a primary school in London found that children’s play at the school playground was a means through which their identities were constructed. The study further showed that school playgrounds were areas of freedom for children due to less control and that boys often used assertive rules to dominate spaces. These boys’ construction of dominant masculinities was seen in their commitment to sports, particularly football (Clark & Paechter, 2007).

A similar study conducted by Bhana (2002) at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal, revealed that the school playground allows children to construct their gender identities. Bodily strength was found to be a key depiction of violent masculinities at the playground. Furthermore, violence and masculinities were seen as a means through which a particular group of boys known as ‘*tsotsi*’ (criminal/gangster) position themselves as masculine as against smaller boys. *Tsotsi* threatened other boys, fought with them, and seized their food and snacks during play time, leading to violent behaviour at the school playground. In a related study of black working class primary school boys and girls, Bhana (2005) observes that violent behaviours at schools can be an effective and acceptable way of getting rewards and are a response to the conditions of poverty under which learners’ live. Bhana (2008) also highlighted girls’ agency in the violence that

happens in school, claiming that girls are not merely passive victims of violence, but are also actively engaged in the use of violence.

Schools are places that are packed with power relations (van Ingas & Halias, 2006). The ways in which power is constructed and negotiated in school spaces, particularly playgrounds, need to be understood. More specifically, in the mapping of the school as a space, in the school structures and practice-related negotiations, power relations are largely gendered. However, within school settings, gender power can be a means of normalising violent practices and plays that are disruptive. A culture of gender power that promotes gender regimes in school is linked to the normalised gendered behaviour that occurs in school settings. For instance, Leach and Humphreys (2007) observe that school promotes boys' privilege and encourage boys' dominance of school spaces through physical and verbal acts of sexual harassment that go unnoticed. These forms of inequality tend to normalise gender power play against girls, leading to gendered violence.

As has been observed, schools in South Africa are seen to reflect the unequal and antagonistic gendered relations which manifest in everyday school culture. Patriarchal notions of power, authority and aggression are also visible amongst children at school, particularly at the school playground (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). Furthermore, bullying, fighting, teasing, gang rape, aggression, assault and sexual assault are blurred in what easily pass as normal practices which promote the boy-cult notion of "boys-will-be-boys" (Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006). Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghail and Redman (2001) also recognise that school playground is a place where children are commonly engaged in a struggle for power. Children construct gender at playgrounds and this prevails where and when adult intervention is absent. The consequence is a re-enacting of a cycle of reproduction of power relations defined in hegemonic cultural identities (Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghail & Redman, 2001).

## **1.5 Rationale for the study**

The school landscape is a social space where boys and girls are active in play (Thorne, 1993). Boys have often been identified as the main perpetrators of violence because of their show of dominance. Studies on how boys construct themselves as gender have explored masculinity and prestige and belonging to what has been termed, the ‘male club’ (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997; Bhana, 2008). Discourses on masculinity have focused on gender, power and violence and their interplay within socially constructed relationships. There is a need to explore how boys’ and girls’ play is constructed as well as the way or ways in which boys conform to the rules of the ‘male club’ while at play at school playgrounds in South African settings. For instance, what do we know about the way boys’ construction of self as gender impacts the exertion of power through coercion, bullying, intimidation, vicious language and forceful gestures on other boys and/or girls at school playgrounds? How does such behaviour lead to or is led by the gendered nature of violence that happens within and around school? Investigating boys’ school playground play and experiences will provide explications of how boys’ construction of self in their play is embedded within violent gendered cultures.

When I first thought of this topic, two things came to mind; firstly, my experience of violence while attending primary school and secondly, my experience during my teaching practice. I vividly remember how, during my primary school days, groups of boys often harassed, intimidated, and talked down at me, other girls and younger boys. Boys were always stealing my lunch and those of smaller boys (including my younger brothers), pushing and hitting us while at the playground and throwing objects at the girls at playtime. Boys never allowed the girls to play with them. In rare instances when they did, they always mocked how we girls played, calling us names, touching us inappropriately and pulling our uniforms to reveal our panties. Boys usually occupied the entire playground space and we could only play on smaller spaces. Sometimes, we just watched them play and retrieved their ball when it went out of the field. Furthermore, ‘those boys’ who considered themselves big and powerful never played with smaller boys. They often seized their balls, sent them off the soccer field and made them watch while they played. ‘These boys’ at school always considered themselves powerful and looked down with spite on girls as a bunch of vulnerable ‘belle’.

Years later, while on teaching practice at a Pinetown school in rural KwaZulu-Natal, I observed that boys exhibited the same type of play at break time, perhaps more frightening than I experienced in my school years. These boys openly used verbal violence against girls and smaller boys; disparaged girls and smaller boys in gender terms and sometimes became physical; touching the girls' dresses and bodies in inappropriate ways, and pushing and hitting them while walking along the school corridors. Moreover, boys whom they regarded as not 'real boys' were often excluded from their games. These groups of boys, referred to as 'gays', were seen as powerless and as such were marginalised and exploited. There was obvious air of arrogance, threat and intimidation among the boys and the playtime hour at the school playground seemed to be fused in this kind of gendered power tension, obviously contrived in disfavour of girls and some boys that were regarded as 'small' or 'not real boys'. Such behaviour got me thinking; in what ways are the nature of boys' play at school instrumental in the gendered violence seen in and around school?

### **1.6 Aims and objectives of the study**

This study had a four-fold objective. Firstly, it investigated how 30 boys from Florida Primary School (pseudonym) in KwaZulu-Natal give meaning to the nature of break time play at the school playground. Secondly, the study explored the role of masculinities in boys' play during break time in order to identify the ways in which boys' play is shaped and influenced by forms of masculinities. Thirdly, the study sought to determine the relationship between violence and boys' play. Finally, it set out to understand how gender violence is manifested in boys' play at the school playground.

### **1.7 Key research questions**

The following key research questions were formulated:

- What is the nature of boys' play at school playgrounds?
- What role do masculinities play in boys' play?

- How does gender violence manifest in boys' play?
- How is violence associated with boys' play?

## 1.8 Research context and site

This study was conducted at a primary school in the Mariannahill suburb of Pinetown, 16kms west of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The school was given the name Florida Primary School.

### Map of the area



The Mariannahill area covers approximately 176 square kilometres (Cross, Bekker, Clark & Wilson, 1992) and forms part of the larger eThekweni Municipality. The majority of the people living in this suburb are from the lower and middle classes. Settlement in the area that is now known as Mariannahill began around 1976. People were resettled from other parts of KwaZulu-Natal under the apartheid Group Areas Act (Act No. 79 of 1961).

Mariannhill is densely populated. The men that live in this community are mainly employed as semi-skilled and factory-floor workers at industries and factories in the nearby Westmead industrial area. The women are mainly housewives with little or no education. The majority of the youth are unemployed. They are seen walking around the community making a noise, smoking and engaging in crime.

The school is surrounded by homes, ranging from shacks to cluster houses and Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses provided by the government at very low cost.



### **The Mariannhill community**

The school presently has approximately 1 500 learners. There are multiple classes in each grade. It caters for Grades 1 to 7 and there is one Special Needs class. Florida Primary School is a mixed school (Coloureds/Africans) but is dominated by African learners. The school has 45 educators, two secretaries and three cleaners. It is headed by a female principal and a male deputy principal. A feeding scheme provides lunch to all learners and they can also buy snacks from the tuck shop that is located inside the school premises for safety and security purposes. This feeding scheme attracts a lot of learners because many are orphans that depend on this meal for their daily sustenance.

The majority of learners at this school come from nearby communities such as KwaNdengezi, Mpola, Nazareth and Klaarwater, while the minority comes from other locations around

Pinetown. Most of the learners are extremely poor and many reside with either single parents, grannies or extended families because they have lost their parents, while others have never had a father figure in their lives either due to their parents separating or their father's irresponsibility when the mother was pregnant. In keeping with their poor socio-economic background, many learners walk to school every day, no matter how far their home is from the school.

### **1.9 Significance of the study**

International, national and local legislation and regimes call for a halt to gender violence, particularly violence against women and girls (UN, 1993; CEDAW, 1993; CHR, 1994/45). In the South African context, violence is seen as rooted in unequal power between men and women that is legitimised by customs, traditions, religion and cultural practices which are promoted by patriarchy and a hierarchical hegemonic social order in communities. South African schools are identified as sites of the prevalence and reproduction of the conditions that propagate gender violence.

Beyond efforts and measures to eradicate gender violence at South African schools, further steps are currently being taken to stop such violence. The main focus of this research study is the South African township school context and setting and how violence is related to socially constructed power. In exploring boys' construction of their identities within school playgrounds, we are able to establish how such identities are defined by power that is supported by culturally embedded practices of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

The significance of this research study is twofold. Firstly, it enables us to recognise that violence in and around school is not only associated with violence in the community, but is also shaped and defined by it, implying that the use of violence in school is intricately woven into the cultural settings and practices that obtain in the community where a school is located.

Secondly, as a site of school violence, the school playground is not a gender neutral space. Boys' active involvement in gender violence is aided or counteracted by girls or those considered as 'other', implying that beyond being victims, girls' agency is also seen in the active use of violence in school (Bhana, 2008). Therefore, this study points to the need to examine both within-school factors and the without-out school causes of the gender violence witnessed in and around school in proposing interventions to bring such violence to an end.

## **1.10 Brief outline of chapters**

### *Chapter one*

This chapter introduces the study by presenting the background and rationale for the study and its aims and objectives. It also sets out the key research questions framing the study and briefly describes the research context and site. The significance of the study is discussed and an outline of the chapters is presented.

### *Chapter two*

This chapter presents a thematic review of international, sub-Saharan African and South African literature relevant to this study. The review focuses on the contested spaces of school and how boys' play is embedded within violent gendered cultures. The chapter also describes the theoretical framework adopted for this study. Connell's (1995) masculinity theory was adopted as the theoretical lens.

### *Chapter three*

Chapter three discusses the research design employed for this study and the study methodology. This study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design and is located within the social-constructivist paradigm. A combination of observation, focus group discussions and individual semi-structured interview was used to collect relevant and reliable data. The field work spanned three months during which time the researcher was immersed in observing the day-to-day playtime activities and interactions of the participants at the Florida Primary School playground. A detailed description and explanation of the purposive sampling procedure used to select the 30 study participants is also provided in this chapter. Finally, the methods used to analyse the data

collected and to discuss the results are presented. Ethical considerations and an explanation of the processes adopted to ensure trustworthiness are also discussed.

#### *Chapter four*

Chapter four presents an analysis and discussion of the study's findings. A diagrammatic representation is provided of the way the triangulation of data collected using the three methods of data collection developed into the themes which guided the analysis and discussion. Connell's (1995) masculinity theory is employed to understand the embedded meanings in the nature of play that boys engage in at the school playground. Investigating how boys' play is embedded within violent gendered cultures called for an interrogation of what break time playground activities meant for boys and understanding their intersection with gender violence. The themes developed from the data collected are used for the analysis and to foreground the discussion presented in this chapter.

#### *Chapter five*

This chapter summarises the content of this dissertation. It draws on the findings and the literature reviewed to present a conclusion and presents recommendations in line with the findings.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

The ways boys are raised in society reinforce masculinity in terms of personality and aspirations in terms of what it means to be a man. This construct is interpreted in this study as the way that boys do identity in and around school, dictated by a cultural context of hegemonic masculinity in the social setting of the school community. This legitimates, normalises and reproduces unequal power dynamics in relationships between men and women, and boys and girls. Power dynamics are heavily balanced against women, girls and those constructed as "other". Violence, subjugation and appropriation of power by men against women define gender relationships in the community and within school landscapes. School structures and settings are not only gender differentiated, but are differentiated in ways that elevate men and boys over women and girls.

The school playground is revealed as an archetype of the school landscape and setting that promotes and replicates these unequal power dynamics between and among boys and girls.

This chapter presented the background and rationale for the study. The aims and objectives were also clearly stated. The study's key research questions were outlined and the research context and research site were briefly described. The significance of the study was also discussed. Finally, the chapter set out the outline of the chapters in this dissertation. The following chapter presents a review of relevant literature.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This study investigates how boys' play at school playgrounds is embedded within violent gendered cultures. Bhana (2008b) and Clark and Paechter (2007) observe that the school playground is a space where children construct their identities and control the construction of others' identities. Boys' play at school playgrounds often shows in their behaviour as characterising certain masculinities. The literature notes that, while such masculinities are complex and contested, discussion has mainly centred on how particular masculinities instil a sense of entitlement and privilege over 'others' among boys at school (Thorne, 1993; Renold, 2005). This chapter begins by discussing the theoretical framework employed for this study. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature under the following themes:

- Hegemonic masculinity as gendered power relations
- Violence and masculinity
- Gender violence and schooling
- Contestation of the school playground
- Gendered violence in and around school.
- Framing interventions to curb gender violence

#### **2.2 Theoretical framework**

##### **2.2.1 Key concepts**

Masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, homosexuality and heterosexuality

### **2.2.2 Masculinity**

Connell (1995), define masculinity as a specific gender identity belonging to male persons. The concept of masculinity is generally used to refer to the cultural construct of maleness, the construction of men as gendered (Hearn, 1996). Morrell (2001) refers to masculinity as a social construct that develops primarily through gender socialization. Morrell (2001) contends that “there is no one typical masculinity but rather different masculinities” (p.33). Researchers also argue that masculinity is what men think and feel and how they behave (Kimmell, 2004; Kimmell, Hearn & Connell, 2005). Furthermore, it is observed that what constitute masculinity is used differently by various researchers depending on their field of study (Khan, 2009).

However, there has always been the contention about what is considered as an inherently flawed colonial construction of masculinity. This construction of masculinity is seen to fall short in terms of recognising broader contexts within which gender norms are shaped (Hunter, 2005). In this study, consideration is given to understanding how patriarchy is central in promoting unequal gender relations. Particularly, consideration is given to understanding ways unequal gender relations privilege men over women (Connell, 1995) and perhaps boys over girls as critical to the conceptualization of masculinity.

### **2.2.3 Hegemonic masculinity**

Scholars have always expressed hegemonic masculinity in terms of the archetypical conception of masculinity which receives prominence in society. Mac an Ghaill, (1994) refers to hegemonic masculinity as dominant cultural stereotypes of masculinity which includes features such as brave, dominant, authoritarian, aggressive, strong. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity is seen as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (p.77). Hegemonic masculinity is conceptualised as emphasising dominance and power, aggression and subjugation of men in relation mostly to women (Morrell, 2005).

However, scholars have argued that hegemonic masculinity is only invested with power and in that manner represented, celebrated and idealised (Morrell, 2005). Whilst hegemonic masculinity struggles with challenge and legitimacy, there are within society multiple forms of masculinity which simultaneously exist in both conflict and conversation with each other (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987; Morrell, 2005). This study conceptualises hegemonic masculinity guided by an understanding that socially defined ways and constructions of man as gender, and the power and possibilities invested in such constructions are fluid and offers a possibility of change (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

#### **2.2.4 Subordinate masculinity**

Subordinate masculinity refers to those men who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) explains this form of masculinity in terms of being ‘expelled from the circle’ of masculinity legitimacy. This form of masculinity is often marginalised (Connell, 1995), and it includes gay masculinity.

However, in some societies, men are slowly breaking out of the traditional stereotypes associated with hegemonic masculinity. These present attributes commonly associated with subordinate masculinity while they become more able to share feelings, be more sensitive and caring in cultivating interpersonal relations (Connell, 1995).

#### **2.2.5 Homosexuality**

Homosexuality as a concept has its defining orientation in the conceptualisation of male to male sexual bonds (Foucault, 1980). In Western conceptions, this orientation is accorded a life-long predisposition. In other cultures (amongst some tribes in the New Guinea and in Crete for example) it has been seen that homosexuality is conceived in terms of a temporary phase in sexual relation. Hirsch (1992) also contends that same-sex bonds or what can be conceptualised as homosexuality was seen as a normal and natural way of life in Imperial China.

However, homosexuality, oppression and marginalisation have come to be associated terms in contradiction to heterosexuality, dominance and legitimacy. Scholars have argued that

homosexuality has gained currency as target group because, as a category seen from western conception as a way of life-long sexual preference, homosexuality has been created and defined as psychosocially aberrant (French & Swain, 2011). While the concept of homosexuality is given prominence in the summation of an individual's identity today, it is equally contended that the concept is problematic and can be misleading. This is because if and when applied to historical times, cultures and periods where homosexuality was not a distinct sexual orientation, it blurs understanding of the way/s same-sex sexual bonds were construed and practiced.

### **2.2.6 Heterosexuality**

Specifically, systems of heterosexuality privilege rely upon people interpersonally and institutionally defining heterosexuality as natural, normative, ahistorical and ideal (Butler, 1999). Heterosexual have rights and privileges granted to them because their sexuality is often considered as 'ideal' in society. Moreover, heterosexual often exclude and marginalize other sexualities because of its legitimacy. According to Jackson (2006), heterosexuality should not be thought of as simply a form of sexual expression, not only a key site of intersection between gender and sexuality but similarly one that reveals the interconnections between sexual and non-sexual aspects of social life.

Connell's (1995) masculinity theory is used as the theoretical lens to inform this study. Critical masculinity offers a lens to investigate gender and power (Connell, 1995; Connell, 1996; Connell, Hearn & Kimmell, 2005). Focusing on gender power relations enables an understanding of how different forms of masculinity are structured in relation to domination and subordination. According to Connell (1995; 1996), everyday life involves active construction of masculinity through culture and socialisation which are most often shaped by institutions. Connell (1995) suggests that social institutions such as schools present social spaces where active construction of masculinities thrives. In the course of daily relations and interactions within the school, spaces for performing gender, including the school playground, promote negotiations and relations that produce and reproduce masculinities. Morrell (1998) argues that, although socially constructed, masculinity is fluid, varied and contextual and that there is no universal masculinity, but rather

multiple masculinities. This suggests that the construction of masculinities is dependent on context and situations.

Connell, Hearn & Kimmell (2005) observe that masculinities “do not exist in social and cultural vacuums” but are seen in the performance and structuring of gender patterns at different layers, often representing sources of tension and change (Connell, 1996). Connell (1995) identifies four categories of masculinity: hegemony, subordinate, complicit and marginal. According to Connell (1995) these categories can be used to explain variations in the construction of masculinity among and between groups of boys and men. Connell explains that hegemonic masculinity refers to dominant forms that subordinate other masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity explicates the notion of privilege over women and ‘other men’ that men collectively enjoy (Connell, 1996). Likewise, Bhana (2005b) asserts that hegemonic masculinity is explainable in terms of ideas invested with power, and that not all men embody a common form of masculinity. Studies indicate that patterns of constructs such as authoritarian, sporty, macho, independent, heterosexual, aggressive and powerful are associated with hegemonic masculinity (Adams & Coltrane 2005; Connell 1995, 1996; Salisbury & Jackson 1996).

The notion of ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ in some cultures (Bhana, 2002; 2008b; Morrell, 1998) accords boys rights, rewards and privileges over girls by asserting their superiority. Bhana (2002; 2008b) and Morrell (1998) observe that this notion is prevalent in South Africa and is of particular significance among communities in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Bhana (2002; 2008b) and Bhana and Pillay (2011), boys are taught to be protective of girls. These cultural communities regard girls as weak and powerless (Bhana & Pillay, 2011), a notion that intuitively sends a message of inherent vulnerability of girls as “gender.” Such notions, which are culturally inculcated in boys, are carried to schools and are reinforced by schools’ institutional culture. Within school spaces, especially at playgrounds, these notions are upheld in boys’ construction of their identity as gender (Bhana, 2002). Adams and Coltrane (2005) contend that the ways in which boys are raised in society reinforce a personality of masculinity and encourage such behaviour. The idea that, ‘boys are boys’ and ‘girls are girls’, determines the intersection of

power relations and gendered constructs. The way in which power is negotiated among boys and girls is impacted by the cultural patterns of hegemony that dominate school spaces.

Therefore, Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity is useful, particularly in providing a lens to understand how boys' construction of masculinities at school playgrounds accounts for gender violence in and around schools. However, masculinity is contextual. Boys or men construct different masculinities (Connell 1995). In order to show how boys manifest different forms of masculinities while playing at the school playground, it is important to examine hegemonic masculinity and gender power relations.

### **2.3 Hegemonic masculinity as gendered power relations**

Masculinity is characterised by how men use their power to dominate women and other men. However, Connell (1995) recognises that masculine identity mutates. Historically and spatially, masculinity is also observable in what Connell (1995) refers to as the making and remaking of identity and meaning. However, Whitehead (2005) defines masculinity as “a common denominator of men... across social divisions, as opposed to existing approaches to men's identity, as men, which employ the concept of different ‘masculinities’ being produced by men in different social positions” (p.411). According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinities are forms of masculinity that are constructed as ‘normal’ masculine behaviour (Connell, 1995). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend that men can take on hegemonic masculinity when it is considered appropriate and necessary but can equally distance themselves from it at certain times. Hearn and Morrell (2012) explain hegemonic masculinity in terms of the exclusive power and privileges that a specific group of men enjoys that grants them access, high status and dominance in society at the expense of women, other men and all those excluded from power. This suggests that masculinity is not static, but evolves with history and context.

According to Mills (2001), “hegemonic masculinities are also contextual constructs.” Mills (2001) further contends that a “particular form of masculinity acquires hegemonic status only in certain situations” (p.21). Mills (2001) notes that hegemonic masculinity rests on the assumption that men react to certain situations on the basis of the position they find themselves in society.

For instance, power and privilege over others can stem from descent which entitles one to become a member of a dominant ethnic group, high social class or dominant racial group. Likewise, Morrell (1998) argues that there are multiple masculinities in every society, each shaped and determined by certain enabling characteristics. Hegemony focuses on power relations and is linked to ethnicity, age, race and class. However, it is difficult to label a boy or man in terms of one type of masculinity or another, even though hegemonic masculinity is dominant.

The position a boy or man may find himself in at a particular time or situation will determine his position as being hegemonic. Moreover, being violent and a desire for power are not natural but are products of social constructs that serve to reinforce masculine privilege in societies (Mills, 2001). Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) recognise that hegemony is not necessarily violence even if supported by force. In this regard hegemony, often described as a patriarchal gender system (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), is assumed to be historically and culturally inherited, and is thus subject to change. Yet, hegemonic masculinity bestows men with power and privilege through its espousal and by laying exclusive claim to it (Morrell, 1998). Associated with violence both perpetrated and experienced by men, hegemonic power is recognised as a problem and a consequence of masculinity (Jeffthas & Artz, 2007). Despite such recognition, hegemonic masculinity stands out as the ideal form, the dominant form in society, and its portrayals are taken as how 'real men' behave, in terms of being aggressive and violent (Morrell, 1998; Ward, 2007).

In South Africa, race and class define the struggle for hegemony and the ways in which groups of men contest hegemonic power are often associated with a very high rate of violence that claims mainly male victims killed by other men (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). Bhana (2002) submits that black boys' portrayal of violence has its roots in the country's violent and oppressive past. Yet, it is observed that some boys reject violence in all its forms (Anderson, 2009). Anderson's (2009) study found that some boys negotiated a non-hegemonic masculinity that inspired them to talk about their emotions and thus encouraged them to create trusting friendships with girls at school. This suggests that a clear understanding of boys' early life experiences of violence can provide significant insight into understanding how masculinities are shaped and constructed in social settings, including schools. Bhana's (2002) study in KwaZulu-

Natal revealed that boys affirmed their masculinity through misogyny, heterosexuality and performing and proving their strength in collision with one another. Furthermore, ridicule and teasing were presented as acceptable forms of masculinity and as opportunities for boys to construct themselves around misogyny and heterosexuality. Bhana (2013b) notes the nature of the dynamics of relational power and its gendered weighting in South African communities. However, Morrell et al. (2012), argue that “hegemonic masculinity has lost its fluidity and is no longer conceived as representing a set of cultural ideas that are constructed, defended and contested” (p. 22).

#### **2.4 Violence, masculinity and schools**

Violence is widespread in schools and men and boys are identified as the main perpetrators (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; McCarry, 2010). Such violence is not only used to maintain control and power positioning, but the mere threat of violence is seen as a way to ensure agreement (Mills, 2001; Renold, 2004). Men and boys are often reported as being the “primary perpetrators of rape, domestic violence, incest, war, sexual assaults, environmental vandalism and other crimes” (Mills, 2001, p.53). There are widespread conceptions that men and boys are more violent in all societies. Understanding men and boys as gendered beings will help to understand their behaviours and how such behaviours relate to the uses and manifestation of violence (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). In this regard, Swain (2006), highlights that schools play a prominent role in the construction of young boys’ identity. Some boys or men assert that violence is natural to men, a source of pride and respect that girls or women like (Merry, 2009). Merry (2009), observes that the construction of masculinity that infuses the notion of power and dominance underlies violence amongst men, even though a sense of shame and regret may follow. Despite this, Morrell argues that some boys are ‘good’ and others are ‘bad,’ pointing out that the defining line is a function of the construction of masculinities (Morrell, 2002). Some boys adopt behaviours that challenge the more harmful ways of being male (Anderson, 2009) and by choosing peace over violence to resolve issues (Hamlall & Morrell, 2012).

Given that schools promote violent behaviour by boys as normal and culturally acceptable, it is important to investigate the nature of gender relationships and the notional constructs of identities as 'gender' within the spatial landscapes of schools in order to understand how violence is gendered within and without these spaces. The lens of masculinities can be used to determine what types of masculinity relate to the manifestation of violence at school.

Hegemonic masculinity dominates all other forms of masculinity, claiming the highest status and authority. This form of masculinity that is associated with power often leads to violent behaviour. Being violent has become an acceptable way of being a man (Hearn, 1998). This suggests that violence reveals the ways that power relations are manifested in the construction of masculine identities (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). Anderson's (2009) study shows how some Coloured primary school boys resisted violence and sought peaceful, loving relationships at school. This suggests the portrayal of alternative masculinities by these boys.

On the other hand, subordinate masculinity is associated with oppression, marginalisation and discrimination. Subordinates can be the targets of violence (Connell, 2002). This happens when they are "expelled from the circle" of masculine legitimacy (Connell, 1995 p. 79). Gay masculinity is a primary target. Epstein's (1997), study at a London primary school found that gay boys experienced homophobia which was expressed towards non-masculine boys and that these boys were termed 'woosie' (girls). Swain (2006), describes subordinate masculinities as those that exhibit immature and babyish behaviour such as doing 'silly' things, playing infantile games, showing fear, crying, acting 'soft' and not sticking up for oneself. Boys that exhibited behaviour that was not regarded as that of 'real boys' were termed homosexuals, often associated with discomfort and deviance and were denied their rights (Bhana, 2014). Msibi (2012), and Bhana's (2014), studies in KwaZulu-Natal revealed that language was a key way of discriminating against gay learners with names like '*isitabane*', 'moffie' and '*ongqingili*' used to refer to them. Msibi (2012) notes, that, language is a powerful tool in which homophobia is embedded. Such language is used to express conflicting notions of power, often leading to hatred and fear (Msibi, 2012).

Renold's (2001; 2004) research at a British primary school found that hegemonic masculinity shapes and forms boys' identities and that those who went contrary to this were shamed and policed as 'other'. This confirms Mills' observation, that, for many boys, not running away from fights and trouble and being able to protect and defend their friends, in other words, 'being tough' is their understanding of what it means to be a 'real man' (Mills, 2001). Violent behaviour by boys is often backed-up and re-enforced by hegemonic forms of masculinity (Swain, 2000) that give them certain status and prestige. Studies have shown that boys engage in physical violence and stand up for themselves in order to avoid being ridiculed by their peers (Renold, 2001; 2004). Boys who do not engage in physical violence are targets for abuse and violence at school. However, despite pressure to show that they are boys, some boys manage to carve out and maintain alternative masculinities (Connell, 2005; Mills, 2001; Renold, 2001; 2004). An ethnographic study carried out by Renold (2006) at a primary school in London clearly shows how some boys excluded themselves from playing football, which was regarded as a game dominated by boys but chose alternative games and were termed 'feminine'. This implies that not all men or boys are violent. Some choose alternative forms of masculinity that are non-violent.

A study by Hamlall and Morrell (2012) at a coeducation primary school in Durban revealed that provocation and situations of conflict were the two main causes of boys' demonstration of masculinity. Boys portrayed themselves through provoking other learners and demonstrated their masculine identities by asserting their masculine superiority. Such portrayals are perhaps the result of certain notions of power-play, a means of affirming and satisfying themselves within certain peer groups. Boys attempt to position themselves within a masculine hierarchy. Such positioning is often contested, leading to competition between learners (Jekwes & Morrell 2010) as well as conflict and coaxing.

## 2.5 Gender Violence and Schooling

Van Ingen and Halas (2006) recognise that, in many ways, schools as social spaces are reflections of the society in which they exist. Schools do not exist in isolated spheres but within communities of social and cultural saturations and contexts. Leach, Slade and Dunne (2012) maintain that gender is socially constructed. In other words, social institutions (such as schools, families and communities) assist in shaping, framing and constructing gender identities. In line with Connell (2011), gender identities are thus “not expressions of an inner truth but are subject positions in discourse,” and are as such “open to change” (p. 2). Yet, in some, if not all societies, prevailing power and authority structures are enacted through social hierarchies that are often dominated by males (Leach, Slade & Dunne, 2012). Schools in particular are known as spaces that are profuse with power (Lefebvre, 1991; van Ingas & Halias, 2006). More specifically, mapping schools as cultural landscapes illustrates structures and practice-related power relations that are largely gendered. It is in this regard that schools as institutions can be said to have different power and authority structures that designate different roles to their members (Leach, Slade & Dunne, 2012), thereby casting gendered identities in terms of power relations.

Yon (2000) argues that the school landscape should be understood in terms of the knowledge and the representations a school holds of how it expresses and/or represses particular identities. In other words, there is a need to understand how school as a place and space creates a manifestation of gendered roles. This is particularly true with respect to how gendered roles at school are reinforced and affirmed. Gender regimes within schools often shape learners’ experiences and identities, including the production and reproduction of masculinities and femininities (Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghail, & Redman, 2001; Paechter, 1998; Renold, 2001). Gender regimes within schools play a role in shaping boys differently, given the opportunities to construct different masculinities (Epstein et al. 2001; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Mills, 2001; Swain, 2005; 2006). Schools treat boys and girls differently, thus promoting socially constructed gender differentiations within school cultural landscapes and in the mapping of school structures. Acceptance of boys’ violent behaviours at school is likely to cut through class and academic ability (Renold, 2005). Renold’s (2005) study revealed that fighting and other forms of physical violence were common topics of discussion amongst boys at school. Recalling past incidents such as fights denoted being a ‘real man’.

It is important to understand how young people conceptualise gender and how they develop their own gender identities (McCarry, 2010). Thorne (1993) observes that teachers are in the habit of relating to learners on the basis of gender, and that such gender-labelling becomes central to learners' self-definition and self-identity, and informs, shapes and defines their social life at school. Within schools, gender roles are constructed in line with stereotypical beliefs and socialisation.

It is also important to note that violence within school structures is often seen as a product of patriarchy that is shaped by cultural meanings (Merry, 2009). Boys' violent behaviours in schools are accepted as natural and normal ways for them to behave. Teachers reportedly often turn a blind eye to what is going in line with the notion that, 'boys will be boys' (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996; Kimmel, 2004). Such traits are regarded as cultural and inherited (Connell, 1995). This acknowledges and perpetuates the notion of boys as the superior gender. Jackson and Salisbury (1996) affirm that, "there is some kind of biological determinism shaping many teachers' perception of the problems of boys" (p.104-103). Furthermore, Jackson and Salisbury (1996) argue that boys act in the way they do as a result of their genetic makeup, thus constraining teachers' responses to such acts. In this way, boys are encouraged to adopt a normative gender role. The possible consequences include violence and misogynist and homophobic attitudes among boys (McCarry, 2010).

Research has shown that violence is perceived as an act of struggle for dominance and a demonstration of power (Mills, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). However, it is important to determine what constitutes violence by pupils at school. What may constitute violence at a particular time in a particular scenario might not be considered violence in another. In this light, violence is contested. Sundaram (2013) maintains that violence includes pushing, screaming, shouting, arguments, verbal abuse, aggression, name-calling and jealousy (Sundaram, 2013). More extreme cases include murder, shooting, punching, child-abuse, rape, kidnapping, fighting, the use of weapons and sexual violence (Sundaram, 2013).

Gender violence is very common in schools and has transformed schools into sites of fear and distrust (Burton, 2008). Gender violence also develops distorted perceptions of identity (Burton, 2008). Learners are often scared or fail to report incidents of violence because they do not want to be perceived as tattle-tales or are ashamed because, when they do report, teachers fail to address the situation (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Gender violence in school is perpetrated by boys, girls and teachers (Bhana, 2008a; Burton & Leoschut, 2013). It can be a combination of emotional, physical and sexual violence, ranging from rape and murder, to injuries and degradation, hitting and wounding, bullying, assault, threats, harassment, insults, humiliation, name-calling, stalking and lack of care (Merry, 2009). Merry extends this definition by arguing that, “violations that a person experiences as a result of racism, class humiliation, and poverty often have gendered dimensions” (Merry, 2009 p.4). However, any act that leads to any harm can be considered violence. What gives such violence power and meaning is the social and cultural dimensions assigned to it (Merry, 2009).

In school, boys notice, learn and copy acts of gender violence. They learn that being considered a “real man” is achieved through prowess in the activities that they are involved in, thereby gaining high status among their peers (Epstein et al. 2001), while failure to prove themselves leads to being stigmatized as effeminate or homosexual. Gender violence in Russian schools is described as a practice which indicates “powerful peer pressure among pupils and powerful teacher pressure on pupils” (Epstein et al. 2001). Epstein et al. (2001) observe that this compels pupils to follow certain models of being a ‘real man’ and a ‘real woman’. Gender violence is seen as significant way for “boys learning to be men, as well as girls learning to be nice, obedient and attractive to men” (Epstein et al. 2001). However, it should be noted that young people use violence in their daily lives knowingly or unknowingly (Sundaram, 2013). Some violent acts are perceived as more acceptable than others (Sundaram, 2013) and it has been observed that young people believe that it is acceptable for men to perpetrate violence against women and to abuse them (McCarry, 2010).

Within the school culture, power is distributed in various ways and is linked to gendered, normalised ways of behaviour linked to gendered regimes. Both the physical space and the verbal space at school are allowed to be dominated by boys and acts of sexual harassment are

tolerated (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). Such forms of power play often indicate inequality in schools that can lead to gender violence. Leach (2003) argues that the school culture accepts gender violence and that this results in the perpetrators of school violence going unpunished. Learners therefore come to regard violence as legitimate.

Studies in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that the gender regimes within schools assist in the construction of gender identities and gender relations which promote inequality, thus leading to gender violence (Dunne, 2007; Leach & Humphreys, 2007; Leach, 2006; Leach, Dunne & Salvi, 2014). According to Leach (2006), gender violence originates from the power imbalance between males and females. Males are mostly accountable for sexual violence in schools with girls as victims (UNICEF, 2010). Corporal punishment is also seen as a means through which teachers exercise control and power over learners, with boys targeted as the main victims. Such acts further promote gender violence in schools (Dunne, 2007; Sommer, Likindikoki & Kaaya, 2013; Leach et al. 2014). However, the way gendered power plays out in school is disruptive as it normalises gendered violent practices and play within school settings. Leach (2003) points out that, boys may learn that the violence that they witness is acceptable within institutions. Boys take the advantage of their superiority to abuse younger or weaker children at school (UNICEF, 2010). Leach and Humphreys (2007), recognise that schools reflect unequal and antagonistic gendered relations which are part of everyday school culture.

Morojele's (2011) study found that boys in primary schools in Lesotho were put under pressure and were often coaxed into performing masculinities at school; being identified as 'real men' signified toughness, physical endurance, competitiveness and physical strength even in situations where they could not meet these standards. Sommer, Likindikoki and Kaaya's (2013) research in Tanzania revealed that older boys often bullied younger boys and used control, power and dominance to portray that they were 'real boys'. Gender regimes within the school socialise boys into the notion that responding to an event with violence is acceptable. Despite this notion, some boys are critical of the use of violence in certain gendered scenarios. Poverty and income inequality were found to contribute to violence by boys/men within school settings (Sommer, Likindikoki and Kaaya, 2013).

The social context in South Africa (Bhana, 2006, 2009; Harber, 2001; Jethas & Artz, 2007; Morrell & Makhaye, 2006; Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009) is characterised by high unemployment rates, extreme inequality, widespread alcohol abuse, continuing racism, the easy availability of guns and patriarchal values and behaviours, all of which encourage violence. These factors have contributed to the high rate of violence in South African schools. Ward (2007) highlights that, children who perform poorly in school, drop out, are not committed, and have low educational aspirations and that those who change schools often are more likely to engage in violent acts. All violence is gendered (Bhana, 2009; 2013; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006; Jethas & Artz, 2007; Morrell, 2002). Schools are sites for the production and reproduction of gender violence. Violence within schools is seen as a legitimate way of managing conflict and solving problems (Bhana, 2006; Urbani, Zulu, Van der Merwe, & Van der Walt, 2006). In this regard, schools can be seen as violent places packed with power (Bhana, 2005b). Teachers are described as not only encouraging and tolerating violence but also creating conditions for it to flourish, thereby making it difficult for children to trust them or report cases because no action will be taken (Bhana, 2006). The violence occurring in schools often involves learners acting violently towards other learners as well as teachers violently abusing learners (Burton, 2008). Such violence plays a major role in increased dropout rates because some learners find such an environment unbearable (Dunne & Ananga, 2013).

Gender violence has been identified as one of the major obstacles in achieving gender equality in South Africa's education system (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997). However, violence does not occur in a vacuum but is promoted by groups and institutions that permit its usage and sometimes encourage it (Morrell & Makhaye, 2006). Research (Bhana, 2013b; Jekwes & Morrell, 2010) indicates that institutional settings in South Africa encourage boys to demonstrate their 'physical superiority' and 'heterosexual prowess' through 'winning' girlfriends. Boys' bodies are used as tools for violence (Bhana, 2002, 2006; Mills, 2001).

Bhana (2008a) observes that violence is not only associated with male power but girl-on-girl violence. Bhana's (2008a) research among working class primary school girls found that girls use violence as a means to secure resources and claims to power. Girls were reported to engage,

negotiate and indulge in violence as a means to achieve social and material rewards such as friendship, and to secure power, respect and food from other girls. This suggests that girls are not merely recipients of violence; like boys or men, they are sometimes active in the use of violence (Bhana, 2008).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that girls are often the main victims of violence at school. Girls suffer at the hands of boys and male teachers. Studies reveal that they are often harassed, sexually assaulted and raped (Bhana, 2008b; 2009). According to Morrell (2002), girls are mainly victims of rape, sexual assault and harassment whereas boys are victims of assault and bullying. Seedat et al. (2009) found that sexual bullying of girls is common in schools. This constitutes rampant violation of girls' dignity and their human rights (Seedat et al, 2009). Cyber bullying and online violence are other forms of violence that are mainly used against girls in schools. According to Burton and Leoschut (2013), cyber bullying and online violence include online fights, rude, offensive or insulting text and visual messages, "cruel and hurtful rumours posted or sent about someone, embarrassing secrets posted or sent online, being threatened with harm online, having messages posted by others using one's account, sexually explicit images", and "texts sent without one's permission." All these contribute to making schools unsafe for children and more particularly, make it difficult for girls to learn (Bhana 2009; Jeffhas & Artz, 2007). It has also been observed that online and cyber bullying leads to decreased educational performance (Burton & Leoschut, 2013).

It is thus clear that learners at school are exposed to violence that often stems from conflicts or disagreements. Understanding how conflicts and disagreements are instigated and negotiated among boys and girls within school settings is thus critical to understanding violence and the nature of the violence learners are exposed to in school. A gender-broad perspective based on the way boys play at school could reveal other patterns of gender manifestation of gendered violence in and out of school. This study investigated how boys' play at the school playground explains the gendered violence in and around schools. Bhana (2005a) affirms the need for schools and educators to be aware of gender in primary school. The ways boys invest in a masculine identity are seen to be powerful; their construction of such identities and their struggle for and

negotiation of power are considered important knowledge for school educators (Bhana, 2005b). The struggle for and negotiation of power at the school playground often occur with little or no adult control.

## **2.6 Contestation of school playgrounds**

Boys and girls play in school and occupy the social spaces of the school landscape (Thorne, 1993). However, the way boys and girls play and navigate such spaces determines the nature and patterns of their interactions (Thorne, 1993). Fairclough and Ridgers (2010) assert that boys' and girls' play at school is not only different in terms of the nature of play, but there are significant differences between the sexes in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. Different levels of maturity are indicated as possibly "differentially influencing boys and girls physical self-perception" (Fairclough & Ridgers, 2010, p. 2). Morojele (2011) observes that boys tend to engage in sports which are constructed as masculine, like soccer, whereas girls confine themselves to games such as hockey and netball that are considered feminine.

Another aspect of the social space of school is that boys and girls tend to form themselves into groups that are determined by what they identify with, including age, grade, gender, race, ethnicity and so on (Thorne, 1993). This tendency is perhaps more biased towards gender formations than any other similarities. These gendered framings of boys' and girls' activities and interaction in school reinforce gendered roles.

Within the space and place of school landscapes, as boys and girls, learners are invariably drawn into relationships and interactions characterised by gender persuasions in identity and in role play (Thorne, 1993). Schools as social landscapes can perhaps best be described as not just a place and space in which interactions occur, but as a context which both produces, and is produced by, gendered power relations (Shilling, 1991). However, studies have indicated that gendered power relations are common features of interactions within school spaces (Clark & Paechter, 2007; Swain, 2006), especially at the playground (Epstein et al. 2001). School

playgrounds are places where the struggle for power among children is very common (Epstein et al, 2001), and places that are highly sex-segregated (Renold, 2006).

It is observed that children often use any opportunity to construct gender in their play at school playgrounds (Clark & Paechter, 2007). Such opportunities are often used to reproduce the hegemonic cultural identities implicated in power relations (Epstein et al. 2001; Clark & Paechter, 2007). While some children regard playgrounds as unbearable places, others are excited about them because they can negotiate their friendships with little or no adult control (Blatchford & Sumpner, 1998; Epstein et al. 2001). Swain (2001) recognises that boys become involved in an on-going struggle to control and negotiate the playground hierarchy. Whereas boys often play violently at the playground, girls are often seen to play gingerly (Kimmel, 2004). This perhaps explicates their differentiated play, as observed above. For instance, boys exclude girls from play as well as some in the subordinated group that are regarded as feminised, and who are also subjected to homophobic abuse (Swain, 2000).

Clark and Paechter's (2007) study at a primary school in London found that children's play at the school playground was a means through which their identities were constructed. The study also showed that school playgrounds were areas of freedom for children due to the fact that there was less control. Furthermore, boys often used their assertive rules to dominate spaces. The playground is seen as an area where children are free, hence allowing for play that leads to violence because of the struggle for and negotiation of power amongst learners. Blatchford and Sumpner (1998) observe that break-time at school playgrounds often produces a distinctive animated culture that may promote harassment, cruelty and authority.

Boys' construction of their dominant masculinities is seen in their commitment to sports, particularly football (Clark & Paechter, 2007), whereas girls spend playtime talking. Thorne (1993) observes that boys are involved in team sports like basketball and soccer and that these sports take up a sizable proportion of school playgrounds as they require large spaces. In contrast, the spaces provided for girls are often fixed in terms of what they can navigate. Girls'

spaces for play and the games they play in such spaces, like hopscotch, gives them a deficit share (Thorne, 1993). The disparate nature and differentiated patterns of play for girls and boys speak to the gendered differences that school landscapes and practices tend to propagate and reinforce. The marginal outlay required for girls' games in terms of space and the nature, level and requirements in terms of physical demands for such games undermine the equal participation of boys and girls within the social space of school. For instance, soccer and rugby depict 'real boys' as tough, strong and competitive, portraying their masculinity, whereas 'weaker boys' and girls are less attractive in their play (Bhana, 2008b). Furthermore, Paechter (1998), reports that boys are unrelenting and vigorously protect their social spaces at school, both in the playground, classrooms and other interactive spaces, by adopting strong gate keeping to prevent girls from intruding.

At school, children engage in play such as teasing, chasing, touching and name-calling (Thorne, 1993). Epstein et al.'s (2001) research at two London primary schools revealed that football and fighting were the main activities for boys through which high status and popularity among other boys and girls were gained. However, at another school, Fridays were set aside for the girls to play football. This made some boys feel less important and they engaged in other games such as wrestling, and of run and chase (Epstein et al. 2001). The differentiated sports that children engage in at the school playground often reflect tension, and negotiations and struggles for gender construction (Bhana 2008a).

In South Africa, the school playground presents as a space for children to construct their gender identities (Bhana, 2002). Some children feel unsafe at the school playground (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Educators or the school authorities have limited control over what happens. This is often so because the playground space is unsecure and is invaded by outsiders (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Parkes' (2008) study in Cape Town revealed that some school playgrounds were hardly monitored at all by authority figures.

Bhana's (2002) research at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal found that bodily strength was a key depiction of violent masculinities at the playground. Violence and masculinities were seen as

a means through which a particular group of boys known as '*tsotsi*' position themselves as being masculine as against other, smaller boys. *Tsotsi* threatened other boys, fought with them, and seized their food and snacks during play time, leading to violent behaviour at the school playground (Bhana, 2002). In a related study of black working class primary school boys and girls, Bhana (2005b), observes that violent behaviours at schools can be an effective and acceptable way of gaining rewards in response to the conditions of poverty under which learners live.

## **2.7 Gendered violence in and around schools**

Gender violence in schools is linked to gender violence in the neighbourhood (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Harber, 2001; Parkes, 2007). There is widespread violence in South African communities, particularly in the townships (Harber, 2001; Morrell, 1998). Disruptions and violence in schools in these townships have often been associated with the legacy of apartheid that encouraged a culture of resistance and violence (Urbani, Van der Merwe, Van der Walt & Zulu, 2004; Ward, 2007). Many years after the demise of apartheid, it is reported that the culture of violence and its manifestations in the context of community life in South African townships have yet to disappear (Urbani et al. 2004). Disrupting school by means of violence occurs because children are socialised within families and in the community to deal with problems in an aggressive and violent manner (Urbani et al, 2004; Ward, 2007). Burton and Leoschut (2013) observe that the violence that occurs in schools results from the violence children are exposed to at home, in school and outside school. Morrell (1998) asserts that violence is regarded as acceptable in South Africa's township schools and that many students are involved in violent crime. It is also reported that verbal insults and threats common in the community are carried into the school environment, thereby increasing the levels of violence among learners (UNICEF, 2010). Thus, the family and school community are regarded as agents for the reproduction of violence by children in schools (Harber, 2001).

In order to gain deeper understanding of violence among learners, it is thus important to examine the surrounding community and neighbourhood. Schools are a micro community of the communities in which they are located (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). Burton and Leoschut (2013)

argue that violent acts in schools are influenced by “family and community-level risk factors.” Violence in the neighbourhood is identified as a persistent threat to children that undermines their safety (Parkes, 2007) by intensifying their vulnerability. Ward (2007) argues that children exposed to risky social situations rather than protection, are more likely to be violent. Furthermore, Ward emphasises that children in neighbourhoods characterised by poverty and high crime rates are more likely to get involved in violent acts (Ward, 2007). According to the South African Council of Educators (SACE), children observe and imitate acts and behaviours associated with crime when they are exposed to unstable, crime-ridden environments (SACE, 2011). Crime and violence in the community permeate the school environment, leading to alcoholism, drugs abuse, gang activity (Burton & Leoschut, 2013), and other forms of violence, including gendered violence.

Violence in and around schools has an intrinsic, strong gender dimension (Bhana, 2009; 2013; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006; Morrell, 2002), meaning that all violence is gendered. It is argued that “wider social conditions” exert heavy weight which impacts powerfully on institutions (Ward, 2007), including schools. Dunne (2007) affirms that unequal gender relations or gender violence in communities where these are taken as the norm and are culturally accepted practices tend to expose children to forms and patterns of violence not just as the norm, but as “an inevitable part” of their lives, including the way they live their lives daily at school. In accepting such cultural inevitability as a way of life, a pattern of gender positioning and the performance of gendered identity becomes symbolic and is intricately woven within what is recognised as “the complex social relations of the schools” (Epstein et al. 2001). Within such complex relations, Dunne et al. (2006) observe the interconnect of gender relations and boundaries within the institution of the school, by way of informal learning as part of the hidden curriculum on the construction and reinforcement of feminine and masculine identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Swain, 2004). The gender hierarchy underlines patterns of gender performance and interaction that are critical to the production of gendered violence within and beyond the boundaries of the school (Dunne et al., 2006; Connell, 1996).

Connell (2002) observes that, regardless of variations in context, the causes of gender violence in school are similar. He notes that these are rooted in the “formal and informal processes of schooling” that produce and sustain inequalities and create the conditions for gender violence (Connell, 2002).

There has been a tendency for educational research on gender violence to focus on African boys (Miedzian, 2002). Downplaying the role of girls in the articulation of gender violence discourse and research has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to addressing such violence not only in terms of its complexity within the social context from which it emerges, but from a more nuanced understanding.

In South Africa, the role of the school “as a social arena in the construction of gender/ sexual identities” has been highlighted (Bhana, 2013b; 2010; 2008a; Morrell, 2008). Schools continue to be observed as locations in which violence is perpetrated (Burton & Leoschut, 2013).

## **2.8 Framing interventions to curb gender violence**

While it is difficult to stop violence, particularly gender violence, in schools, a number of interventions have been launched to curb such violence (Bhana, 2009; Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Prinsloo, 2005). A stakeholder approach is favoured where learners, parents, teachers, school management and governing bodies and school communities come together to address the problem in and around schools (Burton, 2008). This stems from the realisation that much of the violence that happens in schools is the result of children’s’ exposure to violence at home and outside school. Tackling the problem therefore calls for an integrated approach that moves beyond a limited focus on the school.

However, Burton (2008) remarks that different schools need different strategies because locations, resources and level of infrastructure vary from school to school. It is argued that the school has a greater role to play to ensure that learners are safe within school spaces (Prinsloo, 2005) and even beyond. Masitsa’s (2011) study found that learners were exposed to serious

danger because they were attacked by outsiders carrying dangerous weapons that intimidated and harassed them within school premises. Thus, secure fencing and effective monitoring of access and exit as well as improving the safety of building and facilities could curb gender violence in schools (Burton, 2008; Prinsloo, 2005). Other measures include controlling and preventing unwanted visitors (Burton, 2008; Prinsloo, 2005). Burton and Leoschut (2013) note that clearing and maintaining open spaces such as the school playground would ensure that learners have better access to such spaces. Burton (2008) also advises that open spaces, including the school playground should be monitored and be under adult supervision (by the teacher) at all times. This is based on the assumption that children with no adult surveillance use such opportunities to create violence in their play.

Learners are also seen as being capable of resolving their conflicts themselves when they play, and are thus able to prevent violence (Parkes, 2008). Parkes' (2008) research in Cape Town revealed that children resolved their problems at the playground by 'talking it out', discussing them among themselves and using verbal persuasion. These children saw themselves as capable of resolving their problems without adult (a teacher's) intervention. Therefore, it is argued that schools should include children directly in developing and implementing programmes to promote their safety at schools (Parkes, 2007). Similarly, Burton and Leoschut (2013) reason that to ensure safety at school, "learners must be given a voice to express where at school they feel safe or unsafe, and what are their primary safety concerns" (p.103). Harber (2001) adds that a life skills curriculum which actively involves learners in learning about crime and violence can assist in reducing violence at school.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that since gender violence in schools is caused by the school culture and social practices, for example, assigning certain activities, practices, rules and chores to a particular gender, changing such notions, behaviours and practices can help to reduce gender violence in schools (Bhana, 2009). Morojele (2011) also maintains that challenging hegemonic masculinities and supporting alternative forms of masculinity are fundamental in encouraging gender equality in school environments. This should not, however, detract from the school and teachers' responsibility to provide sufficient supervision to ensure that learners are safe while at

school under their care (Netshitahame & Vollenhoven, 2006; Prinsloo, 2005) and to maintain order as a way of preventing violence in the first place. As Bhana (2013a), notes, 'it is time to get to zero' on gendered violence in and around schools. To achieve this, the social and cultural context that gives rise to violence must be addressed.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature and demonstrated that school is a contested space. The rate of gender violence in schools is rising at an alarming rate. It was noted that all violence is gendered and that it often occurs at school and in the neighbourhood. Schools are seen as social spaces where gender inequalities are reinforced and manifested. Gendered power relationships are part of the school cultural landscape. Gendered violence in and around school is an issue of concern and debate. As noted in this chapter, the school's role in reinforcing gender stereotypes is not isolated from the social constructs of society. The literature review revealed a gap in terms of how schools as places with definite spatial conditions and culturally infused meanings shape the processes and interactions that produce gendered violence in and around schools. Therefore, this study's significance lies in enhancing our understanding of gendered violence in and around school as explicated in boys' play at school playgrounds.

Using Connell's theory of masculinity, the study explored how boys' play at school playgrounds explains the gendered violence in and around school. The literature notes that the school playground is increasingly observed as a space that allows children to construct their identities while controlling the construction of others' identities (Bhana, 2008b; Clark & Paechter 2007). In some cultures, boys are instilled with the notion that they are superior to girls and therefore have the right to better rewards and privileges (Bhana, 2002; 2008; Morrell, 1998). This is associated with the cultural practices and accepted norms that institutionalise masculinities in society. Masculinity is associated with issues of power and domination. Connell, Hearn and Kimmel (2005) affirm that masculinities do not exist in social and cultural vacuums. Thus, the theory of masculinity proposed by Connell (2005) is the lens through this study sought to

understand the way in which boys' construction of masculinities at school accounts for gendered violence in and around schools.

The following chapter presents the research design and methodology employed for this study.

## Chapter 3

### Research design and methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study investigates how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures. This chapter presents a description and details of how this research was designed and the methods used to answer the research questions. Remler and Van Ryzin (2011), state that qualitative research involves non-numerical data such as interviews, observations of behaviours, document analyses and so forth. This study adopted a qualitative research approach where data were collected through focus group discussions, semi-structured individual interviews and observation. Kumar (2005, p. 84) describes a research design as the "procedural plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically." According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), methodology is a bridge between the researcher's philosophical standpoint and the methods used to carry out the research. As such, it sets out how the research is going to be implemented and the way in which the research question(s) will be answered.

This chapter describes the research site, provides the rationale for the choice of an ethnographic research design and sets out the process that informed the study. It also discusses the methods used to collect data and the sampling procedures used. A combination of observation, focus group discussions and individual interview methods were used for data collection.

The data analysis is also presented and discussed. The participants comprised 30 boys in Grade 7 at a school in Mariannridge, KwaZulu-Natal. The data analysis revealed the power dynamics that played out among boys and between boys and girls at the school playground during break-time. The complex and contested nature of the information collected called for the triangulation of the data which was collected using different methods (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Coding was applied and themes emerged from the data. Thematic analysis was then used to organise and analyse the

data for discussion. The chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of the study, the ethical considerations taken into account and the steps taken to address ethical issues.

### **3.2 A qualitative approach**

This qualitative research study investigated how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures. It explored boys' perspectives of their play and its meaning in order to understand the gendered violent cultures in and around school. According to Struwig and Stead (2013), in conducting qualitative studies "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the issues being researched from the perspective of the research participants" (p. 11). A qualitative approach was selected as it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of boys' play experiences at school from their own perspective. The choice of a qualitative approach was also influenced by the contention that qualitative research places more emphasis on participants' perceptions and description of their beliefs and behaviours. This is in contrast with the quantitative research approach which relies on controlling and predicting phenomena, and is interested in results that reflect impersonal statements in an effort to remain objective (Struwig & Stead, 2013).

In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to describe and interpret "people's feelings and experiences in human terms" (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006 p. 272). This implies that qualitative researchers seek to understand and see things through the eyes of the research participants in ways that promote insight into the lived experiences of people in the context of their environment. Qualitative researchers are interested in vivid descriptions through observations of the behaviour of those researched (Struwig & Stead, 2013). In this study, the researcher aimed to obtain a rich and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The qualitative research approach was appropriate because it focuses on understanding and describing the phenomenon in the context of the research participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The qualitative research approach enabled me to gain rich and in-depth insight into how and why boys' play at the school playground is embedded in violent gendered cultures in the context of their environment.

In adopting a qualitative research approach, researchers generally rely on human perceptions and understanding (Stake, 2010). Therefore, in investigating how boys' play at the school playground is implicated in gendered violence, the researcher relied on the perceptions and understanding of the research participants of their construction of gendered identity and its intersections with violence in and around school. The agency of language and other symbolic systems were employed in order to understand, explain and interpret human behaviours (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011).

### **3.3 Social-constructivism paradigm**

Creswell (2012) confirms that research is a process in which researchers engage in a small set of logical steps. According to Blanche, Kelly and Durrheim (2006), a research paradigm is seen from three dimensions; ontology, epistemology and methodology. Each dimension encompasses systems of "interrelated practice and thinking" that define the nature of the enquiry (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). This research study is located within social-constructivism. The social-constructivism paradigm aligns with a qualitative research approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Social-constructivism is interested in meaning-makings (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). Social constructionists believe that reality is socially constructed (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006) and that there are multiple realities (Struwig & Stead, 2013). The social constructionist approach examines meaning at a social rather than an individual level. In other words, this approach regards peoples' "thoughts, understanding, feelings and experiences" as resulting from systems of social rather than individual constructs (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). Social constructionists regard language as a tool that helps people to construct reality (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006).

Social-constructivism sees the social world as a kind of language through which reality is constructed by systems of meanings and practices (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). Given

that meanings are constructed and negotiated by humans in the process of social interactions (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006), the social-constructivist paradigm is useful for this research study because it is concerned with how the meanings that the research participants attached to their experiences and feelings, thoughts, beliefs, behaviours and understanding within the social settings of the school playground during playtime were drawn. Therefore, the decision to locate this study within the social-constructivist paradigm was informed by the study's aim of investigating the ways in which boys' play at the school playground are embedded within violent gendered cultures, and also by the paradigmatic agreement with the choice of a qualitative methodology and the ethnographic design of the study.

### **3.4 Research Design**

This was an ethnographic study. Ethnographic study originated in anthropological studies (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2012), ethnographic research designs are qualitative research techniques that can be used to study a culture-sharing group's patterns of beliefs, language and behaviour that change over time with the aim of describing, analysing and interpreting their understanding of the phenomenon under study. Ethnography is also described as the study of people's lives within their natural settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Creswell (2012) explains that an ethnographic study is appropriate when the researcher is studying a culture-sharing group that has been together for some time and has developed common values, beliefs and language. The aim of an ethnographic study is to describe the culture or way of life by making sense of the natural meanings of gestures, display, symbols, songs, sayings and everything else that has some tacit meaning in that culture (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). An ethnographic design was selected for this study because the researcher, as a participant observer, spent a period of three months at the school observing the research participants in their lived environment and within the context of their culture and way of life as they played at the school playground during their break time (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005).

Ethnographers assume that all human behaviour is deliberate and observable, and that research should therefore be orientated towards understanding the thoughts behind people's action (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The researcher conducted an investigation into the culturally-shared understandings of boys' at the school playground over a long period of time in order to understand their social construction of reality as a group of people. This was achieved through a methodological process of observation; recording their behaviours and beliefs, making extensive field notes and through interactions in focus group discussions and open-ended in-depth interviews with selected participants (Creswell 2012).

### 3.5 Context of the study and research site

This study was conducted at a primary school in the Mariannahill suburb of Pinetown 16kms west of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The school is given the pseudonym of Florida Primary School. The Mariannahill area covers approximately 176 square kilometres (Cross, Bekker, Clark & Wilson, 1992) and forms part of the larger eThekweni Municipality.



**Map of Pinetown showing Mariannahill and neighbouring communities**

The majority of the people living in Mariannhill are from lower income backgrounds. Settlement in the area that is now Mariannhill began around 1976. The inhabitants were resettled from other parts of KwaZulu-Natal in terms of the apartheid Group Areas Act (Act No. 79 of 1961). Initially, the area was poorly developed in terms of good roads, housing, schools, shops, clinics and hospitals. Over the years the government has provided houses under the RDP. Today, Mariannhill offers primary and secondary schools, good road networks, a clinic, a community library, a children's playground, a crèche, a taxi rank, police station, mosque and churches, fire station, public swimming pool and many shops. Most of those who live in this suburb work in the factories located in the nearby Westmead industrial zone. Some work at companies in Pinetown while a number run their own small businesses. The languages of communication in this community are English and IsiZulu.

### **The school**

Florida Primary School opened in April 1979 with a capacity to accommodate 900 learners. Most of the learners come from Pinetown, KwaNdengezi, Mpola, Nazareth, Klaarwater and other neighbouring communities. The majority walk to school, while those who live far from school use buses and taxis as means of transportation. The school currently has 1 500 learners. There are multiple classes in each grade. The school caters for Grades 1 to 7 and there is one Special Needs class. There are 45 educators, two secretaries and three cleaners.

Florida Primary School serves an underprivileged community and is classified by the DoE as a Section 21 school. This means that it is completely funded by the government. Florida Primary School is under-resourced. It is common to see learners with unkempt hair and poor physical appearance wearing torn uniforms and worn-out shoes. A feeding scheme serves hot meals every day. The scheme is part of the school's strategy to encourage children to remain in school as most depend on the meals served at school for their daily sustenance. There are two separate playgrounds; one for boys and the other for girls. The school has a large soccer field and netball, valley ball, and tennis and basketball courts.



**Part view of Florida Primary School Playground**



**Views of Boys' playground space at Florida Primary School**



**Views of Girls' playground space at Florida Primary**

### **3.6 Sampling method**

The aim of qualitative research is to obtain rich and in-depth data. This is often achieved by means of purposefully sampling/selecting the right participants to answer the research questions (Struwig & Stead, 2013). However, in qualitative research, the sampling process tends to be flexible, often continuing until no new themes emerge from data collection. This is known as “data saturation” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007 p.79). It should be noted, however, that the information obtained by means of purposive sampling cannot be generalised to the wider population but only represents itself (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in this research study. The participants were selected based on the fact that they were able to provide the depth of information required.

Nieuwenhuis (2007) describes purposive sampling as a process of selecting participants based on the fact that they will provide the data required for the study. The researcher used her discretion to select participants that would provide rich data that answered the research questions (Struwig

& Stead, 2013). These participants were also selected based on their availability and the purpose of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Since the study aimed to investigate how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures, boys constituted the study sample. The participants constituted 30 boys in Grade 7. These were the older boys at the school. It was assumed that older boys would be more likely to construct their gendered identity at the school playground, especially given the absence of adult influence or monitoring. The 30 boys were selected from three Grade 7 classes. Each class was made up of 35-40 learners comprising boys and girls. Even distribution was ensured by selecting 10 boys from each class.

Selecting the participants was quite a challenge. Firstly, I observed all the Grade 7 boys during break-time. A separate area was assigned to them but they did not play there all the time. After four weeks of observing how these boys reacted, played, behaved and treated one another, I approached those who I considered were more likely to provide information that would answer the research questions. I decided on these boys after observing how active, smart or notorious they were in all the games they played and how verbal and disruptive they were or were not. I also selected the 30 participants by observing their quarrels, fights, friendships and mediation abilities within the play groups, as well as how violent and aggressive they tended to be towards others during the play and break-time. The deputy principal of the school also helped me to select participants. When I explained the nature of my study and showed him one of the consent forms, he immediately said, "You came to the right school because I have many bullies, naughty and troublesome boys in Grade 7 who must be part of the study." The criteria used to select the participants tie in with Creswell's (2013) advice to select individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under study.

Through observation, I identified more boys than were required for my sample. I then approached them individually. I introduced myself, briefed them on the nature of the study and asked them if they would be willing to participate. I also explained why I had selected them. I

noted that I had observed that they were active and notorious in all games, were often asked by their friends to play with them, verbally abused others and disrupted play at the playground during break-time. I added that some of them had been identified by the deputy principal as ‘bullies’ and I wanted to find out from them why this was the case. Fifteen of the boys immediately agreed to be part of the research. After having heard about the study, five others indicated their willingness to participate. Some agreed to participate only if their friends were also willing. After a week of persuasion, they finally agreed to participate.

The groups of boys who initially refused to participate were those labelled as ‘bullies’, ‘naughty’ and ‘troublesome’. They were always walking in groups, hitting, pushing, disrupting other learners’ lunch, and fighting. They were always found in play spaces not assigned to them because they wanted to cause ‘problems’. I therefore obtained the required number of participants for the study.

Letters were given to each participant to give to their parents/guardians to sign, granting permission for their participation in the study. After three days, I returned to the school to collect the letters. Twenty-five signed consent letters were initially returned. The others reported that their parents/guardians had not signed. I motivated them to ask their parents/guardians to sign the letters if they wanted to participate. The following week, I received all the signed consent forms.

The table below presents the participants’ biographical information:

	<b>Name (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>
1	Shoba	12	African
2	Sibu	12	African
3	Jaden	13	Coloured
4	Peter	12	African
5	Nathi	14	African

6	Gumede	13	African
7	Khumalo	13	African
8	Jude	12	African
9	George	14	African
10	Andrew	12	African
11	Joel	14	Coloured
12	Thabiso	12	African
13	Zuma	12	African
14	Mbali	13	African
15	Thando	12	African
16	Wiseman	13	African
17	Mazibuko	13	African
18	Cody	13	Coloured
19	Ethan	13	African
20	Thoba	12	African
21	William	12	Coloured
22	Senzo	14	African
23	Jabu	13	African
24	Ayanda	13	African
25	Scelo	13	African
26	Bheki	12	African
27	Nathan	12	Coloured
28	Kenzie	12	Coloured
29	Michael	12	African
30	Zama	13	African

### 3.7 My experience

Being an adult female researching young boys on a sensitive topic like this, was very interesting. The children constructed the researcher as a coach and a source of support. This was because I provided them with snacks throughout the data collection process and listened to all their

complaints and worries, no matter how small or silly they seemed. The teachers at the school constructed the researcher as an adult with formal authority and power over these children. The security officer constructed me as a social worker whose role was to support the learners and make sure they were safe and protected at school. This was evident when she referred to the case of a learner who was abused at home and needed my assistance. However, the said child no longer attends the school.

I had to navigate the power dynamics between the children and the researcher. I was flexible, supportive, open and understanding. I explained that, without the children's participation, I could not generate data. These children felt free and comfortable with me and the power dynamic was broken. Throughout the data collection process, we built a cordial relationship and an atmosphere of trust.

### **3.8 Data collection**

In qualitative research, the use of a combination of methods of data collection is permissible. It is up to the researcher to determine which method(s) are appropriate; this often depends on the purpose of the study (Kumar, 2005). These methods include interviews, observation, questionnaires, and document analysis (Kumar, 2005). In this research study, the use of multiple qualitative research methods, or triangulation of methods, was informed by the need to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Flick, 2014). The data collection methods included:

- Observation
- Focus group discussions
- Individual semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.8.1 Observation**

Observation is a data collection tool in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) that involves the collection of first-hand information through a process of observing people and places at a

research site (Creswell, 2012). Struwig and Stead (2013) maintain that observation enables a researcher to record information as it occurs in a setting, and to study individuals' actual behaviour. This process of observation requires the use of the senses such as hearing, smelling, feeling and seeing (Flick, 2014). The use of observation of participants as a method of data collection is often the result of the purpose of the research study. According to Creswell (2012), the observer can be an outsider who sits at the edge to watch and record the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). As such, he/she is a non-participant observer in the research field that is not involved in the phenomenon under study.

In this research study, the researcher was a non-participant observer. She visited the site and made notes without becoming involved in the participants' activities. The participants were observed during short and long break periods at the school playground. The researcher made use of field notes. Creswell (2012) describes field notes as "text (words) recorded by the researcher during an observation in a qualitative research" (p.216). Field notes were written and observations were made as they occurred for the entire period of field visits with the dates and times lineally recorded.

Observation at the playground mainly focused on the behaviours and interactions of the research participants with their peers. Observations were made of the games the boys played; who played the games; with whom they played; how the boys related to girls during the break time and as the games were taking place; what prompted these relations; what conversations occurred; how the girls reacted; the boys' response(s) to such reactions; whether there was friction, conflict and physical fights amongst the boys and girls involved; the nature of interference during play time games and who instigated such interference or disruptions and why; how the boys dressed, walked, and behaved towards one another during playtime at the playground; the gist of their arguments and conversations around the games, their friends and peers; and what they were saying about girls in general during break time. Throughout this process, the researcher paid close attention to what happened, listening carefully to their conversations and talk as the boys walked and played at the school playground. In certain situations, the researched interjected in conversations to subtly ask the boys questions in order to clarify and confirm what was said or

done by them. This enabled her to follow up on the discussions and actions of the participants, ensuring the collection of relevant data that was useful and in line with the focus of the study (Creswell, 2013). The choice of observation method was particularly appropriate as the researcher intended integrating the information obtained from observations with that gathered during the in-depth interviews, thereby achieving what Flick (2009) recognises as a methodologically flexible and appropriate procedure to understanding the phenomenon under study.

### **3.8.2 Focus group discussions**

The use of focus group discussions in this research study was informed and guided by Struwig and Stead's (2013) description of focus groups as a process which allows a subject to be "exhaustively explored and discussed at length" (p.103). Flick (2014) maintains that focus group discussions enable participants to express their views and produce and exchange ideas. The use of focus group discussions as a method of data collection required the researcher to be attentive, listen carefully, and show keen interest in what was said. It also required the researcher to motivate the participants to express a broad range of opinions, direct the discussion so that everyone participated and take appropriate steps to channel the conversation to centre on the focus of the study (Struwig & Stead, 2013).

The researcher used the focus group discussions to ignite and stimulate discussion among and with the participants (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). This made it possible to uncover important issues and fill in the gaps in the information collected by means of the other data collection methods. A focus group is usually made up of 4-12 participants who participate voluntarily (Struwig & Stead, 2013). For the purpose of this study, six groups of five participants met once a week for a period of two months. These interviews were held during break time and after school at the school counselling office. The focus group discussions and individual interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and the sessions lasted 45 minutes.

The focus group discussions allowed the participants to build on one another's ideas and comments in a convivial way. They also removed the barrier of shying away from discussing the topic of study as peer-influence and confidence set in as the discussions progressed. This enabled unconstrained discussion, resulting in in-depth views and information that could not be obtained during individual interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The focus group discussions provided a wide range of responses from the boys. Rich discussions were held around the various plays they were involved in and their experiences, attitudes and understandings of the nature of the play as implicated in gendered violence.

### **3.8.3 Individual interviews**

Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) define an interview as “a conversation that has a structure and purpose” (p. 5). In qualitative research, two types of interviews are used: structured and semi-structured (Brinkmann & Kvale 2014). Semi-structured individual interviews were held with the selected participants as a complementary source of data collection. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepares a guide that consists of a set of open-ended questions (Flick, 2014). The guide allows the researcher to probe for clarity and to obtain in-depth information (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

In-depth interviews were individually conducted with six boys that were conveniently chosen from each of the five focus groups. The boys I selected were those easily accessible. These individual interviews lasted 30 minutes. Permission was obtained from each of the participants to record the interview. The interviews were conducted during break time and sometimes after school at the counselling office, as it was quiet.

Open-ended questions were enumerated on an interview schedule which proved useful and effective in conducting the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). It also facilitated thoroughness by prompting the researcher to probe deeper into the boys' responses to the set of questions (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Kruger, Mitchell and Welman (2005) note that in semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a list of themes and questions which should be covered

and that the researcher should raise should the interviewee not do so. In this way, it was possible to generate rich and deep responses to the set of questions asked of the participants.

Individual interviews, also referred to as in-depth interviews, allow researchers to collect the correct information for a study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). They create an opportunity for confidentiality and sensitivity in discussing sensitive topics (Creswell, 2013). The use of in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to probe deeper into the phenomenon which resulted in the collection of rich data (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Furthermore, it complemented and was used to triangulate the data collected by means of observation and focus group discussions (Flicks, 2014).

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves analysing data on the participants' definition of the situation, noting patterns, categories, themes and regularities (Cohen et al. 2011). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative data analysis consists of seven phases: data are collected and organised; the researcher carefully studies the data; categories and themes are identified; the data are coded; data are interpreted; alternative understandings of the data are sought; and finally, data are reduced to meaningful chunks. The purpose of data analysis is to give meaning to raw data (Struwig & Stead, 2013). According to Flick (2014), qualitative data analysis aims to describe the phenomenon under study. Data analysis in qualitative research involves the preparation and organisation of data using coding to reduce it to themes and representing the data in discussion (Creswell, 2013). Data interpretation should be coherent, focusing on the purpose of the study and accounting for almost all the data (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Direct conversation is used since it is rich in data and detail (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). The conversations or interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. According to Struwig and Stead (2013), interview transcripts should be typed verbatim and not rephrased to be grammatically correct. I simply typed the recordings without any alteration. Transcription is described as "a process of converting audiotape recordings or field notes into text data" (Creswell 2012, p.239). Flick

(2014) adds that data should be read between the lines without any omission. I also made use of the field notes I made during the observation process.

The transcribed data were coded and the major themes were derived. According to Flick (2014), coding is preliminary step in accessing data and making them ready for interpretation. Creswell (2012) explains coding as a process which involves “segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data.” These codes should be interpreted within a particular context and in relationship to other codes (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Coding data often yields significant information.

In line with qualitative methods and the ethnographic research design, thematic data analysis using an inductive process was used in this research study. Moreover, thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative data analysis because of its flexibility. In thematic analysis, themes are identified once data is reduced to contextual form and then elaborated on the basis of systematic scrutiny (Kruger, 1994). I scrutinised these themes. The themes emerged naturally from the data collected without being imposed by the researcher. Thematic analysis was used in this research study to identify themes in the data collected. Blanche, Kelley and Durrheim (2006) affirm that whilst the themes should be linked to the research questions, at the same time, they should emerge naturally from the data. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) recognises that themes arise from articulating units of information consisting of several codes that are aggregated in order to form a common idea. The data collected for this study were analysed using thematic content analysis.

The data were interpreted in line with the theoretical framework and literature review.

The themes that emerged from the data included:

- 1. We play to “have fun”**
- 2. We “play with girls also”**
- 3. They... show off; they are powerful and can fight**

4. **I also fight**
5. **Of “real” and “other” boys**
6. **“Big boys” – some of them are learners from high school**

### **3.10 Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)**

In describing trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative studies the concepts of neutrality, conformability, dependability, applicability, and transferability supplant issues of reliability and validity in evaluating the quality of the research (Golafshani, 2003). Struwig and Stead (2013 p.136) describe trustworthiness as the “truth value of research.” Among other measures, returning the interview transcripts to the participants for verification, and presenting part of the responses in the participants’ own words ensured the trustworthiness of the study. Persistent observations in the field (Flick, 2009) and the use of interviews and focus group discussions also enhanced the credibility of the research. Creswell (2013) notes that self-reflection (observation) in the field assists in validating a study.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), in qualitative research, validity can be addressed through trustworthiness and the depth, richness and scope of the data, including triangulation and the researcher’s objectivity. This can be a challenge because the findings cannot be generalised given the variety of contexts, culture and individuals’ thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Struwig & Stead, 2013). In order to ensure the validity of this study, three methods of data collection were used: observation, focus group discussions and individual interviews. Moreover, various methods were used (Struwig & Stead, 2013) to analyse the data. These methods conflict with each other because similar findings and themes emerged, but they were not ignored but reported. This ensured the validity and authenticity of the study.

In order to enhance validity, the issue of bias in research requires clarification. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that there is a tendency for research to confirm existing findings. Conformability often leads to bias. According to Creswell (2013), bias involves assumptions that impact an

investigation. While there are negative perceptions and beliefs about boys' as being violent, these can be judged based on my own experience and observation. Having experienced sexual harassment, bullying and attacks from boys, I concluded that all boys are violent. While I had my own views and beliefs about boys, I tried not to enforce and impose them on the participants during the interview process. I treated all the participants equally, regarded them as experts on the topic and did not attempt to encourage them to respond in the ways that I wanted them to.

### **3.11 Ethical issues**

Ethical issues are vital in anticipating and planning a research study (Creswell, 2013). Codes of ethics are designed to control the relationship between the researcher and study participants (Flick, 2014). The University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance which guided the researcher on the ethical codes required for the study.

I went to the school of my choice and presented the purpose of my study to the principal. The principal granted permission to conduct the study. Thirty Grade 7 boys participated in the study. The participants' consent and appropriate permission were properly sought. The informed consent letter provided a clear description of the purpose of the study as well as the researcher's identity (Creswell, 2013). Adequate information and explanation of the research process was given to the research participants and satisfactory efforts were made to alleviate their fears by ensuring that confidentiality (where the participant is assured that the information he/she provides will remain confidential), autonomy (where the participant has the right and power to withdraw from the study at any point if he/she doesn't feel comfortable) and anonymity (where his/her name and that of the school is not mentioned or disclosed) were explained and assurance was given that the research would strictly adhere to these principles (Flick, 2014). Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), anonymity is the evidence provided by the researcher to the participants that their real identity will not be revealed. The participants' right to consent to participation in the research was explained in detail. The participants were also clearly informed of the study, that they had the right to withdraw at any stage and that they were not compelled to answer all the questions

asked if they did not feel comfortable. Moreover, permission was sought and received to record the interviews. Thereafter, learners were given the consent form to sign. Permission was also sought from the learners' parents/guardians by sending the letters of informed consent to them to sign, granting me permission to work with their children.

### **3.12 Limitations**

My position as a researcher could have affected the participants' responses. Power differences might have played a role. Being an adult female researching violence among young boys might have affected the results of the study in the sense that these boys might not speak the truth but rather tell me what I wanted to hear. Furthermore, focus group discussions discouraged individuals who had different views from speaking out. This was evident when I asked an open-ended question and they responded in chorus. This was a clear indication that the participants were exceptionally shy and reserved.

As a qualitative study, it was not intended that this study's findings would be generalisable to the wider population. The study therefore only reflects what was happening at Florida Primary School at a particular moment in time.

The language barrier was a further limitation, as the researcher is a foreigner that does not understand isiZulu. During the interviews, some of the learners used slang that I did not understand. When I asked them to explain the meaning, some did, while others said 'Miss, I can't explain this in English...' To overcome this challenge, I wrote these words down and met with an IsiZulu speaker who translated them for me.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the design of the study and explained the methodology used. It also explained the rationale for using a qualitative research approach and social constructivism

paradigm. Data collection methods included observation, focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews. The research site was described and the methods used to analyse the data were explained. The chapter concluded by highlighting the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

The following chapter presents an analysis of the data collected for this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data analysis and discussion**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The research design and methodology employed for this study were discussed in chapter three. This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data. The study aimed to investigate how boys' play at school playgrounds is embedded within violent gendered cultures.

The study participants are identified using pseudonyms. In order to group them into manageable focus groups for discussion, the 30 participants were broken into six groups. From each focus group, an individual interview was conducted with one member. In total six individual interviews were held. The researcher worked with the focus groups one at a time, observing the members of the group closely while they were at play.

The patterns shown in the grid box below (see figure) were used to code the data and develop themes for analysis and discussion. The figure is a diagrammatic representation of the ways in which the data were collected using the three methods of data collection and developed into the themes used in the analysis and discussion in this chapter.

Participants	Focus Group	Individual Interview	Observation	Timeframe	Literature	Theme
Scelo	A	Gumede	Week 6	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		We play to “have fun”
Sibu				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Jaden						
Peter						
Nathi						
Cody	B	William	Week 5	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		We “play with girls also”
Wiseman				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Joel						
Jude						
Andrew						
Khumalo	C	Shoba	Week 4	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		They... show off; they are powerful and can fight
George				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Shoba						
Mazibuko						
Thando						
Thabiso	D	Khumalo	Week 3	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		I also fight
Kenzie				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Gumede						
Zuma						
Nathan						
Bheki	E	Joel	Week 2	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		Of “real” and “other” boys “Big boys
Senzo				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Jabu						
Ayanda						
Michael						
William	F	Michael	Week 1	1 <sup>st</sup> Break time		“Big boys” – some of them are learners from high school
Nathan				2 <sup>nd</sup> Break time		
Mbali						
Michael						
Zama						

Figure 1: Grid box for triangulation of data at methods level

Through coding, the following themes emerged:

- **We play to “have fun”**
- **We “play with girls also”**
- **They... show off; they are powerful and can fight**

- **I also fight**
- **Of “real” and “other” boys**
- **“Big boys” – some of them are learners from high school**

Connell’s (1995; 2005) critical masculinity theory was used to inform the interpretations and analysis of the data and to foreground the discussion. Critical masculinity studies enable an understanding of specific masculinities from a historically contextualised perspective while offering insight into the individual role men play in varying degrees in the reproduction of dominant masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009). These emergent themes thus guide the units of analysis and the discussion that follows.

#### **4.2 We play to “have fun”**

The school playground is depicted as a space and place to have fun. According to the boys’ understanding, break time is exciting because it allows them to play and “have fun” at the school playground. However, it is interesting to observe what it means for the boys to “have fun” at playtime, which underscores the importance and excitement that the playground holds for them. As we began our focus group discussion, my first question to the boys was what break time meant for them and how they regarded their playtime period at the school playground.

*All: Miss, we play during break time. Ooooo! Miss, it is a time to have fun*

*Me: And so tell me, what do you do?*

*Shoba: We have some fun, we play our favourite games and we play a lot with our friends.*

*Me: Who are your friends you play with, all of your classmates?*

*Sibu: You relax, play with your friends and eat your lunch. Also Miss, break time is fun because sometimes the other children fight and you watch them so it’s fun. It’s good.*

*Me: Is it fun for them to fight? Why do they fight?*

*Sibu: Maybe the girls want to interrupt their games or some boys bully, Miss...*

*Me: Why, do you not play together? Like boys with girls?*

*All: No Miss...*

*A few Boys: sometimes...*

*Me: Why?*

*Shoba: Because they can't play soccer... they stand around the court and if our ball falls out, they pick and give us... and clap for us when we score a goal.*

*Peter: It's not fun to play with girls Miss... they are weak and cry all the time.*

*Sibu: Miss, some girls cry... they will run to the office to report that you beat her. So we avoid playing with them...*

*Me: So, do you have fun when you play only boys alone and no girls to play with you or interrupt your play?*

*Jaden: I play. No one to control me, so I enjoy.*

*Nathi: Miss, playing with girls are not allowed, girls spoil the fun... we are boys, we don't want the teachers to come and control when we play. We play and enjoy the fun...*

*Jaden: You can do whatever you like. I talk with my friends and we run around. We enjoy, you and have fun.*

The tendency to define their playtime period and activity at the school playground as 'having fun' was obvious in the focus group discussions with the boys. It is significant, however, to observe that the boys' description of what having fun means to them is their construct of their identity; an identity of themselves as "boys". This construct positions them not merely as learners at the school playground space, but very strongly as boys and as different from girls whom they tend to construct as "other". It is in terms of this strong gender bond that the importance they attach to interactions and activities at the playground can be viewed and understood. It is possible that the nature, level and weight the boys ascribe to their interactions and activities at the playground is underpinned by a fixation with a 'boys' cult' which not only replicates hegemonic masculinity, but equally means that boys can only be boys to the exclusion of girls. Epstein et al. (2001) recognise the school playground as a place where a struggle for

power among children is very common. As can be inferred from the boys' perception of their activities and negotiations in the playground space, this struggle appears to be prevalent along gender lines.

The individual interview with Gumede resonated with the results of the focus group discussions with other boys on the ways in which boys understand themselves as different from and superior to girls:

*Me: Boys say playtime is fun for them, I mean they say boys have fun at the playground during playtime, do you have fun too Gumede?*

*Gumede: Yes Miss... Eish... you play with your friends, you run about and having fun, Miss I like playtime.*

*Me: So what kinds of play do you and your friends do at the playground?*

*Gumede: Miss, we play soccer a lot..., we also play sandpit and other rough games... we share our food with each other... it is fun*

*Me: Who are your friends, who do you play with? I mean do you also play with girls?*

*Gumede: You can't play with girls Miss... they cause trouble and spoil the fun. Miss, girls cry when they play and Miss, girls are not strong to play rough with boys. The girls watch us play soccer and have fun.*

*Me: Why can't you play with girls?*

*Gumede: Miss, girls are not like boys. We are boys and girls have to play their own games. Eish... girls are not strong Miss.*

Gumede's emphasis on boys' superiority to girls as the reason why boys and girls cannot play together at the playground shows that school spaces can be highly gendered. Renold (2006) observes that school is a place that is highly sex-segregated.

My observations of break time activities at the playground revealed that boys and girls spread across the playground space according to gender. The boys were observed in their different groupings while girls were in similar groupings that engaged in different activities from the boys. Thorne (1993) highlights the gendered framings that can be observed in the activities that boys and girls engage in at school. The activities that I observed the boys participating in at the playground reflect a group formation along gender lines which associate them with play and games, activities and interactions that are ritualised, ascribed with superiority and differentiated from girls' play, games, activities and interactions. The notion of the school playground as a place to have fun by playing "boys" mirrors an understanding of the divide that obtains within the larger social order. Within the social order of the community, men and women's role are defined along gender lines (Thorne, 1993). It can be inferred from the boys' voices that the break time period and space at the school playground provides the time and opportunity for them to play "boys"; this is different from their construct of themselves at other times at school as just learners – boys and girls. This time and opportunity that the playground space offers for momentary swapping of identity also provides the space to re-enact their construct of self as boys, and as different from girls, and thus to construct girls as "other". Such self-constructs replicate what obtains at home and in the broader social setting in the community where gender relations and interactions are fused in complex masculinities (Urbani et al., 2004; Ward, 2007). It is possible that the freedom and lack of adult surveillance and intrusion that the school playground offers serves a ready platform for boys to test their socialised latent ability to negotiate power in their interactions and relationships (Epstein et al., 2001). As Blatchford and Sumpner (1998) explain, the school playground often exhibits a distinctive, animated culture which is reproduced and perhaps promoted in harassment, cruelty and authority. At the playground, learners often engage in play that leads to violence in struggling for and negotiating power (Bhana, 2005). According to Swian (2001), boys struggle to control and negotiate the playground hierarchy. In this way, for the boys, what it means to "have fun," in terms of their understanding of break time in the school playground space can be examined and interrogated. This is particularly true with regard to how the struggle to control and negotiate the playground hierarchy is conducted; what results from such struggle, and how it is implicated in gendered violence in and around the school.

### 4.3 We “play with girls also”

The school playground provides a space where gender persuasions, both in their identity ascription and associated role play, characterise boys’ and girls’ relationships and interactions (Thorne, 1993). Nothing perhaps more aptly exemplifies the propagation of gender differences at the playground that reinforce the patterns, formations, dynamics and physical orientations of the play and activities that boys and girls separately engage in. In my observations, it was seen that boys tended to carve out territorial boundaries around their play spaces within the playground. It was clear that they were protective of these spaces and that they wanted to exclude those they considered as “other”. Given that violence is common among young boys within the social setting of this school community, I asked the participants questions about girls and their interactions with them at the school playground. I was particularly keen to elicit information on whether they play with girls at break time; why and why they do not engage girls, and what happens when the girls resist the restrictions imposed on them and break into boys’ territory, interrupting their play and activities during break time at the playground.

*Me: So don’t you play with girls?*

*Boys: (chorus) No Miss*

*A few voices in the background: (but sometimes... We play with girls)*

*Me: Why?*

*Andrew: Miss, girls are very soft and weak..., we play risky games and girls can’t play them. We play sand pit and stick game, soccer, cricket which are all boys’ games. The girls are girls Miss... they have their own games they play and enjoy.*

*Cody: They have their own games Miss like handball, hopscotch, netball. Miss, they play just there, not in the pitch with boys... like soccer.*

*Me: So, are girls not OK to play soccer with you if they want to?*

*Joel: Because they can’t play soccer.*

*Cody: They can’t play soccer with us.*

*Wiseman: We are boys Miss... See these girls are not like boys, if girls kick our ball we make her know she's a girl and not allowed to play with us boys.*

*Me: What do you do if a girl kicks your ball?*

*Cody: Girls don't just kick the balls - they know they can't because we boys are playing...*

*Jude: Miss, Miss last week at play, the ball rolled over the field and a girl in grade 8 picked our ball and kicked it over the fence and all of us were angry and my friend Thabiso chased the girl and pushed her down and she was hurt and crying. Miss, we forced her say sorry and say to us she won't ever kick our ball again...*

*Ethan: Hmmm...and Miss, that girl told her friends and they called the big boys from high school and they came chasing us away. That day, as we walk back home, the boys from high school were waiting and they beat some of our classmates and Thabiso was hurt and bleeding.*

*Me: That's awful; do the high school boys come to your playground?*

*Ethan: Miss they come to fight us because they, they... girls are their girlfriends.*

*Wiseman: The boys kick our ball over that fence (pointing to the play area fencing), and if we go to pick it, they fight us and beat us because they say we played with their girlfriends.*

*Me: What does that mean? Why do they say you played with their girlfriends, do you really play with the girls?*

*Jude: See Miss, we play with the girls also, like... you see when they interrupt our play, we can't hit them, but we can shove them from one boy to the other like passing the ball...*

*Joel: Yes, some boys can also touch their boobs rough and make them cry out... or hit their bum.*

Boys' construction of rough handling girls at play is of importance in looking at the meaning behind the nature of their interactions with girls while at the playground. It was observed that even though boys tend to segregate themselves from girls in the play activities that they engage in, every now and then, a group of boys would wade into the girls' play and interrupt it. While the girls would normally pursue the boys a few steps, sneer at them and resume their game as the boys ran away, my observation showed that the boys' response was different when a girl, even unintentionally, kicked the boys' football while they were at play. Shoving a girl from boy to boy "like passing the ball" equates them to an object of play, like the football itself. Interrogating boys' construction of their play at the playground as "having fun" to the exclusion of girls (Swain, 2000), and girls' interruption of their play as "spoiling" the fun, enables a better understanding of Nathi's comment that boys "play with girls also." This can be interpreted to mean as an object to shuffle, trample and kick around like a football.

Surrounding boys' play with ritualised elevation and power, by disallowing girls' presence, participation and interruptions in the games boys play, builds a cult-like barrier to boy-girl interactions in playtime activities at school. Thus penal codes are set for breaking the barrier. In breaking these codes, girls become culprits. When victimised in this way, girls report boys to the teachers and to their high school "boyfriends", thus becoming become fun spoilers for the 'boys at play'.

However, victimhood takes on another dimension when boys themselves become vulnerable at the hands of invading and bullying "big boys from high school." In South African schools, the playground space is observed as a site that is insecure and invaded by external influences (Burton and Leoschut, 2013). In this study's context, the ways in which playground spaces are invaded and infused with tensions from outside school influences can be seen in the intrusion of boys from a neighbouring high school. The ways in which the "big boys' from high school" manoeuvre their power over younger boys by bullying, fighting and intimidation in order to protect their "girlfriends" indicate an assertion of masculinity in claiming authority, space and ownership. This invasive way of making such claims mirrors the hegemony inherent in the social order of hierarchical patriarchy, dominance and violence that obtains in the community.

However, in the individual interview with William, a contrasting narrative to “play with girls also” emerged.

*Me: Boys seem not to like playing with girls at break time; do you play with girls at the playground William?*

*William: They're good. I talk and play with them.*

*Me: Interesting, some other boys say they play with their friends only and “have fun”, so do you play with girls as your friends?*

*William: I have more friends who are girls and very few boyfriends. We walk to school together and back home too.*

*Me: So you don't have any trouble playing with girls? Some boys say they do, they get reported, bullied and that girls spoil the fun?*

*William: I prefer girls than boys in this our school.*

*Me: Tell me William, is there a special reason why you prefer girls to be your friends and what do you share with them a lot?*

*William: Miss, when you walk, talk and play with girls, you don't get into problems in school. We share things like food... eeh, our problems with friends and even family related sometimes... they listen attentively while you explain your problems whereas boys will just not listen to you.*

*Me: So what happens when you play with girls; what kind of activities do you do, does it get violent sometimes when you play?*

*William: Miss, we play hide and seek, sometimes we also play hopscotch and netball. I enjoy the playing with them.*

*Me: So do you also play with boys, like play soccer with boys?*

*William: Sometimes with some of my friends, but the boys plays rough most times and they kick you and don't say sorry.*

*Me: What of the girls; do the girls, like make trouble and violence when you play with them?*

*William: Miss, some girls can be rude. Eish... Those girls tease boys a lot calling them names. They see a boy and they say this boy is too ugly like a baboon (laughter).*

*Me: Eh...*

*William: Some girls touch boys' bums (buttocks) and also our private parts (penis), the rude girls, they like to fall over you all the time.*

During my observations at break time, some boys and girls engaged in what could be described as cordial interaction. I observed a number of boys and girls standing together, eating, making jokes and sometimes shouting at each other and chasing one another. I also saw girls and boys playing some games together. I observed William and a cohort of girls and a few boys playing volleyball. In a little while, their game ended up in an argument over claiming playground space and who was girlfriend/boyfriend to whom. Unlike the boys' soccer games, there were no serious squabbles about who won the game or who was winning; instead, the game fizzled out into raunchy laughter and running around as the girls kept chasing the boys while boys made suggestive signs of evading the chase when a girl approached to catch them.

In further discussion with William, he spoke about the girls that they "hang out" with, play and hold discussions with and walk to and from school.

*Me: You seem to enjoy your play with girls, do boys trouble you because you play not with them most time, but instead with girls?*

*William: Miss, sometimes they say things like..., am a doll baby, or they call me sisi, girl.*

*Me: Do they fight or quarrel with you, or is it that they only call you names?*

*William: I don't like some of those boys, I keep away from them and keep safe from trouble..., they call me a girl but, I'm happy to stay away from trouble from them. We like hang out with girls Miss...*

*Me: So you keep out of trouble when you are with the girls? Don't they fight you sometimes?*

*William: Miss, girls can't hit me..., they are girls. Eish, they only play rough and touch sometimes.*

William's assertion that being in girls' company reduces the likelihood of getting into trouble at school contradicts the narratives from the focus group discussions. However, there seemed to be agreement that girls are girls and perhaps cannot hit boys. It would be interesting to interrogate further why boys that keep company with girls keep out of trouble. Do boys like William unwittingly and inadvertently construct girls' play as soft, smooth and safe? In seeking to understand their identity of themselves as boys, could William and the other boys who play with girls at the playground be constructing themselves as boys but different from "those boys?" Several questions like these troubled me as I made observation notes and reflected on the earlier focus group discussions whose narratives ran parallel with William's seemingly converse accounts and experiences. Thorne (1993) and Renold (2005) found that primary school boys and girls construct their identities in opposition to each other. William's preference for girls' company and play activities at the playground is perhaps an identity construction which has not moved away from mirroring hegemonic masculinities that define the interactions and relationships between men and women, and boys and girls in terms of unequal power. Therefore, that boys play with and interact in activities with girls at the playground may be a relationship that is still defined by, understood and negotiated in unequal gendered power definitions (as William remarked "*girls can't hit me..., they are girls*").

On the other hand, the discussions with William and my observations revealed that some boys see girls as friends to talk to and share their problems with. These boys seemed to be open to physical, social and emotional interaction with girls. This illustrates what Anderson (2009) describes as boys' negotiation of non-hegemonic masculinity that inspires talk about their emotions and encourages trusting friendships with girls.

#### 4.4 They... show off; they are powerful and can fight

Referring to boys in different qualifiers was a common occurrence in both the individual interviews and focus group discussions. Boys were variably qualified as “these boys”, “the other boys”, “big boys” and “those boys” “Those boys” was used more than the other terms. What “those boys” means is an important question. Observing the boys at play at the playground provided insight into the struggle that dominated all the games. Power and domination were depicted as epitomising victory in these games. The act centred on defending, occupying or loosing space during almost all the boys’ play at the playground. In the focus group discussions, the boys emphasised that being a boy is all about having power and being able to stand on your own two feet and defend yourself no matter what it takes. I was interested in understanding why boys construct their play as different from what girls do and how they associate their play with power.

*Khumalo: Miss, having power is very good.*

*George: Yes, Miss if you are a boy and you are powerful, you can protect others and yourself.*

*Me: Why would you need protection? I thought you only play and have fun...*

*(All laugh)*

*Khumalo: Miss, you must protect yourself. They are lots of those boys in this school that will hit you, Miss and if you cannot protect yourself, it is dangerous.*

*George: You see Miss, if you have power, you are fearless...those boys will even call you to come and fight for them when they are in trouble.*

*Scelo: And Miss, you, you can hit back when somebody hits you. You don't just walk away when they bully you. You need to fight back and protect yourself. You must defend yourself and stand on your feet.*

*Me: So who are the boys you guys refer to as “those boys”?*

*(All Laugh)*

*George: Those boys who can stand and defend themselves. Boys who can fight back and don't get hurt but survive. Boys like Khumalo...*

*Scelo: A lot of bullying and fighting takes place here at our school. The boys are the same boys who fight on the ground every day during break time and always fighting smaller boys. They intimidate them and take their lunch. Miss, they also fight for their girlfriend.*

*Me: So what do they do to fight you, I mean do you like disturb their play or games?*

*Mazibuko: We have big boys Miss. They want to show off they are powerful and can fight you and push you down to fall.*

*Scelo: Miss, when they see you walking, running, they call you names and swear at you. If you speak back to them, they will hit and kick you. Miss, their girlfriends will laugh at you and sometimes they make jest at you in the classroom.*

*Mazibuko: These boys, Miss... sometimes they walk into the pitch where we are playing and kick the ball out of the pitch or seize it from us... they spoil for a fight.*

*Thando: But they know you can't fight back so they take the advantage. When you even bust into them if you are running by mistake, they just turn and starts fighting you. Also Miss, seize our lunch and share it to their girlfriends.*

*Me: So they fight you to please "their girlfriends?"*

*Thando: Miss, yesterday, there was a fight on the ground. Two grade 7 boys fighting over a girl. The big boy hit the other boy by his nose and he started bleeding.*

Boys' use of violence reinforces and is reinforced by hegemonic forms of masculinities (Swain, 2000). This is so because it gives them certain status and prestige. Studies have shown that boys engage in physical violence and stand up for themselves so that they are not ridiculed by their peers (Renold, 2001; 2004; 2005; Swain, 2001). Emerging from the voices of the boys is an assertion that having power to defend oneself made you a 'real boy' at school. Boys measure their adequacy in terms of self-identity construction by the scale of their power and ability to

dominate and command influence. From my observation, this is seen in the cheering or jeering they receive when they hit and kick each other during fights at break time. Being defeated fuels the need for revenge that is often sought outside of school and the desire among almost all the boys to become not just powerful and strong, but bullies – (like the dreaded “those boys”).

Hidden in boys’ tendency to bully other boys is perhaps their assertion of themselves as not just powerful, but also as dominators and controllers of the space and grounds which they occupy. Fights for control of space and domination within the playground space reflect their masculine prowess. This is particularly true when it comes to fighting to please their “girlfriends.” Engaging in such fights is an attempt to assert their superior masculinity in order to woo girls and is obviously gender motivated. For “those boys”, bullying can thus possibly be understood as a construction of what it means to play like a ‘boy’; to dominate, take control and win. In the context of this study, it is possible that boys’ tendency to subjugate other boys is not dissociated from the hegemony and power dynamics that play out in the wider social order where men are valued in terms of how much power they have to control, dominate and own.

In the individual interview with Khumalo, it was revealed that girls also bully. Girls’ construction of their identity as not just girls, but as more powerful and stronger than boys, also offers insight into girls’ agency in gender violence at school.

Khumalo had this to say about girls:

*Khumalo: ... Miss, girls too are violent. They gossip and fight. There is one girl in grade 7 called Gugu. She is very strong. People say she does boxing. She seizes children’s food, push me out if I enter their game and talk to me rudely and other boys. She wears boys clothes on Friday when its dress up day. She is always fighting with boys and other girls during break time.*

*Me: Tell me Khumalo, do the boys fear her? Aren’t boys supposed to be strong and powerful?*

*Khumalo: Miss, there isn't anything like that for her. If you hit her, she hit you back. Miss, boys always fear ... her stay away from her and her friends.*

*Me: So does she ... play with you when you play your games like soccer?*

*Khumalo: She doesn't play with the boys..., but sometimes she tries to size herself up with the big boys and Miss... these boys like her and the joke and smoke with her and sometimes they seize some boys, marching on their dress as they made them to lie on the floor and burst their football.*

Violence is not only associated with male power (Bhana 2008a). Khumalo's assertion of how powerful this girl is at school suggests that girls also use power and dominance as tools of subjugation. Khumalo's narrative suggests that Gugu and her friends use bullying to gain power and control over boys and other girls. In so doing, they imitate and are able to replicate violent masculinity in their construction of their identity as "powerful" and "strong" girls. Gugu secured her territory by demonstrating domination of her space. She actively used violence (Bhana, 2008). Perhaps, Gugu saw in violence a power that enabled negotiation with the suffocating boycott that pervades school playground spaces. Or, as Bhana (2008) posits, her use of violence was a means to "secure resources and claims to power." Her demonstration of power and control provided a passport to access fraternity with the "big boys" at the playground. Contrary to the dominant construct of girls as soft, gentle and agreeable, Gugu as a type exemplifies that girls' agency in the gender violence seen in and around schools cannot be discounted.

#### **4.5 I also fight**

Throughout the discussions with the boys, they tended to construct fighting and defence as a common and usual part of a boy's life. This indicates that violence is associated with normal forms of masculinity. In his interview, Kenzie indicated that every boy was expected to fight and defend himself at the school playground because tomorrow he is going to be a man.

*Me: Kenzie, each time I watch you guys at the playground, I see mostly boys fighting during your playtime. Do you fight or do violence at break-time?*

*Kenzie: Miss, everybody fights... I also fight.*

*Me: Why do boys fight, Kenzie?*

*Kenzie, Miss... see boys have to defend themselves, if you don't fight, they will think you're a girl... and you know Miss, one day the boys will be a man... I mean they have to learn to be a man, Miss.*

*Me: Really? You mean people have to fight to be a man?*

*Kenzie: Men fight to have power and protect their people, not like girls... Women gossips and shout at each other.*

Protection of oneself and one's friends is understood as building confidence and aptitude for manhood. Kenzie's narrative illustrates what having power during play time means for boys and how demonstrating this power in the fights they engage in enhances the self-construction of their identity as a "boy." Boys therefore regard having power as a normal behaviour because they can always stand up for themselves, which determines their prestige and the respect they have for one another. Such notions of power among boys are not uncommon in the community and are implicated in the patterns of hegemony that manifest in school spaces.

The ways boys are raised in society reinforces masculinity in terms of both personality and personal interpretations of what it is to aspire to manhood. Adams and Coltrane (2005) assert that masculinity is about the dominance men exert over women and the power men wield over other men. This suggests that violence is interconnected with 'normal' forms of masculinity. Thus, it can be inferred that boys fighting by way of play at the school playground is a normal ascription of a masculine role.

The participants' responses illustrate that no boy wants to be humiliated by his peers. According to them, fighting always results from peer pressure and is not voluntarily. Due to fear of being disgraced, they end up fighting to demonstrate their manhood. This suggests that peer pressure is

common amongst boys at school. From my observations and discussions with most of the boys, it was evident that these boys are encouraged by their peers to fight and do certain things that don't always come naturally to them. Peer pressure to fight at the playground conforms to the norms of what constitutes acceptable masculinity, or, as Epstein et al. (2001) suggest, being a "real man."

Given the challenges associated with the norms and expectations of hegemony and masculine status in society, boys struggle to resist such pressure, as evidenced in their break time fighting and violent acts at the school playground. Hegemonic norms are related to power, authority, independence, toughness and aggressiveness. Boys show what they construct as acceptable masculinity at the playground. Having physical characteristics that intimidate smaller boys and thereby dominating and controlling play spaces at school inevitably lead to confrontations and fights. Bhana (2002) found that boys' depiction of violent masculinities at the playground was a negotiation of power that operates to physically position them as boys, using body-language.

Boys defend themselves by fighting while at school so as to protect their identities. If they do not agree to fight, they are labelled gay(s) which they consider a pejorative term. In my observation, in order for boys to show that they are 'real boys' at school during break time play at the playground, they had to demonstrate certain qualities that are held in high esteem as dictated by the expectations of hegemonic masculinity in society. Boys' choice of what defines them is therefore contrived in an intricate weave of their own experiences and the re-enacting of complex social definitions and gender expectations.

#### **4.6 Of "real" and "other" boys**

Children are very conscious of differences amongst themselves. Such differences are reinforced in school cultures and languages that promote negative gender stereotypes. For example, teachers' derogatory practice of referring to a boy as 'girlish' creates awareness that he is a kind of different boy and undermines girls, thereby encouraging unhealthy gendering of school for

learners. In the interviews and focus groups discussions, the participants used words like ‘not a real boy’ to refer to boys who could not defend themselves. The term “other boys” was also applied to boys who were constructed as girls either because they were small, played gently, were gay or did not fight back. As the focus group discussions unfolded, I asked the boys about boys who did not fight and boys who played gently without fighting at the playground.

*Me: Some boys don't fight and they play softly.*

*Ayanda: Miss, even though we are all boys, we are not the same. We are different in many ways. Some have choose to be different... (Laughing).*

*Jabu: Miss, they called them gays, stabane, moffie.*

*Ayanda: We have them in this school especially in grade 7B. They kiss with boys. Miss, this is not right. Some of us don't associate with them. We chase them away from our games because they are not real boys.*

*Michael: Miss, we have homosexuals in this school. Even the other day, our teacher shouted at one of them. 'You must stop behaving like a girl, you are a boy'.*

*Me: Really?*

*Michael: The boy was so angry and everyone was laughing... (Laughing, laughing). Hummm... hummmm... they do things differently from us. They cannot fight back. They're weak.*

*Me: So do you guys fight them at play too?*

*Bheki: Gays! Gays! Gays! Gays! Can't stand up for themselves.*

*Me: Why? Zuma, you shout gays, what about them?*

*Bheki: Miss, Eish... They are cowards because they can't fight back. They are always pushed around the ground and often other boys make jokes of them.*

*Bheki: So we just separate ourselves from them.*

*Senzo: We don't play with them... you see Miss, the other boys are not real boys... they are like small girls and babies that can't fight.*

This demonstrates the stigmatisation of other forms of sexuality and sexual orientation different from heterosexual. Msibi (2012) observes that learners seen walking with gays, were perceived as being one of them. The boys in this study were quick to express disgust and hatred for particular boys that they constructed as other because they were weak, could not fight or behaved like 'sisi'. They despised these boys and excluded them from their games. Thus, homosexuality is regarded as abnormal and heterosexuality is associated with and symbolised the mark of a "real boy." From my observation, in order to not be identified in this group of "other boys", boys who construct their identity as "real boys" tended to isolate them and to use intimation and violent language and sometimes physical attacks to keep them away from the "real boys" play space. In the focus group discussions, I tried to find out why the "other boys" are pushed out of the play and the spaces for boys' games like soccer at the playground.

*Jabu: Miss, I don't like them. They behave very funny. Always doing things like girls. They walk and talk differently. You will always see them sitting with girls and talking about us.*

*Bheki: Miss, like on Fridays which is dress up day, they wear girl's clothes. Eish...how can a boy dress like a girl? They kiss (boys laughing)...*

*Senzo: Miss, I hate them. I don't just want to see them beside me. They irritate me. When any of them touch or hurts me, I beat them immediately. Miss, I won't play with boys who are like girls... this other boys are girls Miss, they can kiss themselves... (All laughing)*

In the individual interview with Shoba, I asked him why boys hated the "other boys", the boys that are gay and that were said to be weak and not strong.

*Joel: Miss, my grandmother told me being a gay is very bad. Gogo said our culture doesn't allow a boygirl ...that I must be a real 'Zulu' man; strong enough, hard, one to fight and to defend my home.*

*Me: Eehh...*

*Joel: Yes Miss, the boys are not real boys, a strong Zulu must fight to defend himself and not do sisi... and Miss, they can't play with us, we beat them up and they cry like girls...*

Justifying their non-association with the “other boys” in terms of their inability to fight and to be strong like boys should be suggests that any form of identity construct other than masculinity is reducible to inadequacy and a lack of power, control and domination (Bhana, 2014). Social constructs impose hallowed expectations on boys that require them to behave, walk and talk differently from girls. Symbolic of their positioning within a social order of hierarchical hegemonic masculinity, constructions such as “real” and “other” boys within school playground spaces emerge. Bhana, Morrell, Hearn and Moletsane (2007) highlight that ‘culture’ is often used to define what is acceptable and ‘normal’ with regard to sexuality. Therefore, any dis-positioning from this expectation equates to a loss of the entitlement to power, control and privilege (Reygan & Lynette, 2014) of the masculinity bestowed within such a hierarchy. The label “other boys” thus signifies not only deviancy, but total difference in terms of gender constructs for boys at the playground space. This could explain how boy-on-boy violence is gender persuaded or induced violence within school spaces. In constructing themselves as the “real boys”, boys appropriate the gender “male” to themselves to the exclusion of any deviant positioning which they consider as “other.” Deviants thus belong to the other gender, “female”. The boys’ notion that gender deviancy makes a boy soft, powerless and weak could inform our understanding of how such conceived deviancy leads to acts of gendered violence at the playground in school.

Using violent language to “other boys” seemed to be acceptable. The focus group participants did not hide their aversion to those that they spoke of as “other boys.”

*Peter: Miss, you know my friend Thabiso?*

*Me: Yes, I do*

*Peter: Miss, he is gay. They always say he is a tomboy and sometimes they say am also one of them but Miss, am not a gay.*

*(Boys laugh out loud)*

*Peter: Miss you see...hummm, nothing is wrong with me. But Thabiso, he is a very nice boy. He only plays with us sometimes because those boys don't like him. They say 'don't come near us, you shit boy... you are a girl... don't play with us, we don't like you... you want my anus? I don't have any shit there for you to eat stabane, dirty moffie'.*

*(All boys laugh)*

*Me: Boys say things like that to them?*

*Shoba: Miss, they say things like that, Miss. They shove them to the ground, push them and hit them and ask them to run away. Miss, they say horrible things... But Miss, we don't send him away.*

Msibi (2012), and Bhana's (2014) studies in KwaZulu-Natal found that language was a key way of discriminating against gay learners, using names like 'isitabane', 'moffie' and 'ongqingili'. In our discussions, names like 'moffies', 'sisi' and 'stabane' were used by the boys to describe gay learners. Msibi (2012) notes, that language is a powerful tool for homophobic acts. Violent language is used to express conflicting notions of power, often leading to hatred and fear (Msibi, 2012). Heterosexual boys' use of violent language was evident in the ways they tended to assert their power and to dominate and subordinate a group of boys regarded as abnormal and tagged as "other."

However, in the focus group discussion with another group, some of the boys explained why they liked gays. Homosexuals are constructed as 'abnormal' people by society. Cody and Joel said that gays should be treated like normal boys rather than being excluded and isolated. It is interesting to contrast this opinion with the dominant narrative of gays being "other".

#### **4.7 "Big boys" - some of them are learners in high school**

Burton & Leoschut (2013) contend that "violence in schools results through exposure to violence at home and from outside school." South African township communities are known to be places

where violence is widespread (Harber, 2001; Morrell, 1998). During my observation visits, I witnessed an incident involving a Grade 7 boy (Thulani), one of the big boys said to be powerful by his friends who was attacked by some boys outside the school gate at break time. The lead up to the fight was that Thulani had approached another boy's girlfriend for a relationship. The girl reported him to her boyfriend at the nearby high school. The high school boy and a group of his friends came to the school through the broken fence, dragged Thulani outside and viciously attacked him. Thulani's friends at school said that, although they were said to be the "big boys", they could not help as the high school boys are even bigger.

Talk of "big boys" was another narrative that dominated the focus group discussions. Equating power to size and age is a way for boys to order the influence and power that are replete in hierarchical masculinities. Mills (2001) notes, that certain forms of masculinities acquire hegemonic status in certain situations. As our discussion moved on, I asked the group whether their play at break time was interrupted from the outside.

*Me: Boys say that some 'big boys' from high school come to fight for their girlfriends during break time; do they disturb you when you play?*

*Nathan: Yes, yes, yes, Miss, some of them come with knives and scissors. They say if you do not give them what they are asking, they gonna stab you. Like my friend, they were waiting for him outside the gate. Miss, this school is not safe. The fences in our school have holes. During break time, big boys from the community pass through these holes and come to the ground.*

*Mbali: Miss, they come to attack us, bully us and take our lunch and phones. If you had beaten their sister(s) or brother(s), they will come and beat you too. Even outside the gate, they'll still wait for you. They look so wild, frightening and wounded. They smoke dagga and other bad stuffs.*

*Michael: Also Miss, if your sister is beautiful, they slap you and tell you that you must clap your hands when they are kissing your sister. When they finish, they say take her and go. Don't stand here and spy them because they gonna stab you. These boys around our school are very dangerous.*

*Me: And these boys; do they come every time?*

*Zama: Miss, some of them are learners in high school. Some, they don't go to school. They keep causing trouble in our school. They stalk us at the playground and seize our things...go and sell to other people.*

*Nathi: Miss, they have their gangs... They sit in groups smoking dagga and drinking. Some of the girls from our school join them on the walk home.*

*Jaden: Just behind our school playground is one dangerous place. We're scared to pass there because at times, they force you to smoke like them, and beat you and make the girls laugh and ridicule you.*

Parkes (2007) observes that children's safety is threatened by violence in the neighbourhood which intensifies their vulnerability. Masitsa's (2011) study found that learners were exposed to serious danger because they were attacked by outsiders carrying dangerous weapons that intimidated and harassed them. Such violent behaviour is seen as an acceptable way of getting what they want (Bhana, 2005). These attacks result in fear, anger, insecurity and humiliation among the victims. The boys that participated in this study said that their school environment was not safe because of constant attacks by outsiders who had dangerous weapons like knives and scissors. They were attacked within the school grounds during break time and outside school. The holes in the school fence enabled intruders to harass learners. Learners could not fight back because some of their attackers were older and bigger than them and were often gang members, thus portraying a stronger masculinity.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) assert that masculinity is fluid; men construct hegemonic masculinity when it is necessary to do so or appropriate or pull themselves away from hegemonic masculinity at certain moments. This was evident in the case of Thulani who, although notorious for his superiority, dominance, authority, aggression, power and independence, was beaten by a "big boy". His personality as a powerful boy in school was humiliated and his dignity was destroyed. This implies a link between gender violence in school

and violence in the neighbourhood (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Harber, 2001; Parkes, 2007). Such attacks by outsiders might cause an atmosphere of tension and fear, making the school environment unsafe. It is difficult for these learners to walk home freely after school hours. During a focus group session, the participants narrated what happens around their school.

Young people living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to be exposed to the risk of violence. Moreover, children's adaptation to violence is linked to their social surroundings and environmental influences on the child and his/her family. Being exposed to a violent environment will cause a child to behave in a similar manner. They use coping mechanisms to endure in a violent environment. One of the reasons for the high rates of violence at Florida Primary School could be the children's exposure to violence at home and in the community.

*Kenzie: Miss, most of these boys who stand around our school bullying and smoking have brothers and sisters in this school. Miss, like Sanele in Grade 1, his father too is there. He is very wild and smokes dagga. He spansks anyone who touches his child and sister. Most of these boys in our school who are violent copy from their brothers and friends at home.*

*Shoba: Miss, our teachers do not teach us bad things. Instead, they correct us and want us to be good children... but now Miss, some children behave badly because they learn them at home. They watch television, read magazines, copy a lot of things.*

*Me: Can you tell me more Shoba?*

*Shoba: Miss, if they see something on television, they want to practise it. Also, if they see someone stealing at home, they also come here and steal. If they see their parents fighting, they also come and fight. They copy bad things which are not good for them because they're kids.*

Kenzie and Shoba's accounts note that children copy bad behaviour at home which is transmitted to school. This supports the findings of Burton and Leoschut's (2013) study that suggests that family and community-level risk factors influence the violent acts that occur in schools. Children

take note of adults' behaviour and imitate them which sometimes make them more vulnerable to being hurt.

This study found that bigger boys assert their power against smaller children by challenging them and using violence. Grade 7 boys used their physical strength size, age and loud voices to terrorise and control others (Bhana, 2005). These boys regarded violence as a means to get what they wanted (Bhana, 2005). This was demonstrated by the fact that they forcefully took lunch (food) from younger boys. They regarded violence as a suitable means to gain rewards.

*Jabu: Miss, am so scared of bigger boys in and out of this school. They fight and bully us. They took my lunch yesterday and my money two days ago. They made me to starve. They're not my friends.*

*Nathan: Miss, big boys claim a lot. They think they got more power than anyone else in this school. Like yesterday, I saw my friend crying. I asked him what was the problem and he said they took his lunch. Miss, the big boy was standing under that tree close to the fence and eating my friend's food. I was very angry.*

In these interviews, these boys explained why they dislike the bigger boys at school. They had to starve because their school lunches were seized. It is often assumed that boys have power and can defend themselves. However, these boys were unable to defend themselves and thus fell prey to these boys. They demonstrated a softer form of masculinity which is under constant menace. Softer masculinities are often referred to as subordinates who are discriminated against, marginalised and oppressed. This form of masculinity can be the target of violence (Connell, 2002) and is often expelled from the circle of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Because they were small, these boys were targets of bullying and were probably too scared to report what happened.

However, I observed that not all the bigger boys fought and bullied smaller children. While at the playground, I noticed some smaller boys bullying and fighting bigger boys. I then draw closer to Nathan to get more insight

*Nathan: Miss, this boy Cody... (Pointing at him) you see him right? As small as he is, he is always fighting. No boy in this school can challenge him. He hits bigger boys. Ah Miss, they can't seize his lunch. Yesterday, he was fighting with another boy. They were rolling on the floor slapping and punching each other. They often say he is a tyrant because he fights everyone. At times, he defends smaller children when bigger boys want to fight or seize their lunch. I like him so much.*

Nathan liked Cody because he defended smaller children. Nathan saw him as a strong and powerful boy that was brave enough to defend himself and others. As a smaller boy himself, Nathan used violence to defend himself, thereby defending his masculinity. A big body doesn't necessarily mean power. As small as Cody was, he could resist bigger boys' pressure. Nathan told me how smaller boys coped at the school.

'Hit one Hit All' was the acronym used by smaller boys to scare away bigger boys. These boys formed groups to protect themselves from bullies at school. They believed that this would enable them to fight back when attacked. Nathan added that being lonely at school endangered your life as you had no one to fight for you. This implies that friendships were a source of protection for smaller boys. Resistance and agency were built and used as mechanisms to cope in a violent environment. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) found that power relations are manifested in the construction of masculine identities. Hence, smaller boys fought against bigger boys by demonstrating their power and superiority when the need arose. I vividly remember an incident in which a group of smaller boys attacked a bully who fought with one of their friends. They tied his hands and made him sit on the floor. His shirt and shoes were removed and the boy whom he had fought with slapped him 10 times. I then drew closer to one of these boys to find out why they acted the way they did.

*Joel: Miss, because we are small, they always think they can get away with anything. So we have decided to form our groups so that we can protect ourselves. Miss, we are helping each other so that these big boys will stay out our way. We did this so that next time, he wouldn't touch our friend or any of us here. Miss, he will be scared of us. We did*

*this same thing to Tobisi (one of the bullies at school) and since then he has never done it again. He goes to other boys who don't have friends and walk alone. That's why it's good to have friends in this school, Miss.*

This suggests that violence is normalised amongst boys, irrespective of size or age. Moreover, these smaller groups of boys portray an alternative mode of masculinity because as a group, they violently oppose intimidation and bullying bigger boys who are seen as trouble makers at school. It can be deduced that among boys, power relations are perceived as an appropriate means to compete for domination. Research has shown that violence can be an act of struggle for dominance and demonstration of power (Mills, 2001; Sundaram, 2013).

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the data and discussed the study's findings. Using Connell's (1995) masculinity theory, it set out to understand the embedded meanings in the nature of the play that boys engage with at the school playground. In investigating how boys' play is embedded within violent gendered cultures, I interrogated what break time playground activities mean for boys and the intersections of these activities with gender violence in and around school. The themes that were developed from the data collected were used for the analysis and to foreground the discussion.

The findings from the data indicate that boys' play at the school playground is ritualised and is symbolic of wider societal constructs of masculinity which go beyond school spaces. Broader understandings of masculinity in the community place expectations on boys, requiring them to be differently constructed. Thus, in their gender identity as different from girls, boys are not only symbolically elevated but are positioned above girls in the hegemonic hierarchical masculinity that obtains within the social order. It is in the framing of such constructions of themselves as "real" and "other" boys at school playground spaces that the hierarchy and hegemony that underlie boys' play becomes apparent. Similarly, boys' positioning as "big boys" in constructing

their masculinity within playground spaces indicates what is contrived in the weave of their own experiences and the re-enacting of complex social definitions and expectations of gender. Dominance and demonstration of power in ways that frame their different levels of the construct of masculinity are perhaps the underlining conception of play: how and what boys and bigger boys do at the school playground.

In my observation, in order to show that they are ‘real boys’ at school, boys surround their play with barriers that create elevation and power. The implications of the breaking of these barriers by others considered as less than “real” boys is seen in the violent interactions that manifest in boy-to-boy, and boy-to-girl violence at school. Yet, the playground is also narrated as a space where children are free (Bhana, 2005). Freedom and the lack of adult surveillance at the school playground mean total control for boys. In being free to “have fun” and “do whatever you want”, freedom opens up the playground as a space that breeds violence as boys engage in the struggle for and negotiation of power (Bhana, 2005; Swian 2001) amongst themselves and between them and girls.

Violence at the playground was not only associated with boys. The findings suggest that girls’ violence is associated with their negotiation of the pervasive boy-cult hegemony that obtains at school playground spaces. As the findings of this study corroborate, it is possible that girls’ use of violence (Bhana, 2008) is “a means to secure resources” and a means to “make claims to power” in ways that enable access to fraternity with the “big boys” at the playground. In contrast to the dominant construct of girls as soft, gentle and agreeable, the findings of this study suggest that girl violence at the school playground is important in understanding girls’ agency in the gender violence seen in and around schools.

On the other hand, the findings also show that not all boys are violent. Connell (1995) refers to a subordinate masculinity. Subordinates are often targets of violence (Connell, 2002). This study found that “other” boys are perhaps not simply a representation of subordinate masculinity, but

are constructed by the boys as “other”, that, is, different from them. These boys considered as “other” are narrated as targets and not agents of violence (Anderson, 2009).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the data analysis and the findings of this study. This chapter presents the conclusion drawing on the findings and interpretation. This was a qualitative ethnographic study of 30 Grade 7 boys at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa that examined how the power dynamics that play out among boys and between boys and girls at the school playground during break-time enable a flourishing environment of unequal gender relations and violence. Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity theory was used to understand how boys' play at the playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures as well as the construction of masculinities by boys at play at the school playground.

The study set out to investigate how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal. The study was directed by the following four critical research questions:

1. What is the nature of boys' play at school playgrounds?
2. What role do masculinities play in boys' play?
3. How does gender violence manifest in boys' play?
4. How is violence associated with boys' play?

#### **5.2 Summary of chapters**

Chapter one introduced the study, detailed its focus and set out the research questions. It also presented the background to the study by mapping the South African school context in terms of gender and violence in school. The study's objectives were identified as well as the rationale for

this particular study. This study investigated how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered culture. Finally, chapter one presented the structure and design of the study by providing an overview of the methodology and methods of inquiry adopted.

Chapter two presented a thematic review of the international, sub-Saharan African and local literature on gender violence and schooling. It reviewed the literature by different scholars that shows that school, and particularly, the school playground, is a contested space and that all violence is gendered. The review noted that, in South Africa, violence occurs in school as well as in the neighbourhood where the school is located. The literature review further noted that children are active both in the construction of their identities and in controlling the construction of others' identities (Bhana, 2008b; Clark & Paechter 2007).

The following themes guided the literature review: (i) Hegemonic masculinity as gendered power relations, (ii) Violence and masculinity, (iii) Gender violence and schooling, (iv) Contestation of the school playground, (v) Gendered violence in and around school and (vi) Framing interventions to curb gender violence. Chapter two also discussed the theoretical framework adopted for this study. Connell's (1995) theory of critical masculinity provided the lens that theoretically informed the findings and discussions in this study.

Chapter three presented a detailed discussion and description of the research design and methodology adopted for this study. The study is located within the social-constructivist research paradigm and a qualitative ethnographic design was employed. A combination of observation, focus group discussions and individual semi-structured interviews was used to collect relevant and reliable data for the study. The field work was conducted over a period of three months during which the researcher was immersed in the day-to-day playtime activities and interactions of the participants at the Florida Primary School (pseudonym) playground as an observer. A detailed description and explanation of the purposive sampling procedure used to select the 30 participants was provided in this chapter. Finally, the chapter set out how the analysis and

discussion of the data was conducted as well as ethical considerations, and provided an explanation of the processes adopted to ensure trustworthiness.

Chapter four presented the analysis and discussion of the data collected for this study. It set out a diagrammatic representation of the way the triangulation of the data collected using the three data collection methods developed into the themes which guided this analysis and discussion. Connell's (1995) masculinity theory was used to understand the embedded meanings in the nature of the play that boys engage in at the school playground. In investigating how boys play is embedded within violent gendered cultures, I interrogated what break time playground activities meant for boys and sought to understand how these activities intersected with gender violence. The themes that were developed from the data collected were used for the analysis and foreground discussion. These emergent themes thus guided the units of analysis and the discussion that followed. Through coding, the following themes emerged:

- We play to “have fun”
- We “play with girls also”
- They... show off; they are powerful and can fight
- I also fight
- Of “real” and “other” boys
- “Big boys” – some of them are learners from high school

The study's findings suggest that boys' play at the school playground is ritualised and symbolic of broader societal constructs of masculinity which go beyond school spaces. Understandings of masculinity in the community place expectations on boys, requiring them to be differently constructed. Thus, in their gender identity as different from girls, boys are not only symbolically elevated but are positioned above girls in the hegemonic hierarchical masculinity that obtains within the social order.

The following section outlines the study's main findings.

### 5.3 Main findings

The study's findings revealed that break time was considered to be exciting and to be a time for boys to play and "have fun" at the school playground. Epstein et al. (2001) recognise the school playground as a place where a struggle for power among children is very common. As can be inferred from the boys' perceptions of their activities and negotiations at the playground space, this struggle appears to occur along gender lines. It is significant that boys' description of what having fun means to them is their construct of their identity; an identity of themselves as "boys". This construct positions them not merely as learners at the school playground space, but very strongly as boys and as different from girls whom they tend to construct as "other". Their tendency to symbolise a strong gender bond enables an understanding of the importance that they attach to interactions and activities at the playground. The findings revealed that the school playground fosters divisions and formations along gender lines which associate boys with play, games, activities and interactions that are ritualised, ascribed with superiority and differentiated from girls' play, games, activities and interactions (Thorne, 1993). Moreover, the playground is seen as opening up play that leads to violence due to the struggle for and negotiation of power amongst learners (Bhana, 2005).

The study also found that the experience of freedom and absence of adult surveillance at the school playground leads to the enactment of dominant masculinities and power for boys. In being free to "have fun" and "do whatever you want", the playground is opened up as a space that breeds violence as boys engage in the struggle for and negotiation of power (Bhana, 2005; Swain 2001) amongst themselves and between them and girls.

This study also found that some boys saw girls as friends to play with, talk to and share their problems with. This set of boys seemed to be open to physical, social and emotional interactions with girls. This illustrates what Anderson (2009) explains as boys' negotiation of non-hegemonic masculinity that inspires talk about their emotions and encourages trusting friendships with girls. The study also highlighted that even though boys tend to segregate themselves from girls in the

play activities that they engage in, every now and then, a group of boys would wade into the girls' play, interrupting it. This gives them a certain status and prestige.

The voices of the boys suggested that having power to defend oneself makes one a 'real boy' at school. It was clear that boys measure their adequacy in terms of self-identity construction by their scale of power and ability to dominate and command influence. Bullying other boys perhaps represents their assertion of themselves as not only powerful, but as dominators and controllers of the space and grounds which they occupy. For "those boys", bullying is thus possibly a construction of what it means to play like a 'boy'; to dominate, take control and win. In the context of this study, this suggests that boys' tendency to subjugate other boys is not dissociated from the hegemony and power dynamics that play out in the wider social order where men are valued in terms of how much power they have to control, dominate and own. It also emerged from the study that violence is not only associated with male power (Bhana 2008a). Interestingly, girls' construction of their identity as not just girls, but as more powerful and stronger than boys offers insight into girls' agency in gender violence at school.

This study also found that fighting and defence were a common and normal part of a boy's life. Protecting oneself and one's friends is understood as building confidence and aptitude for manhood. The study participants regarded having power as normal behaviour because they can always stand up for themselves, which is the measure of respect and prestige amongst the boys. The ways boys are raised in society reinforce masculinity in terms of both personality and what it is to aspire to manhood in ways that associate masculinity with power and domination, particularly "men's power over women and men's power over other men" (Adams & Coltrane, 2005). This suggests that for boys, violence is interconnected with 'normal' forms of masculinity. Thus, it can be inferred that, for the boys, fighting by way of play at the school playground is a normal ascription of a masculine role.

However, the study revealed that not all boys are violent. Connell (1995) refers to a subordinate masculinity. Subordinates are often the targets of violence (Connell, 2002). As shown in this

study, “other” boys are perhaps not only a representation of subordinate masculinity, but they are constructed by the boys as “other”, different from them as boys. Boys considered as “other” are narrated as targets and not as agents of violence (Anderson, 2009). The study also highlighted that the term, “other boys” is used to refer to boys who are constructed as girls either because they are small, play gently, are gay or do not fight back. The boys that participated in this study were quick to express disgust and hatred towards particular boys that they construct as ‘other’ either because they are weak, or cannot fight or behave like ‘sisi’. “Real boys” despised this group of boys and excluded them from their games.

Thus, homosexuality is regarded as abnormal and heterosexuality is associated with and symbolises the mark of a “real boy.” In constructing themselves as “real boys”, boys appropriate the gender “male” for themselves to the exclusion of any deviant positioning which they consider as “other.” Deviancy from “real boy” should belong to the other gender, “female” as girls. The boys’ voices that gender deviancy makes a boy soft, powerless and weak, can inform our understanding of how such conceived deviancy leads to acts of gendered violence at the school playground.

Violence at the playground was not only associated with boys. The findings suggest that girls’ violence is associated with their negotiation of the pervasive boy-cult hegemony that obtains at school playground spaces. As Bhana (2008) observes, this implies that girls’ use of violence is linked to making certain claims to power and territory that allow them access to fraternity with the “big boys” at the playground. In contrast with the dominant construct of girls as soft, gentle and agreeable, the girl violence at the school playground revealed by this study is important in understanding girls’ agency in the gendered violence seen in and around school.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The recommendations arising from the findings of this study are based on two sets of implications: What are the implications of the findings of this study for policy? What are the

implications of the findings for practice? This requires a clear understanding of how violence is associated with boys' play at school.

It is evident that boys' play at school is set in a certain construct of themselves as "boys". This construct, which is the way boys do identity in school and around school, is dictated by the cultural context of hegemonic masculinity in the social settings of the school community. The construct legitimises, normalises and reproduces unequal power dynamics in relationships between men and women, and boys and girls which are heavily balanced against women, girls and those constructed as "other". Violence, subjugation and appropriation of power by men define gender relationships in communities and within school landscapes. School structures and settings are not only gender differentiated, but are differentiated in ways that elevate men and boys over women and girls. The school playground is revealed as an archetype of the school landscape and setting that promotes and replicates these unequal power dynamics between and among boys and girls.

The findings of this study provide an understanding of what it means to be a boy at the school playground. They also offer insight into how, in enacting their own identities, boys' engagement in play activities at the school playground becomes a way of doing violence, even if inadvertently. Therefore, as the study's findings further suggest, boys' and girls' agency in the gender violence seen in and around school are a reproduction of the gender power relations upheld by hegemonic masculinities.

### **What are the implications of the findings for policy?**

Policy interventions to address gender violence against girls in school have tended to adopt approaches that locate the problem within school. However, within-school approaches overlook the fact that boys' and girls' schooling experiences are also nurtured by the gender violence practices against women and girls in the broader community. The failure to expose the structures and externalities that not only impact the phenomenon of gender violence in and around school

but reproduce it is a gap that needs to be addressed. Policy interventions to halt gender violence in and around school need to be broad, nuanced and co-constructive in approach. This means that such approaches should take consider other factors beyond the school, other understandings beyond physical incidents of boy-on-girl violence, or girl-on-girl violence in school, and other partners and stakeholders in learners' schooling like parents and community gatekeepers in coming up with ways of stopping the violence seen in and around school. This is only possible when there is sufficient understanding of the structures and conditions that produce the gender violence seen in and around schools. The findings of this study revealed that how boys' play at the school playground is embedded in violent gendered cultures; the gender violence seen in and around school is not simply a within-school phenomenon. Therefore, policy interventions should adopt prevention approaches that target the cultural root causes of gender violence against girls in and around school.

Policy-makers thus need to contemplate how schooling experiences are gendered experiences (Bhana, 2009; 2013). They need to recognise that schools are not isolated sites, but sites located within communities of social and cultural practices, traditions and norms (Epstein et al., 2004). Within-school policy approaches that focus on school settings with little or no understanding of the complex cultural context and meanings in gender power relations that define "boys" and "girls" in school may prove inadequate in bringing an end to gender violence against girls in and around school.

It is therefore recommended that policy interventions to stop gender violence against girls in and around school must involve and evolve from a nuanced understanding of the complex nature of gender power relationships in certain cultural practices that define boys and girls in school.

### **What are the implications of the findings for practice?**

In terms of practice, it is important that efforts are made within school settings to identify where gender violence against girls in and around school is located. Understanding the practices and

school activities that promote and expose girls to gender violence within school spaces and their intersection with externalities located outside school is important in formulating protective measures for girls in and around school. Furthermore, it is not only important but imperative to understand how boys' and girls' relationships and interactions are characterised by gender persuasions in identity and in role play (Thorne, 1993). As gendered spaces (Paechter, 2012), schools should be sites where boys' and girls' experiences are built on values and respect for human dignity. This requires adequate support for girls' equal participation and interaction in school.

The complex nature of play and activities at the school playground revealed by this study are not only negotiated in terms of power, but are defined by contextual cultural meanings of such power. The impact on school practices must be properly acknowledged and understood.

Therefore, it is recommended that, within school settings, gender positive approaches that enhance learners' schooling experiences should be targeted. Strategies to halt gender violence in and around school could include safety measures to address girls' vulnerability at the playground and beyond, respect for gender differences, rights and equality being part of the school curriculum, both in content and in practice, and the dismantling of pervasive hegemonic school structures that promote one gender over the other.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This study investigated how boys' play at the school playground is embedded within violent gendered cultures. The ways in which boys are raised in society reinforce masculinity in terms of both personality and what it is to aspire to manhood. Adams and Coltrane (2005) contend that masculinity is associated with issues of power and domination. It comprises of what Adams and Coltrane (2005) describe as "men's power over women and men's power over other men", which suggests that violence is interconnected with 'normal' forms of masculinity. These stereotypes perpetuate a gendering of roles and positioning of boys and girls in a hierarchical social order. Embedded in the underlying meanings of such differentiations and positioning are the identity construct of boys and of girls within school spaces that replicate power and hegemonic

masculinity in the broader South African society. It is in terms of this understanding that the violent gendered acts, directed mainly against girls that are seen in and around school can be viewed and understood.

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Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Approval letter



17 September 2014

Mrs Ateh Kals Moma (212558078)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0499/01488 (Linked to HSS/1197/013)  
Project title: Understanding boys' play and gendered violence in school: The school playground as space for construction of masculinities at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Mrs Moma,

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**

In response to your application dated 30 April 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

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

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)

fms

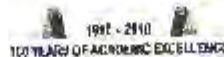
- CC Supervisor: Professor Udaya Bhada
- CC Academic Leader Research: Professor P Marajele
- CC School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)

Wavayville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag 254001 Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 983 2587/2550/457 Fax: +27 (0) 31 285 4508 Email: [hr@ukn.ac.za](mailto:hr@ukn.ac.za) / [ethics@ukn.ac.za](mailto:ethics@ukn.ac.za) / [hr@ukn.ac.za](mailto:hr@ukn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukn.ac.za](http://www.ukn.ac.za)



Edgewood Campus   Edgewood   Howard College   Medical School   Pietermaritzburg   Wavayville



**Date:**

The Principal

Name of School

Dear Mr/Mrs/Dr.....

**Re: Permission to conduct a research study in the school**

I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of the experiences, meanings and understandings of gender-based violence (GBV). The research project is titled: **Stop the violence: girls and boys in and around schools.**

The project aims examine how learners experience, witness and observe GBV in schools. Every day newspaper reports show us that GBV is a problem in some schools and has negative effects for some learners. The project will involve establishing whether and how girls and boys experience GBV. The study aims to analyse how school learners, experience, witness and observe and talk about GBV and how this differs for boys and girls. The project will involve interviews with learners, teachers and school managers, as well as observations of learners' interactions in schools, including in classrooms and playground. Questionnaires will be distributed to learners and teachers to ascertain a broad understanding of the scope and nature of GBV in schools.

All participants in the schools and the names of schools will be anonymized. In the various publications that will result from this study I will not use participants' real names or the names of their school. They are also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty.

Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in every group, there will be limits of confidentiality. Participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure/s which indicate that their well-being/other learners' is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

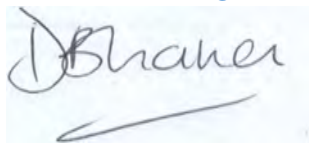
Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely

I can be contacted through:

Email: [kahmoma@gmail.com](mailto:kahmoma@gmail.com)  
Cell: 0837186268/0765412478

My project supervisor is:  
Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD  
School of Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Private Bag X03  
Cnr Mariannahill & Richmond Roads  
Ashwood  
3605  
South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0) 31 260 2603  
Fax: +27 (0) 31 260 3793  
Email: [bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za)



You can also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman  
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Research Office: Ethics  
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4000  
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Email: [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za)

**Permission Form to conduct study**

I..... (Full names of PRINCIPAL) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I grant permission to the learners and teachers participating in the research project and give permission for the school to be used as a research site.

I understand that both the learners and the school are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time.

.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL

.....

DATE

Appendix 3: Informed consent letter to Parents



Dear Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian of \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Ateh Kah Moma. I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I am part of a study conducted by my supervisor Professor Deevia Bhana.

Am writing to request your permission to allow your child/ward to participate in a study examining the shape and form of gender-based violence (GBV) in and around schools. The research project is titled: Stop the violence: girls and boys in and around schools. The project aims examine how learners experience, witness and observe GBV in schools. Every day newspaper reports show us that GBV is a problem in some schools and has negative effects for some learners. The project will involve establishing whether and how girls and boys experience GBV. The project will involve interviews with your child/ward, the completion of a questionnaires, as well as some observations of your child's/ward's interactions in schools, including in classrooms and playground. With your and your child's/wards' permission, the interviews will be audio-taped and these tapes will be transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be stored in locked file cabinets and only I and groups of students who will form part of the research team will have access to the tapes and transcriptions during the project. These will be destroyed when the project ends.

Your daughters'/son's/wards' identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and in the various publications we will produce from it (we will not use their real name or the name of their school). In addition, her/his participation in the study is voluntary and he/she may decide not to participate without any penalty. She/he is also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty. Whilst every precaution will be taken to maintain

the confidentiality of the participants in every group, there will be limits of confidentiality. Participants will be informed that should there be a disclosure/s which indicate that their well-being is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek their consent in addressing the matter.

## **DECLARATION**

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

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

### ***Additional consent, where applicable***

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion      YES/NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion      YES/NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes              YES/NO

Kindly discuss your daughters'/son's/wards' participation with him/her, and if you both agree and you give his/her permission, fill the form below and return to me.

Thank you for your cooperation.

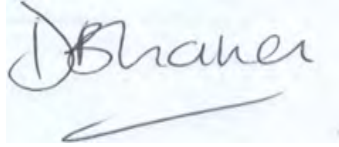
I can be contacted through:

Email: [kahmoma@gmail.com](mailto:kahmoma@gmail.com)

Cell: 0837186268/0765412478

My project supervisor is:  
Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD  
School of Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Private Bag X03  
Cnr Mariannahill & Richmond Roads

Ashwood  
3605  
South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0) 31 260 2603  
Fax: +27 (0) 31 260 3793  
Email: [bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za)



You can also contact the Research Office through:

Mariette Snyman  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Research Office: Ethics  
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Fax: [+ 27 31 260 3093](tel:+27312603093)  
Email: [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za)

### CONSENT FORM

I..... (Full names of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my daughter/son/ward participating in the research project.

I understand that he/she is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should he/she so desire.

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

.....

DATE



## **Informed Consent Letter to Learners**

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Ateh Kah Moma. I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I am part of a study conducted by my supervisor Professor Deevia Bhana.

Thank you for responding to the invitation to participate in a study examining the shape and form of gender-based violence (GBV) in and around schools.

Every day newspaper reports show us that GBV is a problem in some schools and has negative effects for learners with boys and girls in particular suffering from the effects of violence. The project aims to examine how learners experience, witness and observe GBV in schools and what schools can do to stop GBV. The project will involve establishing whether and how girls and boys experience GBV and the nature of GBV. The study aims to analyze how school learners, such as yourself, experience if at all, GBV, what drives the violence and how this differs for boys and girls. The project will involve filling in questionnaires and interviews with you, as well as some observations of your interactions in schools, including in classrooms and playground. Each interview will last for about one hour. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be locked in file cabinets. These will be destroyed when the project ends.

Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study. Your real name or the name of your school will not be used. In addition, your participation in the study is voluntary and you may decide not to participate without any penalty. You are also free to withdraw from the project at any time during or after data collection, without penalty. Whilst every precaution will be taken to

maintain the confidentiality of the participants in every group, there will be limits of confidentiality. Should there be a disclosure/s which indicate that your or someone else's well-being is being compromised or at risk, the researcher will seek your/their consent in addressing the matter.

**DECLARATION**

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

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

***Additional consent, where applicable***

I hereby provide consent to:

- Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion      YES/NO
- Video-record my interview / focus group discussion      YES/NO
- Use of my photographs for research purposes              YES/NO

Kindly discuss your daughters'/son's/wards' participation with him/her, and if you both agree and you give his/her permission, fill the form below and return to me.

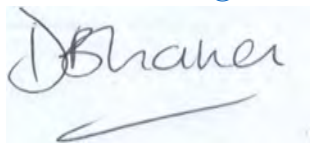
A letter has been written to your parents/guardians to ask for their permission for you to participate in the study. Kindly take this letter and discuss your participation with them as well, and if they give their permission, fill the form below and return to me.

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

I can be contacted through:

Email: [kahmoma@gmail.com](mailto:kahmoma@gmail.com)  
Cell: 0837186268/0765412478

My project supervisor is:  
Professor Deevia Bhana, PhD  
School of Education  
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Email: [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za)

### **Individual Interview Schedule Questions**

#### **Biographical Questions**

1. What is your name?
2. What age are you?
3. What grade are you?
4. Your position in the family in terms of age
5. Do you have brothers and sisters? Yes/No. Explain
6. Tell me about your home. What work do your parents do? Explain.
7. Where do you live?
8. Who else lives with you?
9. Do you like school? Explain.
10. Tell me about your teachers.

#### **School**

1. Do you enjoy break time? Why?
2. Do you play during break time? Where?
3. Who plays with you?
4. Are you included in games when other boys' play?
5. Are you happy on the playground? Explain. (Or will you rather play somewhere else).
6. Do all the boys play well together? Explain.
7. What type of games do you play? Explain these games.
8. Is it important to win a game? Why is it important and if you don't win, what happens?
9. Is there violence in some of the games? Explain what happens.
10. Why are you violent?
11. Do some boys' bully others? Have you been bullied?
12. Do girls come into the playground? If yes/no, why?

13. Do girls play with you or other boys? Explain why.
14. How do boys' talk about girls? How do they talk about them?
15. Are incidence on the playground reported? If yes to who?
16. What interventions are made?
17. Is there any supervisor on the playground by teachers?

### **Focus group discussion**

1. Talk about your friends
2. Talk about your girlfriends
3. Girls at school
4. Violence
5. Sexual violence
6. Break time
7. School playground

### **Observation schedule**

- Observation of boys' interaction with peers in school.
- How do boys dress, communicate, walk, assist and behave towards one another.
- Observe what games they play in the school playground.
- Whom they play with during play break.
- How boys relate with girls.

Appendix 6: Turnitin originality report

Turnitin Originality Report

Full Dissertation by Ateh Kah Moma

From Gender Education article (Masters)

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